

“Are you fatalist, pessimist or existentialist ?”
“Actually I am pharmacist” Toto’

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CONTENTS

Acronyms

Summary

Introduction

Definition of Decentralised Co-operation

1 Background

1.1 Society commitment

1.2 Development and social exclusion

2 General Framework of DC

2.1 Different views about DC

3 The Experience of DC in Former Yugoslavia

3.1 Aspects of the war in former Yugoslavia

3.2 Answer of the international community

3.3 DC in Former Yugoslavia

4 WHO Involvement with DC in BiH

4.1 DC projects

4.1.1 Atlas

4.1.2 Mental health, elderly and vulnerable groups

4.2 WHO's Experience with DC

4.2.1 Main characteristics

4.2.2 Main limits and constraints

4.2.3 Role of WHO

4.3 Analysis of the mechanisms for strengthening development and promoting peace

4.3.1 General outcomes (cultural changes, strengthening of civil society, promoting development and changing health system)

4.3.2 Mechanisms for peace and development (creating spheres of common interests, understanding different experiences, promoting values against war philosophy, promoting an articulated society)

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

References

Annexes

Annex 1	Local Human Development Programme
Annex 2	General information about former Yugoslavia
Annex 3	<i>Hedip</i> : Example of an exchange in DC
Annex 4	Hospital Twinning Project
Annex 5	PRINT project
Annex 6	Mental health contract for focal points
Annex 7	Partnership agreement among Venice, Sarajevo and WHO
Annex 8	Partnership agreement among Pesaro/Marche Region, Doboj/Tesanj and WHO
Annex 9	Resources of DC
Annex 10	Initiatives of the DC committee from Italy
Annex 11	Features of conflict
Annex 12	<i>Kaspar Hauser</i> , a magazine for Bosnia and Herzegovina
Annex 13	Functions of the central and local governments in DC

Acronyms

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
DC	Decentralised Co-operation
DHA/IDNDR	Department for Humanitarian Affairs / International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction
DfID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
Hedip	Health and Development for Displaced Population
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LHDP	Local Human Development Programs
MH	Mental Health, Elderly and Vulnerable groups
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRINT	Urgent Integrated Interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in favour of the populations hit by the consequences of war and for the repatriation and reinsertion of refugees and displaced persons
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WHO	World Health Organization
WHO EURO PAR	World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, Partnerships in Health and Emergency Assistance

Summary

In complex emergencies, especially in developed countries in which democracy is weakened by nationalism, discrimination, violence and war, the traditional strategies of the international co-operation should be readjusted. Capacity building in such a context does not simply mean improving the technical skills but also promoting the ideas of peace, living together, human rights and integration of vulnerable groups. In one word: democracy.

International agencies, particularly inter-governmental organisations such as the UN and EU, are limited in their ability to promote democratic process and strengthen civil society at the appropriate levels. These limitations are financial, structural, legal, and operational. In countries where democracy is fledgling or superficial, Decentralised Co-operation is an innovative tool for community empowerment. It can break isolation and promote bottom-up initiatives. It can create a “culture of exchange” which enhances well-being at both ends of the local partnership and its mechanisms and resources can be much more sustainable and important in the long-term than those that have been channelled through the governments.

WHO has been engaged in Decentralised Co-operation activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina through *Atlas* and *Mental health, elderly and vulnerable groups* projects in a co-ordination and technical assistance role since 1997. Twenty-nine (29) Italian local committees representing 164 municipalities, 10 provincial administrations, 7 regions and 120 NGOs, associations and other civil society groups have been participating in the DC activities. Goods, services, infrastructures, capacity building and new human relations have resulted from this experience in 22 Bosnian towns.

By linking the health and social sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina with European networks, Decentralised Co-operation has enabled the health professionals of Bosnia and Herzegovina to have crucial access to knowledge and information. It has lifted the attention of the population beyond the limited and often negative sphere of internal issues. It has encouraged people to take control of their own problems, thus helping to break the authoritarian grip that has manipulated and polarised the population. Finally, Decentralised Co-operation has generated development that does not rely heavily upon external funding.

Decentralised Co-operation, with WHO co-ordination and support and taking advantage from the synergetic efforts of different partners, has consolidated the ideas of peace, living together, integration of vulnerable groups and sustainable development in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A new tool has been positively implemented in a conflict situation.

This experience should be extended to other similar areas.

Introduction

The role of humanitarian aid is evolving in accordance with the complexities of the present world. This requires new views, approaches, methodologies and tools. During the last years WHO (Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action, WHO Headquarters and Partnerships in Health and Emergency Assistance, WHO/EURO) has undertaken several activities in this direction through:

- reconciliation efforts with *Health as a Bridge for Peace* and *Peace Through Health* programs and different activities within the frame of post-conflict resolutions;
- general focus on sustainable development starting from the emergency phase;
- promotion of civil society.

As a part of these efforts, the experience of DC has been particularly productive in BiH. Its activities started at the beginning of 1997 and are still on going. The case study presented below aims at framing DC of WHO in BiH in a wider context. Some background information is provided and different points of view are analysed in order to better understand the basic principles of DC as a new tool for humanitarian aid and international co-operation. The case study describes characteristics of DC and analyses its effectiveness to promote development and peace, trying to learn lessons for future commitments.

Definition of Decentralised Co-operation (*)

DC refers to systematic co-operation links between local communities in donor countries and local communities in countries that need support. The objective of these links is to create and/or consolidate long-term cultural, technical and economic partnerships between local communities as a tool to promote human development and peace.

In this context, "local communities" refers to a decentralised politico-administrative level of a country, e.g. a municipality, or groups of towns, which answers to a local administrative body such as a province, county or department. They include the political administration (mayor, city councillors, etc) and the population. For the purposes of DC, the local community is represented by a committee or working group which includes the local authorities, representatives of public institutions (e.g. health services) and organised civil society groups such as associations, NGOs, professional bodies, trade unions, the commercial sector, etc. The organised local community is thus the protagonist of DC initiatives, mobilising resources, culture, history and all the potential of its territory.

DC applies a bottom up approach through an institutional, social and grass roots partnership between institutions and civil societies of two or more entities. Working on common interests and needs rather than the opinions of the different parties in conflict, DC plays an essential role in promoting conflict resolution and peace building.

In addition DC creates a "culture of exchange", enables people to have access to knowledge and information, encourages people to take control of their own problems, helps to break the authoritarian grip that manipulates and polarises the population, and generates development which does not rely heavily upon external funding

DC can better use its potential when it is an integral part of a multilateral programme with a specific role of UN agencies such as co-ordination of activities and technical assistance ensuring an orientation in line with the national policies, reform trend and international standards.

We do not consider DC (according to our experience) to be:

- *activities of local governments (municipalities, provinces, etc.) using top down methods similarly to the traditional centralised co-operation;*
- *horizontal initiatives which link enterprises or institutions of different countries without a human development approach;*
- *activities of international NGOs performing as specialised agencies of co-operation without relationships with the civil society of their countries;*
- *activities inspired by volunteerism, solidarity and goodwill but which are isolated, fragmented, not focused on the quality of the interventions, not linked with public institutions and its policies, and/or not co-ordinated.*

(*) Understanding the need to be flexible for such a complex issue as DC, we think it is useful to give a general definition of DC according to our experience, which does not pretend anyway to be comprehensive of other ones or to detract from their legitimacy.