Development agencies: global or solo players?

Sylvia Borren

Emancipation and solidarity: linked or at loggerheads?

The term 'emancipation' is used in this paper to refer to the experiences of any group of people who are disadvantaged, structurally excluded from access to resources, or suffering from some form of discrimination, if they become increasingly able to analyse their own situation, identify the structural forces working against them, and gain access to knowledge, skills, and organisational power to change their situation and work towards sustainable solutions. Emancipation can be achieved by impoverished people, indigenous people, women from a range of social and economic backgrounds, members of sexual minority groups, people living with disabilities, and children – indeed by members of any social sector who identify and organise against the exclusion and oppression that affect them. 'Solidarity', as used in this paper, refers to a conviction of our common humanity that motivates people who are not themselves facing a particular set of negative circumstances, but who identify with those who are. They recognise the need to mobilise against injustice and poverty, because they wish to live in a fairer world, and because they want to support a particular social group or emancipation process.

There are two important links between emancipation and solidarity. First is the cognitive and emotional recognition of injustice, whether experienced oneself or by others, which provides the motivation to work towards change. Cognitive and/or emotional rejection of the reality of injustice, the familiar tendency to 'blame the victim', may be the result of a process of psychological denial. The first step on the road to

emancipation is to recognise and confront one's own pain. The basis of solidarity work may be the recognition of our common humanity, of the universality of the underlying human condition. It is not necessary personally to live in poverty in order to recognise within that condition elements of one's own particular struggle for emancipation: for social or legal recognition as a person, a woman, or a member of a social, sexual, or political minority, for example. Empathy is increasingly recognised as the essential element of the 'emotional intelligence' that is necessary if we are to achieve more balanced and successful lives and social realities.

Second, the aspiration to live in a fairer world, and the desire to achieve that state by 'doing something about it', is driven by the wish to end one's own suffering (to emancipate oneself) or the suffering of others (to demonstrate solidarity). To empathise is to feel the need to act. Many people want not only personal happiness, but also to live in a just world – and they are willing to engage in solidarity work to contribute to achieving this. Information and experience are shared, and people are active in a variety of ways: by doing voluntary work, supporting public and/or political campaigns, donating money, participating in public education or public events, cultivating the habit of ethical consumption or caring for their environments, and so on. Some people invest their direct energy or even risk their lives in voluntary service, accompaniment of threatened communities, or humanitarian work in disasters.

Sometimes, however, solidarity can get in the way of emancipation. Empathising and wanting to act can become negative forces when the problems (and therefore the solutions) are defined by those who are demonstrating solidarity, rather than by those who are suffering injustice or deprivation. The 'helper' will then dominate those 'being helped', and so undermine their efforts to emancipate themselves. Those who are oppressed learn to recognise their plight in the conceptual terms of those who offer solidarity, and will not 'own' their understanding of the routes to freedom. The litmus test for anyone involved in any of the 'helping professions' is to do a power analysis of the way in which decisions are taken – and to assess whether this changes over time.

The wish (need?) to be involved in solidarity work has its own psychological origins, which deserve greater recognition and discussion. Why do some people immerse themselves in solidarity work? What is the (psychological) deal: what is in it for them? Are they acting out their own psychological history or struggles; or escaping from their own personal emancipation process; or projecting it on to others? Are they enjoying power over the more powerless, instead of taking on challenges in their

own societies? Of course, this does not apply to everyone involved in solidarity work, but these critical questions should always be asked, because unfortunately there are (too many) examples of so-called supporters of marginalised people who are motivated by escapist fantasies, the desire for personal gain, or an appetite for exploitation in the name of solidarity. Such 'supporters' are distinctly harmful to the emancipation process of the people concerned.

Coherence of values and ways of working

These observations lead us to a key principle: that solidarity work should be secondary to the emancipation process of the person or group concerned, and that it should therefore be a service that is phased out when the liberation process begins.

Very few professionals in the development industry (largely a 'solidarity business') would disagree with this in theory. However, the values by which a person or organisation aspires to live are seldom completely coherent with the values that motivate particular decisions in practice. The practicalities of life and work are based on assimilated or 'integrated' values, and not on the ones to which a person or organisation consciously aspires. For instance, a school will explicitly aim for the optimal development of its pupils. Yet what happens in that school may in fact be determined more by the desires, interests, or power struggles of particular teachers. This gap between integrated values and 'aspired to' values is not unusual, but it becomes problematic when the tension is not recognised, and when an organisation is not constantly trying to check its ways of working and its actual practice, seeking to close the gap between its two sets of values. Only then can a 'learning' culture be developed within the organisation.

In humanitarian relief work, operational activities, or development projects, the principle of working whenever possible through local, accountable, like-minded organisations or institutions must lead to the practice of seeking out and nurturing relevant local partner organisations, and it will include a withdrawal strategy. The principle of respect for the autonomy of local partners or counterparts may limit the level of donor-driven implementation strategies and management requirements. A commitment to justice and respect for diversity must lead to effective personnel policies, to ensure that development organisations open their doors at all levels to women and to people of a range of class and cultural backgrounds. At the same time, these principles should be applied

equally critically to the ways of working of the agency's partner organisations – organisations which may not respect sufficiently the autonomy or emancipation process of the people participating in their programmes (the intended beneficiaries), or which may not have an effective policy on issues such as gender equity or cultural and social diversity.

The quality of partnership

The quality of the relationship between the donor organisation and its local partner agency depends on the donor's practical commitment to the principle that a local group, organisation, or institution is an autonomous actor, primarily responsible for its own emancipation – and thus also for its own analysis, strategies, ways of working, and management practices. In the same way, donor agencies are also autonomous actors who need to define as transparently as possible what roles they can and cannot play, what their policies and quality standards are, and what they have to offer. They will be sensitive to, and influenced by, a variety of stakeholders and voices in setting these policies, standards, and roles. It is in the interaction between the various autonomous actors (stakeholders) that partnership and co-operation develop. This partnership is based on common values, shared analysis, and the energy needed to find sustainable solutions. Various actors or stakeholders may play differing but complementary roles, depending on the specific problems of poverty and injustice.

Development agencies engage in varieties of partnership. The relationship may well vary, depending on which roles the partners play in specific development situations. Dilemmas and tensions can exist between donor agencies and partners if they are playing several roles at once. Discussion of these issues is needed in order to decide which roles can or cannot be combined, or how checks and balances will be put in place to ensure quality – and to avoid well-intentioned, solidarity-based donor-dominance getting in the way of autonomy, ownership, and emancipation of the real actors of development: the 'beneficiaries', or programme participants.

Roles and functions of development agencies – and their staff

Strategic development funding

Development agencies facilitate change by funding relevant and appropriate actors in the South and (to a lesser extent, as yet) in the North: community-based organisations (CBOs), social movements, trade unions, intermediary or thematic NGOs or organisations, sometimes local governments or other organisations, and possibly individuals on a temporary basis. The aim of the funding is to support and empower organisations and those participating in their programmes who are denied their social, political, and economic rights. Funding provides the financial means for them to organise and construct their own solutions.

'Strategic development funding' involves identifying and supporting social actors who can make innovative and critical contributions to eliminating the immediate and structural causes of injustice and poverty, and who can achieve patterns of sustainable development, mostly in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe, but also in Western countries. Such funding might also be considered strategic because these social actors are supported in their core organisational needs and development (rather than simply in their activities and projects). Sometimes it can be appropriate to fund innovative but small and/or risky initiatives, as stepping-stones to something better or bigger. Ideally, partners are also able to network and interact with others to achieve greater impact than they could if they worked on their own.

Strategic development funding requires the skill to undertake contextual and organisational surveys. Replicability and sustainability are two key criteria for any development programme, but individual initiatives can also lead to significant learning and may be supported on that basis.

A common problem is that the funding relationship is unsustainable. Southern partners can be damaged both by a sudden influx of funds and by an unexpected cutback. But donors may similarly be affected by processes that they cannot control, such as fluctuating exchange rates, a change of government, or changes in the policies of their own funders . Partners often try to solve this by spreading the risk among a number of donors. However, these donors seldom co-ordinate their monitoring and reporting requirements, which leaves the partner organisation having to spend a lot of time and energy on reporting.

A second source of difficulty is that project approval entails a judgement about the partner's proposed strategy, way of working, and organisation. If the proposal or the organisation's capacity is considered inadequate, the partner will often ask for advice about how to improve it. Development-agency staff can offer this support and thus take on an advisory or consultative role. However, since they also have the power over the money, which they can choose whether or not to release, it may be difficult for the partner to take their advice simply as advice, and not as conditions which have to be met in order to qualify for the grant. Hence, the donor may inadvertently fail to respect the autonomy or emancipation process of the partner, or may be giving advice which is experienced by that partner as binding, even though the donor's own knowledge of the external strategic context, or of the internal organisational dynamics, may well be inadequate. Of course, much depends on the actual interaction between agency staff and partners, and on the nature of the partner involved.

The risk of donor-dominance is not so great for strong partners who are in a position to negotiate, and who may have other financial options. But less experienced Southern organisations may well ask donors to help them in their thinking and planning – and will be more inclined to become (too) dependent on them. At the same time, if these inexperienced partners are asking for the transfer of knowledge and skills, should development-agency staff refuse them? Is providing this support not a valid form of solidarity? Some donors resolve this issue by encouraging the development of good, local NGO-oriented consultants, and funding their partners to get support from them. Some feel that they have to choose their particular role at any given time: they should either fund partners, or give non-funding support, but not both at once. This is an area of disagreement among donors, as some believe that the two roles (funding and organisational advice) should not be mixed, while others feel that some of their best development work is done precisely by mixing these roles. After all, it is true that intermediary partners working with CBOs often do both.

This question should be analysed in terms of power dynamics. Does the partner that is involved in or close to a particular emancipation process have the power to disagree with a donor who, in the name of solidarity, supposedly 'knows best'? How are the necessary checks and balances in this unequal power relationship ensured? Organisational consultants (who do not carry with them the extra power of being donors) know the danger of stepping into the 'expert' role. They may seem to be giving much-wanted support in the short run – but this can so easily lead

to dependence, disempowerment, and strategic or organisational problems for the partner organisation in the long term. Good consultants, therapists, and doctors have learned to manage these tensions in their role, and have learned to interrelate with their clients or patients in a way that empowers them, and leaves them real autonomy when making decisions. Development agencies may find it worthwhile to consider some of the professional and ethical standards, codes of conduct, and communication skills that have been developed in those professions.

It may also be possible to design checks and balances in the relationship between partner and donor, to prevent some of the inadvertent donor-dominance described above. It may be helpful to employ more objective ways of working, such as using assessment tools, hiring external evaluators, seeking second opinions, and undergoing mutual appraisal exercises.

A third and related issue is the negotiation of 'minimum standards' between donors and their partner organisations. In part, this has to do with planning, reporting, and financial accountability; but it also concerns value-ridden matters such as gender awareness or a non-partisan ideology. Accountability to the donor often takes precedence over accountability to the participants of any particular programme. There is little opportunity for social organisations or NGOs to compare their performance systematically with that of others. Without accountability to participants, or horizontal accountability among NGOs (benchmarking, or peer comparison), accountability is likely to become donor-driven. This is complicated by the fact that donors may not themselves be accountable institutions with coherent policies, but are made up of individual people who have decision-making power, and their own views and opinions. There are rarely any formal complaint mechanisms in place; nor is there a chance to obtain a second opinion in the case of disagreement. When an individual contact changes in the donor organisation, a partner organisation might face a new set of opinions and requirements. Institutional consistency is not, on the whole, a strong point among donors. Here, then, the power of solidarity-driven individuals over-rides the beneficiaries' or participants' ownership of their development processes.

Operational development work

There are situations, countries, or regions where there are no (or virtually no) local or national organisations, and little or no community

organising. Yet the problems faced by people living there may include lack of health care or education programmes, or poor and unsustainable rural development practices. In this context, an international NGO may decide to take on operational development work. In effect, the donor assumes a role that is usually played by a local social actor or intermediary NGO. The donor's field staff will, in operational programmes, usually employ participatory methods, establishing CBOs, and developing responses to local needs alongside them. The accountability of this work, both to the communities themselves and to the agency's domestic constituency, is not in itself different from the accountability required of local organisations: participatory planning, clarity of objectives, efficient and effective working methods, clear monitoring and evaluation are all needed. Field staff involved in operational work will nearly always also be involved in training and coaching local people and organisations to develop their own capacity to take responsibility for the work later.

The issues to be addressed are mostly concerned with questions of empowerment, replicability, and withdrawal – which are again not intrinsically different from those faced by local intermediary NGOs, except that, where these have good governance, democratic practices, and community-based participant-accountability structures in place, they are likely to be more sensitive to local checks and balances. If, for instance, the operational agency has developed a method of engaging with the community, and then structured means of providing water-points, grain mills, housing, primary schools, child-care services, primary health care, animal husbandry, etc., the first tension lies in the balance between involvement and empowerment of the local community and the efficiency or quality of the product or service provided. It can take much longer – and cost more – to involve the community fully in choices about where and how houses are built, water-points installed, etc. The drive for efficiency or lower costs may result in cutting back on such involvement. Similarly, there may be optimal community development, but a very slow process to achieve concrete results. How can we measure the quality of this community process? How sustainable is the service or product when the operational development workers withdraw? There are many examples of water points or grain mills being abandoned through lack of maintenance, and instances of small economic enterprises failing because local markets are not sufficiently developed or accessible, but also there are many examples of inordinately slow processes in situations where social tensions over scarce facilities are growing.

Effective withdrawal systems that leave sustainable CBOs with improved services and economic opportunities can certainly be achieved. The timing and manner of withdrawal are crucial, and necessarily involve the handing over of control/power. Depending on the level of community ownership of the development work, withdrawal can be successfully handled. But experience suggests that it is difficult to do well, and more systematic learning and research may be needed.

Another contentious issue in operational development work concerns how to deal with existing power structures within a community which in themselves replicate patterns of oppression and exclusion. If the agency is to develop and maintain a strong relationship with local leaders, what should be done about marginalised groups, sometimes of a different ethnic background, or groups with specific problems such as HIV/AIDS? What about domestic violence, genital mutilation, child labour, and so on? Often the choice is to leave some of these difficult questions until 'the time is ripe'. This might imply that certain forms of injustice and exclusion are therefore sanctioned. But is it possible for an external agency to be accepted in a community while also challenging that community on some of these deeper issues of human rights? Perhaps operational international NGOs are more likely to alter some of these traditional patterns, because they have less of a vested interest in winning local acceptance; or perhaps they are less likely to question existing power structures, because they need local acceptance, are required to obtain permits to deploy staff there, or are concerned for the security of their staff, and so they cannot afford to upset local leaders. Although the reality will differ from place to place, some research may help here. Certainly some progressive local groups (not least women's groups and human-rights organisations) at times criticise international operational NGOs for excessive compliance with local power structures.

Humanitarian response

Situations that require a humanitarian response frequently arise, and some agencies now have expertise in this area. Humanitarian response is a specialised business, involving both technical and social engineering. It calls for the assessment of physical and social conditions, understanding the social dynamics of a community under extreme duress, and finding entry-points which will bring physical relief, while respecting the good development principles of empowerment, emancipation, and sustainable development. It also requires tremendous

strategic and tactical insight to balance an operational response with related advocacy work. The latter may (eventually) make more impact – but the legitimacy for such advocacy lies in having a direct operational involvement.

There are many important issues here. The severity of the emergency must be judged, and local opinions might have to be over-ruled. There have been cases of local denial (at NGO and at government levels), but there are also examples of exaggerated and mistaken intervention by the international community. Very practical issues must be addressed: how to organise hygienic conditions in refugee camps, which might require placing sanitary facilities at the outskirts – thus increasing the risk of sexual violence, which may mean that women do not use the facilities. Operational agencies must decide how to distribute food in an orderly and fair way, especially when there is a terrible shortage. Sometimes this is done via male heads of households, neglecting the needs of women-headed households. Sometimes more vulnerable women do receive distributions, but then have no power to keep the food when, for instance, it is taken for re-distribution by local chiefs.

There are many ethical dilemmas too. How can an agency respond appropriately to human-rights atrocities if speaking out may compromise the personal security of its staff, or may result in its being expelled from the area, so leaving local people without support? The agency may be confronted by political dilemmas concerning its degree of neutrality or partiality, the conditionalities attached to humanitarian aid, and so on. A number of these issues have been addressed by the so-called Humanitarian Charter, which has been signed by many donors (Sphere Project 2000).

The familiar problems of discouraging dependency and devising withdrawal strategies when working with local organisations are all the more difficult and significant in an emergency situation. However, perhaps the task of describing and adhering to gender-sensitive high-quality work in emergencies is the biggest challenge – these being by definition situations that require a high-speed response, while some of the developmental dynamics require much more time to sort out. Some see emergencies as an opportunity to fast-track certain aspects of social development (such as fostering women's leadership, or strengthening the position of indigenous minorities), and in general there are increasing attempts to bridge the gap between humanitarian work, operational development work, and strategic development funding. However, the interaction between these three roles needs more reflection.

Political strategising and advocacy

There are many political questions to address at international, regional, national, and local levels. Essential to dealing with them is the development agency's definition of its mission, which will in most cases commit it to relieving the plight of people living in poverty and suffering, injustice or exclusion.

Important issues and dilemmas are often strategic in nature. When the international or national political community does not accept its own responsibilities, but holds the humanitarian aid and development community responsible for not providing better development results, this is clearly unfair. But if the development community draws attention to this fact, it may be perceived as adopting a defensive stance to justify its inability to prove its own effectiveness.

The strength of development agencies in political analysis and strategic positioning may be their access to information at many different levels and from many different angles. Obviously, it is always vital to consult partner organisations very fully on any given issue. They will not always agree with one another, so development agencies have to be prepared to take responsibility for their own analysis and strategies. Accountability to local and national civil society is often not sufficiently organised, however, and this is another area that requires attention and improvement.

Who is involved in what advocacy, and when? These are critical questions. Development agencies themselves will obviously be most involved in lobbying the parliaments in their own countries or regions. Their partner organisations are fully involved in advocacy at their own national and regional levels – and many are an important force in international forums, such as the UN conferences and (increasingly) at the World Bank and IMF. Often, however, an agency's partners want to be involved in research and in defining the issues and strategies of advocacy – and to take part in or run the advocacy themselves. What happens when development agencies wish to play a strategic role in countries or regions other than their own? When is this appropriate, and when is it problematic? Should local partners be consulted first? Should strategies be co-ordinated with them? What if various partners hold differing ideological, strategic, or tactical positions? Should agencies then 'go it alone'?

Capacity building, organisational consultancy, and training

There is a great need for capacity building, training, and organisational consultancy to foster the development of strong CBOs and NGOs. Aspects of their work that need to be strengthened include management skills, women's leadership skills, organisational development, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and effective phase-out or hand-over systems.

The question of how (in which role) to engage with a particular person or partner organisation is very important, to ensure empowerment and emancipatory learning, rather than unsolicited advice or unwanted interventions. The principle of respect and autonomy in the relationship between trainer and trainee, or between consultant and manager, is a value to which all would aspire but which may in practice be difficult to achieve. There are many examples of relationships of dependency which are not in line with a philosophy of empowerment, and which can lead to undesired effects such as the trainer/coach/consultant becoming a 'distance manager'. Such situations are not sustainable; nor do they foster autonomous emancipated partner organisations or the development of strong management.

Professional issues of this type take on a special character when the agency doing the advising, training, or consulting is also the one that is involved in funding it. These combined roles of holding the purse strings and advising/coaching hardly leave the recipient of this well-intentioned work much autonomous space to develop his or her own strategy, or organisation, or management style. The problem of resolving this tension is not exclusive to international development agencies: it also confronts the larger intermediary NGOs in their relationship to CBOs. Even the most professional donor-agency staff, working with the most sophisticated partner organisation, will encounter this issue. Solutions can be found in the clear separation of roles, ensuring that the recipient manager/organisation has a clear choice about whom to engage with as consultant/trainer, or linking and learning opportunities with like-minded organisations in other countries. In practice, the separation of roles may be more difficult for vulnerable CBOs or newly established NGOs – and yet such organisations are obviously more susceptible to the risk of donor-dependence. Clear quality standards are essential here, as is the need to incorporate checks and balances even in these situations.

One advantage that development agencies may have, if and when they learn to co-operate more fully among themselves, is their access to thousands of partner organisations in many countries. This is potentially a tremendous resource for linking/learning processes. One can always learn from the best practice of others. And there are great possibilities for developing 'good practice' portfolios on specific themes or strategic questions. Development agencies need to consider how much effort they are prepared to invest in organising the available information, ensuring enough depth of material and analysis, and making it accessible. The new information and communication technologies open up great opportunities for development work, but only if information is acknowledged as a means of production, and this would mean donors investing in e-mail and Internet facilities for partner organisations.

Another question is how to motivate staff and partners to want to learn about the experience of others. Although the development business seems to adopt many similar ways of working in different countries (a special kind of globalisation), there is at the same time a strong sense of wanting to pioneer individual programmes. There is seldom so much interest in working on systematic learning, benchmarking, or replicability. There is a clear need for much more attention to be paid to systematic monitoring, evaluation, in-depth analysis, and research into the effectiveness of various development strategies and activities. There is an increasing demand for the development community to prove its effectiveness and efficiency (by doing cost/benefit analysis in the widest sense, studying inputs and outputs, effects and results, and longer-term impacts on people's lives). It is, therefore, vital that the indicators for success (quantitative and qualitative) are set by the development community itself, and not by others who may have a simplistic or unrealistic method of 'measuring' results.

The organisational culture of development agencies and their partners which are well intentioned, value-based, and committed to certain causes and principles may be analysed as 'input'-oriented. Hard work and passionate commitment may sometimes prompt defensive replies to the questions 'Are you making a difference?' or 'Could you work more effectively?', possibly because people who do not commit themselves to working for a fairer world sometimes seem to delight in proving that those who do are naïve 'do-gooders' – implying that poverty and injustice are immutable facts of life. The issue here is how to encourage a culture of open and confident engagement with all shades of critical dialogue.

Domestic roles or global ones?

For many development agencies in the North, their global activities are complemented by domestic programmes that aim to educate and involve the general public 'at home'. This can be done in a variety of ways: most directly through 'accompaniment' projects, and less directly through development education, fundraising, and fair-trade initiatives.

Accompaniment

Accompaniment, or 'being there, living and working alongside people living in poverty and oppression', is a function that implies a recognition of the need to understand fully what happens to people within the processes of poverty and injustice. Empathy, the ability to place oneself in the shoes of another, is a very important skill. Accompaniment allows people to experience the lives of others at close hand and to engage in their reality. It takes various forms, such as sending volunteers or witnesses during certain tense times such as elections. Or it can be combined with the function of protecting people or voicing their plight in situations where it is too dangerous for them to speak out themselves.

Accompaniment can then be a positive experience for the people who do it, because it enriches their experience and deepens their insight and capacity for empathy. Back in their own countries, this experience can have a mobilising effect. It can also be important to those being accompanied, because it offers protection or connections to a wider social movement against poverty and related injustice.

Counterbalancing the positive aspects of this international interaction are some potentially negative effects: for instance, the inadvertent dominance of the one doing the accompaniment, who will in 'being there' affect the dynamics of the particular situation. This influence is often beneficial: an external witness may have a protective effect, and may draw the eyes of the world to a particular situation – but what happens when that person leaves? Is there sustainable change? What if it gets too dangerous, and expatriates are withdrawn, while local people cannot leave? And who stands to gain more from accompaniment? Are the results of such interaction clear, and who benefits most?

Development education

Through public-awareness work that is variously known as development education, global education, peace education, human-rights education,

or environmental awareness, the staff of development agencies aim to ensure that children and adults worldwide understand the nature and causes of poverty, that they develop empathy for others, and also that increasing numbers of people use their understanding, attitudes, and skills as part of a global social movement that seeks basic changes in the social and economic systems that perpetuate poverty and injustice.

There are increasing opportunities to include development education in formal education systems and in adult organisations. Learning in schools was traditionally dominated by theoretical training, but more recently there has been a growing interest in action-learning, developing 'emotional intelligence', acquiring social and life skills, and encouraging schoolchildren to do community work. For adults, there is a need to be involved and to take some control over their social and economic destinies.

When development education adopts a highly moralistic or ideological tone, it often fails to engage the intended audience. People resist being preached to: they want to control their own thinking. The challenge facing people who work in development education is to create a process of learning that allows participants to take ownership of their new ideas and understanding of the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion. The same principles of autonomy and equality that are used in developing strategic funding relations with partners should apply here.

Fundraising

Fundraising establishes relations with the general public, small and large donors, foundations, the corporate sector, and government and international institutions. It is significant partly because it is an actual transfer of assets from rich to poor, and partly because it is a vital element in supporting CBOs, social movements, and NGOs – 'civil society' in the widest sense. Social organisation carries considerable costs in terms of human capital, time, and money. Private organisations are considerable players in supporting social movements and NGOs around the world, but they need funds to do so. Finally, raising funds from the general public is one of the surest practical ways for an agency to get feedback on the public's evaluation of its performance: every donation is a vote of confidence.

Fundraising for emergency relief creates a difficult set of issues. Most challenging is the recognition that dramatic cases of human suffering,

and their coverage in the media, create opportunities to raise funds for those affected – and for agencies to expand in the process. It requires honesty to keep the humanitarian response to the fore and to manage it in such a way that relief programmes are not driven by the availability of funds. Development agencies must commit themselves to looking beyond the crisis for which there is funding and towards ways of supporting longer-term solutions.

Fundraisers must resist the temptation to rely on sensationalist images and messages in order to galvanise the public to support emergency relief work. Conventional images of the suffering of passive 'victims' contradict development-education efforts and reinforce negative attitudes among the general public. In addition, using the commercial media to convey over-simplified messages in order to reach a wider 'market' involves the risk of commercial slickness, which may alienate those supporters who understand the complexities of social change or humanitarian assistance in the South.

Fair trade

Some development agencies invite members of the public to become ethical consumers – people whose shopping habits are informed by knowledge of the conditions under which goods were produced. Increasingly, the concept of fair trade is being taken up by consumer movements, and by commercial enterprises who market themselves as fair and ethical businesses. Fair trade in agricultural produce (coffee, bananas, etc.) has reached a commercially viable level and is having an effect on general production practices. However, the smaller, labour-intensive fair-trade enterprises that are supported by development agencies are not always sufficiently equipped to run a commercial business. In addition, tastes in fashion and domestic items undergo rapid change, which makes this a risky business.

Getting our own house in order: conclusions for Oxfam International

Oxfam International (OI) is a network of organisations involved in tackling the injustices that cause poverty and suffering locally and globally, and working with others towards sustainable solutions and a fairer world. These solutions are based on a conceptual framework of justice and human rights, including social and economic rights.

The Oxfam group sees itself as part of a global movement that is working towards such aims, and which therefore embraces a wide range of development NGOs, CBOs, and social movements, North and South. Its central philosophy is that people – wherever they are in the world – should regain ownership over their own lives and destinies, and should receive support on the grounds of our common humanity and the need for social justice at all levels.

As a change agent, OI sets out to play a number of different roles or functions, and wants to be clear and coherent about these. Certain OI affiliates have developed and play certain roles more fully than others. This can provide a basis for constructive harmonisation, based on respect for diversity, compatibility, and complementarity. At the same time, all members of the Oxfam group share a common set of values, which are enshrined in common working principles and on the Code of Conduct for humanitarian agencies (Sphere Project 2000), and which serve to guide their work and indicate the limits of acceptable diversity between them.

OI recognises that the injustice that causes poverty and suffering must be analysed in each specific context – and the analysis should be done by or with, and in partnership with, those people who are themselves affected by the context where change is needed. However, the biggest challenge is not so much the analysis of the problems, but the development of sustainable solutions.

The starting-point for these solutions must be respect for the autonomy and diversity of the work, policy positions, and roles of the respective OI members – and of their partner organisations – in various types of co-operative partnership. A power analysis of the positions of the various actors, and of existing checks and balances, can indicate how partnership relationships are being managed. Any power monopoly that does not have or allow for the development of such a system of checks and balances is in itself suspect. This is true of governments, public institutions (such as prisons or mental-health institutions), market monopolies (for example, multinational companies), and forces within politics or civil society that find themselves in a dominant position (political parties, religious monopolies, Mafia-type groups, and so on). Donor organisations run a similar risk of monopolising power, which is why OI is committed to building checks and balances into its own systems of stakeholder interaction and management.

Key values for members of the Oxfam group are respect for the diversity of people and partner organisations, and for their autonomy; the transparency and accountability of their own organisational policy and

processes; and a consultative style of decision making to ensure that a range of voices and partners can effectively influence Oxfam's thinking and practice. If development agencies as a sector were to adopt similar principles and practices – and be prepared to co-operate more fully with each other – then an effective global citizens' movement could soon be a dream turned reality.

Reference

Sphere Project (2000) *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*, Geneva: The Sphere Project