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**“AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON
SUSTAINABLE HUMANITARIAN CAPACITY”**

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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	4
UNDERSTANDING CONSTRAINTS	5
The Structure of the Aid Industry	5
The Domestic Context	7
Continued Dependency on External Resources	8
Limits to Local Fund-raising and Revenue Generation	9
CONSEQUENCES OF CONSTRAINTS	10
Vicious Cycle of Dependency and Crises	10
Marginalisation of Local Actors	10
Fragmentation of Programmes	10
Vacuum of Local Capacity	11
OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILISING RESOURCES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE CAPACITY	11
Ensuring Organisational Coherence	11
Direct Access to International/Northern Funding Sources	11
Consolidated Funds or Fund-raising Mechanisms	12
Increasing Local Revenue Generation	12
Mutual Accountability	12
NEW PARTNERSHIPS	13
Lessons gained from PARinAc	13
Creating Valuable Partnerships	14
CONCLUSIONS	15
<i>REFERENCES</i>	17

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In view of ever-increasing emergency needs, African humanitarian actors are coming under mounting pressure to scale up the quantity and quality of their services. This pressure is informed by growing consensus that urges the creation of sustainable capacities to deal with African problems, including the humanitarian crises. Yet, a myriad of factors continue to inhibit attempts at creating sustainable humanitarian capacity. Thus, the humanitarian arena is characterised by the marginalisation of local actors and domination by international actors. If Africa is to claim the 21st century, in line with its new vision, there is an urgent need to have a critical re-look at structural, contextual and organisational factors that obstruct activities aimed at building local humanitarian capacity in Africa.

A number of factors inhibit the growth of strong and empowered African organisations. *Firstly*, there are structural issues that relate to the aid industry. These include the imposed dichotomy between development and emergency aid that continues to shape aid policies and practices, and the politics of humanitarian assistance that push assistance out of the realm of altruism and compassion to real politics. *Secondly*, there are factors that relate to the domestic governance context in which humanitarian assistance is administered. Key here is the general lack of policy and administrative frameworks to regulate and direct humanitarian activity. In addition, there are issues of organisational governance, including internal capacity, coherence and management frameworks that contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of each organisation. *Thirdly*, there is the continued dependence of African NGOs on external resources, relegating them to status of less partners and sub-contractors to larger, and more favoured, international actors. *Fourthly*, there are limits related to local fundraising owing to limited revenue base, high poverty levels, lack of culture for supporting institutional building and absence of supportive media.

These factors combine to generate a myriad of negative consequences including entrenching a vicious cycle of dependency and crisis, marginalisation of local actors, fragmentation of humanitarian programmes, limited coordination of actors and a vacuum of as far as humanitarian capacity is concerned.

In spite of these difficulties, a number of proposals are made towards the path of sustainable humanitarian capacity. *Firstly*, the need to improve organisational capacity including ensuring organisational coherence in terms of objectives, focus, strategy and credibility, is highlighted. *Secondly*, the paper calls for exploration of direct access to international resources. *Thirdly*, a proposal for other forms of funding mechanisms is presented. *Fourthly*, mutual accountability between all stakeholders is emphasised. *Fifthly*, the need to increase local revenue mobilisation is underscored and, *sixthly*, the need for valuable partnerships, that ensure the creation and boosting of local capacities, is proposed.

1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Over time, African organisations-both national and regional-have progressively increased their capacity to implement both development and humanitarian assistance programmes. However, this progress has not translated into sustainable capacities either in the humanitarian or development arena. Embedded structural linkages with donors, growing needs of vulnerable populations, inability to have the right organisations imperatives in place, among other factors, all together put African NGOs under enormous pressure to scale up the quantity and quality of services that they provide. These challenges are enormous, and are compounded by indications that existing local capacity to respond to humanitarian crisis has been slowly, but systematically, eroded, overwhelmed and/or marginalised over the last three decades (see the case studies from East Africa in *Juma/Suhrke eds. 2002*).

While it is an accepted truism that strong and empowered African organisations are critical to solving Africa's long-term development problems and to delivering a more effective humanitarian response, we argue in this paper that a myriad of challenges prevent them from becoming effective and sustainable organisations. This reality calls on African actors and their development partners to rethink both the structural issues of aid and humanitarian assistance in particular, as well as organisational and contextual issues.

At a time when Africa is talking about building its capacity to deal with challenges facing the continent, the absence of African humanitarian actors in Darfur, perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis on the globe at the moment, is glaring. Clearly, the sustainability and consolidation of peace in Africa, together with the implementation of the post conflict re-construction agenda will rely to some extent, on the ability of the continent to deal with residual humanitarian crises. Besides, the volatility of the continent to natural occurrences as well as international events underscores the need to create and boost relief capacity to mitigate the effects of any human or natural disasters. This paper explores the nature and extent of the capacity crisis among humanitarian actors in Africa and proposes ways of moving the African humanitarian NGOs on a path of sustainable development. The historical moment for this "revolution" is embodied in the vision of the African Union, which seeks to explore new strategies for addressing long-term challenges that relate to building sustainable African capacities in all sectors, including in the humanitarian arena.

We borrow from the Africa Humanitarian Action's concept of capacity building, which focuses on the development of the organisation as a whole (institutional building), as well as operations-related measures and skills (empowerment in ways that influence the environment). Taken this broadly, capacity building becomes desirable because it enhances effectiveness, efficiency, reduces costs, ensures professionalism, beneficiary/local ownership of the response process, and promotes sustainability, which is the key to future response to emergencies.

While there is a consensus that there is limited capacity in the South, and that there is need to improve the effectiveness of actors in the South, neither the official donor agencies nor NGOs appear to have a sense of what is needed to ensure sustainable capacity and how it can be provided. A majority of large (usually foreign) actors, including NGOs have failed to build local capacity.

Where commendable strides have been attained as in the example of the Red Cross and Crescent Movement, which provides for the creation of local (country) chapters, the relationship between local chapters and the federation is fraught with many difficulties.

Against this background, we need to honestly analyse the existing capacity-and partnerships in order to find ways and means of reinvigorating healthy civil societies in Africa and, in the process, encourage the development of effective, legitimate and autonomous African humanitarian capacities.

2. UNDERSTANDING CONSTRAINTS

A number of structural and practical factors that relate to the manner in which humanitarian assistance is conceived and organised hinder ventures towards the development of sustainable African humanitarian capacities. Three of these, namely: the structure of the aid industry in general, the nature of humanitarian aid, and domestic/local context, where assistance is being administered, are discussed.

2.1 The Structure of the Aid Industry

In a recent article that urges the “rethinking of aid,” Alex *de Waal* argues that the problems of the aid encounter do not lie in the motives of the donors or the competence of those who administer it. In his view, “most ‘mercy’ now passes quality control” (2004:158). The fundamental problem of aid is, therefore, structural: it systematically defeats its own objectives, and its side effects commonly turn out to be worse than the problems it seeks to address. This summation is an indictment on the aid industry and necessitates teasing a number of assumptions out.

The fallacy of development versus emergency aid

Foremost, the aid industry and donor policies and practices emphatically distinguish between development and emergency aid, even though the latter is a substantial part of official development assistance. Further relief aid occupies low status in any donor framework. Prestigious agencies such as the World Bank do not typically do emergencies. While there is an attempt to correct this anomaly, disaster vulnerability and relief remain blind spots in macro-economic theory and practice. For Africa, where the vagaries of nature are close by, failure to factor emergencies in planning is an anomaly. Yet, this is reflected across the continent where countries make limited if any, reference to emergencies in their planning processes. Most have no budget allocation, nor a coherent policy or administrative frameworks, for dealing with disasters. It is imperative that Africa explores ways of integrating development and relief planning. The great debates on relief-development continuum refugee studies during the seventies and eighties could be invaluable (see for example ICARA 1 and ICARA II processes 1979 and 1981; see also *Gorman*, 1993 and *Cuenod*, 1989).

The politics of humanitarian assistance

Like in development aid, humanitarian assistance is organized and driven by an ideology that seeks to transform areas of intervention. In practice this ideology assumes hegemonic tendencies that translate into patronage structures. Reinforcing these structures are two fallacies that impact directly on sustainable capacity. First, it is an assumed dichotomy between the zones of calm & peace,

which produce interveners, and the zones of conflict and disasters for which intervention is designed (*Juma/Suhrke, 2002: 159*). A second fallacy following from this that areas of intervention lack capacity for remedial action, and as a result, such capacity can only be created and directed from outside, by international experts. Within this framework, international agencies are the agents of (positive) change and subsequently position themselves in the seat of power and authority as capacity builders and intermediaries between capacity and recipients. Thus, local agencies—whether governmental or non-governmental—are perceived as fundamentally incapacitated. Unsurprisingly, efforts to build capacity in the 1990s reveals indicate that action “was driven by one basic assumption: inter-national actors had capacity and were, therefore, the capacity builders, while local actors were recipients of capacity” (*Juma/Suhrke: 164*).

Because emergencies are viewed as needing immediate action, the tendency is to rely on large, well tested and experienced agencies. Of necessity, this criteria disadvantages local agencies most of which have not operated outside their countries or continent. The imperative to deliver reinforces the ideology of capacity in the north and incapacity in the south and leads to funding patterns that privilege northern, usually international agencies, as the main contractors in the humanitarian arena. On the other hand local African agencies become sub-contractors and accountable not to the beneficiaries, their governments or people, but to international donors and agencies. These funding patterns perpetuate limited project financing, target short-term projects and embody a mentality of traditional welfare approach. As a result, African NGOs find themselves handling a portfolio of “stand-alone” projects, some well-funded, some badly funded, while many necessary core activities and support functions such as staff and volunteer management, local fund-raising and information technology infrastructure, are not funded at all.

The deleterious effects of project funding for organisational capacity building have been well documented. One effect is that the nature, scope, quantity, quality and timing of what African NGOs are able to do and provide is more often than not determined by the availability of project funding and donor priorities (sometimes influenced by governments’ foreign policy agendas) while the needs of their target groups and the strategic priorities of their own organisation go unheeded. This manner of operation is detrimental to capacity building, as evidenced by the experience in Mozambique and Kenya in the 1990s. At the end of both emergencies UNHCR admitted that no local capacity had been created, and that if another emergency occurred, it would depend on international organizations to weather the storm.

The second structural problem is linked to the manner in which humanitarian aid is conceived. It is defended in a ‘techno-speak’ as altruistic and apolitical. Yet, the operations of humanitarian assistance reveal relationships of ‘givers’ and recipients’ that are highly political. From the strategic level to the implementation levels, decisions on why interventions occur in one situation and not another, the nature and scope of programmes and methodologies employed for execution of activities indicate power games that involve a range of political tools and manoeuvres, including manipulation, negotiation, cooperation, coalition building and competitiveness, among others etc. This reality makes the interface between donors and recipients relations of power: characterised by powerful and influential actors – donors, versus weaker and less powerful actors – recipients. The enterprise of thinking through how to create sustainable African humanitarian capacity will need to focus on these power relations critically.

Thirdly, donor involvement in situations of humanitarian crisis is governed by a myth that views humanitarian aid as short-term exceptional measures. In this myth, emergencies are interruptions of development planning and when there are over, 'normal' development resumes. Clearly, this assumption is untenable in most of Africa where emergency relief is needed year in, year out.

2.2 The Domestic Context

A second broad set of factors that inhibit the growth of sustainable humanitarian agencies are found at the domestic sphere where intervention takes place. As demonstrated in the literature, NGOs capacity building activities are highly vulnerable to the context in which they work. Here, governance at the political and organisational levels has particular bearing on the manner in which NGOs operate and evolve.

Political constraints

At the political levels, African governments have relegated issues of humanitarian aid and assistance to second fiddle. Funds for emergencies are controlled at the highest political levels, with limited, if any, accountability. Further, there is hardly any policy and administrative framework to guide activities in the humanitarian arena. Humanitarian situations are "free for all" arenas with limited government regulation or accountability. Overall, governments have abdicated responsibilities to regulate and supervise intervention. The exception is when a government considers its security threatened – and here it generally becomes obstructive to humanitarian activities. The sum total is the creation of an un-enabling political environment that for the most part works against the creation of effective humanitarian capacity.

The effects of the external factors and lack of enabling environment for operations are compounded by the survival difficulties of national NGOs. Owing to a number of factors, the relationship between NGOs and governments has, historically, been adversarial. For most governments, NGOs were viewed with suspicion, and as lacking legitimacy or representation of local interests. These accusations were fundamental to eroding their capacity and room for manoeuvre. If national and African actors are to retain their legitimacy there is need to think through ways of rehabilitating relations with their governments. This is particularly critical in view of the notion that they are extensions of imperialist international NGOs, or foreign governments that pay for their existence.

Further, the absence of effective NGO networks that speak for them, coordinate their relations, represent their interests and advocate their position on important national issues, has hindered their ability to make collective demands. In most cases, humanitarian actors remain institutionally weak, rejecting measures that seek to coordinate them. This compromises the potential for complementarity and partially accounts for sectoral incoherence and competition. On a programmatic level, an effective, well-coordinated body would enable NGOs to collectively undertake tasks beyond the abilities of each individual one.

Organisational Limits

African NGO performance in delivering quality programmes and services is at times negatively influenced by internal organisational factors such as a lack of

credible leadership and insufficient management capability. More than a decade ago, *Axelle Kabou* (1991) argued that Africans needed to be more self-critical and change their mentalities, values and attitudes if underdevelopment was to be overcome.

While this issue could be viewed as part of the larger good governance challenge, confronting the continent, there are governance issues that are specific to emergency response. Defined as urgent and life saving, emergency response is characterised by stress and visibility problems. Institutional development on the other hand is seen as long-term and as falling outside the realm of saving lives. To ensure survival, actors are at pains to highlight the positive aspects of their programmes and obscure their shortcomings. In the word of the multi donor evaluation in Rwanda, NGOs adopt copying strategies of “half-truths of falsehoods” (*Borton* 1996:154). Thus, annual reports are testimonials of success stories and rarely acknowledge mistakes. These contrasts sharply with independent evaluations, many of which point to marked levels of ineffectiveness and inefficiency (*Eriksson et.al.* 1996). Usually, the worry is that negative reporting impacts negatively on access to resources. If institutional learning, a key component to sustainability, is to be addressed worries that pertain to organisational survival needs dealing with.

Another problem relates to lack of programmatic focus and the tendency of organisations to go from one sectoral project to another depending on the availability of funds. Inability to focus on areas of competence renders organisational learning irrelevant and makes continuity of a particular agenda and goals impossible. Ability to take stock, determine lessons learnt and what needs to be passed on to others is largely non-existent. Although some projects accumulate a large body of data, the information is targeted funding agencies rather than to aid critical and systematic appraisal of the organisation’s work.

2.3 Continued Dependency on External Resources

Key to the lack of capacity and sustainability is the overwhelming dependence on external resources. Nearly all African NGOs are wholly dependent on funds from northern donors.

The relations and partnerships between organisations in the North and those in Africa remain complex and contradictory. A Tanzanian NGO leader describes his experience as follows:

“When we started a new NGO for social services in education, health and water 10 years ago, we had great support from our overseas partners. It started well with a good financial support. We were able to provide very much needed services throughout the country. It is still very active ten years later, but the funding is going down and local contribution is not yet high enough to increase its capacity. It is going to be a struggle for it to survive when foreign support is cut off. What should have been done is that both the stakeholders in country and their counterparts overseas should have worked out ways and means from the very beginning to build up the capacity of the new NGO with a view to make it viable after the financial support from abroad had dried up. I said as much as that to the governing commission which included donor representatives. But very little was done to that effect.”

While in recent years Northern organisations have been seeking to adopt a more enabling role, northern donors are still using financing methods that are inappropriate to the needs of African NGOs and sometimes, inconsistent with the stated aims of the donor agencies themselves.

Often, donor funds are tied to northern experts and consultants, leading to cynical references of humanitarian assistance being a job creating industry for northerners. Back in the eighties, *Timberlake* (1985) noted that there were no less than 80,000 such experts on the continent and that more than half of the USD 7-8 billion spent annually by donors went towards financing this army of expatriates. Despite their good intentions these “experts”, lack sufficient knowledge about the problems they seek to solve and impose alien management solutions. In spite of these observations, the practice of employing expatriates in local environments continues unabated today (*Juma/Suhrke*: 177).

At another level, humanitarian organisations face major obstacles in their attempts to engage with the international aid regime, which often works on the principle of reimbursement for initial investments. They are unable to bid for contracts since they can not advance the funds for the initial phase of any emergency response (assessment, starting up operations and preparation of mid-term plans of action). This inability to win contracts prevents African NGOs from access resources that could transform them to trusted and empowered partners.

Over-dependence on external financing and assistance has compromised NGOs ability to establish a clear and coherent voice nationally on issues, which are crucial to their work, or to the interest of the local communities that they serve. Closely linked with this is the tendency of the sector to place a high priority on their external links, de-linking itself from local political constituencies, which can offer solidarity with their work and guarantee their sustainability.

2.4 Limits to Local Fundraising and Revenue Generation

For a number of reasons, local fund mobilisation is extremely difficult in Africa. With few exceptions, African governments and inter-governmental institutions are facing chronic deficits and are seeking financial aid. They are, therefore, unable to assist civil society organisations. Indeed, governments often expect NGOs to bring in additional resources and to supplement the provision of basic needs. This perception of African NGOs as some sort of “local donor” is shared by the general public and hinders efforts to mobilise resources locally.

Private sector funding in Africa (including corporate social responsibility <CSR> programmes) is limited and, at best, only available in a handful of economies. While there are positive examples of African NGOs generating funds in their own country (e.g. a major Kenyan NGO renting out office space; an Ethiopian organisation profitably running a vehicle fleet, warehouse and training centre), the overall experience indicates that such activities rarely generate significant funds in the long term. While the continent is littered with small-scale income generating projects that benefit individuals and groups immediately concerned, these do not contribute significantly to sustainable organisations. There have been proposal for NGOs to engage in income generating activities. Such a shift would require a re-think of the regulatory and policy framework that define and govern the humanitarian sector.

At the individual support level, there is a very small number of people with surplus cash, and for those that do, there seems to be limited enthusiasm to contribute to humanitarian capacity building. Such a development is depended on the growth of a philanthropic culture that encourages private entrepreneurs and individuals to invest in African capabilities.

Finally, NGOs everywhere depend on publicity for donations. Unlike those in the North, African organisations face severe problems in their quest for media attention and television coverage. The media has played a major role in sustaining negative images of Africa, as for instance in the 1992 analysis of “Africa’s Media Image.” Not only is Africa portrayed almost exclusively as a continent in permanent crisis, troubled by continuous wars, internal conflicts and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, but African efforts at improving the situation are ignored. A very recent example is the visit of the Chair of the African Commission to Darfur, Sudan, the first high-level politician to go there, which was largely ignored by Western media.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF CONSTRAINTS

The above constraints lead to a number of consequences:

3.1 Vicious Cycle of Dependency and Crises

Among the most entrenched consequences is the vicious cycle of dependency on outside aid, entrenchment of international humanitarian actors, diminishing legitimacy of local actors, isolation and targeting of humanitarian assistance, especially for refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) s and other victims, and marked xenophobia and tension against victims. Dealing with this vicious cycle calls for an integrated approach between development and relief, victims (refugees, IDPs, returnees etc) and hosts, utilising and building upon local capacities, as well as engaging in comprehensive planning for intervention in affected areas. In short, it requires long-term investment that employs multi-pronged approach to humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation.

3.2 Marginalisation of Local Actors

The structure, the ideology and organisation of humanitarian assistance has one of three impacts on local actors: It overwhelms them, particularly at the start of emergencies, erodes their capacities or marginalises even the politically and technically capable local actors. Usually there are no thresholds of intervention nor exist strategies. And in most cases, the advantage embodied in the presence of international actors is usually lost as they fail to transfer their capacity and resources to local actors. These processes fed into the vicious cycle of dependency described above.

3.3 Fragmentation of Programmes

Challenges linked to competition for resources (between international actors, and international and local actors), institutional survival and influence all combine to create programme fragmentation, incoherence or limited protection for victims. As turf wars takes precedence over service provision and effective protection, the value of intervention is diminished. Thus, despite of development rhetoric, international European and N. American NGOs, become gate-keepers to resource gate and contribute little to sustainable development of national and indigenous organisations.

3.4 Vacuum of Local Capacity

Since the structure and organisation of the humanitarian aid hardly provides for training, poaching of trained personal from local structures has become a defining characteristic of emergency response. Those that are recruited by

international agencies are paid better incentives than in the government or any local organisations. What follows in any emergency situations is the systematic depletion instead of boosting of local capacity. The dependency of the international actors on local personnel to run programmes is perhaps the principle evidence that counters the myth of lack of capacity in the south. Even then most humanitarian agencies create differentiated remuneration packages: one for 'locals' staff and another for 'experts' staff who happen to be 'internationals.' Significant differences in pay and working conditions (including access to information technology, learning and development opportunities) for staff between international and national staff/or organisations have facilitated a constant brain drain of competent staff and a high turnover in local organisations (Juma/Suhrke: 173).

4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR MOBILISING RESOURCES TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE CAPACITY

Despite the many obstacles discussed, opportunities exist for African NGOs to decrease their dependence and grow into more empowered organisations. Key to this process will be securing institutional funds to cover core costs. These are essential for the promotion of stability, continuity and in ensuring quality performance and results. They are also crucial for reducing dependency and promoting equal participation in national and international policy and decision-making processes. Such development needs to go hand in hand with the following measures.

4.1 Ensuring Organisational Coherence

The basic tenets of self-reliance are based on the principles of cost-effectiveness, maintaining and improving the delivery of per capita net benefits, seizing opportunities for additional programme areas that enhance the humanitarian objectives, financial integrity of the organisation and use of various tools for strategic planning. Arrival at a vision that combines all these aspects needs clear identification of factors that help craft appropriate discernable alternatives. This can only emerge from critical analysis of the environment, including the competitive edge of each organisation. Such a process can be aided greatly by having, and articulating clear objectives, designing and pursuing a public relations strategy that wins the support from the local community for the NGO. Together, these activities would ensure good public image and credibility, which are core to any attempts at building sustainable capacity.

4.2 Direct Access to International/Northern Funding Sources

Direct funding from official northern aid agencies seems to be gathering momentum, with a rationale "...grouped around issues of greater efficiency in aid delivery; better governance in terms of supporting and building local NGOs as stronger civic actors; supporting donor sectoral priorities, learning about local conditions; and maintaining legitimacy for aid by better demonstrating impact" (Fowler 143). Directing funding is taking a myriad of shapes as described in the theme 1 paper. One of the most effective ones is the use of embassies at national level. For instance, NGOs in Southern Africa have managed to secure significant grants (including meaningful allocations for institutional core costs) from embassies for HIV/Aids, peace and security among other sectors of work throughout the region. In another case, a number of South African NGOs secured a core funding of some USD 5 million from USAID that has stabilised their operations and programmes immensely. Such funds can act as endowment funds and help secure the institutional survival of African NGOs.

Comparatively, development organisations access official aid funding more easily. This is partly because decisions on major resource allocations for emergency response are still taken at central government level (i.e. not by embassies) and, as discussed earlier, such donor regimes play in favour of international NGOs.

4.3 Consolidated Funds or Fund-raising Mechanisms

Official aid donors could consider pooling their response (and preparedness) resources into a special fund for African humanitarian organisations. The Disaster Emergency and Response Fund (DREF) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies could serve as a model in this respect: it allows national Societies from the South to apply for and quickly obtain sizeable funds for an initial response when a disaster occurs. The fund is replenished when contributions have been received.

Funds for corporate costs can also be accessed through clauses in contracts between donor agencies and implementing actors. At their 5th Pan African Conference in Ouagadougou in 2000, African Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies, for instance, insisted on a commitment from their Northern partners to set aside a fixed percentage of emergency relief and welfare operations funds to cover core costs. The proposed African Fund by the Special Initiative for Africa by Ford Foundation is another example of a mechanism that seeks to address the perennial challenge of enhancing the capacity African actors working on peace and security. Presumably, consolidated mechanisms would reduce time spend on accounting to different donor agencies.

4.4 Increasing Local Revenue Generation

Increasing local revenue generation will depend on factors beyond the humanitarian actors, such as increasing the capital base of the population. At one level this calls for intervention at levels that seek to improve economic and material status of populations. Hopefully, this would create a subscription ability, encourage participation in humanitarian work and events (e.g. flag days, fashion shows, dinners etc.) and in support for humanitarian work. Local revenue generation also requires development of strategies to popularise the culture of supporting institutional strengthening by the private sector and individuals that have capital.

4.5 Mutual Accountability

In order to ensure transparency and accountability, African NGOs should continue to work on the following areas:

Improved human resources and financial management

Continue improving capacities to manage large-scale fund-raising activities (e.g. recovering costs through services). This involves investing in creating high-level financial management skills, stringent internal systems and accounting procedures. An exceptionally high degree of financial rigour is required among NGOs, not only in Africa, but also in the North. Efficient financial management must be complemented by the development and application of effective, formal human resource policies and systems that provide consistent and transparent support to all staff.

Credible leadership and functioning governance

Good leadership and governance are of critical importance in providing accountability to all main stakeholders and, importantly, to beneficiaries.

There are no ready-made external solutions for creating strong and competent leadership. A study of leaders of successful Asian NGOs suggests that, “effective leadership is contingent upon the environment, the culture and the context in which it is rooted. Leadership styles develop and evolve to suit the context in which they operate. They cannot be transferred easily.” (*Smillie/Hailey*: 156). Partners of African NGOs must give leaders the space to develop their respective leadership styles and to prove that, like their Asian counterparts, they are “a highly capable group of individuals, prepared to experiment, and to apply knowledge and contemporary technologies to the needs of the poor, and to adapt them to the circumstances in which they find themselves.” (*Smillie/Hailey*: 157)

Delivering and demonstrating results

If they are to access funding for institutional core costs, African organisations must demonstrate the real difference their work is making to the plight of vulnerable people. This requires solid reporting and management information systems. However, African NGOs are often burdened by excessive administrative demands from fund-givers, as well as from untimely (sometimes erratic) disbursements. While the NGOs strengthen their management capacities, their partners need to consider modalities of consolidated reporting.

5. NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Recent years have seen attempts at creating equal partnerships between donors (outsiders) on the one hand, and local institutions and victims on the other, as a means to augment protection and assistance of displaced populations. It is assumed in this model that such partnerships will improve the capacity of affected populations and their institutions to respond to disasters. While this model is applauded especially in recent times, the methodology of creating ‘equal’ partnerships has been evasive for a number of structural and practical reasons.

5.1 Lessons gained from PARinAc

UNHCR’s Partnership in Action was perhaps the most innovative attempt at creating local relief capacity. Premised on the imperative of cooperation between UNHCR, governments, international organisations and local actors, PARinAc provided comprehensive templates that would ensure capacity building. However, the momentum created by PARinAc has been lost. The framework did not address some core structural issues that relate to donor practices and governance challenges, which fall outside of the humanitarian sector, but have profound effect on the manner of its organisation. There is an opportunity to revisit PARinAc, from an African perspective. Its ideals relating to ownership, legitimacy, efficiency and burden sharing are central to the creation of local capacity. A concerted effort that draws lessons from the various regions attempts to implement PARinAc would provide pointers on the way forward.

5.2 Creating Valuable Partnerships

NGOs and governments

The value of creating complementary partnerships between governments and NGOs cannot be emphasised enough. This emanates from the realisation that

both are critical stakeholders in shaping the destiny of Africa. States have an obligation to initiate, organise, coordinate and supervise the implementation of humanitarian activities, in particular with non-state actors. In their operations, these actors are guided by the principle of delegation and work in a support of the state. It is therefore incumbent upon the African states to design policy and administrative frameworks that increase the capacity of African actors to deal with the recurrent emergencies on the continent. This should be done by determining the rules of operations, supervising operations and ensuring security in all its forms, including the human aspects that address livelihoods and capacities to deal with humanitarian crises. The lead role of the state would also be key to regulating an otherwise 'imperfect market' and perhaps protecting the market for African humanitarian actors.

NGOs and International organisations

The partnership between African NGOs and their international counterparts is premised on the principle of international cooperation/solidarity and burden sharing. These principles have been invoked in the entire project cycle from the stages of averting crises, to addressing its root causes, providing protection and material assistance to victims of disasters, through and reconstruction. Key in all stages is the emphasis on using local capacity, knowledge and personnel in order to boost the ability to deal with future disasters. Cooperation between these two sets of actors would not only ensure complementarity but transferability of project managerial capacities, in areas such as fund-raising, project planning, implementation and evaluation, from the international to local actors. If organised well, these partnerships would guarantee smooth transition from relief to development.

Relationship between NGOs, African Union and the United Nations

Since Africa is part of the international community, the principle of cooperation and solidarity should apply at the global arena. Specifically, the relation between the African Union and the UN provides opportunity for enhancing African humanitarian capacity. It can guarantee the creation of local capacity by insisting that UN agencies and projects partnering with, and utilise, local actors. Such a policy would ensure a substantial amount of UN Programming makes use of local expertise and capacities, in turn boosting and increasing them.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of the constraints and opportunities facing African NGOs in securing the financial resources to cover their core costs leads us to the following main conclusions:

We accept our responsibilities...

We are aware of and unequivocally subscribe to the need for transparency and accountability within our own African organisations. The framework of the African Union of ownership and accountability provides standards by which Africa can be fully accountable and transparent in its undertakings. The need to transfer this political governance commitment to the humanitarian sector cannot be emphasised enough. In view of the difficulties of mobilising resources domestically, we recognise that partnerships with Northern actors will remain critical to our development. This partnership needs to be guided by the principles of burden sharing, mutual accountability and equal partnership, as envisioned in the New African Partnership for Africa's development.

...we promote direct investments in our institutional core costs

We must work together to alter current donor and public perceptions, at home and abroad, that development and disaster response is simply a question of shipping money overseas for well-defined programmes and projects. Fund-holders have both a role and an obligation to move the capacity development process forward by investing directly in institutional (non-programme related) core costs of African organisations. They should recognise that it is in their interest to do so since it will generate a return on their investment. They must also accept that such costs translate into underwriting salaries, financing infrastructures, technical and material equipment and related expenditure – the ‘nuts and bolts’ that enable people and organisations to work efficiently over time.

To achieve such a change, Northern organisations must resolutely move away from a narrow “project approach” and recognise the significance of flexible programme grants, non-earmarked institutional-building grants and appropriate serviced charges when contracting out. A shift these directions would help African organisations to meet their core costs and build up their own resources for emergency interventions.

A final example of direct investment and a shortcut to rapidly improving African NGO capacity is to invest in equipping them with electronic information technology. IT investment must go beyond hardware into building the capacity for maintenance and development, including training. This will allow African NGOs to have better access to relevant information, to conduct the research needed for producing quality proposals such as those required for obtaining direct official aid, and to establish management information systems that will build accountability, satisfy administrative demands and show results through quality reporting.

...and we launch the idea of an African platform for increasing capacity building services on the continent.

It is reasonable to assume that, if African NGOs could choose their own capacity building advisers, they would probably not choose those provided by Northern NGOs. There are local commercial consultancy firms or management schools with valuable and relevant skills and knowledge that have not been adequately utilised by the NGO sector. Beyond this, we suggest that the time is ripe for investing in the creation of an African centre for capacity building support to Africa-based humanitarian organisations.

Let us recommit to and strengthen our partnerships!

In real consultation with our Northern partners, re-examine existing partnerships and policies, and agree to take steps towards strengthening and building existing and new partnerships. Besides, explicitly addressing capacity building measures for autonomy and resource mobilisation, this process must include, firstly a clear understanding of *mutual rights, obligations and expectations*. As an example, African NGOs should be involved in the selection of external expertise. Another example is that access to all relevant information about an organisation should be a mutual right and not restricted to those giving funds. As mentioned earlier, African NGOs need to be relieved of some of the burdens caused by too rigid expectations on reporting.

Africa Humanitarian Action - AFRICAN UNION
International Symposium on *Building the Capacity and Resources of African NGOs*

Secondly, it should include evaluation, assessment or impact studies that include an *appraisal of the interface between the organisation and those further up the aid chain*. Fowler (110) rightly argues that “Adopting the principle that all transactions contributing to the project must be subject to independent scrutiny will reduce the present tendency to place the burden of performance on NGOs in the South and East, neglecting preconditions set up by the North in the beginning. Knowing that such an appraisal will occur may help share responsibility instead of contracts being used as shields or cut-off points against the critical review of everyone involved”.

In the final analysis, it is *our work*, as indigenous national and local organisations that should hold *the key to the legitimacy of outside actors*. Legitimacy (based on a local presence within communities, having access to vulnerable people and having the knowledge of local conditions and cultures) is what the African NGO brings to each partnership and serves as a counterweight to Northern resources.

Our argument is that partnerships between Northern and Southern organisations need to be reviewed and improved in order to introduce a fairer access to resources, a clear division of labour that is based on the principle of complementarity and equitable distribution of decision-making power. In our view, the result will be a ‘win-win’ situation that is beneficial to all partners: ensure empowered African NGOs that can deliver programmes and activities, address relevant priority needs and have a sustainable impact on vulnerable people, and contribute to Africa’s sustainable development.

Africa Humanitarian Action - AFRICAN UNION
International Symposium on *Building the Capacity and Resources of African NGOs*

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