PSO capacity building in developing countries

YOU NEVER WALK ALONE

participation, partnership, and coordination in humanitarian aid

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Contents

Partnership in Practice

A foreword…

What does partnership mean in practice? How can you organize humanitarian aid locally or form partnerships with local organizations? On what level and with what aim do humanitarian agencies deal with local governments? What are the most important parameters that set the relationship between NGOs and governments in crisis situations? And when looking at cooperation with civil society, how can we organize relief in a participatory way? This set of papers focuses on relations in practice. It explores and deepens our understanding of issues related to cooperation with partners in humanitarian assistance.

In the year 2003 and 2004, The PSO Knowledge Centre on Capacity Building in cooperation with Disaster Studies, University of Wageningen organised some seminars on the stakeholder relations of humanitarian NGOs in the field. These seminars were meant as a learning process on quality improvement in humanitarian assistance. Related to these seminars, three papers were collected to reflect on interviews, literature and seminar discussions. This booklet contains the three papers, written by Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen, together with a personal set of reflections by Richard Blewitt.

A short overview of the content

Thea Hilhorst starts with an introduction on the central theme 'Everyday Practices of Humanitarian Aid' in which she takes up six reasons why everyday practices are central for understanding humanitarian NGO realities. She also discusses three cross-cutting themes that appear to be relevant to the field-relations of humanitarian organizations: discourse and practice, learning from dilemmas and being transparent, and responding to diversity and the need for flexibility.

The first paper ('For better or for worse..') is about partnership between Dutch humanitarian NGOs and implementing local partners. The authors describe two (ideal-typical) approaches to partnership: an approach which views partnership as a means to get a humanitarian job done, and an approach in which partnership and capacity building of partners is a value in itself, a major goal of intervention. The practices of creating and maintaining partnerships in Dutch NGOs vary according to the type of humanitarian mandate, existing networks and funding relations Dutch humanitarian agencies have. These different kinds of relationships in practice are illustrated by cases of Dutch NGOs, together with an illustration of the difficulties like the nature of emergencies, time horizons for partnership, assessing partners, organizational realities, partnership in a larger institutional field, and accountability.

The relationship between NGOs and local governments is multi-faceted. In the second paper, four levels of contact with local governments and their surrounding structures are examined: creating humanitarian space, advocating policy change in the field, strengthening capacities and coordinating, sharing structures. Before discussing these levels of contact, the authors discuss four parameters that set the relationships between NGOs and governments in crisis situations: type of disaster, relief versus rehabilitation, type of state and implementing versus funding. The content is related to and illustrated by the practices and experiences of Dutch humanitarian agencies in co-operating with local governments.

The third article starts with describing some reasons to incorporate participation in humanitarian aid, ranging from efficiency, sustainability to empowerment and learning. It enters into the question what participation actually is. Participation has a multitude of practical meanings. The 'participation typology' of Pretty (1993) gives some grip on the concept. Apart from the benefits or reasons to incorporate participation, there are also constraints on participation in relief. The authors go into constraints like: vulnerability of the victims, time restrictions because of the pressure, efficiency and bias of the programme by hidden agendas. The last question in this paper addresses participation in relief and/ or in rehabilitation. There is a strong belief that participation is not feasible in immediate emergency situations. Immediate emergency demands too much speed to 'waste' time and resources on participation, and participation is too strongly associated with building trust and long-term efforts. The authors contest this notion on three grounds.

To tackle the most important issues in this series of papers, Richard Blewitt, director of the Movement Cooperation Division of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, wrote a personal set of reflections.

Learning from insights and experiences

As an incentive to knowledge sharing and development, the PSO Knowledge Centre is delighted to present you with this collection of papers. Given the interest in and rewarding results of the three seminars organised last year, we are convinced that it is relevant and worthwhile continuing the discussion about partnership in relief aid.

For the PSO Knowledge Centre these papers formed the start of three study afternoons on the quality of humanitarian assistance. See www.pso.nl for the workshop reports. The effort to learn from individual insights and experience was facilitated by the preparatory work done by Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen. As suggested, the issues identified in the three papers and three seminars, will serve as a basis for the contribution of joint learning on the quality of humanitarian assistance.

Sibrenne Wagenaar

Introduction:

Everyday Practices of Humanitarian Aid

Thea Hilhorst

The Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief consists of ten articles. No less than four of these address the relations of international NGOs with local partners, local authorities and the beneficiaries. In principle, these stakeholder relations are thus considered important. But how about practice?

With this question in mind, PSO organized three seminars in the course of 2003 and 2004 on the stakeholder relations of humanitarian NGOs in the field. To prepare the seminars, disaster studies reviewed literature and interviewed people in the Dutch humanitarian NGOs. The literature review revealed that surprisingly little is being published about these relations in practice. We talk a lot internationally about the principles of aid, invest a lot of research in examining the impact of aid in its political context, but are almost silent about what may be called the 'petty normality' of everyday aid practices.

The three papers collected here reflect the interviews, literature and seminar discussions. They draw on people's experiences but not, as I like to emphasize, on empirical research on the ground. This means that apart from references to secondary sources, people in the disaster-affected countries have no voice in these papers. They should therefore not be seen as the outcome of research, but rather as a kind of appetizer, as papers that lay out the questions that need to be asked and break the ground for taking these questions more seriously. In a next step on this trajectory the questions will be elaborated in field situations.

This introduction will take up the questions why it is important to look at everyday practices and summarize some of the main findings of the three papers.

Articles of the Code of Conduct addressing the relations of international NGOs with local partners, local authorities and the beneficiaries.

We will endeavour to respect the culture, structures and customs of the communities and countries we are working in.

All people and communities – even in disaster – possess capacities as well as vulnerabilities. Where possible, we will strengthen these capacities by employing local staff, purchasing local materials and trading with local companies. Where possible, we will work through local NGOs as partners in planning and implementation, and cooperate with local government structures where appropriate.

Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes.

We often act as an institutional link in the partnership between those who wish to assist and those who need assistance during disasters. We therefore hold ourselves accountable to both constituencies. All our dealings with donors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and transparency.

Why everyday practices?

There are six reasons why everyday practices are central for understanding humanitarian NGO realities.

1. Bringing in local perspectives.

Even though under-addressed in these papers, the most important reason to focus on everyday practices is to bring in local perspectives on humanitarian aid. Apart from the fact that disaster-affected people and organizations have the right to be heard, this is also crucial for the effectiveness of aid and even, one could say, for the credibility and legitimization of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian aid seems to be losing credibility on the ground. A sad indication of this is the growing number of humanitarian workers being attacked or killed. It is difficult to assess and generalise about the motivation and organization of antagonisms against aid, and deeper insights into the perceptions of local people about aid are badly needed.

2. Diversity among NGOs.

Implementing modalities of humanitarian aid have become increasingly diverse and complicated. The number of development NGOs and humanitarian agencies in crisis areas have grown and many different modalities of aid can be found in the field, ranging from international NGOs with their own operational capacity, INGOs working through local partners and a range of local NGOs. The different modalities of aid set different parameters for discussions of principles, humanitarian policy and the decision-making space of agencies. International discussion seems mainly geared to the modality of operational INGOs, and leaves out the wealth of other experiences. The typical Dutch humanitarian agency, as elaborated in paper one, is not (fully) operational and works mainly as a donor for implementing partners, sometimes with a history of more than a century. To understand the working of these modalities one has to ground analysis in everyday practice.

3. The multiple realities of NGO 'drivers'.

Humanitarian aid prides itself on delivering principled aid that is needs-based, neutral and independent. These principles are meant to forge the trust needed to provide access to people in need while protecting the safety of the aid workers (Slim 1999, Hilhorst 2006).In practice, however, humanitarian aid comes about through an amalgam of different 'drivers'. It often constitutes an uneasy mix of principles, foreign policy and military doctrine as well as the everyday politics of organizational politicking and rivalry (Kerkvliet 1991:11). At the same time, humanitarian actors are geared towards legitimisation. In order to mobilize support, they have to convince stakeholders of their appropriateness and trustworthiness (Bailey 1971). These different kinds of 'drivers' are entangled in practice and the resulting dynamics are encapsulated in everyday practices.

4. Principles only become alive in practice.

Humanitarian aid appears to be dictated by principles, policies and intervention models. However, fieldworkers construct their own interpretations of principles and priorities in response to demands posed in the field. The translation of principles happens through the combined actions of staff members and other involved actors. It is therefore not enough to discuss principles and policy. Understanding their working requires looking at everyday actions in the field (Long 1989). In such everyday decisions, actors often put the need to get their job done before the policies. In the last few years, humanitarian organizations have invested heavily in their learning capacities and joint initiatives have been taken by changing alliances of humanitarian organizations that all, one way or another, aim to enhance the quality and the learning capacity of humanitarian organizations. Apart from the Code of Conduct, these include ALNAP or the Active Learning Network of Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Assistance Programmes, the Humanitarian Accountability Project; the Sphere project and the Humanitarian Quality Platform. These capacities represent vast potential for learning but only when they are grounded in and make sense to the experiences of humanitarian actors and their surrounding networks (Hilhorst and Schmiemann 2002). Without knowing how actors translate and negotiate principles in their everyday practice, discussions regarding principles tend to become abstracted from reality.

5. Power relations among humanitarians.

A focus on everyday practices allows one to bring out the power processes within humanitarian communities and in their relations with wider domains. In the large perspective of human suffering and the need for relief, humanitarians appear as idealistic aid workers that help people in need often at great personal security risks. But zooming in on the situation, power differentiations become apparent. International NGOs have been uncomfortably associated with imposing a set of humanitarian values on the world that have historically grown from Western societies. In the field of implementation, there are questions about the power differential between INGOs and their local implementing partners, and between humanitarians and the recipients of aid. One of these questions concerns the representation of non-Western NGOs in international humanitarian communities.

6. Familiarity breeds realistic expectations.

Finally by relating the 'petty normality' of humanitarian aid, distancing discourses about humanitarian actors can be counteracted. Humanitarians are not heroes. Neither are they selfish vultures or any other stereotype concocted by friends and foes. Focusing on everyday practices encourages familiarity and may counteract reductionist prejudices against humanitarians. Accounts of everyday practices and dilemmas of NGOs counterbalance blind expectations, unmask uncritical admiration and put unrealistic critique into perspective.

Evolving themes

I will not try to capture all the findings of the separate papers. Rather, I would like to discuss a number of cross-cutting themes that appear to be relevant to the field-relations of humanitarian organizations.

Discourse and practice

Humanitarian practice draws on discourses about how aid should be done. Partly, humanitarians have incorporated discourse because they believe in them, and partly they use popular phrases in their quest for legitimization. Partnership and participation rank high amongst such catchwords. Organizations in need of funds will always include them in their proposals. This does not mean that there is no genuine motivation to enhance the two P's, but these secondary motives do cloud whatever is real about such efforts.

Paper 3 sadly concludes that although many humanitarian agencies subscribe to the importance of target group participation, the actual record of promoting participation is disappointing compared to the importance attached to it. Paper 1 ends with the question where partnership in the sense of ownership, participation and equality becomes an illusion and a mere legitimisation of the humanitarian enterprise, and where indeed it can live up to its promise and contribute to more resilient and capable societies. The paper elaborates how the term of partnership stands for a host of relations between INGOs and local NGO and GO partners, ranging from mere subcontracting to full and equal partnerships. It also discusses some factors that appear to inhibit good partner-practices in humanitarian programming. Great power inequalities can be hidden under the guise of partnership. Zadwe stated in 2001 that "African NGOs have become little more than subcontractors supplying cheap labour for project-based aid. Capacity-building, to the extent that it occurs, rarely aims for more than building a better sub-contractor: more transparent, more accountable; in short, a more reliable recipient of aid funds" (Zadwe, 2001). The papers conclude that NGOs should be careful and specific in defining the terms of partnership in different situations, and be clear what can be expected from them. If results from participatory processes are not visibly taken into account, people lose interest. Living up to promises of partnership is a cornerstone of accountability and imperative to gain trust of local partners and people.

Learning from dilemmas and being transparent.

In many different ways the three papers remind NGOs to learn from their dilemmas and be transparent about them. Humanitarians often encounter problems in their field-relations. There have been many discussions of the political abuse of aid, but agencies appear not to take these routinely into account in assessing their own stakeholder relations. One of the recurring issues was how agencies deal with red tape and corruption. Although agencies appear unable to operate without a certain pragmatism as regards corruption, this is rarely discussed openly, with the obvious disadvantage that agencies cannot learn from one another and define what is and what is not acceptable to them.

There are also dilemmas and difficulties in dealing with local partners and organizing participation. Local partners can be problematic for lack of capacity, trustworthiness or legitimization. While more locally organised aid has tremendous advantages, it also throws into sharper relieve discussions on the politicization of aid on the ground. Participation can be manipulated by powerful actors, be socially excluding, increase tension, produce biased information or be too costly. The papers elaborate that agencies must take these problems seriously and be careful and critical in the process of evolving partnership and participatory programmes. On the other hand, there may be a tendency to blame local partners for what is really a mutual culture clash. Culture is not just located in local customs but also in the way people form organizations, make decisions and develop styles of intervention. Such culture clashes are intertwined with power, whereby international actors have more leverage to impose their values on partners or ignore the values of the recipient population than the other way around. Learning from dilemmas requires a critical and self-critical attitude.

Responding to diversity and the need for flexibility

A final cross-cutting theme is that humanitarian agencies have to respond to increasing diversities in their area of work which requires them to be flexible in their programming. Familiar distinctions – between natural disaster and conflict and between relief and development – are increasingly vanishing and provide few blue-prints for responding to crises. In 1999, Stephen Jackson and Peter Walker argued for looking at humanitarian aid in a contextual way, which acknowledges that some situations allow for development-oriented assistance, whereas in others assistance should be limited to relief. Working in the midst of an ethnic conflict requires a different approach to working in the relative calm of a refugee camp, or in a post-conflict situation. Some situations require strict neutrality; others do not. Some situations allow for a developmental approach; other emergencies require a strict concentration on life-saving activities. In extremely tense situations, local organizations may not be reliable; in others, it might be highly unethical and inefficient not to rely on local groups.

Humanitarian policy needs to be attuned to these different contexts. It also needs to take into account diversity in humanitarian modalities, and live with increasing numbers of other actors that provide aid, such as military and private companies. Paper 2 elaborates how relations with local authorities also need to become more fine-tuned in acknowledging the differential characteristics and possibilities for working with the political parts of local government, law-enforcing institutions or specialised line-agencies. Paper 3 relates how the potential for participation is sometimes curtailed when agencies have a restricted image of what participation can constitute in practice. It concludes that participation can not be viewed as a separate and pre-conceived set of activities. Participation should be reflected in staff attitude and conceived as an approach that can be made operational in many different ways. Rather than relying on particular modes on intervention, humanitarian agencies have to become increasingly flexible.

Conclusion

This paper has argued why a focus on everyday practices of humanitarian aid can provide important insights and has identified three cross-cutting themes that have emerged from the preliminary research and seminars that form the basis of this publication. To further elaborate these themes, research must be done in actual field situations, and the results fed back into discussions of humanitarian agencies.

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Paper 1.

For better or for worse...

Partnership between Dutch Humanitarian NGOs and implementing local partners.

Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen

Let's get together?

Humanitarian aid starts from the principle of humanity: "the desire to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found...". In recent years, however, the practice of humanitarian aid has become far more diverse than the extension of food for the starving or care for the wounded. A number of humanitarian organizations maintains a strict definition of what constitutes humanitarian aid, namely to save lives in a neutral and impartial way. Other organizations have taken on a broader view and want to address underlying causes of conflict and vulnerability by broadening humanitarian mandates to include disaster preparedness, development and peace building objectives. Goodhand and Leader have labelled these approaches the minimalist and maximalist approaches (2001).

In both approaches, a case can be made for channelling humanitarian aid through neutral and impartial local organizations. In a minimalist view, using local channels for relief aid is (in principle) more efficient and cost-effective because organizations are already established locally, and more effective because it builds on local knowledge.
It is recognised that pre-existing local coping mechanisms like family networks and the input of indigenous knowledge are best understood by local people, and best linked by local networks, if these local people, networks and organisations are able to operate. Capacity building can be part of partnership in a minimalist approach, but is functional and geared to enhance the effectiveness of NGOs that may have to deal with a sudden expansion of scale and services during humanitarian emergencies.

A maximalist approach puts partnerships more central, because it is based on the desire to enhance the preparedness of societies to deal with disaster. Disasters, be it natural hazards or outbreaks of war and violent conflict, are not humanitarian disasters per se. As Cuny (1983) puts it: 'a disaster should be defined on the basis of its human consequences, not on the phenomenon that caused it'. This means that the capacity of societies to absorb, deal with or mitigate natural hazards or political conflict, is a crucial element in the (wake) of a potential humanitarian catastrophe. Hence, increasingly international NGOs providing emergency assistance adopt the notion that it is more effective to try to help societies deal with circumstances, than to rush in when a humanitarian catastrophe has occurred. This line of reasoning goes beyond the use of available local channels, and argues to invest in building local capacities for relief, preparedness, development and peace. It is a twofold strategy of using societies own knowledge and potential to provide more effective assistance, and at the same time to increase coping capacity and potentials for future conveniences.

We can thus distinguish two (ideal-typical) approaches to partnership. One approach is functional and views partnership as a means to get a humanitarian job done. The other approach views partnership and capacity building of partners as a value in and of itself, a major goal of intervention. In the latter case, partnership becomes a discourse. It is a discourse around the concepts of self-reliance (preparing organizations to work independently in the future), ownership (capacity building is not only more sustainable but also just) and equality (between the local NGO and the INGO). Partnership then becomes important too for the INGO's identity and legitimacy: a central value on which they build their own worth.
From different angles, then, there are good but different reasons to organize humanitarian aid locally or form partnerships with local organizations. The question is how this happens and works in practice. This paper reviews some of the practices of partnerships and makes an inventory of issues that organizations come across in working with local partners. The paper is prepared on the basis of interviews with representatives of 12 Dutch humanitarian NGOs[1], and incorporates discussion during the PSO seminar on 26 June 2003 on ''Cooperation with Implementing Partners in Humanitarian Assistance''.

What's in a word?

Partnership is the term most frequently used for relations where INGOs fund local NGOs to perform humanitarian work. The term is being used for many different kinds of relationships. Relations between INGOs and implementing agencies take on different shapes and intensity. Some examples to denote the diversity:

- A contractual agreement based on a tendering procedure where local organizations simply implement a job for which the parameters are fixed by the funder. No capacity building is involved, the bidders need to prove they possess the required capacities for the job.
- A short-term incidental project applied for by a local NGO engaged in relief or rehabilitation. Functional capacity building may be part of the project.
- A longer-term partnership whereby the INGO commits itself to support an organization on a long term, possibly including a trajectory of capacity building.
- A long-term partnership where the parties engage in a horizontal relationship in which the partners (ideally) have a say in the policies and decision making of the INGO as much as the other way around.

[1] *Euronaid is formally no NGO but an association of NGOs.*

Some organizations use the term partnership for all these arrangements whereas others reserve the term partner for more intensive relationships. Also, the term partnership is not always restricted to local NGOs funded for relief or rehabilitation, but is also applied in practice to local networks, community-based organisations or other forms of civil society, and occasionally to INGOs with a presence in the field. Besides, we need to mention that INGOs in some cases also fund government agencies like health institutions.

In the interviews it appears moreover that partnership is closely associated with capacity building. The two are, however, not necessarily interwoven in practice. The term capacity building implies that local NGOs lack capacities, which is often, of course, not the case. In those cases where partnership is accompanied by capacity building, it is good to take into account that there are many forms of capacity building, starting with functional-technical assistance such as the provision of material or human resources for a project. Adam Fowler further distinguishes organisational development, sectoral development and institutional (or civil society-) development. In this way the scope and purpose of capacity building strategies differ from strengthening individuals, a community or an organisation, a greater agricultural- or health sector, or even an entire societal subset or civil society as a whole (Smillie 2001: 10).

This paper focuses on the role of INGOs as funders and facilitators of local, implementing NGOs. Although much of the issues raised may equally apply to funding local implementing government bodies or community based organizations, this is not explicitly addressed.

Dutch humanitarian assistance

The practices of creating and maintaining partnerships in Dutch NGOs vary according to the type of humanitarian mandate, existing networks and funding relations Dutch humanitarian agencies have. Seven of the twelve organizations have operations in the field, but most of these also avail of funds for financing other implementing agencies. These need not be local, they can concern projects of other INGOs. Both Cordaid and Care have a policy to reduce their field operations and to increase the proportion of support for local NGOs. MSF has a policy to restrict funding of activities of other organizations a maximum of 7% of their operations.

Table 1: Mandates of Dutch INGOs

Organisation	networks	activities	relief	rehab.	struct.
Cordaid	Caritas Int.	A, B, D	X	X	X
Care NL	Care Int.	A, D	X	X	
World Vision NL	WV Int.	B, D	X	X	X
Dutch Red Cross	IFRC	A, B, D	X	X	X
	ICRC*	B			
ZOA		A, B, D	X	X	
NOVIB	Oxfam int.	B, D	X	X	X
Healthnet		A, B, D		X	
MSF-Holland	MSF Int.	A	X		
KerkinActie/ACTNL	ACT Int.	B, D	X	X	X
Tear Fund NL	Tear Fund Int.	B, D	X	X	X
Warchild		A		X	
Euronaid	Members	C, E	X		

A: operational in the field
B: expat-managed or assisted local channels
C: material assistance / logistics for local NGOs
D: funding of local humanitarian NGOs
E: assistance funds of EU food security budget line

Some Dutch NGOs belong to families that leave them no choice in the local partner. IFRC and WV practically always work through their local family affiliates. In cases of immediate emergencies, WV has the practice of sending in Rapid Response Teams to assess the possibilities of giving aid and to beef up the capacity of their local branches with knowledge and experience. They temporarily take over the management of the local WV operation. When it works with other partners, this is arranged through the local WV. Other NGOs derive from their family network or tradition a group of natural or preferred partners, but also work through other channels. Care-NL prefers working with the local Care, if necessary strengthened by expats, but also considers requests from other organizations in affected countries. Cordaid, Tear Fund and ACT Netherlands (a humanitarian cooperation between KerkinActie and ICCO) avail of long established church-related networks but have also developed numerous relations with other NGOs.

Another possibility is being part of a family network without operational cooperation. For instance Novib has the Oxfam network, the local partner network deriving from the Oxfam family, and their own local partner network from their structural development sector. In most cases requests for assistance comes from relations in those existing networks, which means that finding new partners is not an issue. In exceptional cases, Novib pro-actively searches for new partners, for instance during the Turkey earthquake, when Dutch-Turkish organizations requested Novib to take action in the affected region.

HNI, ZOA, and Warchild are more stand-alone organisations. They belong to identity-based networks but those are less institutionalised than the organisational families. HNI mostly takes over running operations, which have entered a rehabilitation phase, and find local organisational structures in place. ZOA refugeecare is not operational in the immediate emergency phase, but shortly thereafter and in the rehabilitation phase, and works with different kinds of partners (GO, NGO, church-based, CBO) with the intention to facilitate their capacity building until they operate independently and effectively. Warchild policy is usually to start its own organisation, and trying to create an NGO around it in the field. It's a trajectory of training local staff, letting them become more involved in the projects, towards owning and fully independently implementing their own project.
Looking at the field of Dutch humanitarian NGOs, a diverse picture emerges. The classic image on humanitarian organizations that enter an area, establish themselves and their contacts and go again is little applicable to most Dutch NGOs.

The nature of the emergency

Whether or not to engage and invest in partner relations depends partly on the context and the nature of the emergency. Humanitarian crises have many faces, thus the humanitarian response as well. There is a difference between disasters caused by natural hazards and conflict areas. And there is a difference between rapid-onset disasters with a short duration and creeping disasters or complex emergencies. In the case of rapid-onset disasters there is no time to check out partners thoroughly. This means that local capacities are overlooked as channels for relief or, the flipside, that channels are used that are not sufficiently capable. Different INGOs deal with this situation by giving a local NGO the benefit of the doubt, and start funding an operation immediately, with an agreement to improve the project application in the near future. In case of incidental disasters it makes little sense to invest largely in local disaster preparedness, but in the many regions where the vulnerability to disaster is structural and disasters like flood or drought occur regularly to compound everyday vulnerabilities, building disaster preparedness capacity seems imperative. Partnership and capacity building as a means or an end thus also depend on the context.

In the case of rapid-onset emergencies, the access to affected people is important. Areas most in need of aid may not coincide with the reach of existing partners. Hence, Cordaid often finds that the existing partner network in an emergency country are physically far removed from provinces where aid is most needed, so new partners or externally operated aid still needs to be realized. Relying solely on local partners bears the risk that aid concentrates on areas and target groups that partners can access more than on a needs analysis of victims. Hence, having local partners does not guarantee access to victims and may still need to be complemented by direct humanitarian operations.

Time horizons for partnership

The policies around partnership are related to mandates of organizations, whether they are oriented to relief or rehabilitation. Relief programmes are different from rehabilitation programmes in many respects. Relief programmes are typically meant to alleviate immediate basic needs of survivors of an emergency and are directed to the delivery of material, provisions and constructions. Relief is short-term, disembedded (external), quick, incidental, donor-driven and top-down. Rehabilitation, especially in a maximalist approach, is more like development: directed to achieve quantitative and qualitative changes in ongoing socio-economic processes. It is long-term, embedded, structural, and recipient-focused.

At first sight, the distinction between relief and rehabilitation seems logical and needed. In the immediacy of crisis, a humanitarian job must be done and there is no time to waste on assessing or training local capacities. INGOs with a mandate towards rehabilitation can afford to consume more time in assessing partners and their organisational or operational capacity. This explains why strengthening partners is more often an objective of rehabilitation NGOs than relief NGOs.

In practice the distinction is, of course, not so clear. Many relief situations last very long, with Operation Lifeline Sudan as the prime but certainly not only example. Relief, rehabilitation and development are often not sequential but take place in erratic patterns and often simultaneously. This has several implications. It means that INGOs with different mandates and work styles work alongside each other in crises, and may interfere in each other's work, for instance when one organization gives away food while others try to provide credit for agricultural inputs. It also puts local NGOs in a difficult position because they may have to adjust from being mere implementer to partner or work with different funders demanding different approaches at the same time.

The time horizon of relief operations is thus important. The longer organizations stay in a country, the more sense it makes to invest in local capacities of partners. This means that humanitarian organizations should as quickly as possible estimate the time horizon for their stay, and adjust their style accordingly. Otherwise, it is well possible that organizations stay for years in a country and at hindsight regret to have failed to make a more lasting contribution.

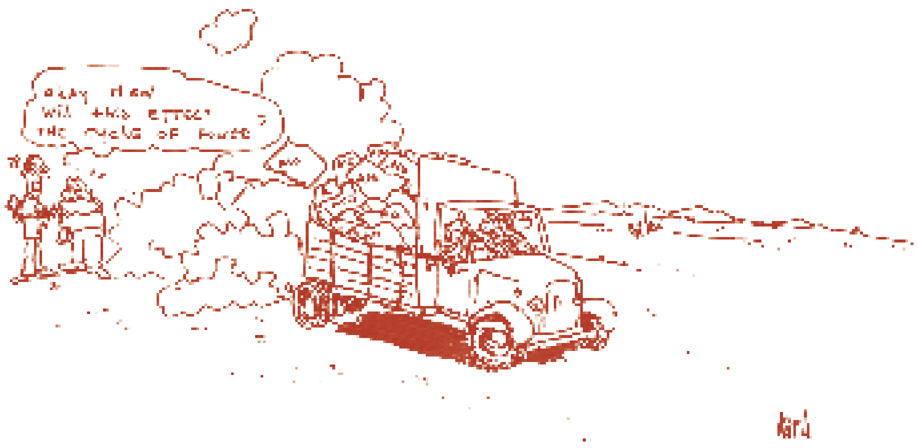
Assessing partners

In many cases, INGOs fund or channel relief through their structural development partners in a country. This has the advantage that they already have a long running partnership, where issues as accountability, trust and assessing are already established. On the other hand, few of these partners may have capacities for relief work. Several organizations, including Tear Fund and Novib work in immediate crises through partners even though they do not meet their standards for quality relief, but make it a point to enhance the capacities of these partners once the immediate crises is over.
INGOs that concentrate on funding requests of local NGOs without being in the field themselves rely on advice from relations in their network about the requesting organisation or the assessment of local experts.
In addition, several organisations are working on organisational assessment tools. Two kinds of tools can be distinguished: quick scans for rapid appraisal of possible partners and elaborate self-assessment tools which are more applicable to longer-term partners that have already established a relationship with the INGO. There is no systematic insight yet on the usefulness of these tools for humanitarian emergencies.

Organizational realities

Working with local partners means working with organizations with their own historically grown patterns of work. Local partners have distinct organizational cultures and operate under particular state-society relations and legal frameworks. Knowledge about these realities and how they change in the emergency is important for INGOs engaging in partnership. Because work styles have repercussions for strengths

and weaknesses in humanitarian work, it is important to explore the nature of organizations during 'normality' to build more realistic expectations about their effectiveness in emergency (Bakewell 1999). This includes gaining insight in divisions within civil society and the diversity of ways in which it is related to politics. Local ties of NGOs may enhance their effectiveness but can also have adverse and harmful consequences, especially in situations of armed conflict.
As one of the interviewees mentioned: 'ask yourself some very realistic questions about the nature of wealth and the nature of power in that



society and how your actions can contribute to the cycle of power and wealth'. Another point mentioned in the interviews is that in areas with a humanitarian history many NGOs are offspring from operations of INGOs. In these cases, interested INGOs may have to pay special attention to the social sustainability of these NGOs, in particular to what extent they are rooted in society, and to what extent they really represent the intended target group.
Furthermore, it is important to realise the effects long-term crises have on local NGOs and civil society (Harvey 1998). Complex Political Emergencies break down civil society and this has implications for developing partnerships. Organization building is never an easy or quick thing. The depletion of local resources, a lack of organizational capacities and the environment of suspicion in which civil society organizations have to grow makes organization building in conflict or post-conflict situations even more difficult. One interviewee argued that such capacity building in emergency situations bears the risk of focussing too much on strengthening capacities of local partners and may shift the focus too far away from relief and the people/beneficiaries it is intended for.

Partnership in a larger institutional field

The influx of international organizations in emergency situations has a profound impact on the local organizational field. As many of the interviewed mentioned, the influx of INGOs, money, and material in post-war zones is immense. As a result, existing operations are blown up or overwhelmed. The situation also attracts new, opportunistic NGOs that want to share in the resources. Coordination among INGOs and the formation of coordination networks among local partners is considered important to remedy negative effects, but remains difficult in practice.

The interplay of different INGOs leads to problems that affect the working of local NGOs and is an expression of competition between INGOs in the field. An often mentioned problem (especially by smaller players) is that big INGOs who are merely engaged in acute relief assistance use local organisations as subcontractors for their short-term relief activities, selecting local NGOs who were already in a process of capacity building with other INGOs. This is exacerbated when institutional donors push INGOs to certain disaster sites or specific conflict areas. The INGOs relation with their back donors then drives them to spend more money and goods in a given situation than needed.

These kind of processes have led ZOA, for instance, to deliberately choose non-obvious partners in terms of capacity for delivering humanitarian aid. Yet, the situation remains problematic in different ways. For instance, some local NGOs are pushed out of the field because the big INGOs have beefed up other locals with an enormous stock of goods and money, as happened with a local partner of ACT-NL. The danger is, especially in the context of sustainability and capacity building, that when the immediate calamity is over, and the funds dry up, these bigger local organisations disappear again, and the region is still lacking local capacities for humanitarian aid. For this reason ZOA distinguishes tactical- and strategic partners, the former as contractors available due to the emergency and the latter as partners whose capacity will be strengthened on a more structural basis.

Policy, Accountability and Standards

Goals and strategies defined in the donor countries differ from the reality in the field. Humanitarian agencies adhere to certain principles including the notion that aid is given in impartial and neutral ways. They have increasingly adopted operational standards, such as the Code of Conduct, the Sphere Standards and internal standards of organizations or networks. In addition, aid should be delivered according to management requirements, methods of reporting, participation of target groups and other general norms and strategies related to INGO policies and demands of their back donors. One of the problems is how to realize that partners adhere to these requirements. Apart from a question of how to monitor this, it also involves the policy question to what extent policy standards and demands from the INGOs can be lowered to retain an acceptable practice.

Another problem is how to avoid mismanagement of funds. Funding attracts opportunists, whereas well-meaning individual actors and agencies often become the target of private or political pressure to devolve funds. INGOs have developed several creative solutions to these problems, including strategies to bring an expat in the field, managing, advising and reporting for a local NGO and in the mean time training them. Alternatively, INGOs to minimize the risk of corruption, misuse or failures, have spread this risk by creating different partnerships in the same region. One of the forms of capacity building mentioned earlier, organisational development and the training of individuals in for instance management skills, standards and reporting, can also be considered a solution to these problems.
When capacity building becomes part of the balancing act to control partners' adherence to standards and financial accountability, this raises questions about the nature of the partnership. Are partners facilitated to become autonomous organizations, undergoing a trajectory of growing independence or growing ownership for local partners, or are they capacitated to become good partners to the INGOs? And what does that mean for the relationship between the partners? Several of the interviewees mentioned they find it difficult to accommodate three roles at the same time: being donor in need of accountability and control, being monitor of implementation, and intervening with advice and capacity building measures.

Finally, many interviewees observed that the amount of complicated management and reporting requirements of donors creates capacity problems in local NGOs. This is exacerbated by the fact that donors all have different requirements. They recommended that procedures and requirements should be simplified.

Conclusion: Is real partnership an illusion?

We started this paper by stating that there are different meanings to partnership. Talking about international aid relations, some authors observed that given the asymmetry between funders and implementers, partnership in development should not be understood as legal partnerships, but more as the partnership of marriage, involving complementary and different identities. As they put it: "as with most marriages, the relationship is as much a site of struggle as a cause of harmony" (Stirral and Henkel 1997). The nature of partnership and the roles and discretion of the partners involved are always under negotiation, and the way in which the partnership evolves reflects the power processes taking place.

In the case of humanitarian assistance, this paper brings out that the relation is perhaps even more complicated. These complications are derived from:

- The immediacy of some of the operations, which may dictate a certain style of implementation and partnership, and the difficulties involved to change this style in the process following the period of immediate emergency.

- The standards and operation procedures of humanitarian aid that do not easily comply or adjust to local organizational work styles, decision making patterns and cultures.
- For several reasons elaborated above capacity building of partners is more complicated, risky and vulnerable to setbacks in conflict situations than in situations of 'normality'.
- The short duration of funding cycles in relief and rehabilitation work against developing full partnership including processes of capacity building. Some INGOs mention that a trajectory of three years is needed to obtain something in terms of strengthening an organisation. In the case of humanitarian relief, funding rarely stretches beyond one year.
- Donor conditions sometimes require the presence of (Western) expats to ensure effectiveness and accountability of the funded operation. For instance Euronaid, which assists local NGOs[2] to access EU funding basically states that expats of INGOs are necessary to receive funding.
- The resource-poor environments of areas in situations of chronic emergency where the capacitation of NGOs in terms of skills is negated by a total material dependency on outside resources.
- Finally, a question that becomes increasingly relevant is how partnership is affected by the interplay between INGOs and military forces. Increasingly, INGOs work almost under the flag of warring parties (Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq) and what this implies for local partnerships remains a point for discussion.

All INGOs in different ways and to different extents act as funding agencies to other local NGOs. The diversity in situations and the risks involved stipulate that they should be careful and specific in defining the terms of partnership in different situations. One of the questions is where partnership in the sense of ownership, participation and equality becomes an illusion and a mere legitimisation of the humanitarian enterprise, and where indeed it can live up to its promise and contribute to more resilient and capable societies.

[2]the Food security budget line is accessible for local NGOs as well as member INGOs of Euronaid and other European NGOs

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Paper 2.

The Powers That Be...

Cooperation between Dutch Humanitarian NGOs and local government structures.

Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen

Let's work together?

If a government fulfils its responsibility of easing the suffering of its own citizens, there is no need for international humanitarian aid. Hence, the very presence of international humanitarian agencies denotes that local governments are not capable or lack the political will to oblige this responsibility. (I)NGOs can thus be viewed as stepping in to provide short-term assistance to compensate for government's shortcomings.

The relationship between NGOs and local governments is multi-faceted. In situations with a functioning government, organizations have to work within its structures and operate within the boundaries of legal systems and rules and regulations. Furthermore, interaction occurs around the co-ordination of aid. When crises occur, many different organizations with varying backgrounds enter a crisis-area, with overlapping mandates and often shared priorities. Who takes the co-ordinating role: the government, the UN, or (I)NGOs? The way in which co-ordination structures evolve, can be crucial for the effect of humanitarian aid in disaster response. Furthermore, NGOs and governments can relate as partners complementing each other in the delivery of aid or government bodies can form the target of capacity building programmes of NGOs. The latter aims to enhance the capacities of local governments in a sustainable manner.

Humanitarian agencies therefore deal with local governments and their structures on different levels and with different aims:

- Depending on governments to create humanitarian space, i.e. to get access to a region where assistance is needed; local legislation, permits and security are issues.

- Targeting governments to address their responsibility by advocating policy change in the fields of human rights, governmental service institutions and disaster preparedness or conflict mitigation.
- Strengthening or enhancing capacities of governmental organizations, as facilitators or even partners.
- In sharing in co-ordination and co-operation structures with INGOs, local NGOs, local CBOs, government-representatives, IGOs, and donor governments or multilateral organizations as the EU.

In this paper the four levels of contact with local governments and their surrounding structures will be examined, and dilemma's, advantages and problems discussed. It presents the practices and experiences of Dutch humanitarian agencies in co-operating with local governments and makes an inventory of issues in working within local governments. In some instances, due to the sensitive nature of information provided, the names of interviewees and organizations are not mentioned. The paper is prepared by Disaster Studies, partly on the basis of interviews with representatives of 12 Dutch humanitarian NGOs, and is part of the PSO seminar to be held on 24 January on ''Cooperation with local governments in Humanitarian Assistance''.

Parameters of NGO-GO relations.

This section discusses four parameters that set the relationships between NGOs and governments in crisis situations.

Type of disaster and NGO-GO relations.

In discussing NGO-GO relations many people make an intuitive distinction between working in conflict and working in disasters caused by natural hazards. This is partly a valid distinction. In conflict situations International Humanitarian Law prevails endowing humanitarians with the discretion to by-pass local sovereignty if necessary. In the case of the Red Cross, the distinction is institutionalized with the ICRC working in conflict areas and IFRC in principle taking care of disasters in non-conflict areas. Viewed in the local context, however, the distinction is not so sharp. Disaster response –whether responding to natural hazards, man-made or political disasters– always depends on local circumstances, context, and local power structures. In case of political disasters it is more likely that failing governments and biased or corrupt power structures have contributed to the crisis. However, many of the so-called natural disasters have structural origins as well, and responses to disasters bring out a lack of capacities and/or political will in many non-conflict countries.

'The current food crisis [in North Korea] has structural causes, including economic mismanagement made worse by a decline in subsidized trade with erstwhile political friends in China, the old Soviet Union and elsewhere. The natural disasters of 1995 and 1996, though severe, merely highlighted structural failure; they were indicative rather than causal.' (Bennet 1999)

Similar observations can be made of many recent disasters, for instance in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Angola. Bad governance is certainly not the prerogative of countries in conflict. Governments can abuse their power for instance by favouring one group of people over another in delivering assistance. Hence, not the type of disaster is the determinant factor in this context but the character, capacities and organization of governance structures. Misconceptions about the relation between type of disaster and governance work two ways. Humanitarian agencies can overestimate the benign character of governments in non-conflict areas, but they also risk underestimating the capacities of government agencies in conflict areas.

Relief, rehabilitation and GO-NGO relations.

The question of how to link to government capacities is for most organizations involved in relief less important than for those in rehabilitation. A quick response is found to be more important than building on durable governmental capacities or policies of coherence between the different players in the humanitarian field. When the immediate relief phase transcends into a rehabilitation phase, the building on capacities and co-ordination becomes more important, for instance in supporting Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation (DPM) or Risk Management (RM) programmes. MSF specializes in the relief phase and has thus little attention for the strengthening of government capacities. Most other organizations, including ZOA refugee care, Care NL, Healthnet International, KiA and Warchild operate more in the rehabilitation phase and work more with the strengthening of local capacities.

The distinction between relief and rehabilitation phases is not clear or principled. In the case of slow-onset crises or contracted emergencies, such as in the case of famines or the conflicts in Sudan, relief and rehabilitation coincide in varying intensity. There has also been critique on the implicit notion in the continuum approach that preceding the crisis there was a situation of normality that was conducive for development. That is often not the case and several authors have warned against misplaced optimism that in many situations there was a balanced normality that can be returned to (Bakewell 1999, Christoplos 1998).

In practice, it is nonetheless important that NGOs define their work in particular contexts as being relief or rehabilitation. Humanitarian emergencies can be considered as 'windows of opportunity', and strengthening local governmental capacities in disaster response can be

a durable investment in international disaster preparedness.
To invest in local government capacities requires, however, a certain level of stability. NGOs thus still need to determine the nature of their assistance. This needs to be based on more contextualized and refined analyses than simply applying the relief-development continuum.

What is the state?

There is a large diversity in government institutions, both between countries and within countries. Within countries, it is good to keep in mind several distinctions that humanitarian NGOs seem to work with in practice. Firstly, there is a distinction between national government and local government. In cases where NGOs do not relate to government at the national level, they may still have established work relations with local government in the areas of their interventions. Secondly, there is a distinction between the political components of the government and its supporting bureaucracy and the so-called line agencies that have implementing responsibilities, such as the Ministries of Health or Education. State organs concerning law, order and violence such as the military, the police and the judiciary apparatus still form another kind of government structures. NGOs often develop differentiated relations in a country with different agencies. They may, for instance, refrain from collaborating with government in the political sense and yet collaborate locally with a line agency.

Implementing or funding NGOs.

A final parameter that sets the conditions of NGO-GO relation is the nature of the NGO. INGOs who physically come to a crisis area to implement a programme have a different relation with local governments than funding NGOs or NGOs with local family branches. When family organizations with local branches like World Vision, Care and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) send people or programmes they can avail of the local embedded ness of their counterparts. In these cases the organizations continue to operate as they did, except that they are being beefed up by specialized (expatriate) personnel or relief teams.

NGOs that provide aid through supporting local NGOs whose institutions and programmes have already been approved by their own governments or channelling their aid through local branches face less complication around access and clearance than INGOs who go to the field themselves. Thus, there is a difference between organizations who mainly fund existing family branches, local partners, or network partners (Care-nl, Dutch Red Cross, Cordaid, World Vision, ZOA refugeecare, KIA/ACT-nl, Tearfund, Novib/Oxfam-nl) and organizations that go to the field themselves (MSF-H, HNI., Warchild, (also)ZOA).

Creating humanitarian space

"Our primary mission is to go and help people and care for them and make them better, and the number one thing is to get access to people, so you have to negotiate, you have to co-operate to some extent, you have to go through local authorities. They got guns, they got the law and a lot of people. What the hell are you doing in other people's country? So, you have to negotiate your access, you can't just walk in without interaction." (interview MSF)

Under International Humanitarian Law governments and other belligerent parties have the obligation to provide humanitarian agencies with the space to access victims of warfare. In reality, belligerent parties often treat civilians as objects to strife over or abuse in their own pursuit of power. They may also block access to victims to avoid exposure of what is happening on the ground through media and NGO reports. This is particularly the case when the population that NGOs want to access is considered hostile to the government authorities. In these cases, NGOs risk to be perceived as partisan and aligning themselves with hostile parties.

In some cases INGOs have to deal with informal governments or regions under rebel rule, or warlord territories. International humanitarian law is even less applicable in these situations, but there are nonetheless several examples where INGOs were able to reach an understanding with rebel groups. For instance with the SPLA, INGOs have reached a Memorandum of Understanding, in which access, permits and even protection is being regulated. Most of the interviewed organizations have experience working with two or more belligerent parties in one country, like Sri Lanka, Sudan, Bosnia and formerly Mozambique. It demands a sensitive way of working regarding independence and neutrality. In order not to be seen as a subcontractor in a political game, INGOs have to be very careful not to lose their legitimation towards the local population, organizations, and governments.

The history and regulation of GO-NGO relations

Apart from the dynamics of the conflict, the access of NGOs also depends on the 'normal' GO-NGO relations in countries. Governments are very different in the space they want to give to (international) NGOs. Sierra Leone is a country often mentioned as having little or no regulations or monitoring on NGOs who are free to do as they like. Likewise, in Mozambique NGOs can just go and open an account where donors can send money to. Countries like Rwanda, India and Bangla Desh, on the other hand, demand a strict registration of NGO and make sure to monitor the flows of money coming in. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh every individual funding has to be cleared by the government, which consumes time and effort. NGOs wanting to work in Eritrea had to wait 6 months for their permits and MSF had to wait two years to get into Birma.

Once NGOs obtain access, they still have to abide to different regulations regarding monitoring and reporting to the government. This takes on different forms depending on the country involved. Many of the Dutch INGOs have little to do with this accountability process in the host country because they fund local partners who maintain this accountability relation themselves. The funding NGOs may still approach the local government for feedback as part of evaluation efforts, and so may their back donors, but they are normally not subject to stringent regulations themselves.

Dealing with local rules and regulations is complicated because INGOs have in addition to comply to rules and regulations of their back donors. ECHO, for instance, demands certain expenditures in Europe like cars or computers. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs makes a distinction between structural humanitarian assistance, with a focus on areas of protracted conflicts, and ad-hoc assistance for rapid onset disasters. There are 10 countries selected for structural humanitarian assistance, these are in 2003: Afghanistan, D.R.C., Sudan, Somalia, Angola, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Liberia, and the Moluccas in Indonesia. INGOs who submit project applications have to consider these regional policies[1].

Accepting harm in exchange for access?

Since the mid 1990s there has been a lot of discussion on the drawbacks of humanitarian aid. Among the many problems cited are that agencies by collecting refugees in camps make them extra vulnerable for attack, that the availability of food and medicines for aid can illicit robbery, and that agencies negotiating access unwittingly contribute to the legitimization of rebel parties (Black 2003).
One of the problems that face humanitarian agencies is what compromise they are willing to make in exchange for access to people in need. There is often a delicate trade-off between humanitarian principles and safe guarding the access to the field. . This can result in dilemmas for agencies whether to stay and leave the people they aim to assist to an unknown (or well anticipated) fate, or to lower expectations and stay. A recent example is the question whether agencies should accept the condition of DPR Korea that all aid has to be channelled through the government's structures. Another example is formed by Angola where agencies were given access, but felt they were being abused because the government was capable of delivering aid but refused to take its responsibility (see Christoplos 1998, WDR 2003: 13/16-17). In another case in Northern Uganda, an INGO could only work by staying silent about government practices while denouncing the atrocities of the rebel side (Jansen 2002). Governments may also make demands on the way NGOs operate in their country. Examples mentioned are the Ethiopian government demanding say in the choice of local partners for INGOs, and the government of Iran interfering with the quality of the personnel of local organizations.

[1]*Also a few rules apply when responding to a rapid onset disaster outside the cluster of 10 structural assistance countries: coordination with UN bodies like UNHCR or WFP after a consolidated appeal or via the United Nations Disaster Assessment Committee (UNDAC) or OCHA.)*

In practice, humanitarian agencies often find creative ways around unjust demands of governments. One example from one of the interviewed INGOs deals with Ethiopia, a country with a high degree of government control regarding foreign assistance. In this example, the agency organized a vocational training but had the primary hidden aim of protecting people against rape by their presence. A similar example was given by another NGO that built clinics and a hospital for Roma communities in Kosovo that would have been under attack if not for the presence of the NGO.

The critique on humanitarian aid culminated in the Do-no-Harm approach developed by Mary Anderson. This approach stipulated that agencies should avoid to do harm with their interventions and that they should anticipate, monitor and remedy (political) abuse of their aid. The Do-no-Harm approach has been very influential and many agencies have taken on the adagium. It has also been reflected in national policies, including the Dutch. Recently, there have been observations that agencies, under influence of Do-no-Harm, have become too cautious at the expense of reaching out to and saving lives of people (Henri Dunant rapport).

The debates on humanitarian ethics and the compromises that have to be made in the field have not been resolved. A recent contribution to the debate appeared in the World Disaster Report of 2003. The WDR takes the opinion that choices of humanitarian agencies are usually not good or bad perse, as long as they are based on thorough analysis, well argued and transparent.

The problem of corruption

Where power is invested in individuals to maintain regulations, corruption and bureaucratic red tape seems to occur. All INGOs have a policy against corruption, but most also agree on the fact that corruption is part of local practice, that compromises have sometimes to be made and that there is a critical boundary between the two. When it is normal in a country to pay something extra when you want to get things done, then it is somehow part of the local context. It is

not, according to some, necessarily wrong to get along with that, if the goal is to help people in need. According to KIA you can't get into Congo without juggling. Also, there's a difference between working in Iran and Kenya regarding juggles, bribes and illicit commission.

It is argued that implementing organizations who are in the field themselves can understand and handle corruption better, by negotiating and advocating against it, whereas bigger funding agencies, who channel their aid trough local partners, do not know what happens on the ground. In some cases, INGOs have ceased activities in situations where the level of diversion of aid was unacceptable. This was for instance the case with MSF in DPR of Korea, where food supplies, and data on the whereabouts and needs of the beneficiaries where subjected to juggles by the government and army.

It is hard to find evidence of corruption and juggles in the reports of local partners. NGOs do not create a financial post for corruption in their budgets or reports. Some argue that such reporting should actually be done to make the problem more visible and allow NGOs more transparency in delineating where they draw the boundary of their compromises.

Advocacy: INGOs as guardians of humanitarian space and more

Advocacy is an important aspect for many humanitarian organizations, irrespective of their mandates. Organizations with a minimalist mandate have often to engage in advocacy, through negotiation or 'silent diplomacy', to realise the humanitarian space needed to access, assist and protect their target groups. Organizations with broader mandates engage in advocacy activities to address the causes of disaster, be it disasters related to natural hazards or disasters related to conflict. In conflict situations the need for advocacy may be more evident, but in the case of disasters caused by natural hazards advocacy can be equally important. In countries where natural hazards frequently occur, advocacy can enhance political awareness of the social causes of people's vulnerability to natural hazards (such as environmental depletion and poor housing conditions), and contribute to disaster preparedness by addressing issues of effectiveness and justice in disaster response.

Humanitarian organizations have several legal grounds to engage in advocacy towards local governments. Most importantly, organizations avail of instruments of International Humanitarian Law. ICRC in particular feels mandated to hold governments and belligerent parties accountable for their actions and policies in view of the Geneva conventions that most countries have signed. In addition it has been observed that humanitarian organizations could make better use as well of other international treaties and conventions that local governments may have signed[2]. It may be relevant to know whether, for instance, a particular government is signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women or to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the case of natural hazards (I)NGOs can often refer to disaster reduction policies drawn in the context of the International Decade of natural Disaster Reduction and the programme of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, as well as different protocols around Climate Change.

[2]*Observation of Koenraad van Brabant during humanitarian aid course in Wageningen, December 2003.*

Dutch organizations engage directly in (local) advocacy or support local NGOs or CBOs to do so. Local civil society in is general considered to be the most crucial in promoting human rights, political change, and so on. Many Dutch organizations aim to sensitize their local partners and build their capacity – if necessary – to address the local government or local government agencies. There are also cases, as related by Care, where INGOs have to lobby on behalf of their local partners to enhance a good environment for them to operate. Where the Dutch NGOs support local NGO partners to do advocacy, they often try to engage in (supplementary) lobby with their own home government, EU or UN to advocate the creation of humanitarian space through political means.

Governments as implementing partners and strengthening government capacities

In the 1980s and early 1990s international discourse strongly favoured local NGOs over government because NGOs were considered more value-based, oriented towards poverty reduction, closer to the grassroots and more effective. The out-contracting of service-delivery to NGOs also fitted then pervailing neo-liberal notions about receding states. Since the late 1990s the tide changed somewhat against NGOs when discussions concentrated on the gaps between NGO policy and practice, the difficulties of upscaling NGO efforts and the presumed lack of accountability. Increasingly, international discourse turned again in the direction of governments. Firstly, because it was felt governments had to maintain their primary responsibility for the well-being of their citizens. Secondly, it was realised that the weakening of state services could make countries more conflict prone since states increasingly could lose legitimacy and credibility. Thirdly, the advantages of governments over NGOs such as their enduring presence, wide outreach and being subject to democratic control (where applicable) seem to have been rediscovered or re-valued. Fourthly, it appears that many government agencies have adopted some NGO features such as packaging programmes in one or three-year projects that facilitate funding by external sources. Presently, INGOs differ in the extent in which they concentrate on the strengthening of local civil society or extend their services to governments as well. In the latter case they may work directly with government or support local NGOs aiming to strengthen governments. This may include sensitizing local governments to their responsibilities, for instance with regard to disaster preparedness and mitigation. Novib for instance, funds a local NGO in Pakistan for the development of government DPM strategies.

In discussing governments as implementing partners or programmes to strengthen government capacity it is important to note the multifaceted nature of governments discussed above. Strengthening policy capacity of national governments can be part of rehabilitation activities, especially when these are geared towards functional rehabilitation. Unlike physical rehabilitation, which is geared towards replacing infrastructure and services, functional rehabilitation takes into account how services will function and pays attention to the 'soft' sides such as staff, curricula, and the (financial) sustainability of services (Macrae 2001). This can imply in practice that NGOs support (directly or through co-ordination structures) policy formulation processes regarding the sector in which they work. INGOs may also be involved in the improvement of co-ordination or communication between government agencies and NGOs and in policy awareness raising and improvement in the area of Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation.

Mostly, however, NGOs deal with local line agencies. This varies from a state water company, a district authority, to the local department of health. Working with such agencies is comparable to working with a local NGO, and we can refer to the first discussion paper regarding the characteristics and challenges of such relationships. The more localized and less politically involved government agencies are, the more easy it appears to work with them, especially in violent conflict zones, as examples from Angola and Afghanistan show. NGOs do report positive experiences in working with governments. In Kosovo for instance, Warchild advocated the adoption of creative therapeutic lessons into the curriculum of primary schools, in cooperation with the ministry of education. MSF, Cordaid and Healthnet all provided examples where they were able to strengthen or otherwise support and co-operate with state health clinics as implementing partners. Sometimes, INGOs provide experts in state facilities or pay state employed personnel if the governments is (temporarily) not capable of doing so.

Work relations with the military or policy segments of local governments are complicated. In cases of peacetime disasters, INGOs may make use of the capacities of local military apparatus to deliver aid, in conflict situations this is considered highly inappropriate. This is not to say that in everyday practice, NGO staff may feel there is no other way but to make use of local military channels against NGO policy (Hilhorst and Schmiemann 2002). Capacity building of local military or police is considered a legitimate task of INGOs. ICRC, for instance, trains, advises and criticizes military to prepare them better for their humanitarian task. In a similar vein, NGOs have supported training on human rights or gender for local police forces.

One of the problems that NGOs encounter in cases where they work with local government is often how to make these programmes sustainable in the absence of a facilitating or co-operative national government. Another problem encountered is how to hold governments accountable for their responsibilities. Where government refuses to pay for health services, should NGOs still continue to uphold these services? One of the examples provided was from Healthnet International, who felt forced to stay longer in Cambodia than planned, because the State refused to the over a clinic as agreed but planned instead to pass the clinic on to an other NGO. Governments, in these cases, politically use suffering to attract foreign assistance.

Coordinating structures

´Everybody wants coordination, but nobody wants to be coordinated´ is a widely used phrase, Luitwieler en Frerks (1998) continue with the remark that it can also be in conflict with an organization's mission statement regarding their independence and neutrality.
In practice, most INGOs are engaged in creating platforms and consortia, such as Operation Lifeline Sudan and the Birma Border Consortium. Co-ordination mechanisms start usually to operate once the immediate relief phase is over. Even then, for some organizations the need for co-ordination is not so crucial, especially when they have a specialized mandate such as in health.
Co-ordination is usually done by multilateral organizations such as the UNHCR, WFP, FAO, or OCHA. Often UNHCR or WFP takes on a co-ordinating role, with some few exceptions, for instance when UNHCR was not acceptable to the government of Birma, who considered UNHCR to be partial, and thought a Consortium of INGOs were more suitable. There is some discussion over the question if local authorities should be given priority in taking the lead in co-ordination.

Humanitarian aid and global security.

One of the interviewed organizations during its operations in Bosnia had to co-operate with local Serbian, Muslim and Croat authorities. They were involved in re-building schools. In one case they assisted in building a school for Muslim children. However, the school was being built on Croat-ruled territory, which the Croat authorities did not want to allow. Since the Office of the High Representative (check OHR) according to the Dayton agreement could over-rule local policy, the school was nonetheless being built. However, to curb local resistance a Spanish SFOR tank guarded the construction of the school. As a result, the INGO could thus not avoid being associated with military forces.

Working with local governments takes on an entirely different dimension when government is taken over by Western intervening powers. Under the heading of humanitarian interventions, anti-terrorism or preventive war, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq have encountered military attacks and subsequent occupations by the same countries that are major donors of humanitarian funding and locate the head offices of humanitarian organizations.

Humanitarian organizations have difficulty to define their relation with the occupying powers and retain their neutrality. Lately, it looks like that no matter how they operate they have become targets of attack themselves, with the recent bombing of the ICRC / Red Cross and the UNHCR offices in Baghdad as most notorious examples. Humanitarian organizations report numerous more incidents that do not reach the headlines but nonetheless take lives of humanitarians.

One of the difficulties involved is how to perceive of Civil Military Co-operation (CIMIC) in these conditions. CIMIC has become a trend in humanitarian operations, where NGOs (often reluctantly) work together with peacekeeping forces. It becomes, however, highly complicated when the military are associated with occupying forces and fulfil different mandates at the same time, as apparent in Iraq at this moment where peacekeeping coincides with offensive military operations.

Conclusion

Some points to conclude:

- Co-operation with the government is not principally different in cases of conflict or disaster caused by natural hazards, although in the former case chances that NGOs have to cope with bad governance situations are larger. Likewise, there is no principled difference in working through government channels in emergency relief phases or in rehabilitation, although the nature of the relation may change from negotiating access and implementation to policy-oriented assistance and capacity building.

- Working through the government can be advantageous considering that governments often have the channels available through which aid can be delivered and considering that governments usually have an enduring presence making capacity building a long term investment. On the other hand, governments may not be best suitable to reach specific target groups and working through governments can jeopardise humanitarian ethics when organizations become enmeshed in politics.

- Political will to prevent or tackle crises is the most important asset in effective disaster response (Luitwieler en Frerks 1998). This is also what most of the interviewed practitioners mentioned. When there is no governmental capacity to respond to crises, INGOs can come in and assist, through local NGOs or through government agencies. When government lacks political will, the relation becomes much more complex. It is also extremely complex when government is taken over by occupying forces of the countries of origin of the NGOs

- NGOs directly or indirectly working with local governments make use of the multi-faceted nature of governments to increase their room for manoeuvre by developing differentiated relations. Where relating with central government is problematic, they nonetheless define work relations with implementing local government agencies avoiding contact with security segments of government. This results often in workable relations, although it is difficult to aim for sustainable forms of capacity building with agencies without the back up of higher political agencies.

- Working through government channels can sharpen humanitarian dilemmas. When NGOs depend on government for access, the question is what they are willing to compromise to reach their target groups. An other problem is how to hold governments accountable for their primary responsibility for the wellbeing of their people without denying victims the help they need.

- The multi-faceted and multi-dimensional nature of government provides NGOs often with room for manoeuvre, but the relations developed in one domain are nonetheless affected or restricted by what happens in the other domains. One such effect is mentioned above, namely that working with local agencies remains necessarily limited in scope without political backup. An other effect may be that the local population can not make the subtle distinctions by which NGOs organize their work, as has been sadly demonstrated by recent developments in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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Paper 3.

Participation and Humanitarian aid: Biting realities?

Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen

Who has time and cares about participation in emergencies when everything is about life-saving anyway?
What do you mean, participation in humanitarian programmes?
Even if we want to do participation, are victims of disasters and conflict interested and capable to do it?
If we start doing participation in humanitarian programmes, wouldn't it be wise to learn first from the experiences in development?

Introduction

Compared to the long history of participation in development, issues of participation in humanitarian aid are just beginning to be explored. For a long time organizing relief in a participatory way seemed unthinkable. Even though little attention was paid to the question of participation, objections against it would point to the pressure of the emergency that would leave little time and space for participation. One could add that participation of local people and giving them say in decisions on the relief operations could jeopardize the neutrality of the humanitarian organizations.

Since several years, participation has nonetheless entered the policy and practices of humanitarian aid. This shift can be attributed to several factors. One is the increasing reflection taking place in humanitarian agencies when they were confronted with critique about their effectiveness and the way aid tended to make people dependent. Many humanitarian agencies in the 1990s began to broaden their mandate to work on rehabilitation and disaster preparedness, and make aid instrumental for development. Many development agencies, on the other hand, started to consider how to do development work in conflict situations, bringing along their agenda for participation. Finally, NGOs in the emergency areas as well as beneficiaries from humanitarian organizations have started to become more vocal in demanding participation. While participation is rising on the agenda in humanitarian aid, there are still many questions around it. This paper addresses some of these questions. It takes stock of current issues, concerns stemming from experience in development with participation and forwards some notions on participation in a context of conflict. The paper makes no distinction between participation in natural disaster situations or conflict situations. As was elaborated in an earlier paper on co-operation between humanitarian agencies and local authorities, this distinction is not principled and often not relevant (Hilhorst and Jansen 2003).

Reasons to incorporate participation in humanitarian aid.

Before going into the question of what participation means in practice, let us review the reasons why humanitarian agencies should take participation seriously:

- *It is a matter of respect.*
  It befits organizations that have the principle of humanity as their core value to treat aid-recipients with dignity. Creating space for participation is a token of respect.

- *More efficient and (cost)-effective aid*
  There are instrumental and pragmatic reasons to take a participatory approach to humanitarian aid. Interventions will be more carefully planned and executed if based on local people's perception and knowledge. Participation can enhance cost-effectiveness because it reduces the risk of putting money in irrelevant or unaccepted aid.

- *Improve knowledge base*
  Participation helps to obtain a holistic picture of the local situation and actors. Local people are diverse, and people in similar situations may have different ways of perceiving needs and problems and have different ways of coping.

- *Sustainability*
  Participation can make aid more sustainable. Water installations need to be maintained after the NGO leaves, which is easier when from the start maintenance structures are put into place. The chances to make aid contribute to disaster preparedness and the transition to development enhances when the people having to do the follow-up have participated from the start.

- *Social and organisational learning.*
  Through discussions and negotiations people shift in their labelling and giving meaning to situations and social structures and develop a shared appreciation of the problems.

- *Legitimisation of aid*
  International NGOs may be associated with foreign policy or considered too external, national NGOs may be perceived as elitist. When people feel they are taken seriously, can participate, and can express their ideas and complaints, aid agencies gain legitimacy, because it shows transparency towards the clients or beneficiaries.

- *Vehicle to empowerment*
  Participation can be a vehicle of empowerment. Through participation in management vulnerable groups of society can be emancipated to speak up and be heard. People who can feel ownership with aid programmes can regain their dignity and take charge again of their own future.

- *Participation is a must.*
  Every organization that has signed the Code of Conduct has obliged itself to never impose aid upon beneficiaries. "Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programme. We will strive to achieve full community participation in our relief and rehabilitation programmes".[1] Likewise, organizations that have adopted the Sphere Standards are committed to the principle that the disaster-

[1] *7th principle of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*

affected population has the opportunity to participate in the design and implementation of the assistance programme.

Participation in humanitarian aid: Some checks for saying yes and doing less:

• Do you screen local partners for their participation approach?
  – If yes, can partners' clients approach you with complaints?

• Are people asked about their needs?
  – If yes, are they asked about their priority needs?

• Are there meetings with client groups?
  – If yes, is follow-up granted?

• Are people's voices heard in evaluations?
  – If yes, also in formulating Terms of Reference?
  – If yes, are evaluation results reported back?

Conclusions

In view of these considerations, one would expect that participation in relief aid has become widespread practice. Analysis shows that many organizations have adopted participation in their objectives but that their practice is different. "The concepts of consultation and participation of affected populations are more often found in the discourse of aid agencies than in their operational practise" (Grünewald 2002).
Tania Kaiser (2000) concluded that there is much less experimentation, implementation and documentation of beneficiary participation than would be expected on the basis of the widely proclaimed importance of the issue. Partly, this may be attributed to difficulties in the implementation or context of aid, or to a lack of knowledge on the part of implementing agencies. Partly this can be attributed to an inflation of participation resulting from donor conditions. Implementing partners of international agencies know that their proposals will be scrutinized for participation and may adopt the concept as part of their rhetoric to secure funds. The latter points to the responsibility of donors in enhancing participation. Ntata (2002) mentions about this: "it seems that the time is ripe for donors to reassess their accountability requirements and priorities in order to change the upward accountability from being a bottleneck to agencies that might be committed to participation". If donor agencies are less strict on a blueprint conception of participation and enhance their own understanding as a local and flexible process, aid agencies have more space to create and experiment with participatory practises.

What is participation?

The term participation is used for a range of mechanisms of different intensity and levels of people's ownership. Participation has a multitude of practical meanings, among others there is often confusion whether participation should be seen as a means or as an end. Jules Pretty has made the following distinction of participation in his famous 'participation ladder'

1. Passive participation	People are told what will happen
2. Participation in information giving	Information is elicited from people
3. Participation by consultation	People give their opinions
4. Participation for material incentives	Schemes like food-for-work
5. Functional participation	To make the project succeed
6. Interactive participation	People involved in deciding
7. Self-mobilisation	People take independent initiatives

('The participation typology', Pretty 1993)

The upper part of the ladder represents forms of participation that have more to do with instrumentality than with rights or ownership. It is important to note that participation can take many forms. Even though particular methods of work have become strongly associated with participation, such as mapping, ranking and other instruments used in Participatory Rapid Appraisals, participation can mean any kind of consultation or involvement of target groups in humanitarian programmes. It has also been suggested that participation is an attitude and approach rather than a set of separate activities. Participation is used for forms of involvement of stakeholders in humanitarian programmes. There are also other ways to take local perspectives into account. Social researchers, and particularly anthropologists, are equipped to unravel local dynamics and explore local people's lifeworlds to discover how they view their situation, their capacities and the aid they are given. Even though these mediated forms of bringing in the differentiated and gendered local perspectives may be flawed, like any information, and do not result in the sense of ownership that may come along with real participation, they are important. They can provide valuable information where the situation inhibits direct participation. And they can provide important complementary or additional information counterbalancing some of the problems encountered with participation (Pottier 1993:7). We will return to this point later.

Participation can be part of every stage of programming humanitarian aid: in programme planning, in programme implementation/exiting and in programme monitoring and evaluation. Just to mention some examples, target groups can be involved in needs analyses and the establishment of baseline data. Refugees are often expected to contribute labour to the erection of shelters, and are involved in programmes through a host of PRA techniques. Agencies may have a fund to support target group initiatives in the field of disaster preparedness, including for instance a community-based ambulance service. There are several techniques to ask recipients of aid to rate the performance of the aid and involve them meaningfully in evaluation exercises. Participation and accountability issues are often closely associated, and debate is ongoing on participation to bring about downward accountability to beneficiaries. This includes, for example, complaint procedures, public hearings on the quality of aid, social audits or the idea of an ombudsman that has the mandate to consider complaints from all humanitarian agencies working in a particular area (Brabant 2002b).

Finally, it is useful to make a distinction between direct and indirect participation. Direct participation concerns participation at the individual level of beneficiaries. Indirect participation concerns participation of membership organizations of target groups. These can be Community Based Organizations (CBOs), or a range of other forms of civic or religious organizations.

Constraints on participation in relief

There are several reasons why some people think there can be no participation in relief situations. All of these are contested, although they may have relevance in particular situations.

Some reasons concern the supposed willingness and capacity of people that are affected by conflict or disaster to participate. Until recently, many believed that there is no need for participation, since humanitarian aid is doing good and people are grateful to agencies for saving their lives. In reality it turns out that beneficiaries have many complaints about humanitarian agencies and their staff, and that they usually appreciate to have space to express and address these complaints (Brabant 2002a). It is also suggested that the clients of humanitarian aid are too vulnerable: sick and starving people cannot participate. However, as Anderson and Woodrow have demonstrated, even the weakest in society have skills, resources and strengths that can be harnessed for participation.

"Disaster victims have important capacities which are not destroyed in a disaster. Outside aid to these victims must be provided in ways that recognise and support these capacities if it is to have a long-term effect. When relief assistance is given without recognition of these capacities, it can undermine and weaken them, leaving those whom it is intended to help even worse off than they were before" (Anderson and Woodrow, 1993:136).

Survivors are active and if they display symptoms of dependency this is usually induced by aid. Nowadays the notion that people are too traumatised to participate becomes more popular. However, being traumatized has many different manifestations and does not necessarily stop people's active involvement.

Other reasons refer to the nature of humanitarian emergency response. It is often said that there is no time for participation under the pressure of emergency. However, most relief programmes last much longer than envisaged, in the case of long-term emergencies or when agencies stay on for rehabilitation or development work. Other arguments raised are that organization of humanitarian aid is too complex for meaningful participation or that participation makes no sense under the restriction of short project cycles. These ideas forsake that participation can be done in many ways, as long as the political will to promote participation is there.

Recently, it has also been suggested that participation costs time and money that should be saved for saving lives. Although this could be a problem, it is not generally valid, since participation can also be more cost-effective than traditional approaches. Finally, it is sometimes suggested that situations of instability are characterized by too many political tensions and hidden agendas that will bias the participatory process, and may even be exacerbated by it. On the other hand, it can be stated that lack of participation can also increase tension and conflict. Participation is a form of respect, that can enhance good relations with and among the community and contribute to the security of field teams and aid personnel (Grünewald, 2002).
The general perception that all institutions in conflict situations have been destroyed or broken down, thus forfeiting opportunities for meaningful local participation is also not sustained by reality in many situations. As one of the people consulted for this paper mentioned: "There are always structures to connect to, there is never nothing".
Having discarded some of the a-priori objections against participation in humanitarian programmes, it remains nonetheless important to take into account that there can be many risks, pitfalls and problems with participation. Decades of experience with participation in development has revealed many weaknesses and problems in practice. These may be even more poignant in conflict and disaster, and must be faced and dealt with. Among the problems cited is that participation is often manipulated by powerful actors, thereby reinforcing the status quo (Frerks 1991). In humanitarian emergencies, the risks that warlords, rebel leaders or oppressive authorities may abuse participation to advance their own interests or feed into conflict are real and can not be neglected. Also less powerful actors may use the possibilities created by policies of participation. Kibreab (2004) writes about cheating amongst refugees regarding food rations and refugee statuses.
He concludes that many beneficiaries of aid perceive NGOs and donors as bureaucratic institutions that stand outside of the moral universe they occupy themselves (Kibreab 2004).

Participatory processes can be a powerful element in facilitating alternative dispute resolution, but can also mercilessly expose or worsen conflicts in society. In conflict situations, tensions between groups of people are high and suspicions and rumours often abound. Providing channels for participation may exacerbate these tensions and lead to open conflict. Also, in many situations people may feel too oppressed of fearsome to express their minds freely, rendering the

discussion or information gathered useless or perfunctory.
There can also be practical problems in emergency programmes that delimit the space for participation. Local people, especially after having fled from their own environment, may not have the specific knowledge required for the planning of humanitarian programmes, and local practices of decision-making may be such that they delay or even obstruct implementation. In humanitarian crises the price for delay or obstruction is high and can lead to unnecessary suffering.
Local people may also be 'unreliable' in the information they give. They often suit their reported needs according to what they expect particular agencies can deliver, or cunningly underreport their coping capacities and remaining assets in order to enhance the chance for receiving aid (Hilhorst 2003: 216-8). In some cases, people are not aware of their needs, such as Warchild sometimes experiences in relation to parents of traumatised children who may not be aware of the symptoms involved.
Participation is also time-consuming and depends on the ability of the different actors to speak up and organise to claim their position. Survivors of disaster and conflict may need all their energy for coping and caretaking. As one respondent explained her absence from meetings in a humanitarian programme in Rwanda: "I have no time for meetings and projects, I am too busy to survive!"[2]

Finally, there can be problems of representation and mandate. It is very important to consider who becomes included or excluded in participatory practices. In refugee situations, for example, participation can worsen relations between refugees and hosts, if the host population is not involved. When it is not clear to what effect participation is done, in other words what the mandate is of the participatory 'voice', people may lose their interest to participate. In that case they do not feel taken seriously. Participation has then become an empty ritual, which simply consumes resources away from more beneficial activities. Ntata has pointed out that the latter is a real risk in humanitarian aid where 'centralised, top-down, measures, have long been the norm'. As he says: "if power and decision making are seen to remain with humanitarian actors, there may be no perceived value in participating in a process that is essentially pre-determined by agencies" (Ntata 2002).

[2] *Fieldnotes Thea Hilhorst, Rwanda 1998*

There are thus genuine concerns that in particular contexts may decide against adopting particular forms of beneficiary participation.
The challenge is in these situations to maintain nonetheless a participatory approach, which requires creativity. As the table below illustrates one of the main challenges in these situations is to remain critical towards one's considerations. Too often, organizations decide against target groups involvement because of the wrong reasons.

Time for introspection: When your agency identifies constraints for local participation, ask yourself: Are they real constraints or do they signal:

- Lack of political will?
- Inter-agency competition and rivalry?
- Hiding programme faults?
- Thinking from the perspective of the own organization?
- Leaning to donors instead of local recipients?
- Lack of motivation from cynicalized programme staff?
- Resulting from cultural bias, prejudice or racism?
- A mind-set emphasizing speed, control and logistics even when the emergency is over?

Participation in relief and/or in rehabilitation?

One of the most persistent beliefs about target group participation is that it is not feasible in immediate emergency situations. Participation is then only considered in rehabilitation or chronic emergencies. Immediate emergency would demand too much speed to 'waste' time and resources on participation and participation is too strongly associated with building trust and long-term efforts. We like to contest this notion on three grounds.

Firstly, participation is feasible in al situations, provided it is considered primarily an attitude and approach rather than a pre-conceived set of activities. Small measures can make a big difference in how aid is being perceived and appreciated. For instance, people in Northern Iraq often mentioned how they appreciated a particular aid agency that, unlike other agencies in the region, provided them with a choice from a certain 'menu' of relief items. By providing such choice, the agency had acknowledged that people have differentiated needs even in emergency and had treated them with the respect owed to their clients (Waegeningh et al 2003). Improving communication with the target group can provide other examples that can make a difference, for instance through providing information on the agency's identity and programme or providing space for individual consultation.

Secondly, it has been argued that disaster situations are also windows of opportunity in the sense that people are motivated to change their practices in order to prevent future disasters. The 'wind of change' that often blows in the aftermath of disaster or conflict can make local bureaucrats and NGO officers more open to change, providing humanitarian agencies with the opportunity to advocate or introduce more participatory approaches than hitherto applied (ALNAP/Groupe URD 2003, Anderson and Woodrow 1989).

And thirdly, it turns out to be very complicated to change towards a participatory approach once a programme has started out with a particular style of intervention. Changing from a top-down relief-oriented style to a more participatory approach is difficult. Agencies tend to postpone the change for too long. Besides, it is notably easier to change objectives and activities than it is to change intervention styles, especially since the latter is highly interwoven with staff attitudes and recipient perceptions. A recent evaluation of 11 years of aid to North Iraq by a Consortium of Dutch NGOs showed that the participatory approach lagged several years behind a change in programme objective towards rehabilitation. It took a radical break in the programme of one year due to a delay in fund-raising, after which a new staff had to be recruited before significant changes were achieved (Waegeningh et al 2003). In a similar vein, ZoA experienced it was difficult to introduce a participatory approach after several years of relief programmes in Rwanda and finally decided to dismiss the entire staff and selectively rehire some of the more participatory-inclined members of staff.

These experiences suggest that a participatory approach is best adopted from the start of interventions, even on a limited scale which can then be expanded in the course of the programme.

The following statements can summarize and conclude the foregoing:

1. There are many good reasons to take a participatory approach to humanitarian aid. Target group participation is a sign of respect, can improve the quality and effectiveness of aid, enhance organizational learning, legitimise aid, enhance downward accountability and make aid into a vehicle of empowerment of crisis-affected people.

2. There are many types and forms of participation. Participation can be part of all phases of humanitarian programmes from planning, to implementation to evaluation and exiting, and is crucial in enhancing the accountability of humanitarian agencies.

3. Although many humanitarian agencies subscribe to the importance of target group participation, the actual record of promoting participation is disappointing compared to the importance attached to it. This is partly due to constraints inside organizations and the widespread pragmatical adoption of participatory rhetoric to oblige funding conditions. It is also due to misconceptions on disaster-affected people, the nature of humanitarian programmes and the working of institutions in conflict situations. Agencies may also have a restricted image of what participation can constitute in practice.

4. Best results are achieved when a participatory approach is adopted from the very start of relief interventions. By adopting such approach from the start, crisis-affected people can easier regain their dignity. It helps to positively seize the wind of change that often blows in (post-) conflict or disaster situation. Early investment in participatory approaches also pay off in the long run because it avoids that programmes develop inert intervention styles that counter participation.

5. Participation must be implemented seriously, in the sense that results from participatory processes are visibly taken into account. If not, it becomes a meaningless waste of time and resources that people lose interest in.

6. Notwithstanding its potential, participation is often constrained or frustrated in practice. Participation can be manipulated by powerful actors, be socially excluding, increase tension, produce biased information or be too costly. Agencies must take these problems serious and be careful and (self-)critical in the process of evolving participatory programmes.

7. In view of the constraints to participation, humanitarian programmes ideally should not rely exclusively on participation to access the lifeworlds of their target groups and identify their differentiated and gendered perceptions of and responses to the situation, their capacities and the aid they receive. Complementary knowledge must be gathered through alternative sources and through professional and external social research.

8. The different issues raised in the paper lead to the overall conclusion that participation can not be viewed as a separate and pre-conceived set of activities. Participation should be reflected in staff attitude and conceived as an approach that can be made operational in many different ways. There are no standard approaches to participation and it must be implemented critically and creatively.

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Humanitarian aid and living up to the INGO, Red Cross-Red Crescent Code of Conduct.

Personal set of reflections.

Richard Blewitt, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The issues tackled in the series of papers by Thea Hilhorst and Bram Jansen (ranging from the participation of affected populations in programme development and implementation and working with local governments to addressing the question of partnership between local international humanitarian actors) are the central issues of our times. Sadly this whole domain has been under researched and there has been both a lack of sharing of experiences and leadership commitment to close the gap between lofty intentions and reality on the ground. Hence the dialogue in Holland and the papers are an important contribution to tabling a number of key issues we, as humanitarians, must confront in the future.

On participation, the paper usefully addresses the opportunities and the constraints to participation in different emergency and recovery settings. It could perhaps have gone further in exploring the entire question of legitimacy in the eyes of the affected population, and how this interfaces with access. Interesting research in Afghanistan is highlighting the challenging reality in some contexts where all aid agencies are lumped together and seen as something foreign to the local context. This has impact on both efficacy, and access for the agencies. Rootedness in and effective communication with the affected communities, and the delivery of promises are seen as important strategies in addressing these emerging set of challenges.

The participation paper highlights a typology of levels of participation. This should be useful in providing a frame for practitioners to not be afraid of stepping into the participation arena. The participation paper rightfully highlights the constraints to participation, but maybe does not go far enough in challenging the system to examine and confront why so little progress has been made in this area. And the gulf between the rhetoric of international aid actors and reality on the ground is very wide indeed.

A critical and often under-reported element of disaster response is the critical role played by communities themselves in addressing their problems and challenges. Aid agencies have been projecting the image of the "passive victim" far too long in disaster settings. Also a mix of paternalism, self interest and so-called mandate-driven responses do little to place the affected people at the centre of the humanitarian response.

The second paper on relationships between local governments and humanitarian actors is a highly under researched area and the contribution of the paper to reflection and policy thinking is very important. The paper highlights the geographic and situational context specificity surrounding scope for and the nature of relationship options between humanitarian actors and local government.

Most humanitarians have relationships with technical counterparts in local government. Humanitarian actors also have to work within the legal framework of countries and often need to relate to local authorities to secure the programming and access. Some additional perspectives beyond the paper that characterise the dynamic between international humanitarian actors and local governments include:

a) Taking the best personnel to work for the humanitarian agencies. Draining local government capacities;
b) Dealing with the imbalance of resources between the well funded and logistically strong international aid actors and often under-funded, under-resourced local government officials;

c) The lack of local knowledge many humanitarian expatriate staff have and the need to gain this knowledge through dialogue with local government officials and other actors;
d) The tendency of many local government actors to favour support to local NGOs rather than having large international aid actors working in the environment (often this perspective is for good reasons linked to familiarity, cost effectives and sustainability).

The notion of 'do no harm', and the fact that, sometimes, INGOs must accept causing a degree of harm for the greater good, is a challenging one. Many humanitarians will recognise this reality of dialogue and negotiation to achieve humanitarian outcomes, having to accept limits that local authorities can place on action and access. Building trust even with very challenging officials is a critical dimension of gaining access and achieving a humanitarian mission.

The paper also highlights corruption as another challenge to INGOs in their working relationships with local governments. An element not fully considered in the paper is how humanitarian organizations that rapidly expand ensure they have the right control mechanism and ethics to avoid internal corruption. Their working practices can also fuel speculation in the market, based on individual self interest to acquire a certain purchase from the market, often paying above the market price to secure the resources. This can have very negative effects for the local population.

Corruption is also a relative concept. One issue many humanitarian organizations need to consider much more closely is that of their real transaction costs. What share of the resources they raise actually reaches affected populations, and what is the relationship between the public communication and marketing materials and the reality of their organizations.

The third paper on partnership rightfully suggests a considerable amount of tokenism and paternalism between northern humanitarian organizations and their southern partners-contractors. The exception being many faith-based organizations where solidarity is considerably stronger.

The demands for greater accountability, transparency and professionalism have been a positive development over the last ten years. However, how these demands are met, and what mechanisms and commitment have been established to support local southern partners to build capacity to meet them, is another question. Overall the score card is not all that promising. The trend rather has been to increase policing, monitoring and the expatriate presence around the local partners to ensure accountability pressures from donors. This is not a progressive or positive development. Far too much self interested instrumentalisation goes on in the humanitarian sector including, regrettably, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The concept of partnership is used too loosely in the humanitarian sector. In reality, many so-called partnerships are really just contractual relationships. One example of the limits of the concept that highlights how weakly committed many humanitarian organizations are to partnership relates to supporting local partners in contexts considerably impacted by HIV-AIDS. Many northern partners fail to help southern partners working in heavily affected HIV-AIDS countries with good workplace policies that support staff and volunteers working for the local partners. This example simply serves to highlight the double standards and hypocrisy surrounding the partnership concept.

Hilhorst, Jansen and the Dutch INGO community have done a fantastic job of facing up to three very central issues that confront the humanitarian community. Much more policy – practice research should be going on in these areas to help humanitarian organizations move towards becoming effective organizations that are accountable in the contexts they serve to the people they serve. Building on this agenda could have profound and very positive effects on the humanitarian community at large.

Notes

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Participation, partnership, and coordination in humanitarian aid

november 2005

What does partnership mean in practice? How can we form partnerships with local organizations? What do humanitarian agencies hope to gain in dealing with local governments? And when looking at cooperation with civil society, how can we organize relief in a participatory way? This set of papers explores and deepens our understanding of issues concerning working with partners in humanitarian assistance. Diverse topics are covered, ranging from the participation of affected populations in programme development and implementation and working with local governments to addressing the question of partnership between local international humanitarian actors. A comprehensive publication on participation, and the opportunities and constraints surrounding participation in different emergency and recovery contexts. Central issues of our time.

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