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Food Security in the Context of Crisis and Conflict: Beyond Continuum Thinking

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Executive Summary

Conflict can be both a cause and an effect of hunger because food security and emergencies are so closely intertwined. Tackling food insecurity is thus at the core of aid interventions in complex political emergencies. However, creating food security involves more than just distributing food to people in distress. We argue for a development-oriented, participatory approach to address the multiple dimensions of food insecurity prevalent in such complex conditions.

Most policy-makers, donors, relief and development agencies still regard conflicts as some kind of aberration in the 'normal' path of development. They overlook the fact that conflicts tend to be strongly linked to society during so-called normal, more peaceful times. In such circumstances, aid measures must avoid eroding the foundations of subsequent development activities. Yet the widespread handout mentality of many humanitarian organisations is hastening this erosion. Whilst delivering essential services is an obvious necessity in most emergencies, it is essential to link physical reconstruction with institutional capacity building to ensure that services can be managed even under constraining conditions.

Our experiences with an Integrated Food Security Programme in one of Sri Lanka's war zones show that involving local people in the full project cycle is the first step towards reconstruction and recovery. Social capital, local decision making and leadership structures are revived or created anew in the process. However, participation cannot be the only objective; the planning process must also significantly, and quickly, improve people's chances of survival.

We outline seven milestones essential for participatory approaches in conflict situations:

1. Target the unreached. Even in emergencies, only certain groups of the population tend to face real food insecurity. Interventions must be targeted carefully to reach the most needy; the best approach is to involve the community in this targeting.

2. Share the cake. Power inequalities exist in every community. Thus projects must co-operate both with existing community-based organisations, which are largely elite-dominated, and with informal action groups which involve vulnerable groups.

3. Enlist local contributions. Contrary to widespread belief that crisis victims are 'too poor to contribute' to development initiatives, contributions in cash or kind ensure a sense of ownership; a precondition for the sustainability of project activities.

4. Build institutional capacities: strengthen partner institutions whilst increasing the self-help capacity of the local population

5. Share knowledge and co-ordinate action. Strong donor co-ordination is a key for long-lasting, sustainable interventions.

6. Balance process and output. Participation should have a purpose. It must lead to action and tangible results which improve the living conditions of the population.

7. Address food *availability*, *access* and *utilisation* simultaneously. The complexity of crisis situations and the multiple dimensions of food insecurity call for a multi-sectoral approach that addresses the physical, economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of an emergency.

FOOD SECURITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS AND CONFLICT: BEYOND CONTINUUM THINKING[1]

Benedikt Korf and Eberhard Bauer

Introduction

Conflict can be both a cause and an effect of hunger (Messer, Cohen and Marchione, 2001) because food security and emergencies are so closely intertwined. Extreme poverty, inequality and human suffering are some fundamental reasons for social rebellion and its escalation into civil war. On the other hand, civil wars in their complexity and protracted duration cause food insecurity, famine and deprivation. Tackling food insecurity is thus at the core of aid interventions in these complex political emergencies. With the increasing frequency and intensity of political crises and conflicts, an ever greater proportion of public funds is absorbed by disaster-relief measures and emergency aid delivered by official overseas development assistance (cf. GTZ, 1998). However, creating food security involves more than just distributing food aid to people in distress.[2] We argue that the complexity of emergencies demands a development-oriented, participatory approach to address the multiple dimensions of food insecurity prevalent under such conditions.

Humanitarian agencies often portray human beings caught up in political conflicts or crises as helpless victims in dire need of emergency aid. In many instances, however, people do survive an emergency without aid by coping with and adapting to their new circumstances. Development and emergency assistance should, therefore, focus on areas and opportunities which these people have themselves identified as essential. Yet aid and reconstruction are frequently instituted for, instead of with, the people.

There is still a widespread top-down approach to planning prevalent in humanitarian aid in complex emergencies. Humanitarian and development agencies are under great pressure to produce quick and visible results on the ground, especially in conflict and post conflict situations. Faced with the dramatic situation confronting the population, many aid organisations tend to give emergency aid in the form of handouts and gifts, ie. distribution of food, free supply of tools, financial aid for reconstruction etc. without

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1 This policy briefing paper is a synthesis of a number of research papers and consultancy reports (Bauer et al., 1999; Bauer, Bigdon and Korf, 2002; Bigdon and Korf, 2002; Korf and Bauer, 2002; Korf et al., 2001; Korf, 2002).
2 Food security is often reduced to a problem of production and national self-sufficiency in food. However, food security at macro-level still does not guarantee food security for all at household or at individual level (Kelegama, 2000; Thomson and Metz, 1997). Amartya Sen (1981) highlighted the entitlement thesis of famines which argues that people may be starving even though sufficient food is locally or regionally available. Often, malnutrition and starvation are more a problem of purchasing power or other entitlements of specific individuals or households to food than one of availability.

asking for anything in return. But in the long run, such handouts can have serious consequences for any local development impetus, since they undermine self-initiative and encourage a recipient mentality.

Most policy-makers, donors, relief and development agencies still regard conflicts as some kind of aberration in the 'normal' path of development. They overlook the fact that conflicts are not apolitical events of violence, but are strongly linked to society during so-called normal, more peaceful times (Bastian and Bastian, 1996). Civil wars have been described as complex political emergencies which are deeply rooted in society and its social and economic power struggles (Goodhand and Hulme, 1999). Aid agencies thus face a social phenomenon of the utmost complexity. Simple solutions and blueprint approaches can easily *do harm*. It is therefore essential to first establish a sound understanding of the dynamics of complex emergencies, and, second, to evaluate carefully the experiences of humanitarian assistance and development co-operation in such circumstances.

We believe that the only adequate response to food insecurity in the context of crisis and conflict is to take a participatory development approach. Delivering essential services is an obvious necessity in most complex emergencies. However, it is essential to link physical reconstruction with institutional capacity building to ensure that services can be managed even under constraining conditions. Assistance under emergency conditions should thus be development-oriented in the sense that it provides support to vulnerable people before, during and after the emergency without undermining future development efforts. Agencies should hence encourage existing local coping patterns and strengthen communities to deal with their own developmental issues in a constructive and peaceful manner.

This paper draws on our experience with a participatory development approach in the war-torn areas of Sri Lanka to highlight the value of such an approach under crisis conditions. Even though each ethno-political conflict is different, it is essential to evaluate the lessons from the field so as not to re-invent the wheel. The recent debate on assistance for Afghanistan (eg. Wimmer and Schetter, 2002) shows that many aid agencies are highly susceptible to falling back into the relief and dependency trap: the pressure to have rapid impact and to administer huge flows of funds urges many organisations to adopt a technocratic approach which imposes aid with little understanding of the social dynamics of reviving a people.

Challenging the continuum approach in relief and development

Most organisations tend to view relief and development as distinct sequential endeavours (Figure 1). However, this concept of a 'continuum' in which response to an emergency moves from relief through rehabilitation and reconstruction to development has recently been challenged. It is now questioned whether these are distinct stages, whether specialised agencies should take responsibility for each stage, and whether there is a linear progres-

Figure 1: Comparison of Concepts
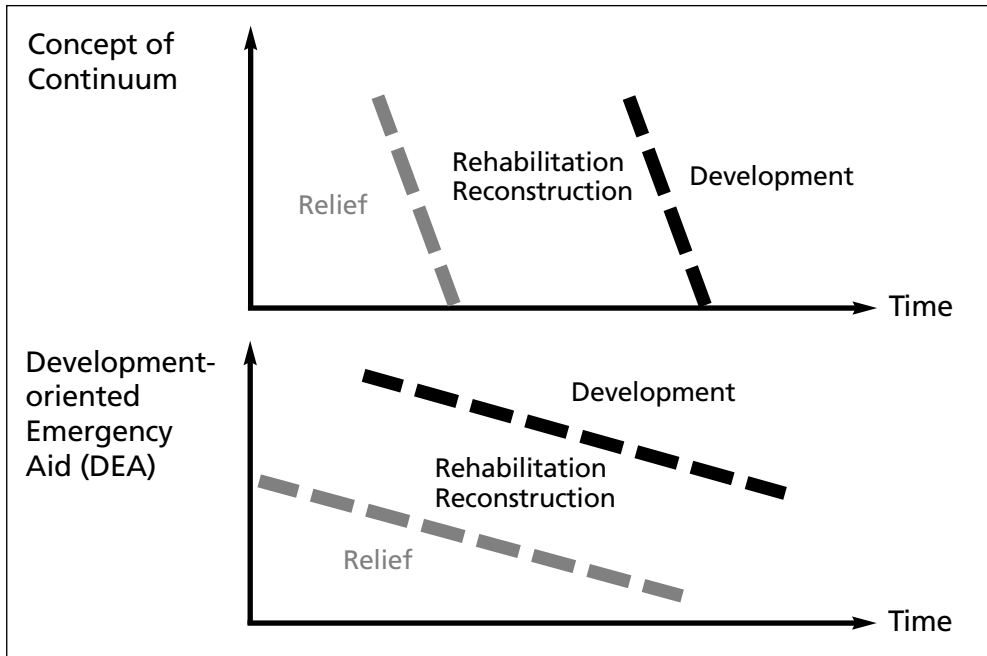
Source: Korf, 2002

sion from one stage to another. Many suggest that a more circuitous and multi-directional understanding of the process of political, economic and social change is useful (eg. Bruchhaus, 1999; Hoffmann, 1999; Horen, 2000; Macrae, 2001; Smilie, 1998).

What is important to note is that one never encounters a simple 'emergency situation' or 'development situation'; rather, elements of each type are found in each phase to varying degrees, during and after a humanitarian crisis or emergency (Preuss, 1999). Hence the German technical co-operation agency (GTZ) recently proposed the concept of development-oriented emergency aid (Box 1). Emergency aid may be unavoidable in certain situations; however, it should always be conceived in such a way that it does not undermine future development efforts. A basic tenet is that recipients should participate in all stages of a project cycle, in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities, whether for distributing food (necessary in certain circumstances) or reconstructing infrastructure.

In the more cyclical nature of many civil wars (such as the one in Sri Lanka), periods of relative calm are often interrupted by a sudden eruption of violence, destruction and displacement, which in turn demands a new phase of extended relief. This situation calls for a complex mix of intervention strategies taking elements from relief, rehabilitation and development as complementary measures. In the immediate aftermath of a crisis, relief might be more prominent, but more long-term oriented activities should

complement relief and disaster aid as early as possible. Relief should become development-oriented and should address the underlying causes of a conflict from an early stage. Such an holistic approach calls for agencies which are conceptually and logistically capable of providing all three types of assistance, and which have a development-oriented thinking rooted within their institutional philosophy.

Development-oriented measures during or after emergencies have to respond to the complexity of the crisis and should combine the following five dimensions of rehabilitation and development:

1. **Physical:** rehabilitating and reconstructing infrastructure

2. **Economic:** restoring income earning opportunities in agriculture, self-employment in small businesses or access to employment or casual labour

3. **Social:** restoring social ties within the community, households, rebuilding trust and confidence, improving health and education

4. **Political:** offering opportunities for participation and establishing linkages with the politico-administrative system

5. **Environmental:** addressing ecological impacts of war and deterioration of natural resources from overexploitation

The key challenge for development-oriented emergency aid is to prioritise those areas which need most urgent support and to identify the most suitable local cooperation partners (state, NGOs, private sector). One main constraint in complex emergencies

has often been that the more development-oriented agencies refrain from engagement until the wars are over. The experience of the GTZ funded Jaffna Rehabilitation Project (JRP) in Sri Lanka, however, has shown how vital it is to remain visible and present even during ongoing conflict and war. This gives the local population a sense that they have not been deserted by the international community and the trust established between the aid agency and the local population during wartime builds a sound foundation for post-war recovery and reconstruction (Konold *et al*., 2002).

Development-oriented emergency aid is thus not restricted to post-war interventions, but should start as early as possible during an emergency, or even as a preventative measure before latent conflicts escalate into crisis and war. At the same time, it is equally important to find post-conflict intervention strategies which include preventive elements, to avoid repeating the old mistakes and reduce the threat of a re-escalation of social and political conflicts.

The challenges facing participatory approaches in emergency situations

The terms 'participation' and 'empowerment' have become central ideas in mainstream development co-operation, but much less so in humanitarian and emergency assistance. The danger is that the term 'participation' is used as a slogan or label to attract donor funds. It is therefore essential to assess in each case what the protagonists of participation and the practitioners in the field really mean. We would like to distinguish between two schools of thought (Nelson and Wright, 1995). Some consider participation as a means, ie. as an instrument to improve project sustainability. The hypothesis is that through involving the target groups in their own development activities and through their contribution to project costs, people will take 'ownership' and thus sustain the development process or maintain constructed assets. Others argue that participation should be an end in itself, ie. that the processes of participation should lead to an increase in decision-making power at the local level. Empowerment, and not physical project outcomes would then be the major objective of participatory approaches. We argue that participation, while essential for empowering people, should always produce tangible results for the population involved, especially under emergency conditions.

A particular challenge for agencies is that tight fund disbursement schedules urge projects, agencies and NGOs to demonstrate visible and quantifiable results within a short period. This is even more pronounced in emergency situations than in development co-operation, since donors and media want to see immediate visible results. This time pressure can be counter-productive for inducing self-help processes at the local level and prevents more suitable planning and implementation approaches being pursued. Participatory processes and empowerment are unpredictable and sometimes very slow. They cannot be forced into formalised procedures without seriously harming the development of self-reliant processes, institution building and collective action.

It is important to note that participatory development does not take place in a vacuum, but in a complex and diversified society. Communities are not egalitarian social entities and they are rarely united. Social processes, of which vulnerable groups are as much a part as the local elite and middle-class, often take place over a wide area which transcends village or community borders. Consequently, participatory approaches have to cope with local power struggles, accommodate cross-community or intra-community social networks, and take into account the wider political and economic conditions set by the politicised conflict or civil war. Development agencies often assume they can be neutral actors, somehow mediating between different social rivals or strategic actors, such as the conflict parties. This perception denies the reality that any actor in a conflict environment is perceived to be partial to some extent.

In emergencies, external institutions (donors, NGOs, government departments) enter a local social and institutional scene which is often complex, obscure and highly fluid. A development project is essentially a strategic resource over which strategic groups and actors negotiate to acquire their share of the cake (Bierschenk, 1988). These bargaining processes take place at the institutional level of agencies and organisations as much as at the village level, where the local elite will be eager to divert funds for their purposes. Participatory processes are equally subject to negotiation between various interested parties, and naturally tend to engender conflicts. The aim is to deal with these in a peaceful and constructive manner, while at the same time taking care of the interests of the poor, whose lobby within existing structures is often weak or is channelled via clientelistic dependency patterns. Agencies need to seek win-win situations for the various strategic groups and thus avoid creating 'losers'.

Sri Lankan experiences

So how can development-oriented emergency aid be put into practice, and what are some of the key lessons from such an approach?

We now present some of our experiences as consultants for the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) in establishing a participatory development approach in the war zones of Sri Lanka (Box 2). Trincomalee District, in the eastern part of the island, was until very recently an arena for armed conflict between the Singhalese dominated government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In Trincomalee the LTTE has a few small enclaves completely under their control (generally referred to as 'uncleared' areas). In other parts of the district (officially referred to as 'cleared' areas) the LTTE also influences people's lives to a large degree. The influence of government institutions and the army outside the larger towns is limited. The protracted conflict has increased poverty and malnutrition in the war-affected areas.

> **Box 2. Sri Lanka's Civil War**
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> The civil war in Sri Lanka erupted in 1983. It is essential to understand the ethnicised conflict in Sri Lanka as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, or a conflict cocktail. Social and political cleavages occur at various levels along many lines of dissent. The fundamental issue of the macro-conflict is the grievance between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese-Buddhist majority which has escalated into a war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the largely Sinhalese armed forces. In addition to this major line of dissent, there are other social, political and ethnic cleavages between and among the three major communal groups (Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims).
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> The conflict can be described as a complex political emergency or a protracted social conflict as it is rooted in, and is an expression of, existing social, political, economic and cultural structures. It involves every dimension of society and the lives of the people in the conflict zones of Sri Lanka (mainly the northeast). It is ethnicised or ethno-nationalist in nature, characterised by loyalty to one particular communal group, accompanied by strong antipathy towards other communal groups living within the same state.

Over the past years, many international, national and local aid agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been trying to help refugees and to resettle displaced people in Trincomalee. In most cases, the effects have been very limited. Most local NGOs are mainly involved in social welfare and the distribution of handouts, such as food, clothing and other goods, often with funds from the government. These organisations generally lack a sound understanding of and experience in development-oriented work. In addition, they are not really institutions of civil society, but organisations which largely depend on external funding for their existence. Only a minority of NGOs actually have clearly defined areas of competency; most are essentially donor-driven in what they do (Bauer *et al*., 1999). Hence, there is simply a lack of expertise and management capacity.

The state sector does not perform much better. In the crisis-situation of the civil war, government services are largely reduced to delivering relief and welfare to refugees and poor people, many of whom are dependent over a long period of time on such relief. Planning is largely top down. The state apparatus adopts a kind of paternalistic approach towards its citizens who are reduced to helpless, dependent recipients of welfare.

Top down planning has a lot to do with the cultural divide existing between the local population and government personnel, NGOs and international agencies. There is a communication gap between the 'uneducated' villagers and the academically trained 'experts'. The latter, for their part, 'dispense' their advice, services and agro-inputs, without entering into a meaningful dialogue with those at the receiving end. The population adopts subordination and submissiveness to avoid getting on the wrong side of

the 'givers'. Staff members and their target groups frequently find it difficult to bridge this communication gap and to stimulate a dialogue which sees both sides as equals.

A few aid agencies do employ participatory planning methods, if somewhat selectively. However, a real understanding of the actual significance of participation is largely lacking. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods are often applied mechanically, without an awareness of the actual reasons for collecting data or calling meetings. The teams of facilitators are insufficiently trained and are not able to respond in a flexible manner to unforeseen events. The result is that the population is confronted with some bizarre and off-putting experiences which cause frustration. In the long-term these prove to be counter-productive, as people may rapidly build up a general feeling of mistrust towards all aid organisations, especially if, after some participatory assessments, agencies are unable to respond to the demands of the communities. Furthermore, some agencies or government institutions force people into groups or established community-based organisations since this is the only way they will be eligible for further support (Silva, 1998). In the rebel controlled areas, the LTTE forcibly 'encourages' its population to participate in collective activities in a form of 'forced mobilisation'. Thus the term 'social mobilisation' has become an ugly word in the Sri Lankan context.

Conflict mitigation through food security? The Integrated Food Security Programme

Since 1998 the Integrated Food Security Programme Trincomalee (IFSP) has supported people at risk of food insecurity in Trincomalee district to diversify and intensify their food and income sources and to improve their nutrition and health care. Food insecurity is the fundamental livelihood issue in complex emergencies. The volatile social, economic and political context makes it difficult for households to continue their traditional livelihood strategies. They face constant difficulties in pursuing economic activities in order to secure survival. The high level of uncertainty and risk restrains people from investing in land and agriculture. This, in turn, also reduces the resilience of households to political shocks or natural disasters, since their assets are constantly being eroded.

The IFSP is implemented as a bilateral cooperation project by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Plan Implementation (MPI) and supported by the German technical cooperation agency (GTZ). The project follows the concept of integrated food and nutrition security (FNS) promoted by German Development Co-operation. This emphasises three dimensions of food security (BMZ, 1997, 1998):

(i) Availability of food at all times (is sufficient food locally produced or imported to be available at local markets?)

(ii) Access to food at all times (do households have the purchasing power or other entitlements to buy food?)

(iii) Use and utilisation of food according to sufficient dietary standards (do people prepare nutritious food and is their state of health able to absorb it?)

Since its inception, IFSP has initiated numerous small-scale projects and supported measures in all three dimensions of food and nutrition security:

(i) Rehabilitation of village infrastructure re-establishes basic conditions for the production of food (e.g. irrigation systems) and access to it (roads).

(ii) Income generating activities and improved agricultural services enhance people's purchasing power (access).

(iii) A comprehensive health and nutrition programme optimises use of food by improving hygiene, creating awareness of nutrition etc.

With its focus on development rather than relief, the guiding principles of IFSP comprise people's participation, mobilising local capacities and contributions, facilitating better services and promoting stability in the conflict area. These principles are closely related to GTZ's concept of development-oriented emergency aid.

These projects are not directly implemented by IFSP, but in collaboration with existing government institutions and non-governmental organisations. They play a dominant role as service providers in needs assessment, planning of poverty and community projects, their implementation and their evaluation, while the local communities act as implementing partners and contribute actively to the project (IFSP, 2000, 2001).

Seven milestones on the path to food security

Drawing on our Sri Lankan experience, we suggest seven milestones for development-oriented assistance seeking to address food insecurity under the conditions of a complex emergency. The first five milestones deal primarily with agencies' bargaining processes with the other relevant actors. The last two milestones contribute to a pragmatic, action-oriented and multi-faceted approach to comprehensively tackle food insecurity.

1. Targeting: reaching the unreached

Even in emergencies, it is frequently only certain groups of the population who are faced with food insecurity. It is therefore important to target interventions carefully to reach the most needy. Targeting starts at the regional (or district) level with an identification of those areas which are most hit by the emergency. The next step is to select communities. The Trincomalee experience shows that government institutions tend not to be best-placed for identifying truly needy villages and communities. Either they do not have much knowledge of remote areas, or else they can be ethnically biased (or be under political pressure to favour certain groups). Agencies should therefore carefully assess the choice of villages, for example by establishing a simple data system, often

based on existing information, which has to be processed and ranked according to specified criteria. Such technical criteria allow agencies to justify their selection against political attacks (which are often based on ethnic grounds).

The last step involves the community. Development projects can only provide assistance to a limited number of households, and it is essential to reach those which need support most urgently. The IFSP approach has been to ask the community itself to select the most vulnerable people using pre-defined criteria. This forces the local elite to take social responsibility for the community. Since only a few people are likely to pre-select the beneficiaries, the whole community has to sanction the selection. In some cases, this has been conducted with significant positive outcomes, but in others it has been a very sensitive and difficult process.

2. Sharing the cake

Scholars of participatory development often overlook the influence of power inequalities (see Nelson and Wright, 1995). Participatory village workshops are about distributing donor funds, and the local elite is very much aware of that. Thus, such workshops should use a bargaining approach in order to identify projects which benefit a large part of the population and at the same time, channel specific support to the most vulnerable. Otherwise, there is a danger of bypassing the local elite when working exclusively with vulnerable groups. The elite can easily undermine attempts from outside to challenge existing power structures and local institutions and counteract the development process, and this is why it is essential to keep them on board.

The IFSP therefore takes a two-pronged approach: while community projects provide assets which benefit the whole community (and often benefit the middle-class and elite more than the vulnerable), the project also implements poverty projects for vulnerable groups only (Bauer *et al*., 1999). This offers something to the leaders while at the same time bargaining space for specific support to the poorest or most disadvantaged. The project's strategy is to involve village leaders in the whole process and also to appeal to their social responsibility for the poor. The IFSP therefore co-operates both with existing community-based organisations, which are largely elite-dominated, and with informal action groups which involve vulnerable groups.

3. Negotiating the tasks: local contribution

Participatory project planning has a lot to do with negotiating and distributing tasks and responsibilities among the various actors involved, ie. service providers (either government or NGOs), local implementing partners (community-based organisations or informal action groups) and the donor. A basic prerequisite is a significant contribution by the target group themselves in the form of work, materials or money, as part of the deal struck between the project and its service institutions. This ensures that a sense of ownership develops; a precondition for the sustainability of project activities. This is by no means a new idea within development co-operation, but in the context of catastrophes and crises it needs to be constantly re-emphasised. In Trincomalee, many

aid agencies and local organisations totally refuse any contribution from the population, pointing to their dire social situation. Experience from the IFSP, however, has shown otherwise; the population of particularly poor and remote villages were the sooner prepared to make a contribution, since their immediate survival depended on the support and services offered (cf. Korf, 2000). These findings contradict the widespread view among the 'donors' that the population was 'too poor to contribute'. However, it demands continuous negotiation between a project and the local implementing partner over the terms of co-operation and the appropriate ways and means in which a community can best contribute to their project.

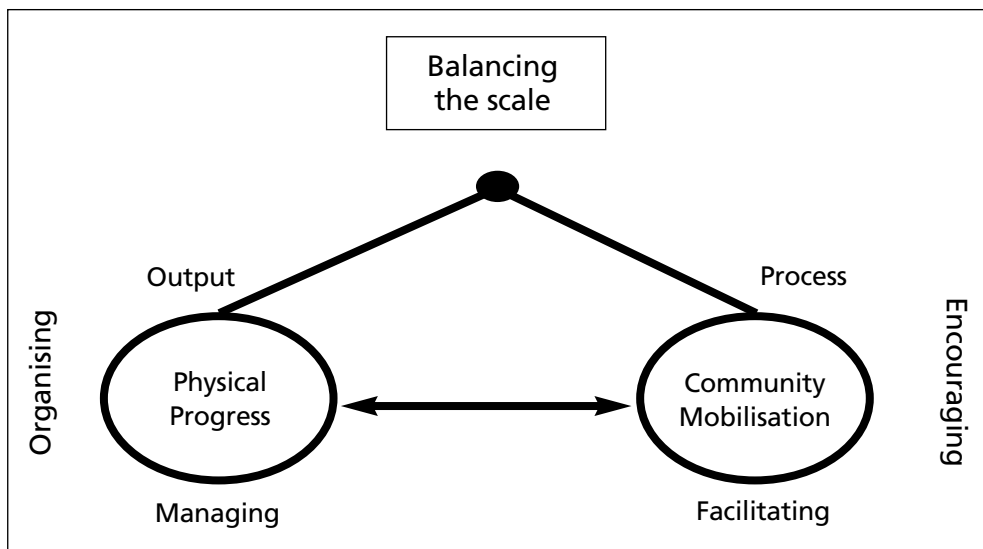## 4. Building capacities: an institutional sandwich strategy

A major challenge for international agencies in complex emergencies is to work with existing institutions and avoid the temptation of creating parallel implementation structures, thereby sidelining the existing bureaucracies. Some international NGOs in Trincomalee carry out their activities using their own personnel without involving the government authorities or local civil society institutions. Quick and visible results can be obtained in this way; the question is, just how sustainable these measures are and how much they contribute to improving livelihood opportunities of people in war zones. On the other hand, trying to work through existing government organisations and NGOs in the war zones of Sri Lanka sometimes feels like an uphill struggle. The war has seriously undermined such organisations' capacities. Measures of support often disappear into thin air, leaving even fewer of the resources for the target groups.

It is therefore essential to follow a two-pronged strategy, in which the partner institutions' functions as service providers are strengthened. This is complemented by strengthening the local population's capacity to draw down the services and to undertake some measures without outside help. International agencies should seek to support (re-)establishing institutional arrangements at the various levels, for negotiating the conditions for services and collective action. However, it is nearly impossible to establish long-lasting local institutions in deeply insecure situations such as civil war. In such cases, more medium-term and informal solutions of collective action and organisation might be more appropriate depending on the local circumstances. The IFSP, for example, works with both established community-based organisations and with informal action groups formed for the specific project activity, which may or may not dissolve afterwards.

5. Sharing knowledge, co-ordinating action

In emergencies, donors as much as local NGOs tend to 'fence' or demarcate their areas of intervention, whether in geographical or sectoral terms. This leads to conflicting approaches on the ground. People might face different agencies demanding profoundly different terms of co-operation. When new organisations such as the IFSP appear on the scene and insist that local people contribute, this raises many difficulties with a population accustomed to the handout strategies of relief organisations. In those areas served by several different organisations, the population will simply look for the best 'seller' on the agency 'market'. In such instances development agencies should be wary of

Figure 2: Balancing Output and Process

Balancing
the scale

Output

Process

Organising

Encouraging

Physical
Progress

Community
Mobilisation

Managing

Facilitating

watering down their conditions and relinquishing the need for local people's contribution. Strong donor co-ordination at the various levels (national, regional, local) is therefore a key for long-lasting, sustainable interventions. Unhappily, such donor co-ordination rarely occurs.

6. Balancing process and output

In emergencies, it is essential to strike an appropriate balance between output and process in participatory development. To launch into a long mobilisation process without simultaneously bringing about concrete improvements will cause impatience and lead to little buy-in by the target population. Since the future is uncertain people are generally wary of making long-term investments. This is true of both physical and social capital.

Participation should thus have a purpose. It must lead to action and tangible results on the ground which improve the living conditions of the population. The overall aim is to find an appropriate balance between physical project progress and community mobilisation, ie. between output and process (Figure 2). In emergencies, this balance often tends to lean towards physical outputs which an agency can subsequently present to donors and evaluators. Academic scholars, on the other hand, often stress the importance of empowerment and learning processes and forget that at the end of the day people also want to see some benefit from all the talking.

7. Multiple Tasks: Availability, Access and Utilisation

The complexity of crisis situations and the multiple dimensions of food insecurity call for a multi-sectoral approach which addresses the five dimensions of rehabilitation and development outlined above. The concept of food and nutrition security also outlined

earlier points to how different interventions should be interlinked. Infrastructure rehabilitation is essential to revive the local community, agricultural production and markets (availability of food). At the same time, it is important to improve employment opportunities for vulnerable groups so that they can purchase food (access to food). While most donors largely focus on self-employment, which rarely leads to long-term business success, it is equally important, though difficult, to support small- and medium-scale entrepreneurs to invest and thus create jobs. Complementing such measures, nutrition also has much to do with habits and behaviour, and substantial traditional knowledge might have been lost in the virulent social disruptions. Communities might have to relearn aspects of child care, hygiene and nutrition (utilisation of food). The IFSP in Trincomalee supports various partner institutions to provide essential services in all three pillars of food and nutrition security.

Conclusions

In crisis zones where politically motivated acts of violence continue, aid measures must avoid eroding the foundations of subsequent development activities. Yet the widespread handout mentality of many humanitarian organisations is hastening this erosion.

We believe, and our findings support the hypothesis, that by involving local people in the project cycle from the outset, the population will regain a sense of self-confidence and self-responsibility, since participating in their own development impetus gives them dignity and treats them as citizens whose needs and competencies are recognised. The very process of involving people in all the stages of a project cycle (from the analysis, planning and implementation, through to monitoring and evaluation), is thus itself the first step towards reconstruction and recovery. Social capital, local decision making and leadership structures are revived or created anew in the process. But participation cannot be the only objective; the planning process must also produce credible concrete results, which significantly increase people's chances of survival.

Our experience from Sri Lanka confirms that target group participation (and community mobilisation) are as important in complex emergencies as under more peaceful and stable conditions. Agencies involved in emergency aid should thus be pressed to justify themselves if they do not take such an approach.

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