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*capacity building in  
developing countries*

# **PARTNERS IN CRISIS**

*Peer review of partnership  
in crisis-related interventions*



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## SYNTHESIS REPORT

2009

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This report is the outcome of a peer review of partnership in crisis-related interventions jointly realized by Cordaid, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands Red Cross, Oxfam Novib and War Child Holland and supported by PSO and Disaster Studies.

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## SYNTHESIS REPORT

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# FOREWORD

This study puts a deep crease into issues whose surface is rarely more than scratched. It digs vigorously into the concept and practice of “partnerships” between Northern humanitarian organizations and their Southern counterparts. It examines the stakeholder experience of relationships that must function in dangerous and chaotic situations, and in the context of funding arrangements that are equally chaotic and too often short term in nature.

By examining North–South relationships through the eyes of different Western traditions and the voices of Southern practitioners, the study elicits a wider and deeper variety of feedback than might otherwise have been the case. In taking the study to Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Colombia, it tests Dunantist principles of neutrality and independence, finding that relationships are inevitably “traversed and conditioned by the [prevailing] political debates and agendas” but that “solidarity is not necessarily a partisan stance”.

The study delves into the vexed issue of capacity building, and hears Southern voices, most notably in the Sudan, asking for relationships that go beyond project cycle management and the short-termism that they have known for 20 years. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where local organizations are important, if not essential to the delivery of relief supplies, they are “invisible” – i.e. ignored – when it comes to any kind of serious coordination. This might not matter so much if donor coordination was working well, but even local organizations that are left out of the loop can see that it is not. In India, the need to focus on more than the transactional aspects of partnership comes across loud and clear.

The study touches on critical gaps between relief, reconstruction and development, and it places the discussion within a wider context of “back donors”, narrowly conceived accountabilities and an emphasis on projects rather than on processes of change.

This is a refreshingly candid study of the partnership phenomenon, one that avoids both cant and rant. It is a thoughtful and constructive look into some of the most pressing problems of a humanitarian enterprise that too often fails in one of its greatest ambitions, universality. And it opens new windows of opportunity for thinking, policy development, programming and research into one of the most pressing and important problems facing humanitarians today.

*Ian Smillie*

*Ottawa, January 2009*

# PREFACE

Partnership implies sharing, reflecting and working together. In crisis-related interventions most Dutch NGOs work in partnership with local organizations. Dutch NGOs and their partners have supported millions of people affected by crises over the past decade. With local partners the Dutch NGOs have been able to contribute to saving lives, disaster recovery and the empowerment of people on a large scale. Partnership between Northern and Southern organizations in crisis-related interventions is even more complicated than partnership in regular development co-operation and therefore merits special attention.

The idea for this peer review on partnership was first born during the conference "Ten Years Code of Conduct: Principle and Practice", which was held in The Hague in 2004. Article six of the Code Conduct of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief states: "We shall attempt to build disasters response on local capacities". It seems obvious therefore that the approach of Dutch NGOs should emphasize partnership. It is a firm statement towards working, whenever possible, with local organizations as partners. The relationship with partners was identified as a priority among Dutch NGOs and was singled out for follow-up activities after the conference.

Since then, several initiatives were undertaken and have resulted in the publication by PSO and Disaster Studies of Wageningen University of, "You Never Walk Alone; Participation, Partnership and Coordination in Humanitarian Aid" in 2005. The present peer review is a continuation of these initiatives, based on the desire for a more in-depth understanding of partnership relations which is considered crucial for the quality of interventions.

Cordaid, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands Red Cross, Oxfam Novib and War Child Holland participated in this review of each other's practice. The review took place in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), India, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, and Sudan in 2007. Some 40 Southern partners' organizations were

involved. Locally recruited co-facilitators assisted in the review. Disaster Studies of Wageningen University coached the peer review and facilitated the research process based on scientific approaches. PSO, an umbrella organization of 54 Dutch NGOs, specialized in capacity development of civil society in the South, supported the overall process. This report synthesizes the outcome of the peer review of these five Dutch NGOs on partnership in crisis-related interventions resulting from conflict or natural disasters. The preliminary conclusions of the peer review were debated during a workshop on May 23, 2008, in which a variety of Dutch organizations participated as well as representatives of a number of the Southern organizations interviewed.

The participating organizations yielded a better understanding of the possibilities for viable and effective partnerships by reviewing each other's practice. This report shares insights with the wider community of Northern and Southern NGOs. It is meant to be a source to review our own practices of North-South partner relations. The peer review reconfirmed that partnership can add more value than just a narrow financial relationship in project support. There is the potential to create synergy in the relationships, for example in lobbying and advocacy or capacity building on preparedness. Let this report be a source of inspiration for improved, more effective partnership in crisis-related interventions!

This peer review would not have been possible without the support of a range of people. In the first place, PSO would like to thank the five peer reviewers, who did this work next to their other daily activities: Klaas van Boeckel (War Child), Violeta Lombarts (Netherlands Red Cross), Eric Roetman (ICCO and Kerk in Actie), Marco de Swart (Oxfam Novib) and Will de Wolf (Cordaid); the co-facilitators Taban Sabir Alatia in Sudan, Patricia Landínez in Colombia, Shoaib Rahman in India and Jean Baptist Safari in the DRC. We also thank their respective organizations for their commitment to this review. Similarly, we are very grateful to the staff of the Southern partners for their willingness to share their ideas on partnership. We also thank Sibrenne Wagenaar and Marit Ijpelaar for their support in the earlier phases of the peer

review. We thank Adriaan Ferf for his useful comments on sections of this report. Special thanks too to Professor Thea Hilhorst and Dr Gemma van der Haar of the department of Disaster Studies of Wageningen University for their valuable contributions and for writing this report.

*Henk Tukker*

*PSO*

*The Hague, January 2009*



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## PARTNERSHIP IN CRISIS?

Partnership in the field of humanitarian aid and emergency response is becoming increasingly common in practice. Many international organizations active in the humanitarian sector believe that in crisis response, as much as in development work, there is both a need and a potential for partnership with local organizations. They see partnership as a way to make aid more effective and as an avenue to build local capacities, in line with Article 6 of the Code of Conduct of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster relief. This Code states: "We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities". Although many organizations already work with local partners in their humanitarian work, there is a lack of knowledge about their experiences and the particular challenges they confront.

Against this background, the idea for a peer review on partnership in crisis-related interventions took shape, of which this report is the outcome. The peer review was initiated by five Dutch organizations interested in understanding the challenges of partnership in crisis situations better and in exploring the possibilities for strengthening partnership under those conditions. All five organizations have a history of working with partners in crisis-related interventions and promote it as an alternative to direct implementation by international agencies.

This report focuses not on emergency response in a strict sense but on the broader issue of partnership in crisis-related interventions, defined as follows: *collaborations in the aid chain concerning regions that are, will or have been experiencing crisis resulting from natural disaster or conflict or both. The partnership can include the delivery of humanitarian aid or related interventions on preparedness, reconstruction, development or peace building.* The focus in this study is primarily on vertical partnership that is to say between

international NGOs and NGOs in crisis-affected regions.<sup>1</sup> For the Dutch organizations in the peer review, crisis intervention was generally part of a longer-term involvement spanning also pre- or post-crisis developments. With the one exception of the case study dealing with the 2004 Asian tsunami, all the other case studies chosen address situations of protracted crises and concern regions in which several of the organizations studied had a long-standing involvement, in many cases predating the crisis. The peer review therefore has particular contributions to make regarding interventions in protracted crises and on the shifts from development to relief and back to development. This report thus hopes to contribute not only to the debate on partnership in crisis but also on the issue of linking relief and developmental modes of intervention in practice.

### **SET-UP OF THE PEER REVIEW**

The peer review was initiated by five Dutch agencies, of varied size and character, but joined by their interest in partnership issues: Cordaid, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands Red Cross, Oxfam Novib, and War Child Holland. The peer review process was facilitated by PSO and Disaster Studies of Wageningen University. The peer review set up was chosen to allow for mutual learning as well as to draw lessons for the humanitarian community more generally. The peer review was expected to generate a better understanding of the possibilities for viable and effective partnerships in emergencies, improved practice among the organizations involved, and for promoting partnership in crisis-related interventions as an alternative to direct implementation by international agencies.

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The central questions defined for this peer review were the following:

- What are the mutual expectations that 'Northern' and 'Southern' partners have of partnership? How does agenda setting and (mutual) accountability between 'Northern' and 'Southern' partners take place and what are the areas for improvement?

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<sup>1</sup> We did not consider relations between 'Southern' organizations and UN agencies. This would, however, be an important topic for further study.

- What is, and could be, the role of capacity building in crisis-related interventions?
- How to address specific challenges related to emergency response such as the need to act fast, security concerns, information limitations and opportunities, and the impact of crisis and crisis interventions on civil society?
- What does partnership mean for the effectiveness of the aid chain as a whole and how could this impact be strengthened?<sup>2</sup>

The peer review originated as a follow-up to an earlier project on participation, partnership and co-ordination in humanitarian aid. This project, entitled *You never walk alone*<sup>3</sup>, examined the experiences of Dutch NGOs working in humanitarian aid with local partners, with local authorities and with participation by recipients of aid. This project revealed that there was surprisingly little reference in academic literature and policy reports to humanitarian agencies' relations with local partners. At the same time, partnership in humanitarian aid came out as one of the central concerns of the Dutch agencies on which they felt more systematic reflection was needed to inform the policy choices.

The peer review was designed as a joint effort between the five Dutch organizations and the academic facilitators. Each Dutch agency selected a peer reviewer from its staff. These prepared the peer review, carried out three weeks of field work in one of the selected countries, wrote a country report and engaged in drawing out the analysis. Five cases were selected representing a variety in terms of the nature of the crisis and the make-up of civil society: the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Democratic Republic of Congo, southern Sudan, Colombia and southern India. In order to come to a more complete and nuanced

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2 An additional question was formulated which, however, turned out to be hardly addressed in the interviews. We include it here for sake of completeness: How can unheard voices and unseen actors be identified and involved in crisis-related interventions by international agencies?

3 Published in Hilhorst and Jansen (2005).

understanding of the realities of partnership in crisis situations, the peer review was particularly interested to hear the experiences and viewpoints of organizations in crisis-affected regions. For each of the selected regions, partners of three Dutch agencies were selected for interviews. The peer review was designed primarily by Netherlands-based participants in the initiative, with varying degrees of consultation with the partner organizations selected for the research. The findings were validated with the interviewed partners and the opportunities for follow-up were explored both through feedback meetings during the field work, and by sharing the case reports afterwards.

There was considerable discussion in the peer review team about the appropriate term to be used for the partner organizations in crisis-affected regions. Using the term 'local organizations' is somewhat problematic, given that some of these organizations have a regional or national reach. We often use the term 'Southern organizations' as an alternative, emphasising that they are active in the Global South. We do, however, recognize that also this term has its problems.

## **OUTLINE OF THE REPORT**

This report synthesizes and discusses the main findings of the peer review. It draws on the reports<sup>4</sup> prepared by the peer reviewers on the case studies, as well as numerous discussions within the peer review team. The next chapter provides more detail on the methodology followed and introduces the Dutch agencies. The third chapter presents the main issues of debate on partnership in crisis-related intervention as they are reflected in recent literature. The fourth chapter discusses the major findings for each of the five cases studied, placing them in their respective context. This chapter serves as a background to the more general discussion of issues of particular concern around partnership that were raised across the cases and which are presented in chapter five. Chapter six summarizes the main conclusions and

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4 In view of anonymity considerations, the case study reports are for internal use only.

discusses the implications for our understanding of partnership and for the promotion of more effective partnership in crisis-related interventions. It pinpoints a number of challenges that we hope are of interest, also to the broader humanitarian and development community.



## 2. PEER REVIEWING PARTNERSHIP

### PEER REVIEW METHODOLOGY

In the field of development and international co-operation, peer reviews are increasingly welcomed as an important tool for organizational learning and practice improvement. In this study, the peer review was used, in addition, as a method of enquiry to generate knowledge of a wider relevance on the issue of partnership in crisis-related interventions. On the basis of other experiences, we expected a peer review methodology to offer more scope for mutual learning and exchange than, for example, an external evaluation, particularly because the degree of mutual understanding tends to be higher and the context less threatening.<sup>5</sup> In addition, we expected the peer review to yield knowledge closely connected to the practice of humanitarian aid. Using the peer review method introduces particular biases and challenges that we will briefly discuss, after introducing the methodology followed.

This peer review was conducted by a team of five practitioner-researchers (here after called peer reviewers), who were staff members of the five participating Dutch agencies. Together with the academic facilitators, they formed the peer review team which defined the central questions for the peer review, selected the countries to be studied, set out the parameters for the field work and drew out the most important conclusions. Each peer reviewer carried out three weeks of field work in one of the selected cases, and interviewed the local partners of his or her own organization as well as of two of the other organizations participating in the peer review (an overview of the case studies and the Dutch organizations studied for each case, is given in Figure 2.1).

The selection of local partners to be interviewed was made by the respective programme staff in the Netherlands. The peer review team

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5 E.g. Report IC consult (2007), CGAP peer review on micro finance (2004), Patrizi et al. (2006).

only had a marginal influence on this. Its influence was restricted to asking for the choice to reflect a wide variety of local organizations, in terms of their sizes, missions, organizational set up, and the duration of the partnership. The reason to opt for selection by the responsible staff was to avoid possible unintended negative effects on the relationship with the partnership. This method of selection introduced a bias into the study in the sense that organizations with which there was a stressful relationship were likely to be excluded. The advantage was, however, that most partners were receptive and strongly interested in the issue of partnership, making the interviews overall very constructive.

The selected partners were invited to share their experiences, concerns and reflections about partnership and how it could be strengthened. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, guided by a list of topics derived from the central questions of the peer review. The interviews were lengthy, ranging from about three to four hours on average, and mostly developed into dialogues in which both partners to the conversation brought up topics. In the field, the peer reviewer from the Netherlands was accompanied by a research counterpart or assistant, familiar with the local conditions and knowledgeable about the NGO sector. In most cases, this person became an invaluable co-interviewer and an important sparring partner in the analysis and writing of the case study report. The field visits were, where possible, concluded with a feedback workshop in which the researchers presented their first conclusions and put them up for debate to the organizations interviewed. These reports were subsequently analyzed by the team in the Netherlands, which formed the point of departure for the findings as presented here.

The biggest methodological concern in the peer review was the interference of the relationship of financial dependence. We sought to reduce this in a number of ways. The peer reviewers made it clear that they did not have any funding responsibilities in their agency. They also guaranteed the confidentiality of the information being shared, in such a way that none of the findings can be attributed to a particular

organization or staff member. Though overall the interviews took place in an open atmosphere in which there was also room for criticism, the influence of the financial relationship cannot be ruled out, requiring us at times to 'read between the lines'. Where it was possible to hold final workshops (DRC, Sudan), these turned out to be a powerful means of inviting more critical discussion.

We were less concerned about a possible lack of objectivity on the side of the peer reviewers, as compared to external, academic researchers. We did not require the peer reviewers to remain 'neutral' throughout the interviews but during the preparation the team developed and agreed to a number of 'rules', including discretion about information obtained regarding other organizations and refraining from promoting or defending their agency's policy regarding partnership. Overall, these guidelines seem to have been followed in practice. Researchers also incorporated projects from their own organization so we could actually observe that they were as critical of their own organizations as of their peers.

**FIGURE 2.1: OVERVIEW OF PEER REVIEW CASES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

Region	Organizations		(in charge of case study)	Peer reviewers
Colombia	ICCO & Kerk in Actie	Netherlands Red Cross	War Child Holland	Klaas van Boeckel Patricia Landínez
Democratic Republic of Congo	Oxfam Novib	War Child Holland	Cordaid	Will de Wolf Jean-Baptiste Safari Bagula
India	ICCO & Kerk in Actie	Cordaid	Oxfam Novib	Marco de Swart Shoab Rahman
Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories	War Child Holland	Netherlands Red Cross	ICCO & Kerk in Actie	Eric Roetman
Sudan	Oxfam Novib	Cordaid	Netherlands Red Cross	Violeta Lombarts-Vasileva Taban Sahir Alatai

## PRESENTING THE PEER REVIEW ORGANIZATIONS

This section presents the Dutch organizations that initiated this peer review. The ICCO and Kerk in Actie, Oxfam Novib and Cordaid are all large organizations with a mandate spanning development work as well as relief and lobbying and advocacy. All have a professed preference for working with local partners. The other two participating organizations are the Netherlands Red Cross and War Child Holland. The organizations are presented here in alphabetical order.

**Cordaid** is an organization that resulted from the merger of several agencies with a humanitarian and development background, rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition. Cordaid has more than 90 years of experience in working on emergency aid and poverty eradication. Cordaid has a network of almost a thousand partner organizations in 36 countries in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. These partners work on a variety of themes, including health care, quality of urban life, access to markets, and peace and conflict. Cordaid operates four programmatic sectors: Participation, Emergency Aid and Reconstruction, Health and well-being and Entrepreneurship. Cordaid spends around 170 million euros each year on initiatives in the South, of which 30 million are earmarked for emergency aid. A small proportion is spent in the Netherlands, on lobbying and consciousness-raising.<sup>6</sup> Cordaid works with a comprehensive strategy in which crisis response and sustainable development are linked. When engaged in emergency situations, Cordaid takes a medium and long-term perspective, to avoid dependence on external aid but also in order to address the roots of disaster and conflict.

The **ICCO and Kerk in Actie** are organizations rooted in the Christian tradition that have recently (2007) merged their international departments. ICCO is the Inter-church Organization for Development Cooperation. Kerk in Actie is the global ministries of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The ICCO defines its mission as follows: 'to work towards a world in which people live in dignity and prosperity, a world

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<sup>6</sup> See Cordaid website: [http://www.cordaid.nl/English/About\\_Cordaid](http://www.cordaid.nl/English/About_Cordaid)

where poverty and injustice are no longer present'.<sup>7</sup> The organization supports local organizations and networks across the globe that are involved in providing access to basic social services, equitable economic development and promoting peace and democracy. In its support, the ICCO combines four roles: strategic financing, brokering, lobbying and advocacy, and capacity building. The ICCO is active in about 60 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe. Together, the ICCO and Kerk in Actie provide emergency aid offering not only direct assistance, but also contributing towards longer-term improvements. The Disaster Management Unit is a special unit in the global affairs department of the ICCO and Kerk in Actie. This unit facilitates projects and programmes in the field of rehabilitation, rapid response and risk reduction in the "regular" thematic departments (Access to Basic Services, Fair Economic Development, Democracy and Peace Building). The unit has no budget, with the exception of private money that is raised in the constituency for rapid response. In practice, this money is spent mainly by the regular thematic departments. The Unit engages in policy development, networking, lobbying, quality control, fund-raising and occasionally is engaged in projects itself.

The **Netherlands Red Cross** is the oldest organization in the peer review, established by royal decree in 1867. The organization provides emergency relief and social and health care both in the Netherlands and internationally. The Netherlands Red Cross is a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, which is founded on the principle of humanity. The mission statement of the Netherlands Red Cross states that it 'works with and assists vulnerable people locally and globally'. It thus adds the dimension of empowerment and capacity building. The organization's efforts in international co-operation cover both humanitarian assistance and long-term co-operation. The Netherlands Red Cross is active in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Europe. Humanitarian assistance focuses on emergency response, disaster preparedness and risk reduction, as well

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7 ICCO website, <http://www.icco.nl/delivery/icco/en/>, retrieved 15/01/2009

as reconstruction and rehabilitation. Long-term co-operation focuses on basic health care, including HIV-Aids, and water and sanitation. All programmes aim at strengthening partner national societies' capacities, in order to enable them to continue to support vulnerable people independently. The Netherlands Red Cross has increasingly contributed to operations of the International Red Cross. There has also been an increase in direct partnerships for development co-operation with sister national societies.<sup>8</sup>

**Oxfam Novib** is the Dutch member of the worldwide Oxfam family. The organization dates back to 1956 and defines its mission around the fight against injustice and poverty. Oxfam Novib works from the basic idea that these goals can be reached by supporting people's own initiatives.<sup>9</sup> The organization has a strong commitment to working with local partners including in its humanitarian programmes. Oxfam Novib is organized into several regional bureaus and a humanitarian unit. Oxfam Novib aims to dedicate 10% of its total funds to emergency responses. If needs exceed these 10%, external funds will be solicited. Local counterparts can present their funding proposals to the respective regional bureau at Oxfam Novib. Several of these regional bureaus have a special humanitarian programme officer to manage humanitarian projects. For proposals exceeding € 50.000, obligatory advice is required from the humanitarian unit within Oxfam Novib. To enable and co-ordinate local counterparts and other Oxfam affiliates to respond effectively, Oxfam Novib has a field representation in six countries, excluding the former office in southern India for the area affected by the tsunami. Oxfam Novib is committed to embed relief projects into development work and to make reconstruction after crisis sustainable. It has a special focus on linking community-based disaster risk reduction and conflict sensitivity to local capacity building. By integrating the emergency response within the existing regional bureaus, Oxfam Novib aims to stimulate this bridging of humanitarian response to structural development.

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8 See also [www.rodekruis.nl](http://www.rodekruis.nl)

9 See website: [www.oxfamnovib.nl](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl)

**War Child Holland** is part of the network of War Child International. It is a relatively small organization with a precisely defined focus. It works on the psychosocial well-being of children and young people affected by armed conflict using creative, artistic and sporting means. War Child is neither a relief nor purely a development organization. The interventions of War Child are not immediately life saving and in the heat of a humanitarian crisis resulting from armed conflict do not have the highest priority as compared to security, water, food, shelter and medical treatment. However, once these essential needs are being provided at a basic level, War Child starts its interventions as quickly as possible because the earlier the programmes start, the more effective they generally are. The psychosocial interventions are long-term in nature. It takes time to build and nurture trust and relationships. This does not imply that War Child should therefore remain in a conflict or post-conflict area for an extended period of time. Rather, War Child develops and enhances the capacities of its partners so that the direct presence of War Child in the (post-) conflict area becomes less and less necessary.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See also [www.warchild.nl](http://www.warchild.nl) and [www.warchild.org](http://www.warchild.org)



### 3. PARTNERSHIP IN CRISIS INTERVENTIONS: A REVIEW

Evaluations of aid have consistently pointed out that crisis-related interventions undervalue and under use locally available capacities for aid. The dominant image of humanitarian aid is therefore that it is delivered directly by international agencies. Notwithstanding this general image of direct implementation, working with local organizations in the implementation of humanitarian assistance is a much more common practice than suggested in the humanitarian literature. There is a large variety of collaborative arrangements between international agencies and organizations from the countries in crisis.

#### **AN ACTOR-ORIENTED APPROACH TO PARTNERSHIP**

One of the reasons to engage in a peer review of partnerships is that we view these relations as dynamic and negotiated. The realities and outcomes of aid depend on how actors along and around the aid chain – donor representatives, headquarters, field staff, aid recipients and surrounding actors – interpret the context, the needs, their own role and each other. This is founded in an actor orientation approach that premises that social actors have agency (Long 1992; 2001).

People reflect upon their experiences and what happens around them and use their knowledge and capabilities to interpret and respond to their environment. Partnerships in crisis-related interventions are not the direct translation of objectives as related in the project or annual reports. In reality each actor imbues the partnership with their own aspirations, interpretations and interests and as a result these arrangements end up being negotiated 'socially'. Social negotiation encompasses any kind of strategy, including written statements, formal interactions, schemes deployed in the shadows of the official process, the banalities of everyday gossiping, and even violence. To know the complete story, then, we have to find out how different actors define partnership and how they perceive of its reality.

This empirical view of partnership allows us to keep an open mind to the analysis of power. Power relations are often assumed as local NGOs being at the mercy of their donors. In reality such relations are much more flexible and unpredictable and often take the form of interdependencies. Local NGOs find room for manoeuvre by using their advantages of local knowledge and proximity to the implementation to shape the partnership. International NGOs depend on their partners to know what is going on, and depend on their partners' performance to satisfy their back-donors.

### **INSTRUMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS**

Many partnerships in crisis-related interventions develop because it makes sense operationally to use local channels for relief aid, as this is more efficient and cost-effective. The distribution of food aid, for example, is often subcontracted to local companies or NGOs. There is also a growing tendency to use local agencies not merely as implementers of aid, but to put partnership more central and move beyond a subcontracting relationship to one of collaboration. In these cases, agencies want to move from an instrumental approach to partnership to a more developmental approach. In a developmental approach, the partnership stretches beyond programme implementation and aims for institutional development of the partners and/or the relationship between the partners. This approach allows a greater say for local organizations over the kind of activities they will develop and often includes building capacities to enhance the preparedness of societies to deal with disaster or conflict. 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 for investing 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 their capacity to cope and their potential for serving their future interests.

Partnership is the term most frequently used for relations where INGOs fund local NGOs that perform humanitarian work. The term, as it has been used in development, is associated with an ideal image of long-lasting attachments between agencies that share a set of values although they are different in character. For example where one partner acts as donor, while the other partner implements the programmes. In the development literature, these partnerships are often permeated with expectations regarding the mutuality of the partnership. These include, for example, attention to local validation and shared control, mutual accountability, and a focus on organizations rather than merely on projects (Fowler 1997, 2000).

However, the relationships that build around the funding of programmes rarely live up to this ideal image, nor are they always meant to. In practice they vary considerably. The term partnership is being used for many different kinds of relationships. Partnership has become a label, under which different realities are hidden, and that often bears little resemblance to an ideal image of two complementary agencies that have strategic discussions on an equal footing. Relations between donor NGOs and recipient NGOs take on different shapes and intensity:

- A contractual agreement based on a tendering procedure where local organizations simply implement a job for which the parameters are fixed by the funding organization. No capacity building is involved; the bids simply need to prove they possess the required capacities for the job. It could very well be argued that these arrangements are purely businesslike and should not be labelled as partners, yet in reality many agencies in fact do refer to them as partnerships.
- A short-term incidental project applied for by a local NGO engaged in relief or rehabilitation. Functional capacity building may be a part of the project.
- A longer-term partnership whereby the INGO commits itself to support an organization in the long-term, possibly including a trajectory of capacity building.

- A long-term partnership where the parties engage in a horizontal relationship in which, ideally, the partners have a say in the policies and decision-making of the INGO, as much as the other way around.
- A situation where an INGO forms a local NGO that is encouraged to become an independent organization.
- A network partnership, where the donor-partner belongs to the same network or 'family' as the implementing partner.

To illustrate the diversity of partnerships, the table below elaborates on the metaphor of partnership, where the ideal image of partnership resembles a marriage between two different, complementary partners.

Type of partnership	Metaphor
Family networks, such as IFRC where local partners are given.	Family
Long-term equal relationship, two-way accountability and two-way policy advice.	Marriage partners
Long trajectory including capacity building or institutional support	Adoption
Incidental support on the basis of specific project	Casual relationship
(Tendered) subcontracting	Paid services
Creating a local partner by rendering a local branch of the INGO independent	Having a baby

It is important to stress that all these forms of collaboration can be valuable, depending on the possibilities, needs and programme objectives. Whether or not to engage and invest in partner relations depends partly on the context and the nature of the emergency. During a rapid-onset emergency of a short duration, it may not make sense to develop partnerships and the subcontracting model may be the best choice in these cases. However, the question is if all these diverse relationships deserve to be called partnerships. Often, a language suggesting mutuality is illusory and fails to outline what the conditions and prospects of partnership entail. In some cases, it might be preferable to view partners as business partners, based on contracts, rather than entertain partnership language that promises mutuality and trust but remains vague on how to achieve this.

This peer review deals with a diversity of humanitarian partnerships. All varieties mentioned above, except the subcontracting relationships, could be found in the sample of organizations that were interviewed. However, most of the cases examined stretch far beyond a single project. The reason for this is that many Dutch humanitarian agencies, including all the agencies involved in this study, work to a substantial degree on the basis of longer-term collaboration with what may be loosely labelled their "Southern" partners, sometimes in combination with direct implementation. The Netherlands Red Cross has a long-standing working relationship with National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies. War Child Holland implements programmes itself but also identifies a limited number of organizations to develop partnerships with, or focuses on the formation of local organizations to work in their particular niche. Oxfam Novib, ICCO and Kerk in Actie and Cordaid are agencies with a broad mandate that engage in humanitarian assistance alongside their main work in development. The methodology of the peer review is designed to study organizational relations of collaboration, not subcontracting procedures.

### **AID WEBS AND AID CHAINS**

Partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs that centre on programme funding are always part of larger wholes. There are

many different kinds of stakeholder relationships in humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development. The partnerships are usually embedded in an aid chain. In many cases there is an institutional back-donor that may impose conditions on the implementation arrangements, and put specific demands on the accountability. Also, the implementing NGO often establishes other partnerships down the aid chain with community-based organizations or local authorities, which also has consequences for implementation and accountability relationships. The INGO is then in fact an intermediary between a back-donor and the local NGO, whereas the local NGO is the intermediary between the INGO and the community-based organizations or between the INGO and the beneficiaries of aid. It must be noted that the notion of aid chain is in fact also a metaphor, as the chain is much more complex than a single vertical connection. NGOs in the field usually relate to a multiplicity of donors. In addition, each of the partners is part of an aid web that comprises the aid chain but is much broader and diffuse. Both Northern and Southern NGOs are part of different horizontal networks, they buy services from private companies, take part in hierarchical co-ordination structures, and have to abide by representatives of national law. These different stakeholder relations are taken into account in this peer review only in as much as they affect the relationship between the national NGOs and their international NGO partners.

### **PARTNERSHIP IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

When a crisis occurs in a country, INGOs often already have partnerships in place, due to ongoing development work. In these cases, INGOs fund or channel relief through their structural development partners in the country. Although there is continuity in these collaborations, the conditions of crisis may lead to profound changes. Among others, these conditions concern:

- The influx of international organizations in emergency situations has a profound impact on the local organizational field. In many cases INGOs will all be seeking local partners, which can have many effects. Local NGOs may rapidly grow in size or new NGOs emerge that want to share in the resources.

- The politics of providing aid in crisis situations are complicated, especially in the case of conflicts. Abuse of aid can feed the conflict and the chaotic conditions lead to diminished checks on accountability, which may in turn lead to corrupt practices. International agencies seek partners that can provide aid in neutral or impartial ways that may be alien to local development organizations. Most INGOs have subscribed to the Code of Conduct, or subscribe to the Sphere standards, but their partners may not have. The question is how to deal with this.
- Disaster response and humanitarian aid differ from normal development work, and local agencies may lack the specific expertise needed. A major challenge is that crisis situations and their aftermath are volatile and often rapidly changing. Periods of immediate response are followed, or even paralleled, by periods of reconstruction or development.
- Funding cycles in humanitarian crises are usually much shorter than in development, restricting the scope for partnership and capacity building.
- An issue that becomes increasingly relevant is how partnership is affected by the interplay between INGOs and military forces. In Afghanistan, for instance, this has strong implications for partnerships between international and national NGOs. This aspect is not dealt with in the peer review, as it was not relevant in the cases under study. But we did find that geopolitical agendas, notably in relation to the War on Terror, do affect partnership relations.

There are also many cases where INGOs cannot make use of an existing partner network and have to find new partners for the humanitarian role. This is a complicated issue. There may be a limited presence of NGOs and their strength and capacities may have been eroded by conflict or disaster. The time factor may be crucial. In rapid-onset crises there may be no time to identify local organizations or civil society groups. On the other hand, many crisis situations trigger a long-term response, which makes it all the more important to make efforts to create local partnerships as soon as possible.

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTNERSHIPS

There is much discussion about how partnerships with local NGOs enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid. These discussions often follow entrenched positions regarding the 'pros' and 'cons' of local NGOs (Hilhorst and Jansen 2005). The advantages of local NGOs that in principle would enhance their efficiency and effectiveness are, amongst others, that they can use local knowledge and networks, that they can be more cost-effective, that they are culturally sensitive and know what aid is appropriate, and that their long-term presence enhances the impact and sustainability of programmes. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that working through local partners can hamper effectiveness, when local agencies lack the capacity for proper programme implementation, have limited coverage and are likely to be part of the politics of the conflict or disaster situation. There is also a fear that local organizations are more prone to corruption. It should be added that international organizations are not free from these risks: they are wittingly or unwittingly part of the politics of the situation. There are also many cases of abuse or lack of transparency on the part of international agencies.

This peer review does not test these assumptions directly. We do not measure the impact of partnerships on the effectiveness of aid. In the first place, this would require a much more in-depth examination of case studies, whereas this study meant to consider partnership issues in a broad variety of situations. In the second place, this would require a comparative analysis comparing indirect with direct implementation practices. We do, however, discuss how the organizations in the peer review think the effectiveness of aid is hampered and can be enhanced.

In this peer review we do take into account effectiveness, but in a much more narrow meaning. We question the effectiveness of the partnership itself and ask if the partnership operates as it is meant to. Here, one could distinguish between the effectiveness of service

delivery and the effectiveness of partnership or the effectiveness of capacity building. However, as the terms of partnership are rarely made explicit, this question often boils down to a subjective measurement of whether the partnership fulfils the expectations of the interviewee.



## 4. PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE: PEER REVIEW CASE STUDIES

This part of the report presents some of the key findings for each of the five case studies included in the peer review. Partnership is a social practice of encounter and collaboration that takes shape under particular social, political and historical circumstances. This is why we have chosen to present the findings in their specific context. Issues of partnerships are discussed in relation to the development of the crisis and of the international response to the crisis through time, and the kinds of webs which have evolved between local, national and international actors.

The first two cases concern protracted political crises, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Colombia, where there are important humanitarian consequences in regions with a relatively strong but contested state and a professionalized and politicized civil society. We find partnerships here in which local organizations have strong opinions about the role of international NGOs and 'talk back' to their international donors. Core concerns in partnership under these conditions are political choices, the nature of solidarity, and the role of lobbying and advocacy work.

The second two cases concern two African regions, southern Sudan and eastern Congo, which are emerging from complex and compounded crises with high levels of violence and massive displacements. Here the state has a limited capacity and civil society is either weak or eroded and strongly dependent on international aid. Dominant concerns in partnership here are the impact of international aid in setting the parameters for local organizations, the shift between relief and developmental methods of working, and the nature of capacity building.

The last case, southern India, addresses the impact of a natural hazard, the 2004 Asian tsunami, in a region with a varied and mostly

well-developed civil society. The core concerns are the way the international reaction to the tsunami made an impact on local civil society and reshaped partnerships. The case shows how rights-based approaches carried over into disaster response and it brings out a strong need, expressed by local NGOs, to think about partnership beyond the financial relationship.

### **ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: PARTNERSHIP AND POLITICS<sup>11</sup>**

The conflict between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) is not only a protracted political emergency; it is also a major humanitarian crisis. In the 60 years that it has lasted, millions of people, Palestinians especially, have been forced to leave their homes, many of them being permanently displaced. The OPTs have been economically crippled, making them heavily dependent on foreign assistance. Basic services in health care and primary education are to a large extent financed, and to some degree operated, through multilateral organizations and international NGOs. The involvement of international NGOs with the conflict is long-lasting and dates back at least to the 1960s. Much of this aid was channelled through the Palestinian authorities through to local NGOs.

Though much of the aid to the OPTs continues to be framed in terms of humanitarianism, primarily responding to the needs of the victims of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the peer review makes very clear that such assistance inevitably gains a political meaning. Partnerships between local and international organizations are traversed and conditioned by political debates and agendas. In the post 9/11 context, political agendas have been put more sharply into relief. American organizations in the OPTs ask their partner organizations to undersign

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11 This section draws on the case study on Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, written by Eric Roetman, ICCO and Kerk in Actie. This case study considers the partnership relations of ICCO and Kerk in Actie, the Netherlands Red Cross and War Child Holland. The field trip took place in October 2007 and included visits to both Jerusalem and the OPTs. Direct quotes are from the original report.

an act to support the War on Terror to guarantee no support is given to terrorists. This issue came out prominently during the interviews. In one interview it was put as follows:

*We were nearly done with the project preparations when one of our American donor organizations suddenly imposed a new rule. They said they could only continue to work with us if we undersigned a declaration for the government of the United States. We officially had to support the War on Terror and had to hand over information to the government of the United States about our organization and staff. We are against terrorism but we do not want to work for the intelligence of the United States. We refused to sign because we do not accept 'collaborators money'... Our donors should treat us with dignity.*

Whereas the organizations interviewed all stated they refused assistance under these conditions, they also pointed out that this is changing the civil society landscape, with some organizations accepting the conditions and gaining the larger contracts at the expense of more principled organizations.

The peer review shows how different Dutch organizations have developed different ways of positioning themselves in this political landscape. The partnerships they developed reflect this diversity. The peer review found that the Netherlands Red Cross works from a Dunantist tradition<sup>12</sup>, with a strong adherence to the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality. The other Dutch organizations included represent a 'Third Way humanitarianism' emphasizing social and political justice<sup>13</sup>, while also drawing on a religious tradition. This is especially true for Kerk in Actie. Each works with partners that match these traditions.

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<sup>12</sup> Also Stoddard 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Also Leader 2000.

The **Netherlands Red Cross**, following the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality, has sought to maintain an open dialogue with the national societies of both the Israeli state (Magen David Adom) and the OPTs (the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)).<sup>14</sup> The financial support of the Netherlands Red Cross is mostly focused on the PRCS, given the protracted crisis affecting the Palestinian population. The needs-based approach followed by the Red Cross is consistent with their choice for the PRCS which is able to reach important parts of the vulnerable population.

**ICCO and Kerk in Actie** work from a rights-based approach, emphasizing human rights, discrimination, deprivation of political rights, and poverty. ICCO and Kerk in Actie are in a process of merging which is not yet complete, and the Middle East departments still have a separate policy and portfolio. ICCO adopts an explicitly political position and works with partner organizations in both Israel and the OPTs that focus on human rights issues and support self-determination for the Palestinians. It prefers to address the root causes of the crisis and human rights issues over reconciliation work. Kerk in Actie, on the other hand, works on justice and peace from a religious tradition and invests in "building bridges between the different religious and ethnic communities". For ICCO and Kerk in Actie it is important to have partners "which are rooted in civil society; organizations that can sense the public opinion and are aware of violations of human rights". The partnerships feed directly into the lobby efforts that ICCO and Kerk in Actie undertake in Europe.

**War Child Holland** supports psychosocial initiatives in both Israel and the OPTs, targeting children and teenagers especially. Some of its partners work explicitly on reconciliation between Jews and Palestinians. War Child seeks out partners that are well-rooted in civil society and "have networks of schools and community centres to reach

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<sup>14</sup> An interesting detail is the fact that the Netherlands Red Cross was one of the advocates for admitting both the MDA and the PRCS into the IFRC, which was realized in 2006.

out to children". War Child mostly works with young organizations that are in the process of becoming professional agencies. A War Child representative is based in the area and provides regular assistance for capacity building. This includes helping young organizations to write proposals and access international donations.

Politics permeates the partner relations in Israel and the OPTs. The peer review brought out that local partner organizations expect their Dutch counterparts to take a genuine interest in what the partner is trying to achieve and to support their "mission and vision". Local partners expect solidarity with their approach, but not necessarily a partisan stance. In the case of ICCO, a strong identification of political standpoints is indeed an important condition in the partnership. A number of other organizations embraced a similar notion of solidarity, but there was also an interesting counter-discourse of agencies that appreciated particularly that donors supported their choice to work on reconciliation. One agency pointed out that the moral support of the donor was important, especially because its reconciliatory approach attracted so much criticism from other segments of civil society in Israel and the OPTs. In addition agencies understood solidarity not only in its political sense. Moral support, continuity and reliability in the relationship, despite hardships, were other crucial elements mentioned.

The peer review in Israel and the Palestinian Territories revealed clearly that local partners have expectations of their Dutch counterpart beyond simply a funding relationship. As the peer reviewer put it: "They want more than a cheque". They expect efforts in the field of lobbying, but also brokerage – for example to link them to other funding organizations – and advice and training tailored to the specific needs of the organization. Both local and Dutch organizations expect a certain degree of mutual accountability in their relationships. All three Dutch organizations reviewed were concerned with sharing decision-making with their partner organizations and being more accountable to their partners. In the case of War Child, the close and frequent contact that it maintains with its partners was seen as an important way to foster

an open communication: "Ideas can be shared freely, and problems can be addressed at an early stage". In the Red Cross movement "operational alliances" are important instruments to facilitate dialogue and to co-ordinate the different societies supporting, in this case, the Palestinian Red Cross Society. The ICCO is launching a new structure for decision-making on its policy for the Middle East through a so-called "regional council", extending co-responsibility for policy development to civil society actors, including some that are not partners. However, the peer reviewer concludes that despite these intentions to share power more equally, partnerships are still to a large extent constructed around the policy agendas and theories of change of the international NGOs. A particular concern brought up by the organizations interviewed was the need they felt to be more informed about policy and organizational changes at the headquarters of their Dutch donors, given that these changes tend to have a strong impact on the partnership.

### **COLOMBIA: PARTNERS IN THE DEFENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS<sup>15</sup>**

Colombia suffers from a combination of a prolonged civil war involving stages of intense violence and recurrent natural disasters, including floods and volcanic eruptions. Together these crises have caused massive displacements. Present estimates of IDPs range from 2 to 4 million with many people seeking refuge in the cities. Afro-Colombians, indigenous peoples and peasant farmers in remote areas are the most vulnerable sectors of society. Colombia is currently involved in what is called the 'Justice and Peace process', which is, however, highly contested. Whereas the government claims to be making progress and the security situation seems to have improved overall, others criticize the continued human rights violations and doubt the prospects for a durable peace.

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15 This section draws on the case study on Colombia, written by Klaas van Boeckel, War Child. This case study considers the partnership relations of War Child, ICCO and Kerk in Actie, and the Netherlands Red Cross. In Colombia, the author worked in collaboration with Ms. Patricia Landínez. The field visit took place in November 2007 and included several locations. Direct quotes are from the original report.

Given Colombia's sound socio-economic performance during the 1980s and 1990s, most international development agencies left the country during that time. Many of them have returned in recent years to address humanitarian problems surrounding the IDPs and human rights issues, or to support Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration programmes of former guerrillas and paramilitaries. Colombia has overall a strong and mature civil society. This is apparently one of the main reasons, next to security considerations, why very few international agencies implement their programmes themselves. Most INGOs work in partnerships, with national or local governmental actors, with Colombian NGOs, or with a variety of other organizations, including CBOs, associations, foundations and faith-based organizations. Some areas, like the Chocó, however, lack a consolidated civil society sector.

The presence of Dutch agencies participating in this peer review in Colombia ranges from a long-term involvement to a more recent presence. Their partnerships have developed in different ways. **War Child** started to work in Colombia in 2005 and its emphasis is on partnering organizations focusing on the "psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth using the power of creativity, arts and sports". Financial support to these partner organizations is specific to each project, but the relationship also includes capacity development, joint lobbying and advocacy on human rights issues, as well as a degree of shared policy and strategy development. **Kerk in Actie** has been in Colombia for many years and some of its partner relationships have a history of more than a decade. **ICCO** had left the country in 1990 but is now returning via the newly established ICCO/ Kerk in Actie alliance. Kerk in Actie's financial support, targeted especially at supporting human rights and IDPs, has been rather flexible in practice and has often been used to build organizational and institutional capacity. Kerk in Actie has worked through a Colombian intermediary organization that maintained the direct contact with the NGOs and CBOs it supported. The **Netherlands Red Cross** partnership with the Colombian Red Cross (CRC) dates back to the 1980s, prompted by natural disasters. The CRC exists since 1915 and is one of the most

consolidated Red Cross societies of Latin America, with a presence in most vulnerable regions of the country, including those with a less dense NGO infrastructure.

ICCO and Kerk in Actie and War Child share a view of the situation in Colombia as primarily a human rights crisis. Much of their interventions concern lobbying and advocacy related to human rights abuses by the paramilitaries and, to a lesser extent, the FARC which affect vulnerable sectors of society. Lobby activities include missions to areas of insurgent and paramilitary activity to identify abuses and public events to denounce human rights violations. The peer review found that local organizations see an added value in partnerships with international organizations precisely in the field of lobbying and advocacy on human rights abuses. Both Dutch and Colombian organizations participated in lobby platforms.

Many of the Colombian partners in the peer review see it as their role to "speak out on behalf of the people affected by the conflict" and partner international organizations in order to be in a better position to carry out this role. Without the protective umbrella of international partners, denunciation of violations has proven to be extremely dangerous, not only for the organization involved but also for the victims of these human rights violations. ICCO and Kerk in Actie and War Child see lobbying and advocacy as an essential element of their partnerships in Colombia. The joint efforts in the field of lobbying and advocacy make these networks stronger. According to the peer reviewer, lobbying and advocacy are an "area of convergence". Unlike projects, where one essentially is the implementer and the other the funder, lobbying and advocacy are joint activities where both sides treat each other more as equals."

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The Colombian Red Cross Society also frames its activities partly in a human rights context. However, they do not opt for high-visibility strategies through the human rights platforms. Rather, they are concerned with the defence of the right to protection and the right to assistance of IDPs and people affected by disasters at the local levels. In

Colombia, local governments have the duty, and the specified budgets, to provide assistance to IDPs and the Red Cross chapters support IDPs in claiming these rights.

The peer review found civil society in most regions of the country to be relatively mature. Organizational capacities and a sense of identity and purpose are generally well-developed. As a consequence, Colombian organizations look to their international partners for an obvious extra benefit. Many of those interviewed expressed a reluctance to give up too much of their autonomy in return for funding, as is evident from the following comments, made during the interviews:

*"It hurts to give up a donor opportunity, but it hurts far worse to give up our independence."*

*"Some donors act like Schwarzenegger: I pay so I say. Those days are over!"*

Many of the partner organizations in this peer review take up an intermediary position between the end recipients of aid and the Dutch donor. The peer review revealed that many of these organizations understood their role as facilitating or accompanying local groups of beneficiaries, such as associations of IDPs as well as communities, CBOs, youth groups, or schools. They argued that the ownership of interventions and projects should be located more strongly with the people targeted by the aid. In the analysis of these Colombian organizations, groups of beneficiaries claim, increasingly, ownership over the intervention process. The "increasing level of empowerment" that these groups display makes them "an acting echelon in the aid chain as opposed to a mere end recipient". This means that the strategies and procedures of these groups condition, increasingly, the intervention process and that "they increasingly question and challenge the added value of other actors in the chain".

A point of concern raised by the Colombian organizations was that there are tensions between the need to support social and political processes by means of funding mechanisms that are project-based with the concomitant short time horizons and elaborate administrative procedures.

## SOUTHERN SUDAN: FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT: EMERGING PARTNERSHIPS<sup>16</sup>

Sudan is just emerging from a complex protracted crisis. After more than twenty years of violent conflict between the north and the south, Sudan has entered a new, more promising phase with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005. However, peace is fragile at best. There is much uncertainty about the responsibilities and workings of the new government, a factor which is expected to continue to cause tensions between north and south. The Darfur conflict, though not part of this review, continues to affect the north/south tensions. This results, for example, in local conflicts over nomadic migration routes. There are problems related to large numbers of IDPs, but also the returning of refugees from camps in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the region suffers from recurrent floods, droughts, food shortages and epidemics. In much of southern Sudan, basic services such as clean water and primary education are lacking.

The humanitarian crisis in southern Sudan has attracted a large international response, starting in the 1980s. The signing of the CPA has meant a turning point in international involvement, as many aid organizations dedicated to emergency relief only, have started to leave the country. Those organizations that remained, having a broader mandate, are trying to assist in the transition from emergency to recovery, rehabilitation and development. The shift from relief to development is visible in the partnerships of the Dutch NGOs participating in this peer review. **Cordaid's** involvement with Sudan dates back to 1972 when Cebemo, one of Cordaid's participant organizations, started humanitarian work in co-operation with an organization with which they still have a partnership today. Cordaid's present partners in Sudan include faith-based organizations that provided emergency aid during the war and are at present gradually

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16 This section draws on the case study on Sudan, written by Violeta Lombarts-Vasileva, Netherlands Red Cross. The research assistant was Mr. Taban Sahir Alatai. This case study considers the partnership relations of the Netherlands Red Cross, Cordaid and Oxfam Novib. The field visits took place in September/October 2007. Direct quotes are taken from the original report.

making the shift to development-oriented work. Peace-building, education and women are priority areas for Cordaid. **Oxfam Novib** has been working in Sudan since the 1990s and currently does so within the framework of the Oxfam International country group. Their Sudanese partners are making the shift from relief to development, focusing on issues such as education, health, food security and gender. The **Netherlands Red Cross** has been providing humanitarian assistance to Sudan since 1983. The bilateral relationship with the Sudanese Red Crescent, considered to be the pioneer humanitarian organization in Sudan, started in 1988. The Sudanese Red Crescent branch in Juba was established in 2004. At present, the partnership focuses on primary health care, water and sanitation, and income generating activities for IDPs in different parts of Sudan. There is also a HIV/AIDS programme.

The southern Sudanese NGO sector was, according to the partners interviewed, non-existent prior to the crisis and has been very much conditioned by the prolonged emergency. Virtually all local NGOs have started as emergency organizations and for the past two decades have been dedicated almost exclusively to relief aid. To a large extent, the NGO sector has been donor-driven. In the 1990s especially, local organizations mushroomed in response to funding opportunities, though with time many of these collapsed. The current 'post-emergency' phase is a turning point for many Sudanese organizations. The peer review brought out that Sudanese organizations see it as a major challenge to make the transition from relief to development. Funding opportunities have sharply decreased and a new way of working is required. In the words of some respondents: *"Development is difficult because it coincides with a fall in funding. Many partners only work in relief. Most pack and leave. We are just trying to emerge from that"*.

The partners interviewed for this peer review all stressed that they were in a phase of reorganization. They identified the need to change their way of thinking about their work, but also their management style and organizational culture, to make the transition to development work successful. As they put it: *"Donor priorities and agendas change, we*

*have to be flexible to survive, to catch up with new developments".*

Difficulties they emphasized were the lack of qualified personnel for development work, the need to acquire a new type of knowledge and skills, and the need to reshape the way they relate to the beneficiaries and to their donors. Under the development mode, beneficiaries are no longer just the receivers of aid, but need to gain a certain degree of ownership over the process. As one respondent put it: *"We must work very close with the communities. In development you must be planning from the beginning with the people"*. Furthermore, Sudanese organizations face the challenge of addressing the social consequences of the transition process, the impact of which is also felt strongly at the local level: *"If we say to people the money finished- how can we explain?"* They feel the pressure to deliver visible and tangible results at the local level in order to show people that change is possible.

Another new and problematic issue is the greater involvement with governmental actors. Much of the work of Sudanese NGOs, especially in the field of basic services, is now to be transferred to state structures. However, these are still in the process of being built up. No regulations exist regarding the role and legal status of NGOs. Sudanese organizations consider that international NGOs could also play a role in addressing these issues and contribute not only to strengthening civil society but also improving relations between civil society and the newly established government.

In this transition phase, the Sudanese organizations interviewed identified capacity building as a particular need. They see an important role for their Dutch partners in supporting them to become more professional: *"The transition from relief to development forms a real challenge for the relation. [...] [we] need a long-term partnership, support in skills and training to reorient us as we got used to short-term funding during the crisis situation"*.

*"It is very important that the Dutch organization stay with us after the crisis. It has management expertise and provides advice."* As the peer

reviewer summarized it: "capacity building is seen as a tool to support the reorganization process."

Capacity building has a variety of meanings in the southern Sudanese context. In the view of local organizations it includes building up material infrastructure and human resources, a better performance on logistics, accountancy, administration, project management and implementation. But it also includes developing a greater visibility for their organization, making them more eligible for other donors. Interestingly, some appreciate explicitly the demands put on NGOs regarding reporting and accountability, because it provides them with an opportunity to show their professionalism in a competitive field of local NGOs. The organizations interviewed pointed out that under the emergency-mode of working, capacity building was not a priority for international NGOs and donors, though it was a constant concern of the Sudanese organizations themselves. They felt that when the crisis was severe, local actors and capacities tended to be overlooked. Some Sudanese organizations, however, managed to invest in capacity building during the crisis, even when no specific funds were available for that, and invested in their office, logistics, expertise and financial procedures. Some Dutch organizations were prepared to cover the core and overhead costs of their partners during the crisis, which is identified as a crucial factor in preparing these organizations better for confronting the current challenges.

During the final workshop in Nairobi with a number of partners, the problem was raised of the lack of joint agenda setting, vision or co-ordination between the southern Sudanese NGOs. It was analyzed that after a long period of project work in the context of an emergency, they were now in the process of building capacity at the organizational level. Capacity building at the sectoral level had not yet begun, nor envisaged in any of the partnerships these agencies were involved in.

The peer review brought out that many local organizations see it as a real challenge to build up partnerships that move away from the basis of the subcontracting relationships that are characteristic of the

emergency phase. During the crisis, 'partnership' as such was not so high on the agenda of NGOs and donors. In the view of the Sudanese organizations interviewed, the construction of partnership as a relationship based on mutual respect, exchange and joint activities was only just beginning. The peer reviewer concluded in this regard: *"All partners agree the partnership is still to be built up. [...] During the crisis the partnership started but now the issue is to develop it and give it shape"*.

A particular problem raised during the interviews and the concluding workshop were problems in relation to back-donors. There were several problems mentioned. Many donors do not want to fund local NGOs and insist on an intermediary international NGO: *"Then we are forced to accept a partner above us who adds little to the implementation and has no experience in the country"*. Another problem is that NGOs are not involved in the discussions with the back-donor. They are frustrated that they do not have the chance to explain their programmes directly to the back-donor, and suspect that INGOs sometimes redirect funds that were requested on their behalf to other areas of agencies.

### **EASTERN CONGO: PARTNERSHIPS FROM DEVELOPMENT TO RELIEF, AND BACK?<sup>17</sup>**

During the 1990s, eastern Congo, and more particularly the South-Kivu region, suffered from intense violence. As civil war broke out in Rwanda in 1994 an estimated 1,5 million refugees entered Congo, amongst them the extremist Hutu militias known as Interahamwe. Since then, eastern Congo has become the battlefield between Rwandese militias, armies of the neighbouring countries, the Congolese army and Congolese rebel groups contesting state power. Intense periods of violence have been registered, uprooting thousands of people and destroying the

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17 This section draws on the case study on Congo, in particular the South Kivu region, written by Will de Wolf, Cordaid, together with Jean Baptiste Safari Bagula. This case study considers the partnership relations of Cordaid, Oxfam/Novib and War Child. The field visit took place in August 2007. Direct quotes are taken from the original report.

social and economic infrastructure. Fully-fledged civil war in Congo was halted by an African UN intervention force. In 2004 the Sun City peace agreement was signed. In eastern Congo, the security situation has improved but there are still regions beyond governmental control, impeding the return of IDPs. In remote regions, sexual violence continues to be widespread today. State structures and capacities are only just beginning to function again. The region also suffers from chronic poverty with a large part of the population depending on subsistence agriculture and living in areas that are difficult to access.

The international humanitarian response to the crisis in eastern Congo started in 1994, in response to the refugee crisis created by the Rwanda genocide. Emergency assistance was given, on the one hand, by newly arriving humanitarian organizations mostly from the US and UK. On the other hand, development organizations already present in the region, such as those included in this peer review, responded to the appeals of their local partners and supported the provision of food and medicines, as well as the rehabilitation of schools and health centres. The UN was also an important player in providing humanitarian assistance in eastern Congo.

Eastern Congo has a dynamic civil society consisting of both church groups and NGOs. The 1980s saw a considerable strengthening of civil society. There was a variety of union and base organizations aiming for emancipation, out of which the, still existing, regional body of NGO co-ordination (CRONG) developed. Furthermore, civil society and the churches in eastern Congo have a long history of service delivery, especially in health and education, and, with international support, became strong and well-organized. The ongoing wars, however, have weakened civil society structures. The Mobutu regime co-opted some of the most important civil society leaders. With the influx of international agencies after 1994, there was a rapid growth in small NGOs but most of this local capacity was used to implement the programmes of these international agencies. Local actors interviewed for this peer review estimated that at present there are about 2000 NGOs in the South-Kivu province, of which, they believe, about 20% is really functioning,

in the sense of implementing activities. Local NGOs are crucial to the regional economy: local actors estimate that about 40% of the salaried employees get their incomes from these local organizations.

The Dutch organizations included in this peer review reflect a variety of experiences with partnership and present different mixes of relief and development work. **Oxfam Novib**, which had a long-standing involvement with the region dating back to 1984, focused on development in rural areas, and to lesser extent urban centres, with an emphasis on income generating activities. Some of Oxfam Novib's partnerships in the region go back to those early days. Partners include development organizations working on issues such as food security and agricultural production, including credit schemes and gender, in sometimes very remote areas. Emergency relief was not a primary concern in Oxfam Novib's partnerships. However they were now to be confronted with the realities of the war. Prompted by their long-standing partners who were forced to address the needs of the population groups they were working with, Oxfam Novib supported emergency activities, mostly focused on IDPs and refugees. Oxfam Novib also supports some more explicitly peace-building activities. **Cordaid's** Emergency and Reconstruction department has been active in the region since 1994, but development sectors in Cordaid (Bilance with health care programmes and Mensen in Nood/Caritas with social development programmes) were present since the 1980s. According to the peer reviewer, Cordaid works towards long-term planning "in which it connects emergency relief with structural development. ... [This] offers the opportunity to link emergency relief and reconstruction to development." Cordaid has set up its own field offices. In view of the limited capacities of local partners in strategic planning, project design and management, and administration, Cordaid felt a closer proximity was required. Cordaid partners in South Kivu work, amongst other things, on demobilization, trauma and rehabilitation, and conflict prevention and resolution, but also on access to basic services. **War Child Holland** also has its office in eastern Congo and focuses, like in the other regions in this peer review, on improving the psycho-social well-being of vulnerable children and youth affected by the war

situation. War Child provides intensive support to a limited number of local partners, which it provides with both financial and capacity building support, alongside more incidental funding for projects of other local NGOs. It also engages in lobbying and advocacy jointly with its partners.

The peer review found local NGOs have been, and continue to be, crucial in responding to the crises in eastern Congo. Local organizations are frequently the ones in direct contact with the populations affected by violence and natural hazards. In some regions, they are the only NGO actors present, given that security provisions prevent the UN agencies as well as international NGOs from going there. However, local NGOs still remain largely invisible in the international co-ordination efforts and are hardly involved in them. In 2006, the DRC became one of the pilot countries where UNDP-OCHA introduced the "Pooled Fund" mechanism, as a means of strengthening donor co-ordination. This mechanism involves donors pooling their funds available for the Humanitarian Plan. This was followed by the introduction of the so-called cluster model, whereby different agencies, mainly from the UN, co-ordinate the efforts in particular sectors. These reforms in the humanitarian sector seem only to have marginally improved the position of local NGOs regarding access to decision-making, funding and co-ordination. An overriding concern brought out by the interviews in eastern Congo was with the lack of involvement of local organizations in the UN Pooled Fund. The Congolese organizations interviewed found it impossible to access UNDP-OCHA funds due to restrictive criteria and considered they had only a very limited opportunity to participate in co-ordination and consultation meetings between international NGOs.

Another prominent problem was the lack of donor co-ordination and coherent overall vision for the reconstruction and development of South-Kivu. One respondent commented: *"I do hope that this research [peer review] is the starting point of donor collaboration"*. The peer review found that neither the government nor the international actors present in the region have as yet been able to put forward strategic

plans for development effectively. The provincial government has only recently been created and development plans are still being made. Humanitarian and development plans are functioning in parallel rather than in relation to each other. Also the Kivu NGO sector itself is lacking in co-ordination, due in part to the co-option of leaders and internal frictions. In the final workshop, held in Bukavu, local organizations identified a paramount need for greater exchange and co-ordination amongst themselves. They identified the need to speak out jointly to the donor community. They see a role for donors in strengthening them in this regard, but they also formulated proposals to overcome fragmentation. It was deplored that, so far, capacity building has remained limited to the level of project cycle management and strongly focuses on financial accountability. Building a stronger civil society sector, that can have a stronger voice towards external parties, should also be a part of capacity building.

One further problem identified by the peer reviewer is that understanding of relief and development are not brought to bear upon each other. This problem is not articulated in discussions or in practice. The peer review found that local development organizations often worked from a needs-based approach and did not, in spite of their response to the crises, analyse the socio-political context which made people vulnerable or re-think their development strategies. Emergency and reconstruction-oriented NGOs, created after the wars, were found to work from a more rights-based approach and to produce more critical analyses of the socio-political situation to which they tailored their activities.

## **SOUTHERN INDIA: DISASTER RESPONSE AND NEW AVENUES FOR PARTNERSHIP<sup>18</sup>**

Like in other parts of Asia, the tsunami of December 26 2004 hit the southern coast of India with a devastating effect. The tsunami cost at least 10,000 lives and destroyed houses and fisheries in coastal communities. India shared in the unprecedented inflow of humanitarian funds and agencies in response to the tsunami. Most of these relief and rehabilitation programmes are now ending. As a consequence, there is a sudden decline in international aid to the region which, given India's overall economic success, is not likely to be considered for structural development assistance.

Most partnerships between the Dutch organizations included in this peer review and local organizations in southern India date back more than ten years, some going back even to the 1970s. These partnerships concerned different development issues and were partly re-framed in response to the tsunami.

The three Dutch organizations are strong advocates of a rights-based approach. This is also reflected in the choice of their partners. **Cordaid** works, on the one hand, with well-developed organizations with which it engages in joint analysis and on which it draws to support smaller organizations, for example in writing proposals. On the other hand, the agency supports emerging organizations which it helps to develop. Thematically the partners are concerned, amongst other things, with issues of Dalit empowerment and capacity development in response to an emergency. Cordaid intends to continue its work in the region, though not specifically in the tsunami-affected areas. **ICCO and Kerk in Actie** have recently merged their India departments, though the tsunami funds were still administered separately. An important focus of the work has been on children's rights, and this is the area in which

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18 This section draws on the case study on southern India, written by Marco de Swart, Oxfam Novib, with assistance from Shoaib Rahman, ASK, India. This case study considers the partnership relations of Oxfam Novib, Cordaid and ICCO and Kerk in Actie. The field visits took place in November 2007. Direct quotes are taken from the internal report.

these agencies will continue to support partners. Due to a reduction of funds and the choice to focus on fewer partners, Kerk in Actie had ended relationships with several other organizations in 2004. In response to the tsunami, the support was temporarily resumed though only for as long as the tsunami funding lasted. **Oxfam Novib** mostly works with larger partners, such as an NGO consortium and network NGOs, either funding and supporting smaller organizations or local communities and self-help groups. The focus varies from support for disadvantaged groups, especially Dalit, to land issues, micro-finance and water. Oxfam Novib is preparing to transfer its activities in India to the newly established Oxfam India, a development that causes some anxiety amongst the partners concerned.

The Indian organizations interviewed in this peer review considered that partnerships that had grown up between them and the Dutch agencies “helped greatly during the tsunami response. It gave the Dutch counterparts the confidence that they could respond very quickly after the tsunami hit the Indian coast, by transferring funds without too many administrative procedures. This greatly facilitated the direct relief efforts of the Indian partners”.

Civil society in the coastal zones is less developed than in other parts of India, yet the organizations selected for the peer review were relatively strong. An effect of the tsunami was that existing organizations in the coastal region became suddenly well-funded. Many organizations were able to take advantage of this to reinforce their capacities for implementation and disaster response and to improve the material infrastructure of their organizations. The overwhelming international response and great influx of funds also entailed a threat. The organizations interviewed said that there were strong pressures, from the side of their own Dutch counterparts as well, “to get involved in themes in which they had no expertise (housing and boats especially)”. The organizations interviewed resisted these tensions and managed to set their own priorities, which in hindsight they think strengthened them and has given them a stronger sense of mission and vision. They reconsidered their own added value and this lead

some of them to target those groups largely forgotten in the tsunami response: women, children, Dalits, and tribal peoples. In at least one case, the Dutch donor appreciated the fact that the Indian counterpart stood up for its own approach. This involved using rotating funds in recovery projects, rather than working on the basis of gifts.

The Indian organizations interviewed felt that, despite their lack of experience in emergencies, they were able to respond effectively to the tsunami, amongst other things because of their investments in capacity building before and immediately after the tsunami. This seems to confirm the idea that well-developed organizations are also able to respond to emergency situations (e.g. Brinkerhoff 2008). These organizations also considered it important that they were able to maintain the rights-based approach in their tsunami response. Some were able to organize their response to the tsunami through the self-help groups, and their federations, which they had help establish.

The experience of responding to the tsunami has made the organizations which were interviewed rethink several aspects of partnership. Some organizations were disappointed that their international partners showed little interest in "investing in disaster management in the post-emergency phase". More fundamentally, they have started to question the heavy emphasis on the financial and administrative dimensions of partnership. They experienced that, after the flexibility present during the emergency, "in the rehabilitation phase, the planning and reporting requirements became strict again, leading to some frustration". The organizations interviewed did not dismiss the importance of financial transparency and accountability but voiced the concern that "managerial and administrative pressures" prevent the development of "new dimensions of the partnerships" which implies that the full potential of partnership is not realized. During the peer review interviews, respondents suggested that it is necessary to "find a new balance", in order to place less emphasis on the financial relationships in partnership and to invest more in the "immaterial aspects" of partnership. Instead of "transactional" partnerships, centred on "delivering results in return for funding";

they suggested rethinking the partnership as a "transformational" relationship, that is concerned with social and economic change in a broader perspective. In the words of this respondent: *"In such a partnership there is no recipient or donor, only contributors that see a shared benefit in working together. It requires a deep reflection on what type of change is desired"*.

The interviews yielded another important and related insight on emergency response. The managerial approach may lead to a rather narrow vision that blocks the local potential from view. One respondent is quoted: *"People from Holland are ToR driven, if something is not part of their task chart, they will not put much emphasis on that"*. This is given as one of the reasons why international NGOs, including the Dutch, failed to recognize the multiple local responses to the tsunami that in southern India were particularly significant and included private individuals, but also companies, the government and the media. The respondents deplored that, in the "interactions with Dutch programme staff, consultants and evaluators", there was rarely room to discuss the possible relevance of local responses.

## 5. CONCERNS IN PARTNERSHIP: KEY FINDINGS

This section discusses the key concerns around partnership in crisis-related interventions that cut across the five case studies. The cases show that partnership is already an established practice in the emergency response of the Dutch NGOs and their partners, though the full potential of partnership is yet to be realized. Some of the issues raised are not fundamentally different from concerns about partnership in development contexts, for example the issues of accountability and capacity building. This is the case, in part, because partnerships around crisis interventions include episodes of emergency as well as episodes of normality and recovery, in the same way that development partnerships will also involve episodes of emergency.

### **THE REALITIES OF PARTNERSHIP IN AND AFTER EMERGENCIES**

This peer review wanted in the first place to produce a more complete and nuanced understanding of the way partnerships take shape in reality in crisis situations. A first finding in this regard is that, in all of the crises studied, Dutch organizations were already working in partnership with local organizations. In that sense, partnership was found to be already a reality in emergency and post-emergency interventions. The Dutch organizations are strongly committed to working in collaboration with local organizations and in all cases were able to find such organizations. In part this was possible because they were already involved in the region concerned. Either they had been involved in development work and took on the additional challenge of responding to emergencies, as in India and Congo, or, as in the case of the Red Cross, the basic partnership infrastructure was already in place to be activated when an emergency happened.

It should be noted that, with the exception of the tsunami impact on the southern Indian coast, the crises studied are protracted crises. Whereas such crises may present episodes in which there is a need to act fast and the rules of good partnership may not be observed,

their protracted nature allowed for building up and consolidating collaborative relations with local actors. It should also be noted, however, that partnerships were more fully developed in some regions than in others. In Colombia, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and India, civil society had greater maturity than in southern Sudan, and partnerships had a higher degree of mutuality. Sudan stands out as a case in which the humanitarian emergency mode of intervention has dominated and seems to have prevented, until recently, a development of partnerships beyond simply subcontracting. In Congo, local and international NGOs did engage in long-term relations, but partnership remained limited in many ways. This was related to both the fragmentation of Congolese civil society and the humanitarian operation. Many new international NGOs entered the scene while ongoing relations became managed by humanitarian departments, rather than the development departments of international agencies. The potential for effective partnerships in crisis should therefore be understood in relation to the pre-emergency strength of local civil society, the impact of a prolonged crisis and the nature of the partnership infrastructure.

There is diversity in the kinds of local partners the Dutch organizations in this peer review work with, in terms of their size, mission, organizational culture and their place in the aid chain. Also the ways in which the relationship is organized vary, in terms of the basic relational infrastructure and the intensity of the contact. Thus, different kinds of partnerships were found to exist alongside each other. In their diversity, Dutch agencies apparently manage to find, and enhance, local organizations and networks of organizations that match their values and way of working. The diversity of agencies in the Netherlands thus mirrors diversity in the countries affected by the emergency.

Both the Dutch organizations, and their partners included in this peer review, largely agree on partnership as the preferred way of organizing intervention, even in the face of emergencies. The legitimacy, necessity and effectiveness of working in partnership were not fundamentally questioned. The vast majority of the NGOs interviewed showed an

interest in close collaboration with international donor organizations. This is particularly relevant in the light of findings about partnership in development such as reported by a larger group of NGOs in the Netherlands. According to this report, many Southern NGOs have professionalized and prefer a business-like relationship rather than more intensive relations that would include aspects like capacity building or joint advocacy.<sup>19</sup> NGOs involved in this peer review all favoured precisely these aspects of the partnership and would like to see these intensified. Civil society in the countries of the peer review is immersed in the realities of emergency-prone settings. Here development is limited and governance structures weak or contested, and civil society argues it needs more support than that provided by simple financial relationships. Local organizations expressed a need for support in the fields of lobbying and advocacy, appreciated the support in making their work more effective, and in general stressed how they value physical proximity through a regional representative. The points of debate that were raised during the peer review relate particularly to how to deepen the partnership, how to make the collaboration more effective and how to make it better able to reach its full potential.

### **PARTNERSHIP BEYOND PROJECTS**

One of the central questions in the peer review concerned the expectations that Dutch and local organizations have about partnership with a view to identifying where these may diverge, and in doing so, hamper the development of effective partnerships. Overall the peer review found that Dutch organizations and their partners share an understanding of partnership as a relationship that includes more than the mere aspect of funding. All participants and interviewees in the peer review agreed that partnership, to merit the name, should include more than just a contractual relationship. It should also include an interest by the donor-partner in what the local organizations is trying to achieve, and a degree of exchange of views and dialogue about desirable courses of action. Local organizations overall expect their donors to respect and trust them, and to make an effort to understand

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<sup>19</sup> Hotze Lont (2006), p. 20-22

the conditions under which they are working and what they are trying to accomplish. Partnership relations are furthermore held to include mutual commitment and open communication, with room to challenge each other.

However, the peer review also revealed that in current practice the funding relationship constitutes the core of the partnership. To a large extent, the partnerships are structured around projects in which the Dutch organization acts as the funding body and the local organization as the recipient and direct implementing body. Capacity building was part of the relationship, but in limited ways, an issue to which we will return later. Partnership in a deeper sense, as many NGOs define the ideal, aims towards realizing synergy between the partners. This was more the exception than the rule. In this respect, several Southern organizations felt that they could mean more to the partnership, for example if their donor-partner would involve them more in their advocacy work.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, while the donor identity of the Northern partners was thus considered highly dominant in actual practice, the Northern NGOs do not perceive of themselves primarily as donors. They do not work, for instance, with the principle of Good Humanitarian Donorship that has been developed and adopted by more institutional donors.

Projects and project-related communication are the grammar of partnership. It was signalled in practically all the cases that much of the communication between the partners remains limited to the proposals, and financial and narrative reports. Or that, as it was put in Sudan, partnership seems to be reduced to "administration". Disagreements or misunderstandings about reporting can cause great turbulence in the relationship. Many organizations stressed the importance of flexibility in project implementation, especially during more acute crises, and positively underlined those instances in which their Dutch donors had shown such flexibility.

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20 This point was also made during an earlier meeting sharing the results of the peer review in which it was picked up by one of the Dutch agencies who then involved a local organization, also present, in the development of a training manual.

Although the INGOs participating in the peer review all have more or less elaborate policies regarding partnership, the peer review found no instances where the terms of partnership were laid down in an agreement between the Dutch NGO and its partners. An exception is the Netherlands Red Cross. The Red Cross movement – in the words of one of the reviewers – can be seen as “a family of organizations with a clear sense of mission and identity. Each chapter or society already is a partner—or part of the family—even before direct collaboration starts and continues to be a partner thereafter. As within any family, there are a great number of issues, problems and rivalries but rarely is the family itself at stake. This creates an entirely different playing field for partnership relations. Strengths and weaknesses can be and are strategically distributed among its members. [...] The partnerships within the Red Cross family run the full gamut of possible partnership activities: transfer and exchange of resources, reciprocal capacity building and enhancement, learning, and joint policy and strategy development”.<sup>21</sup>

Many of the partnership relations that were reviewed dated back many years. However, there were hardly any formal partnership arrangements beyond contracts and specific projects. The time horizon of these contracts was generally one to three years. In the case of Sudan this was felt as a problem: “Partners expressed the strong need for much longer-term investment, based on development programmes for 5 to 7 years”.<sup>22</sup> Project-based funding led to a lack of institutional funding. On the other hand, it was acknowledged that three-year contracts already represent a positive exception, as most humanitarian arrangements are much shorter. A number of organizations referred to the fact that they had survived the times of crisis given that their organizations could be maintained because of these relatively structural forms of funding.

Many of the Southern NGOs mentioned the importance of ‘being there’, that is to say to have a regional representative present in the area.

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21 Van Boeckel

22 Lombarts

This allows regular face-to-face interaction, sharing of information and capacity building. This is another interesting difference with the expectations displayed by the Southern partners in more stable situations referred to above. These often well-developed agencies feel no need for a local presence of Northern agencies and point out that these tend to compete with them for activities and funding. Apparently, NGOs in crisis situations have different needs in this respect. This may be related to the rapidly changing conditions that need frequent adaptation of planning, and in some situations, agencies' great need for capacity building. Both require direct communication within a short time lag.

### **UNBALANCED ACCOUNTABILITIES**

One of the concerns of the peer review has been to identify what upward and downward accountabilities exist and how agenda setting gets shaped in the partnership. The peer review made clear that upward accountability, from the local partners to their donors, dominates the partnership. Overall, this was accepted as an inescapable fact. As the saying goes, recorded in Congo: "The hand that gives is above the hand that receives".<sup>23</sup> Many of the local organizations saw accountability to their donors as a necessary aspect of the funding relationship. For India it was found that: "Accountability in the partnership is still interpreted as good financial management and reporting on the part of the Indian partner".<sup>24</sup> In some cases, the emphasis on accountability is even welcomed as local organizations wish to improve themselves on the count of transparency and reporting, as is illustrated by the following quote from Colombia: "Initially the new formats caused a lot of problems, but now we manage them like our own. The reporting discipline actually helps to reinforce our own internal organizational discipline".<sup>25</sup>

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23 De Wolf

24 De Swart

25 Van Boeckel

However, a number of problems were signalled, some of a more practical nature, others of a more fundamental nature. At the more practical level, upward accountability implies that the donor-partner establishes the criteria and formats for financial or other reporting. One of reviewers goes as far as calling this "the dictatorship of the donor criteria".<sup>26</sup> There is little co-ordination among donors nor coherence in reporting formats. Organizations did make clear they find it burdensome to have to deal with a variety of accounting and reporting formats from different donors and would welcome more standardization in this regard. As one Colombian partner, working with an array of donors, exclaimed: "Having one single reporting format would be a great blessing indeed!"<sup>27</sup>

But there is a more fundamental issue behind this. The upward accountability defines, to an important degree, what local partners can and cannot do and shapes their relationship with the beneficiaries. It was found for Congo that donors influence their local partners' activities greatly by setting the criteria for the choice of the target group and the definition of vulnerability that is applied, next to other criteria related to geography, security etc. In some of the cases studied, notably Sudan, local organizations felt extremely vulnerable to the demands and agendas of their donors and were prepared to go very far in meeting these demands. In other cases including India, Colombia, and the OPTs, apparently where civil society has stronger roots and preceded the crisis, local organizations showed a stronger sense of identity and were less willing to comply with directions. They picked their donors with more care and were prepared to disengage when they did not agree with the conditions placed upon them. A related issue concerns the accountability towards the back-donor, a point to which we will return when discussing the aid chain.

Downward accountability of the Dutch organizations to their partners deserves to be further developed. Several of our peer reviewers were

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26 De Wolf

27 Van Boeckel

surprised to find that the local organizations they interviewed had not previously considered the possibility of expecting downward accountability from their donor-partners. The cases showed a great need amongst local organizations to know more about the major policy developments and organizational changes of the Dutch agencies. This need was generally found to be underestimated by the Dutch agencies, for example the OPTs. Dutch organizations, however, seem, according to one of the peer reviewers, to: "underestimate how much their partner organizations want to know about their organizations. [These organizations miss] communication about the general policy and the state of affairs of the headquarters in the Netherlands".<sup>28</sup> The Dutch agency staff pass information about programmes but not about the overall policy and organizational issues of their organizations. The Congo case put it thus: "The donor's global and regional strategies, if these exist, are not part of the partnership relation".<sup>29</sup> These strategies are, however, of considerable relevance to local organizations, for these imply new ways of organizing the partner relationship and new policy priorities which they would like to be able to anticipate.

Some Dutch organizations are developing initiatives to move towards more mutual accountability and give local actors a greater say in developing the policy agenda for the region. The operational alliances established within the Red Cross movement are an important example. Another example is the creation of a regional council by the ICCO in Israel and the OPTs. However, it remains unclear to what extent this initiative is responding to a need felt by their partners.<sup>30</sup> In Colombia, it was not the accountability of the Dutch donor-partner, but the "general lack of information" next to the slow processing of project-related documents, that was the main concern of local organizations.<sup>31</sup> In India organizations did not express a need to decide about the donors'

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28 Roetman

29 De Wolf

30 Roetman

31 Van Boeckel

money but rather a wish to develop joint agendas with the Dutch agencies on shared interests.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the obvious power differences in the North–South partnerships, the power difference as such was not explicitly challenged. Apparently, Southern agencies take the power differentials for granted, and as they are not invited to talk about it, treat these as a given. Local organizations appear to accept these power differences, although they find it immensely important that the relationship is based on respect and genuine interest. Within this framework they question those practices that they feel are unnecessarily inhibiting the development of a more effective collaboration.

### **CAPACITY BUILDING**

The peer review explicitly addressed the actual and potential role of capacity building in crisis interventions. It was found that capacity building is a common and well–accepted part of the relationship. It has been suggested that capacity building in humanitarian relief can be seen as a form of ‘disciplining’ local partners, to make them perform as good project managers (Hilhorst and Jansen, 2005). This is perhaps to some extent the case, yet many partners made clear that this kind of capacity building is *their* concern also, not just a requirement from their donor–partners. Partner organizations also relate capacity building to professionalism in project management and reporting. For the Dutch agencies involved in the peer review, capacity building was found to refer mostly to organizational capacities, or, as it was put for the Congo case: “It is mainly about Project Cycle Management and on professionalism of the NGO staff members”.<sup>33</sup> It was remarkable that some partners appreciated this kind of capacity building, partly because it was evidence of their professionalism. This was found to be important in those situations where many new NGOs arise in response to the large budgets available for relief and recovery.

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32 De Swart

33 De Wolf

A good management system in place facilitates finding new funding partners.

Having said this, it must be stressed that enhancing project management systems and skills was for many of the NGOs interviewed only one aspect of capacity building. In Sudan as well as the Palestinian case, agencies emphasized the need for material capacity building, such as the availability of computers and cars to enable the job to be done. The appreciation for capacity building in the form of training varied. In Colombia, an NGO representative commented that training was easily forgotten, saying: "What was the training again that I attended?" They see real capacity building as happening on the job. As it was put by a Colombian respondent: "We do not really distinguish between capacity building and projects, neither administratively nor in practice. We build capacity through our projects and our capacity enables us to do projects". In Sudan, on the other hand, where many agencies were making the transition from relief to development, training to facilitate this process was considered crucial to the longer-term survival of the organization. In fact, local organizations were found to create space for improving their capacity, even where this was not explicitly considered in the project proposal. One area of possible expansion of capacity building is found in reducing the risk of disaster. Both in India as in south Sudan this interest was made explicit by respondents.

We have found little on forms of capacity building at a level beyond project cycle management. The DRC peer review concluded that it is unclear to what extent donor-partners are interested in promoting what may be called "institutional empowerment", i.e. "the positioning of NGOs in society and in the social-political context".<sup>34</sup> The peer review encountered a lack of strategic thinking about and investment in capacity building at the level of the civil society sector and the longer-term. This was also the case in Sudan. In the case of the Palestinian Territories, on the other hand, NGOs were, for example, very

appreciative of initiatives to bring civil society actors together to discuss strategy and co-ordination. Such occasions were created by donor-partners and were highly valuable, given that they had to be organized outside of the country because of security concerns.

Most Dutch organizations seem to understand their contribution to the longer-term sustainability mostly in terms of capacity building. The idea is that this should leave the partner organization well placed to attract other funds. Only the Red Cross was found to have an explicit policy on financial sustainability and invested in activities that can make the local chapters of the Red Cross partly self-reliant. These included blood banks, pharmacies, emergency services, training on crisis prevention and response, but also in-country fundraising through lotteries, private donations and so on.<sup>35</sup>

### **DEVELOPMENT, RELIEF, DEVELOPMENT: DIFFICULT TRANSITIONS**

The last decade has witnessed intensive discussion in academic circles of policy, as well as practice, concerning the links between relief, rehabilitation and development, known under the acronym of LRRD. Originally, the issue of linkage was represented as a continuum from relief via rehabilitation to development. Although it has been realized that such a continuum does not exist, especially in the case of complex emergencies, the issue of links between the different domains remain relevant. International evaluations often point to a lack of commitment to link relief to development in practice, despite the rhetoric around its importance. This is not to say that such links should always be part of emergency responses, but it is important to examine the debate around LRRD and view how it is shaped in practice.

In the Palestinian case, a long lasting refugee problem interspersed with periods of intense isolation and conflict, permanently in the spotlight of international attention, has resulted in a dense field of intervention where all kinds of different traditions and styles have been able to develop alongside each other. While a number of

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35 Van Boeckel

'Northern' and 'Southern' agencies shift activities according to the situation, many continue working along the lines they are comfortable with, varying from direct asset transfers in relief programmes, rehabilitation, development activities and to all sorts of peace-building and cultural projects.

When the tsunami hit southern India, this was an opportunity for development NGOs in the region to expand their work into this hitherto neglected region. Their focus was from the start to build long-term development relations and they shied away from projects that were overly relief-oriented. In the DRC, a long-lasting tradition of development was interrupted by the wars. While older agencies tried to maintain their development style of working, new agencies emerged in the course of time, which were more emergency-oriented. In southern Sudan, on the other hand, there was no development NGO tradition before the wars, meaning that all NGOs have evolved in emergency years. It was only in the last years of the conflict that opportunities arose on a somewhat larger scale for development-oriented work, so-called humanitarian-plus, and most NGOs perceive that they are only now starting to reorient themselves towards development. In Colombia, agencies have a long-lasting engagement with their target groups and work strongly in a development and human rights tradition, putting much emphasis on community ownership and participation. In response to the fact that donor NGOs mostly have a policy towards conflict and natural disaster response, they frame their work as emergency interventions, even though they realize their target groups suffer from poverty as much as from an emergency.

This diversity underlines that *the* gap between relief and development as often referred to in literature does not exist. Rather, there is a high diversity in the kinds of problems that arise around linkage. The extent to which NGOs manage to link relief activities to development work appears to depend on the situation, the history of development work in an area and the room for manoeuvre presented by the funding strategies of donor agencies.

Where we most consistently find a *gap* is in the organization of the funding. The actual commitment to recovery appears limited despite the fact that the international community recognizes the importance of recovery in order to allow societies to recover from disasters, to create a peace dividend and to prevent a resumption of conflict. Both in the DRC and Sudan, NGOs on the ground are confronted with dwindling funding opportunities and see many INGOs close their programmes. NGOs in Colombia are aware that a reduction of violence will result in fewer donors. This sometimes brings local organizations to emphasize, perhaps even over-emphasize, the emergency in order to be able to continue to address the needs with which they are confronted.

Next to the question of how to link relief to development, that is how to make relief activities feed into structural development, there is the question of *how to link development to relief*. This question pertains to the fact that in many countries, like in the DRC, prior to an emergency development, agencies have been active that could be linked to, and might be built upon, in relief efforts. During crises, these, and possibly new organizations, rarely view their work as just humanitarian, trying to combine or alternate relief and development efforts according to what the situation requires and permits. The experiences of the partners interviewed in the peer review give ample evidence that there is scope to do this which is not recognized explicitly by international actors. One of the complicating factors is that donor NGOs shift the administration and handling of partners internally to an emergency department during conflict. This means that part of the institutional memory of partnership for development gets lost.

### **PRINCIPLES AND POLITICAL POSITIONING**

Humanitarian relief is guided by a set of principles that are the hallmark of the Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement. These are the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Similar principles are part of the Code of Conduct that most other humanitarian agencies abide by. A striking finding is that these humanitarian principles hardly figured in the interviews with local

agencies. This is remarkable given the attention given to these principles in the minds of humanitarian INGOs and humanitarian literature.

There are, however, a number of ways in which principles were discussed implicitly, albeit more under the heading of politics and organizational relationships. In the case of the Palestinian Territories, and to some extent the case of Colombia, the choice of an approach based on humanitarian principles was considered as one of the *political positions* agencies could maintain. Aiming to bring Israelis and Palestinians together in reconciliatory programmes, working exclusively with Palestinians or even refraining from politics was seen as equally political. NGOs focusing on Palestinians emphasized that they too were engaged in reconciliatory activities in order to bring different factions of Palestinians closer together.

Humanitarian literature sometimes suggests a 'North-South', or 'West-Rest', divide when it comes to humanitarian principles, with Northern-based INGOs more associated with the principles and Southern agencies more immersed in politics. The reality shows a much more diversified picture. In Israel/Palestinian Territories it was most visible how different political positions were found among donor and partner agencies alike. Humanitarian principles are shared by the entire Red Cross/ Red Crescent movement and are the basis for collaboration between the NRC, the Palestinian Red Crescent and the Israeli Magen David Adom. War Child, ICCO and Kerk in Actie have all three built up a network of partners that work according to their political positioning. As a consequence, differentiation is found both amongst the Dutch agencies and the local organizations with parallel alliances being created around specific positions. This also suggests that the initial ways in which the international agency frames the crisis that is in humanitarian or political terms, strongly shapes the kind of partnership that develops.

The principle of independence was not mentioned as such, but the term autonomy was often used instead. This term was used by local partners to denounce political interference by donor agencies. This was

most explicitly the case with agencies that refused donations when they had to sign up to the War on Terror, but also, more generally, many agencies mentioned instances where they refused money because the terms were considered unacceptable.

Local NGOs, especially acting in contexts where civil society is politicized, find it important that their donor-partners display solidarity and are willing to support lobby activities to forward their cause, to find protection or to help them maintain their autonomy. This is the case with agencies that are neutral, reconciliatory as well as partisan. In the other cases, expectations with regard to solidarity concerned the willingness of INGOs to help their partners to diversify donors, or build their capacity.

The engagement with the state varies in the different cases. In Colombia, local agencies tend to maintain a principled distance from the state because of its involvement in the conflict and the human rights abuses committed. Agencies likewise aim to maintain their distance from the rebel groups, except that they admit to the complexity that a choice for the victims is complicated by the fact that victims can be political actors as well. In the Palestinian case, many agencies engage with the Authorities, yet are forced to divert their relations due to the international boycott of the authorities. In the DRC and Sudan, NGOs are still struggling to define their position as civil society vis-à-vis an emerging or weak state.

The impartiality principle was evoked in discussions around targeting. The definition of target groups appears as one of the most decisive aspects on which international agencies select partners. More often than not, the INGO/ donor agency determines what kind of target group is selected. South Indian NGOs had so many funding opportunities after the tsunami that they had more room to define their own target groups. War Child has made a pre-selection for children and youth while distinguishing further target groups among these categories. Other agencies select particular regions or target groups and search for partners willing to service these groups. It is arguable whether these

INGOs with their distance from the field are indeed capable of defining the groups that are the most in need and are least covered.

### **CRISIS, PARTNERSHIP AND THE AID CHAIN**

The aid chain in humanitarian assistance consists of the different institutes that money passes through on its way to people in need. These chains can be rather long and may branch off many times. Take, for example, a bilateral donor allocating money to a UN body which passes it on to a specialized UN agency, who hands it over to a country office from where it is going to an international NGO, who gives it to a national NGO that uses it in one of their provincial offices for a programme on the ground. Short chains appear to have a lot of advantages, in particular because they can save on overheads, and because their transparency and accountability is easier to realize. There is always the risk that by the time money reaches the programme beneficiaries only a fraction of the money is left and nobody at the top of the chain controls any more what is actually done with it or what quality the remaining services have. On the other hand, short chains have their own problems. International agencies implementing aid directly may be more costly than having an additional layer of a local agency, both in ethical and in monetary terms. An intermediate NGO that supports local capacities for aid-delivery is then a valuable part of the chain. Also, if an additional co-ordination layer proves to render aid more effective, then this ensures a better coverage and in turn humanitarian space is less competitive. It is an asset to the chain even though it becomes longer. The interest in strengthening partnerships that motivated this peer review builds on the belief that partnerships have the potential to make the aid chain as a whole more effective. Though the set up of this study does not allow for proving the comparative advantage for working in partnership, as compared to direct implementation by international agencies, several elements were identified that point to the possible strengths of partnership in crisis interventions and indicate particular challenges.

The aid chain is still strongly structured from the top down, with downward agenda-setting and accountability dominating. However,

there is room in the partnership to respond to analyses and initiatives from the bottom up. The how, where and when of the involvement of international organizations in response to a crisis would be different without their links to local partners. The voices of these local partners, however, rarely reach into the international policy debates regarding humanitarian aid. The level to which the shaping of crisis interventions is organized bottom-up, seems to be stronger in those cases where local organizations are strong and have a clearer sense of their mission and *raison-d'être*.

It turns out that the position of the INGO and the national NGOs in the aid chain are often more complex than assumed. This results, for instance, from the complicated relationships between the emergency and development units within agencies. The peer review underlined that the partnerships between the international agency and the local NGO is important, yet it also became clear that the aid chain as a whole must be given more attention. This works along the chains in both directions. Importantly, we found that many NGOs also act in their own context as an intermediary agency between the donor NGO and community-based organizations. In fact, a number of the Dutch agencies in this review rely largely, or in part, on such intermediary organizations and have a number of 'indirect' partners in the regions in which they are active which are to an important extent supported and monitored by the larger partners. These larger partners thus act as an extension of the Dutch agency. While struggling with the relationship with their funding body, these NGOs were also seeking to define their own role towards local groups, equally struggling with the uneasy questions of how to achieve downward accountability and how to arrive at a meaningful joint agenda with their partners on the ground.

At the other end of the chain, the relationship with the back-donor is often considered problematic. Back-donors put conditions on partnerships. The EU, for example, insists on having an international NGO as intermediary, rather than dealing directly with national NGOs. In some cases, local organizations expressed a wish to be

able to establish direct contact with back-donors in order to explain the situation on the ground, which they feel they might be better positioned to do than are the Dutch agencies. The concern with accessing the back-donor points again to the vulnerability that organizations experience about the agendas and requirements of the higher echelons of the aid chain.

Participants in the peer review often felt that the potential of existing partnerships to strengthen the effectiveness of the aid chain are underused. One issue that was often mentioned was co-ordination. Partnerships are still strongly managed as dual relationships without building on the fact that local and international organizations are tied together in multiple ways in the organization of humanitarian aid, reconstruction and development. A rethinking of partnership in terms of networks, considering the webs of links in which local as well as international agencies are involved, could considerably enhance co-ordination among NGOs at different levels.

Another area where the partnership and aid chain could be rendered more effective is in security. Local organizations have access where international organizations do not, which is one of the reasons why international agencies engage in partnership in the first place. As a result, local organizations also take the highest risks in the delivery of aid. In different situations it was observed that international organizations have leverage with armed actors and governments that local organizations can often not achieve. How international agencies can use this leverage to arrive at a better protection of their partners was a question raised several times.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study gives ample reason to maintain that partnership is viable in crisis situations too. In many of the situations studied there were enough local organizations that qualified as partners. Time and other constraints did not play as central a role as generally expected for emergency situations. This review encountered international and 'Southern' organizations that are investing in forms of collaboration that go beyond a subcontracting relationship and that include a degree of exchange and dialogue on vision and strategy, though admittedly this degree is variable. The added value that partnership has in development situations, in terms of reach, effectiveness, and capacity building, also holds in crisis situations. Especially when working partnerships are already in place, these offer an effective starting point for responding to disasters and conflict.

### CONCLUSIONS

#### *Money flows structure partnership*

One of the most evident findings from this review is that the financial relationship, and especially the direction of the money flow, strongly shapes the partnership relations. The 'top-down' direction of the money flow from the international NGO, in practice often referred to as 'donor-partner', towards the organizations in the global South, structures the way accountability, agenda setting and strategy development are organized. This undermines in many regards, the mutuality that the idea and ideal of partnership implies. The money flow explains a number of the most important concerns brought out in the peer review: the emphasis on projects rather than processes of change; the emphasis on financial and accounting skills in capacity development; and the dominance of upward accountability. For instance, we found that despite the intentions and implicit understanding of partnership, actual contracts rarely stretch beyond a single project. This is mainly due to the fact that the donor-NGOs do not want to raise expectations beyond their own funding cycle for

fear of possible legal consequences. The aid architecture puts a high premium on financial accountability and reporting proficiency. This tends to render invisible the contribution, or potential contribution, of local organizations to the partnership in terms of knowledge and expertise.

Money flows also have an aggregate effect on the development of civil society in crisis regions. Both the high influx of funds with an emergency, and the drop in funding after an emergency is declared 'over', have important consequences for organizations in those regions.

### *Roles in partnership*

Partnership in practice implies strategic collaborations between dissimilar actors operating on the basis of a certain degree of trust and shared interest, and with a view to the longer-term. Within the partnership, each of the partners has different roles. Often, there is no explicit discussion of the roles of each of the partners, the terms of the engagement and the expectations beyond the level of particular projects. This is limiting the development of the partnership. The INGO, especially, accommodates different roles at the same time: being a *donor* in need of accountability and control; monitoring implementation; being something like an *expert organization* assisting with advice and capacity building measures; and being a *partner* proper or colleague, exchanging viewpoints and analyses and discussing strategy on a more equal footing. Whereas the Dutch agencies reviewed are often clearly identified by their Southern partners as *donors*, often referred to with the term donor-partner to distinguish them from agencies acting purely as donors, they themselves do not identify primarily as such. A similar multiplicity of roles may be found in the larger Southern partners. The intermediate or network organizations also need greater attention, a point that might also be made with regard to the local representations of the big INGOs. There is a risk that the need for accountability and monitoring eclipses other possible roles of the 'receiving' partners, which reduces in consequence the scope for exploring joint analysis and action. This is clearly an area where expectations and practice currently diverge.

### *Crisis contexts and partnership*

The case studies in five very different crisis-affected regions make clear that the history of the region and the development of the crisis shape civil society and partnership relations. The needs and possibilities of local organizations are a product of this context and in turn condition the kinds of partnerships that are possible. On the basis of this peer review we would conclude that contextual factors are more decisive in shaping partnership relations and specific challenges encountered, than the differences in the mission and vision of the international agencies involved. In a context of a protracted crisis in which organizations have been unable to develop beyond the implementation of relief services, as found in Sudan, all international organizations face challenges related to building up the organizations' capacity for development. On the other hand, in a context marked by continued human rights abuses and a strong human rights tradition, all organizations work with a human rights framework. The common concern here was not capacity building but the room for manoeuvre for local actors to carry out their work. Further reflection is necessary on the ways partnerships may be designed to best support local organizations in these different conditions.

Notwithstanding a certain convergence in each context, the peer review also found differences between Dutch agencies. Differences regarding the political position were most pronounced in the case of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, but less evident in the other cases. Other differences were found in the modalities of working and the kind of organizations sought out as local partners. The requirements of young organizations, such as those that War Child tends to work with, are different from the requirements of well-developed organizations with a broader mandate and that act as intermediaries to smaller partners. In some contexts all these different types of organizations are present, in others however, the intermediate type of organizations are rare. One aspect that has not been developed fully in this review is to make more explicit what needs different kinds of organizations have and how these needs change through time.

### *Partnerships move between crisis and 'development'*

The crisis-related efforts we analysed mostly occurred within longer-term partnerships that were either geared to working on development or developed in the context of protracted crisis. In protracted crises, time pressure and information constraints become less of a problem and collaboration with local actors becomes more feasible. When emergencies occur in the framework of longer-term development or interventions oriented towards reconstruction, partner organizations and their donors respond to these circumstances on the basis of their earlier collaborations. The existing familiarity and trust thus facilitates the response to the emergency situation. Local organizations found their Dutch donor-partners generally flexible and willing to assist their call. However, the shift, sometimes back to developmental ways of working, with more stringent financial control, and a reduction of the overall funding available, was sometimes more problematic.

There is a lack of theorizing about protracted crises with more and less violent or critical periods or with natural hazards compounding the crisis. The intervention models of aid remain based on a dichotomy between relief and development, though practice shows that there are many ways in which relief and development efforts are already linked. More attention should be paid to how these efforts might be strengthened. An interesting issue in this regard is to assess the scope for rights-based approaches in emergency response.

### *Horizons of partnership*

The peer review showed the importance of defining the horizons for partnerships. With a horizon we mean that a possible future scenario is defined, even though it is not clear whether it will indeed materialize. Emergencies often open up new areas for intervention for both local and international organizations. They reach into new regions, for example, following displaced people, or start to work with new target groups. An important question is whether support to those areas and groups should continue once the emergency is over. We should not assume too easily that more aid is always better. When emergencies occur in situations where development commitments already exist there is a distinct

rationale for continuing support. Emergency efforts are then placed within a development horizon. Similarly, chronic crises set a horizon for longer-term engagement. In regions with a high vulnerability to natural hazards, disaster preparedness provides a further rationale for continued support. In other situations, for example, where there is little chance of a hazard repeating itself, there seems little reason to engage in longer-term partnerships. Defining such a horizon is important for setting the parameters and expectations regarding partnership.

### *Capacity building*

Capacity building is a central issue in partnership in crisis-related interventions. A recurring issue regarding capacity building is who sets the agenda and for what purpose. Capacity building may become a means to control partners' adherence to standards and financial accountability, and it has been suggested this has more to do with disciplining organizations to become good partners than to help them to realize their own goals (Smillie, 2001). At the same time, however, capacity building is often welcomed by local organizations as a way to realize their own ambitions to achieve greater professionalism. This finding may be characteristic for the crisis contexts we researched.

In practice, the means and modalities of capacity building are very limited. Capacity building is often reduced to perfecting the project cycle, but local partners pointed to other capacity building needs. These include, on the one hand, material and organizational support for investment in infrastructure and human resources, and on the other hand, the need for longer-term development of the organization and of the civil society sector as a whole. The peer review identified, particularly, a lack of reflection on the actual and potential roles of civil society in crisis-affected regions. Capacity building should be taken beyond the level of individual organizations and consider ways to strengthen the civil society sector as a whole. In view of the still often noted problems with co-ordination in emergency and post emergency situations, a stronger domestic civil society sector could contribute to the effectiveness of aid. Similarly, the current vulnerability of Southern NGOs in states that cannot function properly needs to be addressed.

### *Security issues*

In situations of violent conflict, aid interventions involve security risks. These risks affect local organizations more directly than their international partners. It is the local partners who operate directly in insecure areas and are less bound by security protocols that would restrain them from entering high-risk areas where the need is most severe. They also seem more able to negotiate access with armed actors. In the case of human rights issues, the visible accompaniment of international observers provides a shield to the local actors. A tentative conclusion could be that partnerships afford more scope for action because the different strengths of 'local' and 'external' actors can be drawn upon.

### *Partnership and power*

Partnership as a practice of engagement and collaboration is necessarily affected by power relations, both global and specific. It was evident from this peer review that the partnerships under consideration were subject to the global inequality between the 'North' and the 'South', though this was never explicitly put on the table by any of the organizations interviewed. One way to interpret this is that Southern organizations are acutely aware of the parameters of power within which they need to function and make a pragmatic option to function within them rather than to challenge them directly. Within the peer review team, we were surprised at the lack of overt criticism of these inequalities. One concern that arose as the review progressed was whether Southern organizations had not perhaps been socialized too effectively into the global aid system to the extent that they had lost their capacity to be radically critical.

One way in which the organizations interviewed showed their concern with, and awareness of, the global relations of power is in their anxiety about their lack of knowledge about what was happening higher up in the policy chains. Both the expressed need to know more about upcoming policy and organizational changes of their Dutch donors, as well as the worry that their needs might not be well-represented at the higher levels of back-donors, reflect this awareness. It seems

that organizations in the global South assess that 'reaching up' into the chain would make them less vulnerable in the aid system. More reflection is furthermore needed on the dynamics of power within North-South partnerships, but also within organizations, and the ways in which differences of opinion are dealt with.

### *Partnership and effectiveness*

Ultimately, partnership is not a goal in itself but a means to reach a series of goals. These goals include reaching the people in need, the end beneficiaries, but also making societies more resilient by investing in local capacities, and achieving social change. On all these points, partnership is believed to contribute to a greater effectiveness of aid. Though many of the Dutch organizations ultimately want, and claim, to contribute to progressive social change, we found no explicit attention given to how to reach that change in crisis-related interventions. Social change is not a concern reserved to 'regular' development situations. Crises are often moments in time when major changes might be forged. More reflection and joint analysis with partners is needed on the links between crisis events and longer-term social change and how a crisis may be 'seized' to foster such change by using the momentum already in place.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the peer review, we come to the following recommendations:

1. As working in partnership is an accepted practice, there is a dire need for research and policy development regarding principles, policies and practices of humanitarian assistance in partnership. Northern and Southern agencies both need to develop their policies and standards for partnerships.
2. There is no recipe for partnership. In many situations, instrumental forms of partnership, such as subcontracting or project-based forms of collaboration, may be optimal. In other cases, agencies can consider more developmental forms of partnership that aim for a longer term institutional collaboration and incorporate forms of capacity building.
3. There is a need to establish what are the most effective ways of organizing partnership under different conditions, depending on
  - the humanitarian needs
  - the nature of the crisis (protracted or short-term)
  - the past and prospects for development work and/ or disaster preparedness
  - the policies of the partners involved

Whether instrumental or developmental relations are more suitable and whether there is a horizon for longer term engagement should be specifically defined for each of these situations.

4. The terms of partnerships must be laid down in clear language. In cases where the financial relation is the only meaningful aspect of partnership, a business-like language is appropriate. In cases where agencies chose to develop a more strategic or developmental relationship, this must be specified as well.
5. Northern NGOs should be aware of the fact that they are donors, and apply the standards for Good Humanitarian Donorship.

6. More explicit attention is needed on the practice of working with intermediate organizations in crisis regions. Important questions are what the specific needs and potentials of such organizations are and how partnerships with them can be developed more fully.
7. There is a need for more systematic research into the positive and negative implications of working in partnership for the effectiveness of humanitarian service delivery.
8. There is a need to develop standards for effectiveness of partnerships and institutional capacity building.
9. There is a need to re-think partnership in crisis-related interventions in terms of longer term social change and the roles the different partners could play in that.
10. Southern agencies must realise that they have room for manoeuvre in negotiating the terms of partnership. They should be more explicit about their expectations what partnerships can mean beyond the financial relationship, in term of capacity building, institutional support and sector-level civil society development.
11. There is a need for more dialogue and stronger networks amongst Southern agencies in order to voice common concerns in dealing with humanitarian donors and co-ordination structures.
12. The international humanitarian response system must be more geared to recognizing, enhancing and developing existing local humanitarian capacities, amongst others by prolonging contract cycles, by providing space for local agencies in co-ordination, and by ensuring access of local agencies to back-donors and international policy forums.



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# PARTNERS IN CRISIS

*Peer review of partnership  
in crisis-related interventions*

Many international NGOs prefer to work in partnership with local organizations, not only in development but also in crisis-related interventions. But how do they deal with the specific challenges of partnerships in crises? And what do Southern organizations think about these partnerships? Is there room for capacity building? How is accountability organized? How can these partnerships be strengthened?

These are the central questions that this report tries to answer. Based on a peer review methodology, it documents the experiences of five Dutch NGOs and their local partners in five crisis regions (Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories, Colombia, southern Sudan, eastern DRC and tsunami-stricken southern India).

*"This is a refreshingly candid study of the partnership phenomenon, one that avoids both cant and rant. It opens new windows for thinking, policy development, programming and research into one of the most pressing and important problems facing humanitarians today."*

From the foreword by Ian Smillie