

# What future role for local organizations? A reflection on the need for humanitarian capacity-building

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## **Abstract**

*While treating the humanitarian organizations themselves as rational actors, this article considers the factors that influence the decisions and the current logic of Western humanitarian organizations in their dealings with local organizations. This reflection necessarily leads to a re-examination of the current structure of these organizations and to proposed scenarios to identify the best methods for the future, particularly in the relational framework between international organizations and their local partners. Ultimately, the humanitarian organization interventional model must be broadened, taking local humanitarian capacity-building into greater consideration.*

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In a period in which the humanitarian system is tending to have a growing influence in world politics, a number of the fundamental pillars of contemporary humanitarianism are being questioned. How will the professionalization of organizations develop? Are humanitarian principles still realistically applicable? Are international humanitarian organizations still legitimate? These are among the

questions raised in academic and specialized literature that address the core elements of a future humanitarian system.<sup>1</sup>

As described by Pierre Micheletti and Daniel Henrys, this system consists of a score of international humanitarian organizations that have taken root in the West and are active in developing countries affected by disasters.<sup>2</sup> Each year more than two-thirds of all humanitarian activity is undertaken by these organizations, which are active both in looking for funding in the North and in project implementation in the South. This framework for humanitarian action is based on assumptions dating from period immediately following World War II and evolves only with great difficulty. Indeed, while norms tend to adapt to changes in technocratic fashion, the intervention model itself has altered little: Western expertise and funding in support of victims in the South.

International humanitarian organizations face many challenges in this complex and changing context. Among these, implementing local humanitarian capacity-building activities is at the top of the list. ‘Capacity-building’ is generally defined as a skill and knowledge transfer from an international to a local organization, the former investing resources to support and strengthen the latter.<sup>3</sup> This definition, which implies an asymmetrical power relationship between an organization *that has the capacity* and another *that wants to have it*, has tended to give way to a more balanced model of inter-institutional partnership relations. Indeed, humanitarian organizations now view their relationships with their local partners with more consistency. However, while there is a growing consensus in terms of the priority of capacity-building, most organizations have still been slow to invest seriously in support mechanisms for local humanitarian capacity development.

Besides, in the response to emergencies, the heart of the problem lies in the fact that international humanitarian organizations daily question their relationships with their local partners. Is it necessary to have local partners? Why work with partners that delay intervention while international organizations can act directly and quickly? What are the criteria to select them? What will be their role and how should the contractual and financial accountability be shared? What methods are preferable? What are the advantages of having such partners? Should such relationships focus on their results or on their progressive development? All of

- 1 See, in particular, Hugo Slim, ‘Relief agencies and moral standing in war: principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and solidarity’, in *Development in Practice*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1997, pp. 342–352; Michael Schloms, ‘Le dilemme inévitable de l’action humanitaire’, in *Cultures & Conflits*, No. 60, 2005, pp. 85–102; Tony Vaux, ‘Humanitarian trends and dilemmas’, in *Development in Practice*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2006, pp. 240–254; Marie Pierre Allier, ‘Introduction’, in Claire Magone, Michaël Neuman, and Fabrice Weissman (eds), *Agir à tout prix? Négociations humanitaires: l’expérience de Médecins sans frontières*, Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 2011.
- 2 Pierre Micheletti and Daniel Henrys, ‘Le “modèle humanitaire dominant” est mis en question en Haïti’, in *Le Monde*, 12 January 2011, available online at: [http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/12/le-modele-humanitaire-dominant-est-mis-en-question-en-haiti\\_1464293\\_3232.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/12/le-modele-humanitaire-dominant-est-mis-en-question-en-haiti_1464293_3232.html) (last visited 27 January 2012).
- 3 Brooke Lauten, ‘Time to reassess capacity-building partnerships’, in *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 28, 2007, p. 4.

these questions, however legitimate they may be, raise deeper issues concerning the value in international organizations really ensuring local institution-building.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by a series of interviews with humanitarian organization administrators, this article's objective is to highlight some of the factors that influence the decision-making process concerning local humanitarian capacity-building and the future role of these organizations.<sup>5</sup> Treating the humanitarian organizations as rational actors, the article considers the factors that influence the decisions and the current logic of international humanitarian organizations in their dealings with local organizations.<sup>6</sup> While there is extensive literature analysing the problems that affect such partnerships, this contribution aims to present possible solutions and identify the best methods for the future, particularly regarding the framework of relations between international organizations and their local partners.

The text is divided into three sections. The first part defines the object of study and explores some of the arguments put forward by organizations to avoid investing in local humanitarian capacity-building. The second part counters these institutional arguments and demonstrates how the implementation of capacity-building is a positive vector for the effectiveness of the humanitarian system. The last section initiates a reflection on the responsibilities left to local organizations, and considers the means that can be used for developing better humanitarian partnerships.

## Local humanitarian capacity-building: debate or taboo?

Local capacity-building, sometimes called 'capacity development' or 'organizational development', is one of the sharpest points of disagreement in the humanitarian system. There are probably as many interpretations of capacity-building as there are organizations. While some, such as Oxfam and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), see this activity as the central axis of their action or mission, others look at building local capacities with greater ambivalence.

- 4 For the purposes of this analysis, I will use a typology that includes the great diversity of existing local organizations and institutions, even if this obscures the complex realities in each particular case. Therefore, unless otherwise noted, the concept of 'local organizations' is taken to refer to organizations having a local constituency and/or status, and having a minimal capacity to play a role in future catastrophes. This includes formal and informal local organizations (civil society or community groups), decentralized government institutions, municipalities, and even the state itself. In particular, it also includes the decentralized offices of humanitarian organizations in the South, often called 'country offices' or 'missions'.
- 5 Organizations that were interviewed for this study are: Doctors without Borders, Doctors of the World, CARE, Save the Children, Oxfam, Caritas, the Canadian Red Cross, World Vision, and Handicap International. For confidentiality reasons, names and details of the interviews are not provided. The interviews were carried out between April and October 2011 as part of a study conducted by the Canadian Research Institute on Humanitarian Crisis and Aid (OCCAH) of the University of Montreal, Canada.
- 6 This study was particularly inspired by the postulates of rational choice theory in international relations described by Boudon, and by the interpretation of decision-making processes in organizations by Crozier and Freidberg. See Raymond Boudon, 'Théorie du choix rationnel ou individualisme méthodologique?', in *La Découverte/Revue du Mauss*, Vol. 2, No. 24, 2004, pp. 281–309; Michel Crozier and Erhard Freidberg, *L'acteur et le système*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1977.

How to apply capacity-building? Is it a principal orientation, a programme, or a method? One component of capacity-building includes preparedness and disaster and humanitarian action management, and relies largely on partnerships between Western organizations and local institutions in the South. The approach to building local humanitarian action capacity thus implies two challenges, the first related to the partnership itself, and the second to carrying out skill-transfer activities.

In our context, local humanitarian capacity-building refers to the efforts necessary in equipping local structures to respond better to potential disasters. Activities that characterize local humanitarian capacity-building are extremely varied and the subject of a vast literature. They include, among other things, the exchange of expertise, joint strategic planning, technology transfer, post-emergency transition measures, prevention, and risk reduction.<sup>7</sup> Such activities are not necessarily, or not always, structured in a coherent programme within humanitarian organizations.<sup>8</sup>

The debate goes much deeper, beyond the challenges linked to the implementation of such activities. While a consensus exists on the failures of humanitarian organizations in capacity development, few studies have tried to understand why humanitarian organizations do not invest in it adequately.<sup>9</sup> We can group the reasons for the lack of investment in local humanitarian capacity-building into four main arguments.

First, for some organizations, the subject is almost a taboo because local capacity-building is synonymous with development activities. In other words, these organizations see local capacity-building as an activity that is not necessarily within their remit, but is rather the responsibility of organizations that are working in long-term sustainable development or that are present for a longer period in the post-disaster continuum. For these organizations, maintaining relationships with local partners conflicts with their mission. But it turns out that, while the origin of local capacity-building is in fact related to the development programmes of the 1980s, this activity is now inseparable from the humanitarian action of all professional humanitarian organizations. In fact, the literature demonstrating the importance of such an approach in improving the effectiveness of interventions is now abundant, and there is a clear consensus on the need to integrate this approach.<sup>10</sup>

7 See, for instance, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons*, June 2010, which presents excellent examples of humanitarian capacity-building, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4c2355229.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

8 A number of guides, standards, and practices detailing the issues and activities related to humanitarian capacity-building have developed in the wake of humanitarian reform. See, in particular, Global Humanitarian Response, 'A brief overview of the humanitarian reforms', 10 July 2006, available at: <http://www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org/doc00001833.html> (last visited December 2011).

9 See, for instance, Henk Tukker and Rob van Poelje, 'Capacity development in humanitarian crises: practice and lessons learnt about strengthening civil society organisations', in *PSO Capacity Development*, Praxis Note No. 54, INTRAC and PSO, June 2010, available online at: <http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/687/Praxis-Note-54-Capacity-Development-in-Humanitarian-Crises.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

10 See Ian Smillie (ed.), *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises*, Kumarian Press/IDRC, Bloomfield, CT, 2001; Mirna Mutiara, Ian Smillie, Henk Tukker, and Rob van Poelje, *Capacity Development in Humanitarian Crises*, papers presented at the PSO Panel, the World Conference

The consensus in the academic literature is also supported by the rhetoric of a growing number of humanitarian organizations.

This argument is related to the 'development-emergency' duality faced by many organizations, which inevitably limits investments in capacity-building. Indeed, these humanitarian organizations claim that they do not have the time, the resources, or the mandate to perform such actions and that they lie outside the traditional scope of their activities. Such organizations justify direct action based on an essentially Western expertise. In contrast, development organizations, or those working in the longer term, use these activities in a relatively systematic way. It should be noted that they are sometimes accused of practising some form of interference,<sup>11</sup> which is also one of the arguments used by some humanitarian organizations for avoiding these actions, claiming that they could jeopardize the impartiality of their intervention. In fact, part of the identity of the humanitarian movement has developed through an anti-development line of argument. Therefore, many organizations still have difficulty imagining a presence that precedes crises or that goes beyond the emergency period. However, the cases of complex and almost permanent emergencies are numerous, and organizations that work in such situations are generally there for a long period (in Haiti, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, etc.). Strategic inconsistencies arise in such situations, since some organizations develop annual strategic plans, knowing full well that they will remain there for longer periods. The pretext of the short term is no longer valid.

The second argument put forward by organizations is based on the fact that local humanitarian capacity-building implies certain preconditions to ensure results that are difficult to achieve: for example, having valid and legitimate interlocutors, which is relatively complicated, and sometimes impossible in conflict areas. Another argument is that such actions should not be undertaken during emergency relief interventions. This corresponds to an argument regularly used by some organizations explaining that they do not want to put victims' lives at risk by focusing on skill-transfer activities. This is certainly the most valid reason for not getting involved in capacity-building. In any case, most organizations plan to 'stay' beyond the initial emergency.

The third argument is linked to expertise: that the qualities needed by humanitarian emergency professionals are different from, and even incompatible with, those of capacity-building professionals. This ideological duality of 'emergency' versus 'development' often results in the creation of separate management teams for emergency and development within the same organization. However, while emergency professionals do indeed work under conditions that involve prioritizing rescue activities, they are also the best placed to ensure an

of Humanitarian Studies, February 2009, available online at: <http://www.pso.nl/files/CD%20in%20Humanitarian%20Crises%20Final%20February%202009.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

11 This critique is sometimes referred to as post-colonialism by the realist current in international relations. See, especially, Mark Duffield, *Development, Security and Unending War: Governing the World of People*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2007.

exchange of expertise in this area. In addition, there are no professional humanitarian organizations that are limited strictly to emergency action.

Finally, the fourth and last argument demonstrates a certain amount of distrust on the part of humanitarian organizations confronted with investment in building local entities. This is usually due to a misunderstanding of the method, often linked to a lack of expertise, or to fear of a loss of efficiency at the point where external pressures are exerted to achieve quick results. This is caused, in particular, by limited funding, the pressure to present tangible results to donors and the media, or the conditions imposed by donors. While organizations must learn to manage their communications and the media, it should be noted that most donors now recognize the importance of local humanitarian capacity-building.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, this argument of emergency specialists should not be seen as an obstacle to the efforts of humanitarian capacity-building. The action for local institutional capacity-building must be separated from the contradictory debate on ‘emergency versus development’.

Setting aside the arguments advanced by the organizations, local humanitarian capacity-building is above all a sincere and constructive attitude towards the Southern partners. It is about recognizing that local organizations and communities have intrinsic capabilities on which all forms of humanitarian co-operation should be based. The objective is that the on-site presence of foreign experts, which is intended to be a temporary measure, should be an opportunity for encouraging local partners to be better prepared to confront possible disasters.

It has now been demonstrated that if international organizations do not take local capacity into consideration in their intervention, foreign presence can have the opposite effect to that hoped for, namely the erosion of local capacity.<sup>13</sup> There have been numerous cases in which it has been found that the presence of foreign humanitarian organizations has helped to establish a system of Western dependence. Juma and Suhrke have described particularly well-documented situations in which the humanitarian actor has contributed to the deterioration of the capacity of local institutions, which would have, over time, completely destroyed the existing capacity.<sup>14</sup> In some of these cases, humanitarian organizations were forced to stay longer than expected in order to provide basic services, thus substituting for local institutions.<sup>15</sup>

Humanitarian organizations are generally aware of these risks. ALNAP (the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action) has concluded that local participation in humanitarian operations is one of the biggest challenges faced by humanitarian organizations and that, when it is

12 This is particularly true of the European Union, which in 2008 established a specific funding programme to support humanitarian capacity-building. See ‘Strengthening humanitarian responses through global capacity building and grant facility: DG ECHO guidelines’, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/grants/capacity-grant-guidelines\\_2009\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/funding/grants/capacity-grant-guidelines_2009_en.pdf) (last visited December 2011).

13 Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO/UNESCO, Paris, 1989.

14 Monika Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke (eds), *Eroding Local Capacity: International Humanitarian Action in Africa*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 2002.

15 *Ibid.*; see in particular the concluding chapter, p. 164.

implemented, the methodology involved is highly convoluted. Despite the existence of the ideas and standards of the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations in Disaster Relief,<sup>16</sup> as well as the SPHERE project, community participation in humanitarian projects remains extremely limited.<sup>17</sup> Grünewald and the Braun report, which assess the humanitarian capacity-building of seven major organizations, all members of the Interagency Working Group on Emergency Capacity (IWGEC), reached the same conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Braun says, that: ‘community capacity building has not been strong in large part because of the weak capacity of country offices and their partners’.<sup>19</sup> The need to change humanitarian organizational culture, particularly in relation to the opening of positions to non-Western personnel and the establishment of a plan for the professional development of local staff, is one of the main conclusions of the report. It should be noted that the Braun report has enabled the development of a new joint initiative entitled the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB),<sup>20</sup> which is specifically designed to address some of these institutional shortcomings.

In fact, all organizations interviewed in this study agreed on the importance of local humanitarian capacity-building.<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite these findings and the apparent consensus, humanitarian organizations still resist integrating capacity-building into their activities. In other words, rhetoric has not been transformed into action. Moreover, the editors of *Forced Migration Review* aptly titled the July 2007 special issue ‘Enhancing Southern capacity: rhetoric and reality’.<sup>22</sup> In fact, all organizations are continuing to struggle to internalize local humanitarian capacity-building efficiently within their operations. Even organizations that claim

- 16 ‘The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief’, prepared jointly by the IFRC and the ICRC, available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/code-of-conduct/code-english.pdf> (last visited January 2012).
- 17 Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), *ALNAP Global Study: Participation of Disaster-affected Populations*, Practitioner’s Handbook (Draft), London, 2003, p. 11.
- 18 François Grünewald, *Bénéficiaires ou partenaires: quels rôles pour les populations dans l’action humanitaire?*, Éditions Karthala, Paris, 2005. Spee Braun, *Report on Emergency Capacity: Analysis for the Interagency Working Group (IWGEC) on Emergency Capacity*, July 2004, available at: <http://www.ecbproject.org/resources/library/8-emergency-capacity-report> (last visited December 2011). The constituent organizations of IWGEC are: CARE USA, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, Mercy Corps, Oxfam GB, Save the Children-US, and World Vision International.
- 19 See S. Braun, above note 18, p. 29.
- 20 The ECB project aims to build staff capacity, to encourage risk reduction activities, to improve accountability, and to evaluate project impact. See details at: <http://www.ecbproject.org/WhatIsCEP> (last visited December 2011).
- 21 With regard to rhetoric and official communications (annual reports, websites, etc.), all the humanitarian organizations interviewed presented local capacity-building as an important component of their action. This observation is also shared by other studies on local humanitarian capacity-building: see, in particular, Ian Christophos, ‘Institutional capacity building amid humanitarian action’, in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2004: Capacity Building*, Overseas Development Institute, London, 2005, pp. 29–71, available at: <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/rha04-ch2.pdf> (last visited December 2011).
- 22 Marion Coudrey and Tim Morris, ‘Introduction’, in *Forced Migration Review*, Vol. 28, 2007, p. 2.

to implement these actions are finding it difficult to move beyond the stage of rhetoric.

Inspired by interviews with international organizations, this section has identified the reasons that organizations give for avoiding investment in local humanitarian skill enhancement. In opposition to this reasoning, the next section outlines the logic supporting the need for local humanitarian capacity-building.

## Why local humanitarian capacity-building?

While the partnership relations between Western organizations and those in the South were largely influenced by the ideologies of international solidarity that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>23</sup> they are now specifically supported in order to improve programme efficiency, ensure some sustainability of funding from donors, and encourage local participation. In other words, technocratic standards such as results-based management have profoundly changed the partnership philosophy. Thus, the association between Northern and Southern organizations will be realized if the organizations agree that it will generate effects that would not have been possible without it.<sup>24</sup> In this exercise of negotiation, in which the calculation of costs and benefits is central to the decisions made by the organizations, multiple factors promoting or encouraging activities of local humanitarian capacity-building are counterposed.

There are as many objectives and degrees of relationship between partners as there are projects. The literature on this subject is abundant and explains the various forms and methods that capacity-building (humanitarian or otherwise) can take, as well as the challenges faced by organizations.<sup>25</sup> But beyond the organizational factors that justify partnerships and skill transfer, we should note two objectives concerning the need for local humanitarian capacity-building.

The first objective is to be found in the process of humanitarian empowerment of the South. This objective is based on the generally accepted idea that dependence on foreign assistance and expertise must gradually be reduced. Southern countries must themselves ensure the process of capacity-building. In fact, the central, but often hidden, idea behind local capacity-building is founded on the assumption that all countries should have sufficient capacity to respond to the humanitarian crises they might face. In other words, they should be able to assess their skills and vulnerabilities, to identify their needs, and to implement the process

23 Alain Fowler, *Striking a Balance: A Guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-governmental Organizations in International Development*, Earthscan, London, 1997.

24 David Brown, 'Bridging organizations and sustainable development', in *IDR Reports*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1991, available at: <http://www.worlded.org/docs/Publications/idr/pdf/8-4.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

25 See William Postma, 'NGO partnership and institutional development: making it real, making it intentional', in *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1994, pp. 447–471; Jan Ubels, Naa-Aku Acquaye-Baddoo, and Alain Folwer, *Capacity Development in Practice*, Earthscan, London, 2010, available at: <http://www.snvworld.org/en/Documents/Capacity%20development%20in%20Practice%20-%20complete%20publication.pdf> (last visited December 2011); Debora Eade, *Capacity-Building: An Approach to People Centred Development*, Oxford, Oxfam UK and Ireland, 1997; H. Tukker and R. van Poelje, above note 9.

of enhancing their own humanitarian capacities. Thus, over time, the institutions of countries identified as 'beneficiaries' should have the necessary tools to ensure the safety of their own population. Humanitarian activities should not conflict with this objective, but rather commit themselves to this process of empowerment.

The second objective is based on the changing role of international organizations. While it is certain that they will continue to play an indispensable role, their presence on foreign soil should be looked at with a certain detachment. Their responsibilities, which have already changed dramatically in recent decades, will logically evolve so as to anticipate a sort of progressive withdrawal. This trend has been observed in several countries, such as in Peru and India with the organization CARE, or in Kenya with the Red Cross. This has happened, on the one hand, in order to allow more space for local institutions that now have increased capacity, and on the other, by modifying the organizations' actions to promote the transfer of skills. Direct interventions will gradually give way to support mechanisms. This can only be done by changing the traditional role of international humanitarian agencies towards the function of supporting local associations and transferring skills to local groups so as to delegate responsibilities. While disasters continue to occur in areas that require direct intervention, humanitarian agencies must anticipate this transition and voluntarily commit themselves to it.

Thus, the operating methods of humanitarian organizations need to adapt to increasing local capacity, and each situation will have a particular response. One observed risk is related to the pooled emergency response teams. These teams are mostly composed of Western experts, who are on standby so as to participate as needed in the evaluation efforts and responses to a crisis. The establishment of these regional structures (global response teams), which is currently favoured by many organizations, should not lead to them becoming monolithic response tools, applied to all interventions without being adapted to local contexts.<sup>26</sup> Despite the willingness of organizations to try to adapt their pooled teams to local contexts, this creates an asymmetrical power relationship with partners and local experts, since the teams usually consist mainly of Westerners. Little independent research has dealt with this way of working or with its possible effects on local authorities, but further analyses of these intervention models should give us a better understanding of the long-term impact of these structures on local capacities.

## **The future role of local humanitarian agencies: some thoughts**

The unfolding transition highlights the advent of new ways of functioning for international humanitarian organizations. The traditional humanitarian

26 For example, CARE has set up a pooled emergency response team called CARE International Emergency Response Team (CERT). For further information, see: <http://www.care.org/careswork/whatwedo/relief/ehau.asp> (last visited December 2011). Save the Children also has rapid deployment international emergency response teams, called Regional REDI teams: see Save the Children, 'Emergency Capacity Building Project: "case study of good practice"', available at: <http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/pubs/building-capacity-for-emergency-response.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

interventionist approach will give way to a more symmetrical power relationship between Northern and Southern institutions. This change in organizational culture will affect North–South relations, as well as organizations’ operational modalities. Accordingly, the responsibilities of local institutions will also continue their mutation.

Relations between Western humanitarian agencies and local institutions can take many forms and vary over time and space according to the organizations, projects, funding, and context of each crisis. As a result, it is unrealistic to propose a unique model of North–South humanitarian relations. However, using models of existing partnerships, and without exhaustive demonstration of expected roles of local humanitarian organizations, here are four of the most feasible forms of partnership in the decades to come.<sup>27</sup>

### The model of country offices: towards local governance

This structure, fairly standard across organizations, has a functional office in a country or a region considered as being in a humanitarian crisis. The leadership of the office is generally provided by Western expatriates, and employees of the projects are mainly of local nationality. The relationship with local employees is, for some organizations, the primary relationship of proximity with local capacity.

The country office structure is certainly the most widely used by humanitarian organizations. It is particularly popular among English-speaking organizations such as CARE, World Vision, Save the Children, and Oxfam, and has also inspired the European ‘without borders’ organizations, including Doctors without Borders. In the latter case, there are generally fewer local employees. Conversely, the number of expatriates is greater and the functions that they occupy carry more sectional responsibilities, particularly in the case of medical organizations.

With the evolution of the humanitarian structure, country offices will continue increasing their empowerment, advancing the decentralization of organizations’ power, with greater progress towards the establishment of local governance. In these cases, local humanitarian capacity-building will take on its full meaning. By promoting the recruitment of local professionals for leadership positions and professional development plans, the country office will be headed by local experts, which will eventually allow them to become full members of their federation. Despite some internal resistance, this process is already underway at CARE International, particularly in its offices in Peru and India. Having become members of their confederation, these organizations have the opportunity to access international funds, enabling them to ensure their financial

27 Humanitarian organizations generally give out very few details as to their preferred management model and structure. The official institutional documents (websites, annual reports, institutional publications, etc.) reveal little information on this subject. The examples presented below are drawn from the personal experience of the author, as well as from information from interviews.

viability. This process is the most logical culmination of organizations with such structure, reducing the risk that local aid professionals work only for foreign interests.

### The model of decentralized partnership

This type of partnership is generally based on agreements between an international organization and a local one. The international organization can be located either in the country in crisis or in its country of origin. In both cases, the role of local organizations is critical because they are usually responsible and accountable for the implementation of all project activities or programmes. This relationship is based on bilateral agreements, related to conditions of financial management and the objectives to be reached. Most organizations use this form of partnership in one way or another. The types and duration of such partnerships vary greatly. In some areas, the local organization will be autonomous in the absence of a 'physical' presence of the international organization. We see this in particular in Colombia, which has an extensive network of capable humanitarian organizations. The same situation prevails in Cuba, where many organizations such as Oxfam work through Cuban organizations. In other cases, the partnership allows the establishment of consortia based on the interests and capacities of actors in the same sector. This relationship is generally asymmetrical because the local partner is dependent on funding from international organizations that manage foreign funds (institutional or private donors).

Since this kind of partnership is based on a pragmatic contractual relationship depending on the duration of funding, investments in local humanitarian capacity-building are often limited. This is a relationship based more on project management than on structured skill-transfer actions. While it is also true that some projects are mainly oriented towards building local capacity in various sectors, the organizations interviewed generally felt that these initiatives were still insufficient.

In any case, if this support is sincere, and the relationship is sustainable and centred on progressive development and not on results, local organizations will gain in experience and will be able to focus on looking for international financing. Nevertheless, this kind of partnership remains fragile because local capacity-building, as far as research for international funding is concerned, puts organizations in competition with each other, and their institutional survival remains an important question.<sup>28</sup> Yet, for some local organizations, access to international funds is often the only way to remain active and independent of their Northern partners.

28 For a management science analysis of humanitarian organizations, see Erwan Quéinnec, 'The ambivalence of the inherent nature and purpose of humanitarian organisations: a research theme for the management sciences', in *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 177, 2003, pp. 501–523.

## The implementing partnership model

These partnerships appear less frequently than the ones cited above. They are based on pragmatic agreements between international and local organizations, in accordance with a fixed level of funding, and they occur particularly in situations of conflict in which insecurity or the local government no longer allow expatriates to have access to areas affected by the crisis. The recent cases of Somalia and Myanmar are good examples of international organizations developing such implementing partnerships.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, in such contexts, international organizations target local partners according to their capacities, which were often not enhanced while conditions permitted.

International organizations' interest in this type of partnership is mainly based on the results, and organizations are bound by a contract from which elements related to local capacity-building are usually absent. The role of the local partner, although fundamental to the implementation of activities, is logically limited to the achievement of actions identified as part of a contract. The relationship usually ends with the end of funding. Some organizations are sometimes able to take advantage of contracts to develop their own capacities. On the other hand, others close their doors when financing ends.

This type of relationship will always be necessary when the circumstances impose. Nevertheless, international organizations now have extensive international networks and can both anticipate their partnerships and enhance the capacities of their partners when the situation allows. They will benefit from having better organized and better prepared local organizations, which will have greater chances of surviving at the end of their contracts. The main challenge lies in the financing of such activities, and donors must be convinced of the importance of this activity for preparing for disasters.

## The model of national societies

This structure is exclusive to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The statutes and principles of the Movement indicate that every country should have its own national society that acts as auxiliary to governments in disaster management. These societies are supported by the IFRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and their sister partner societies in the form of bilateral relations. History has shown many positive partnership relationships between national societies that have helped develop a high-level of humanitarian expertise, as was the case with the Kenyan Red Cross, for example. Indeed, several UN agencies and international donors are increasingly interested in working with and financing national societies.

29 Some organizations also opt for such partnerships where funding is inadequate, and when crises do not generate enough interest for the deployment of expatriates or the establishment of a programme. The funds collected will then be channelled through a local organization in the framework of an implementing partnership.

A number of national societies are nevertheless still very weak and dependent on support from the rest of the Movement. The Haitian experience is a notable example of this situation. This national society, notwithstanding the fact that it has enjoyed widespread support in organizational development and funding for many years, has not been able to take the leadership in the aftermath of the earthquake of January 2010. Consequently, most reconstruction projects are now done directly by the rest of the Movement, without taking the Haitian Red Cross into consideration. In this case, factors identified as explaining this situation include the magnitude of the crisis, the pressure to achieve quick results, and the lack of co-ordination in the Movement. Nevertheless, the Movement will continue its efforts, ensuring that the current environment is an opportunity for the overall strengthening of the Haitian Red Cross.<sup>30</sup>

In all cases, despite the political and institutional challenges posed by the continuation of this structure, the model of national societies remains one of the best ways to guarantee the existence of local capacity in a sustainable manner. If they are adequately supported by the rest of the Movement, it is expected that Southern national societies will continue their emancipation. National societies in rich countries, like those of poorer regions, should continue to maintain their organizational development programmes. Financial independence and the balance between the administration and governance are some of the major challenges that national societies will face in coming decades. Nevertheless, this model continues to be a good example of the way in which strengthening of local institutions remains a priority approach.

## Conclusion: towards a paradigm shift?

The context within which the humanitarian system evolves is so complicated and there are so many possible multiple solutions that it seems unrealistic to conceive of the emergence of a consensual change in professional humanitarian organizations. However, the continuing debate indicates that humanitarian organizations agree on the need to review their partnership relations.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the relationship between international agencies and their local partners will need to be fundamentally transformed in the future. If the aim of humanitarian organizations is to reduce human suffering, and their basic premise is that the first to arrive on the scene of a disaster is the local community, a rapid paradigm shift in intervention methods in the humanitarian partnership relationship is needed.

30 The *Strategic Plan of the Haitian Red Cross for 2010–2015* noted this institutional weakness prior to the earthquake, as well as the opportunity of looking at the resources channelled to Haiti in building their organizational capacity at all levels. See in particular p. 18 of the text, available at: <http://www.croixrouge.ht/wp-content/uploads/Strategie-Croix-Rouge-Haitienne-2010-2015-version-finale--2-fini.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

31 To learn more about the ongoing debates, see in particular Michael Edwards, David Hulme, and Tina Wallace, 'NGOs in a global future: marrying local delivery to worldwide leverage', background paper for the Third International NGO Conference, hosted by the University of Birmingham, 10–13 January 1999, available at: <http://www.futurepositive.org/docs/futures.pdf> (last visited December 2011).

According to Amhed Manzoor, a new business model to improve the humanitarian system is necessary and it must function in a sincere manner.<sup>32</sup> This organizational culture change will be essential for many organizations that still resist taking local circumstances into account when undertaking a humanitarian intervention. Organizations that have not yet started this development will have to do so quickly. These adjustments must also be conceived in parallel with donors and Northern governments, who too often insist on promoting their organizations, their expatriates, and (incidentally) their interests. It is indeed necessary to maintain and strengthen arguments to convince donor governments of the profitability of investing in the preparation of foreign partners.

This study has highlighted some key factors that influence organizations in justifying their inaction. While some of these factors are beyond the reach of organizations – such as the pressure to show results quickly to donors and the media, and the conditions imposed by donors – others may be more under their control. This is particularly true of the lack of clarity in the definition of capacity-building within organizations, of the lack of responsibility for capacity-building in terms of employees, and of the systematic recruitment of Western resources. Organizations should focus on these factors in order to promote the paradigm shift of the humanitarian system towards empowerment of Southern partners. In doing so, they will create an organizational culture that is less resistant to the empowerment of partners and local offices.

Thus, if the humanitarian movement is to maintain its purpose, preserve its value, and respond to criticism about the impact of its action, it must broaden its response through sincere and deeper consideration of local humanitarian capacity-building. International organizations need to rethink their actions and transform their management model from one of ‘delivering services’ to one of ‘support and local capacity-building’. This change implies that they should no longer be guided according to their own interests and capacities, but according to the interests and capacities of their Southern partners. It is undoubtedly a great challenge.

32 Amhed Manzoor, ‘The future issues and challenges for humanitarian action and the role of Southern NGOs’, in *Revue humanitaire: enjeux, pratiques, débats*, 21 March 2011, available at: <http://humanitaire.revues.org/index915.html> (last visited December 2011).