BUILDING REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CAPACITIES FOR LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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I. INTRODUCTION

During this last decade of the century, we have witnessed an increasing amount of civil strife and ethnic conflict. The short-lived euphoria and visions of a kinder and gentler world that briefly emerged at the end of the cold war rapidly made way for a pattern of institutional disintegration in many areas of the world. As the contestants of the cold war lost interest in, and control over, their former client states, many of these dissolved into quagmires of conflict.
At the same time, donor countries began to question the traditional post-colonial model of development cooperation, delivered mainly through technical assistance programs, and started to support a new paradigm, driven by globalization and privatization Similarly, as the demands on the international community,s humanitarian solidarity increased, faith in its effectiveness was sorely tested. As a result, by now, the purchasing power of Official Development Assistance (ODA) has shrunk to nearly half of the volume it had reached at the end of the eighties. Much of what remains goes to the multi-lateral financial institutions, and a broad array of development and relief organizations, international and national, governmental and non-governmental, has to scramble for the leftovers Additional funding for humanitarian assistance during the crises of the 1990s often had to be found by reducing the resources for development. Moreover, as donor fatigue has set in, charitable giving in many countries has suffered similar setbacks as ODA.

All this has led to intense competition for these dwindling resources among bilateral and multilateral organizations, among proponents of relief and of development, and among international and national NGOs. At the same time, this scarcity of funds has contributed to a new culture of efficiency and accountability in those agencies which have seen this competition as a challenge, and which have set out with renewed energy and commitment to achieve their mandates

This lack of resources has also led donors and aid agencies alike to re-examine some of the basic assumptions under which they have worked. As the number of humanitarian emergencies due to armed conflict has increased, and as the scope and duration of these crises has expanded, the challenges posed to the international community have become ever more complex. Issues of peace-building, humanitarian relief and reconstruction are inexorably entwined. Thus, the efficient deployment of international humanitarian assistance in emergencies demands more than merely effecting improvements to the international aid system and better coordination of the humanitarian and political aspects of relief operations Innovative approaches in the international response to crises are called for, in order to ensure that aid not only provides temporary relief, but becomes the tool that makes peace and development possible.

In this paper, we examine one such potential innovation: capacity building through the systematic introduction of national and regional professional staff into the leadership and management of humanitarian assistance efforts mounted in response to complex crises As we see regional institutions in the South taking on an increasing role in the management of political crises, and as donor nations increasingly seek burden sharing as a prerequisite for their assistance, it would seem that this expanding level of involvement at the political level should lead to a corresponding operational role. At the same time, even within the existing institutional arrangements for aid, there are many compelling arguments to be made that there should be ample room for national and regional leadership.

Current practice thus far in most emergency relief operations dealing with the results of conflict has been to utilize the services of international personnel (in the main, from developed countries) to take on professional posts; nationals and people from the region are often cast in a supporting role as interpreters, drivers, cooks and cleaners. While the rationale for such arrangements has usually been cast in terms of impartiality and reliability, this rationale itself deserves a further look. In fact, over the last few years, a series of studies and evaluations undertaken by academics as well as practitioners for bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as international non-governmental organizations has pointed to growing recognition that an endogenous response to humanitarian crises is likely to produce more sustainable and, hence, satisfactory solutions

How credible is this point of view? What is the institutional capacity of the South to support such a shift? Are the available human resources adequate? What are the respective strengths and weaknesses of national, regional and international staff? What competencies and skills would make national and regional staff most attractive to a broad range of potential employers? What is the scope and content of some of the major existing programs to prepare and train staff for leadership in complex humanitarian crises? Are these programs accessible to professionals from the South? What is the impact on team cohesion of the various „local‰ and „international‰ remuneration models currently in use?

These are some of the questions that we explore in this paper. To the extent that we have found credible answers, we have made recommendations how the lessons learned can be introduced into the practice of humanitarian aid delivery And to allow for the testing of their validity, we propose a modest pilot project where these recommendations can be put into practice.

II. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The Center on International Cooperation (CIC) was established in 1996 at New York University as an independent institute It promotes policy research and international consultations on multilateral responses to transnational problems, with a view to producing practical policy recommendations and building the public understanding needed to implement and sustain essential multilateral activities.

As one of its current projects, the Center is examining issues of management, coordination and financing in the humanitarian assistance system Seeking to improve the quality of aid provided to recipient populations, the project is exploring three interrelated areas of need: alternative funding scenarios for ensuring readiness among the front-line agencies; the potential for and

appropriateness of locating responsibility for response in the regions in which crises occur; and the strengthening of local and regional capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies.
In September 1997, the Center convened a meeting on „Resources for Humanitarian Assistance‰, which produced a set of recommendations on issues of management, coordination, and financing. As a follow-up to that meeting, the Center is seeking to develop strategies to ensure that the core competencies of humanitarian provider agencies are maintained, and that the resources are available for an effective response to humanitarian crises.
One strong recommendation emerging from the September meeting was for the strengthening and utilization of national and regional capacities in developing countries, in order to build a cadre or reserve of people who could respond at short notice to humanitarian emergencies. This paper was prepared so that the issues raised implicitly by this recommendation could be made explicit, and so that a course could be set for a pilot project to ascertain the feasibility of the recommended approach. The terms of reference for this study can be found at annex I.
The authors of this paper come from Africa, Asia, and Europe. They all have worked extensively on development issues, and three of them have been directly involved in the management of humanitarian responses to crises caused by conflict. They have examined a broad sampling of the literature that could be found on the topic, trawled the Internet for information, and conducted over ninety interviews with high-ranking officials as well as with the foot soldiers of humanitarian organizations (intergovernmental, non-governmental, bilateral, regional and multi-lateral), with diplomats, government officials, and, perhaps most importantly, with people who have been on the receiving end of the international community,s humanitarian efforts. They are listed at annex II. In September 1998, a draft of the report was sent to everyone who was interviewed, and all comments received were incorporated in the final text.
This paper is not comprehensive, definitive, or exhaustive. As to capacity building, it focuses mainly on Africa, and the number of interviews conducted on the actual site of humanitarian operations is quite limited. It speaks mainly of North-South issues, although many of its findings and recommendations are also applicable to the West-East axis. Only a restricted number of donor countries were consulted. Similarly, a choice had to be made among the plethora of organizations actually delivering humanitarian assistance. But we believe that the views of a broad range of people are reflected whose contributions, in sum, represent and reflect the cumulative wisdom and experience that can only be acquired by first-hand observation of the complexities which arise when some people try to mitigate the impact of others, follies.
These views are not always uniform ˆ on the contrary. But together they allow us to construct a valid picture of the key issues, and search for ways to address them. We have rarely cited individual sources, but rather tried to identify common patterns or threads: what are the relevant facts, trends, developments, areas of consensus and issues where philosophies clash? From this material, in turn, we have developed recommendations and concrete proposals for action.

III. NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STAFF: DIFFERENT STRENGTHS, DIFFERENT ROLES

There is overwhelming support, in principle, for the idea that national professionals and professional staff from the region should play a major role in the design and delivery of humanitarian aid in times of conflict and crisis. The level of this support is as emphatic as that for motherhood and apple pie. However, when it comes to the question whether this principle is applicable to one,s own organization, positions vary substantively, and when it comes to actual practice, two distinct schools emerge: proponents and opponents.
Some of those who expressed reservations focused on the effectiveness of nationals ˆ and staff from the region - in general; others specifically questioned their impartiality in times of conflict. Among the proponents, many stressed the individual contribution nationals could make, while others emphasized their capacity-building role. It might be helpful at this stage to review these various positions in some more detail, and to compare them to the arguments presented supporting or questioning the role of international, expatriate staff.

Perceived disadvantages of national or regional staff - and some counter-arguments

Very few, if any, agencies will profess to policies that limit the recruitment of national (and regional) professional staff. Yet, in interviews with senior managers, many perceived

disadvantages are mentioned. Often cited is the alleged lack of management skills of nationals, especially when it comes handling financial resources. Many aid organizations have very complex financial planning and reporting procedures, which are often linked to the specific requirements of various donors. Also mentioned frequently is the concern that national as well as regional staff lack analytical skills, have not been exposed to different environments, and have a lower standard of education.

In addition, several references were made to potential corruption and theft. And, most seriously of all, questions were raised about the ability of nationals to remain impartial in a situation where they would by necessity be identified with one of the conflicting parties. This case has been made most cogently by Joanna Macrae, who has pointed out that aid organizations, whether they like it or not, make an essentially political decision when they involve national partners in their work at times of conflict. Their choice of institutional or individual collaborators represents a choice for or against one or more of the parties involved in the conflict, and will have consequences that must be considered carefully. One large agency which supplies physicians and other trained medical staff expressed a reluctance to use nationals and staff from the region in professional functions because they had faced serious problems of insensitivity and even prejudice of these staff in dealing with refugees and victims of war. Moreover, there was no shortage of qualified medical staff from the North. This testimony, however, was not mirrored by other agencies.

Another de facto, though not intentional, opponent of national capacity building in complex emergencies is the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), which was set up as a separate unit of the European Commission (1992) to coordinate the humanitarian policy of the European Union and its member states. ECHO has no policy directives that would give it an incentive to stimulate the use of nationals in crises brought about by armed conflict. Its own operational policies lack flexibility, as they restrict its partnerships to contracts with a limited number of European NGOs. These normally work with their own compatriots. If, however, any European NGOs sub-contract work to national NGOs, ECHO will not raise objections, provided all partners adhere to its extremely complicated financial reporting requirements ˆ a condition that is difficult to comply with for nationals of the South who have no access to the specialized training this requires.

Another concern that came up in discussions (but not supported by interlocutors from the South) was that national professional staff hired by the humanitarian agencies would leave critical posts unfilled in their own governments and civil society institutions, thus contributing to brain drain.

Do these perceived drawbacks by themselves add up to a convincing argument that one should shy away from the employment of nationals in key positions when planning and delivering humanitarian assistance in complex crises? In our discussions with managers of organizations that rely heavily on nationals to provide assistance, we have come across many valid counter-arguments.

Training staff, be they nationals or expatriates, in the intricacies of the organizations' managerial and financial procedures certainly takes time and effort. The real problem is the lack of resources for training that plagues so many humanitarian agencies. Here the insistence of many donors on „program delivery‰ and „low overheads‰ shows its undesirable side effects: inadequate focus on training and preparation. This problem is compounded by the shortage of up-front funding, allowing humanitarian organizations to build and retain a stable cadre of well-prepared staff. Obviously, any investment in the training of nationals seems to have a lesser long-term value than an investment in mobile international staff. But in fact, as the duration of specific missions has become much longer than in the past, and as the borders between development aid, peace-building and relief begin to dissolve, organizations are often on site for the long haul. The turnover, moreover, among expatriate staff is also considerable.

The belief that national staff suffer from a lack of education belongs to a previous era. There are very few countries nowadays, even among those affected by conflict and disintegration, that do not have a broad range of professionals available for employment. Those organizations that actively seek out competent national staff have no problem finding them. This does, however, require effective and up-to-date recruitment networks, and there again, lack of resources often hampers organizations, ability to move beyond the narrow circuits of their personal and informal contacts. We will argue later on in this paper that there is much to be said for informal networks, and that even the best rosters often remain underutilized. Fact is, however, that many organizations do not even have no rosters, or only outdated and limited ones, and feel donor pressure to keep their recruitment cost at an absolute minimum. As for corruption: while there

are certainly many documented incidents of pilferage or kick-backs that can be attributed to national staff in humanitarian missions, it is important to place such stories in context. As one national employee of a large international aid organization phrased it: „When you see the large amounts of waste, the gasoline and cars used for private purposes, the poorly guarded food and supplies, the international staff,s lack of concern for their organization,s assets, it becomes very tempting to redirect some of this to immediately deserving causes!" There is a clear correlation between the quality of an organization,s management and oversight, the values and behavior of the international staff, and the loyalty and commitment of their national (and regional) colleagues.
The concern that the hiring of nationals might lead to brain drain was dismissed by several discussants from the South with the observation that more often, there are far more well qualified people on the labor market than the Government or civil society institutions can absorb, given their budgetary constraints. Also, they argued, „a brain trained is a brain gained" and the capacity-building and sustainable impact of national involvement contributes directly to the country,s or region,s long-term development.
A more fundamental concern is that national and regional staff may find it hard to be impartial, and may not be seen as politically neutral. Mary Anderson, in her groundbreaking study Do No Harm, makes a very strong case, based on lessons learned from the experience of many agencies and individuals, that there is another side to this argument. She takes the position that there are people in every conflict who do not side with the partisan extremes of their political, ethnic, or religious group, but who seek a path to peace: „In the delivery of their programmes of assistance, aid agencies can provide a place where people can act in Œnon-war, ways or where they can engage with people on Œother sides, of the war in joint endeavours." This, in turn, can lead to contemplation of a shared future. By providing space for people who want to get involved in „non-war" activities, agencies can contribute to a process of reconciliation and inclusion.
Moreover, as Antonio Donini points out in his case study of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, not all of the relief agencies active in an area of conflict work on all sides of the battles simultaneously. While large international organizations such as ICRC and the various UN agencies normally try work across factional divides, the smaller agencies often choose one specific area, and thus should find it easier to involve national staff in their relief efforts.
While the reluctance of many players to use nationals and staff from the affected regions to participate in the planning and direction of relief operations in war-torn areas can be rationalized, it can not be defended.

The case for the employment of national and regional staff

As a growing number of organizations and agencies is turning to national and regional staff to reinforce their presence in the countries where they serve, there is also a growing body of testimony supporting the effectiveness of this approach. Those who advocate their inclusion in the design and execution of relief efforts do so on the basis of three key elements: cost, effectiveness, and capacity building.
As for cost, it is clearly to the advantage of agencies to use nationals, and even staff from the region, given the wide gap between „international‰ and „national‰ remuneration. In a separate chapter, we will address the potential drawbacks of a situation where people work side by side, doing work of comparable worth, while receiving dramatically disparate levels of compensation. But in terms of the organizations, bottom line, the positive value of using national human resources, both men and women, is beyond dispute.
In terms of effectiveness, there are numerous considerations that came up in our interviews:

- Language skills
- Familiarity with local environment
- Awareness of cultural, geographic, historical, tribal, social and political factors
- In-depth knowledge of key issues related to conflict
- Ability to mobilize local people who want to help
- Ability to relate with, and gain cooperation from, the local population
- Ability to direct resources effectively
- Skills in working with local media, in local vernacular
- Capacity to identify and motivate community leaders willing to support „non-war‰ efforts

- Commitment to alleviate suffering of their own people
- Ability to assess and circumvent security risks
- Less prone to alcohol dependency and other symptoms of stress due to hostile environment and separation from loved ones
- Negotiating and facilitating skills adapted to local culture

One firm believer in the importance of these factors is the Dutch NGO Novib. It takes the position, based on many years of experience, that it will exclusively use nationals in its relief operations. „It,s their problem, it,s their solution.‰ In Afghanistan and Somalia, for example, Novib worked on its humanitarian programs using national professionals, while at the same time, and in the same place, Medecins Sans Frontieres was doing similar work with only international staff. Novib felt that, as a result of its approach, its work was not only sustainable, but also contributed to capacity building.

Capacity building through nationals

In addition to the individual attributes that nationals can bring to a relief operation, there are advantages of their participation that are linked to their communities, efforts to rebuild their lives. Rarely, if ever, do relief operations take place in isolation. They usually occur in the context of efforts to make peace, and to create an environment where development can resume. Rarely, if ever, is the so-called „continuum‰ from relief to development a linear process, where one finds a neat and logical sequence of events.

This is recognized by many aid agencies. The 1994 „Code of Conduct‰ developed by the International Red Cross and Crescent Movement, together with a group of NGO,s working in disaster relief, specifically states: „We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capabilities.‰ This applies equally to natural and war-driven disasters, and addresses both planning and implementation.

Many of the practitioners and diplomats from the South whom we interviewed, however, took the view that there was a lot of rhetoric when it came to capacity building among the agencies and international NGOs. Changing that rhetoric into reality, they said, was a major concern. Yet, a renewed emphasis on capacity building would provide opportunities to explore and formulate new methods and alternative strategies for the whole spectrum of humanitarian assistance, rehabilitation, and development.

The idea that peace-making, relief and development are three separate activities is largely derived from the budgetary process in the donor capitals and in the large international organizations. The experience on the ground often belies these distinctions. Mounting a relief operation without an exit strategy is a fairly hopeless enterprise, and if the exit strategy is peace and development, nationals must play a key role. 9

Thus, the integration of national staff in the design and delivery of humanitarian assistance already paves the way for a hand-over period where these national leaders and managers can transform these external efforts into a sustainable and internalized process, and where the fragile institutional structures and coping mechanisms built up during the relief phase can be reinforced to provide the foundations of a new civil society.

The complementary value of international staff

No one we have spoken with has argued that international, expatriate staff should be banned from international relief operations. On the contrary. While drawbacks were mentioned such as their relatively high cost, lack of local language skills, occasional cultural insensitivity or emotional problems, inadequate understanding of local coping mechanisms, inadequate contributions to sustainability, and short-term commitment, there were also many references to their indubitable strengths. **What emerged from our discussions was a sense that national and international staff are complementary, that each group brings skills and qualities to the process that are absolutely indispensable for success.**

Some of the specific attributes that distinguish international staff:

- Ability to apply lessons learned in a range of different operations
- High levels of professional competence
- Independence to act as advocate on human rights issues

- Ability to intervene in conflicts from a position seen as „neutral"
- Ability to resist corruption; reliability in handling resources
- Experience in planning and programming
- Familiar with agencies, policies and procedures
- Ability to see problems in broader context
- No kinship or political ties to any of the local power groups
- Familiarity with their organizations „management culture"
- Ability to obtain donor support from their own constituencies
- Advocacy within their own communities upon return

Clearly, what is needed, then, is a judicious mix of national, regional and international staff that matches the specific nature of the humanitarian crisis to which a response is being mounted.
That, however, is more easily said than done. What is the capacity of institutions in the South (and East) to train and mobilize the necessary human and financial resources? What is the corresponding potential „market‰ of professional managerial and technical employment opportunities for national and regional staff? How can supply and demand be matched? What are the options, what are the obstacles?

IV. NATIONAL STAFF IN DEMAND: EMERGING MARKETS

If indeed a strong case can be made for an increased involvement of national and regional staff in managing humanitarian aid operations, new questions arise. Is there sufficient demand? Who will employ them? What is the size of this „labor market?"

What is the scope of the employment opportunities?

It is extremely difficult to estimate how many people are involved at any given time in humanitarian assistance activities, and how many of them can be described as „professionals‰, doing work that requires a level of skills and experience normally associated with tertiary education. It is equally difficult to estimate the turnover in these functions, and thus to have an impression of the range of possible job openings. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the distinctions between peacekeeping, humanitarian work and development work are fluid, and that the number of people employed varies widely from year to year as crises erupt or relative stability returns. The number of internationally recruited staff in the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, for example, dropped from 13,000 to 2,000 within a three year period, from 1995 tob1998.
The fact that there is quite a gap between organizations that combat the effect of natural and man-made disasters (such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) and organizations that deal with complex crises caused by armed conflict (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross) further muddles the picture. Staffing figures of relief agencies, furthermore, do not include the number of people who work under sub-contracts. If, for example, an international agency has hired a local NGO to take on some relief functions, this will show up in the budget and in the accounts, but not in the personnel records.
With all these caveats, there is one source of information that appears reliable and up to date: Francesca Taylor,s study on relief personnel, cited earlier, which contains the results of a survey conducted in 1997 among 195 organizations in Europe and the U.S. She comes to the conclusion that „a minimum of about 17,000 people were employed in emergency relief in 1996." Of these, roughly half were recruited internationally. Taylor does not indicate what percentage of the locally recruited staff held other than support functions, but from our interviews, it appears to be a relatively low number. As to the staff working under sub-contracts, one organization, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), indicated that it spends approximately 10% of its annual budget (over $80 million in 1997) on „umbrella contracts‰ with NGOs. UNHCR, to cite another example, has an operational partnership with some 500 NGOs through project agreements. Many of these are based in the South. This is illustrative of a growing trend to work through networks of sub-contracted implementing agencies.
Statistics on turnover are more difficult to come by. Only half of the agencies sampled by Taylor had full-time salaried staff; most used short-term contracts, often for no more than three months at a time. Mobility, according to the people whom we interviewed, is generally high. People burn out. UNHCR, for example, which has 900 posts in the field and 400 in Geneva, rotates some

300 to 400 of its staff every year in order to maintain a balance between hardship and comfort. People move from agency to agency, and from crisis to crisis. Many agencies make efforts to retain their best people, but few have the resources to bridge their staff from one assignment to the next. Often, training is used as a way to fill gaps in employment. More frequently, agencies do not invest in training because their high turnover renders the cost too high. Overall, though, the need is mainly for people who are available at short notice, who come with considerable professional skills, who do not need much training, and who have a place to go at the end of their assignment. That is why some organizations, such as UNHCR and the World Food Programme, have extensive „stand-by" arrangements with a number of donor countries who supply well-prepared staff on demand.
In order to arrive at some order of magnitude, we are assuming (conservatively) that there is a 25% annual turnover rate, and that most of the posts staffed internationally, i.e. some 8,000, are professional. **This would then lead to the conclusion that there are some 2,000 professional positions annually in relief work that need to be filled. If one were to set a modest initial target for nationals and regional staff to fill 25% of these substantive functions, we would come to a range of some 500 openings a year worldwide.** Clearly, this projection is only indicative, but it does allow us to assume that we are talking about hundreds, not thousands, of openings in relief work annually that could be staffed by nationals. It is evident, moreover, from the available information about turnover patterns, that these assignments normally would be of relatively short duration (three months to a year), reflecting the staffing patterns in the field.

Who will employ national and regional staff? Existing organizations

If there were a sufficient supply of qualified candidates within the humanitarian organizations, field of view, would these employers be interested? In Taylor,s survey, most organizations stress the shortage of experienced personnel with appropriate language skills and suitable technical skills who are available at short notice. Several respondents (18%) specifically singled out the recruitment of staff from the South as a key priority for future operations.
While many major relief organizations seem reluctant to bring in nationals, there are others, such as the International Rescue Committee (200 expatriates, many from the south, and 3,000 local staff, including many refugees), Life and Peace, the Asia Foundation, USAID, DANIDA, NORAD, SIDA, the World Food Programme, Australian Aid, CARE, World Vision, and Norwegian People,s Aid (to name just a few), that make every effort to do so to the extent possible, as a matter of policy. The International Organization for Migration, to give another example, has 1200 staff in the field, with 70 offices around the world: only 10% of its field staff are expatriates. At least 400 of its local field staff are doing fully professional work.
All of the United Nations system organizations, agencies, programs and funds, by their very nature, employ large numbers of nationals from developing countries among their professional and managerial staff. In addition, many of them use „national professional officers‰ in their program countries, who are not subject to international reassignment. These national officers work on development issues as well as relief operations, and many of them in due course move into the international category. The same goes for the United Nations Volunteers, a low-cost source of competent expertise that is tapped for relief and development activities alike.
Sub-contracting is also widely used by the UN organizations. The World Food Programme, which has 117 national officers in its field network, employs over 1700 nationals yearly on so-called „special service agreements‰, a kind of consultancy contracts, normally of short duration. These people are considered a valuable resource: over 500 nationals attended WFP training courses in 1996 alone.
Clearly, there are a large number of organizations nowadays that welcome national staff, and it appears from our interviews, as well as from Taylor,s survey, that the interest in achieving diversity, and thus enhancing effectiveness, is rapidly expanding in the world of complex emergencies relief work.

Who else will employ them? Emerging institutions

While we have signaled a gradually increasing demand for national and regional staff among the existing relief agencies, this does not fully meet the need for a truly endogenous response capacity to the humanitarian crises caused by armed conflict. Such a response will have to come from national and regional institutions in the South (and the East). What is the likelihood that we will see a gradual devolution of responsibilities from the North to the South in fielding the front-line response to humanitarian crises caused by arms?

In fact, the capacity to provide a response is gradually emerging. In order to assess its true scope, one has to look beyond the immediate confines of the humanitarian aid machinery specifically geared to deal with the effects of armed conflict, and focus on the broader range of relief organizations and capabilities that have come up in recent years to address natural and man-made disasters. This will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter, where we examine the availability of suitable recruitment sources.

In addition, moreover, to the purely humanitarian institutions in the South that already now competently provide disaster relief, one has to be aware of the growing range of political institutions at the regional level in the South which have disaster relief as one among their many mandates, or which may add this field to their future areas of concern.

Does the political will exist in the South to take on more of the humanitarian burdens caused by armed conflict? To examine this question for at least one part of the world, we conducted a series of discussions with diplomats from Africa, as well as officials of intergovernmental and international organizations. Overall, the answers we received were positive and moderately optimistic. We would hope that what holds true for Africa is valid globally, and that the trend for regional organizations to share some of the responsibilities traditionally shouldered by the international organizations and the donor community is going to continue.

In Africa, particularly, old institutions are gaining in influence and scope, while new institutions are emerging in a process closely linked to the democratization and commercial integration that characterizes large parts of the continent. In June 1993, in a landmark decision, the Assembly of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) established a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, and it designated its Central Organ, a committee of member states, to take charge of the process. The OAU,s Assembly recognized that internal conflicts generated massive flows of refugees, spurred crime, encouraged the proliferation of arms, destroyed the investment credibility of the region and eventually affected the economic viability of the continent. A Commission on Refugees makes recommendations to the council of ministers, supported by a Bureau for Refugees of the OAU Secretariat. In addition, t,he OAU Coordinating Committee on Assistance to Refugees in Africa provides institutional linkages between the OAU bodies and other organizations which provide support to refugees in Africa. As African countries therefore recognized that internal wars tended to have external consequences, they concluded that collective action was now both appropriate and necessary. In general, it has become clear that Africa is prepared to assume more responsibility for peacekeeping and conflict management on its own continent. Apart from the normal operating expenditures of the Central Organ and the OAU,s Conflict Management Division (which is covered by the OAU,s regular budget), the OAU has set up a separate Peace Fund. Thus far, African countries have contributed approximately five million US$, while the donor community has matched this sum. The OAU now has its own Humanitarian Affairs Office, and while its operational capacity is still limited, it could ˆ with proper funding and training support ˆ evolve into a viable presence in the region.

Similarly, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), through ECOMOG, which has taken on peace-keeping responsibilities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the community of East and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD, uniting the Horn of Africa with Kenya, Uganda and the Sudan), and the Maghreb Union can all be expected to develop their own humanitarian response capacity over time. As to burden sharing, several discussants pointed at the contributions made by the OAU in the past: it has harbored refugees, supported liberation movements in cost-sharing arrangements with Western donors, and established voluntary funds for specific crises. With the establishment of the Peace Fund, this trend towards self-reliance can be expected to accelerate.

Illustrative is also the work of Synergies Africa. This major African NGO, with considerable political clout, has successfully mediated several crises in the region. At the end of 1995, it created an alliance of NGOs from the Great Lakes region that jointly operated a Humanitarian Unit out of Bukavu. While this particular initiative came to an abrupt halt when the war reached the Kivu province, it represented a conscious effort to provide regional leadership.

Of particular interest is the rapidly growing influence of the new Southern African Development Community (SADC), presently chaired by President Mandela, which has a defense and security component which would allow for disaster preparedness training. Indicative of SADC,s current capacity to coordinate its member states, activities in this area was the Initial Framework for

Drought Contingency Planning, which SADC developed in 1997 in cooperation with the World Food Programme.
The World Bank has recently been asked to support an initiative by the African Governors of the World Bank Group to develop more effective ways to build and utilize human and institutional capacity in Africa. This has led to a „Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa‰, with its secretariat in Harare, and focal points in most sub-Saharan countries. It aims at transforming the public sector, strengthening the private sector, improving the quality of education, and strengthening civil society. Since the initiative is still in its infancy, it is not clear whether there is room for disaster preparedness training within its program, but a discussion on the revitalization of African universities, the enhancement of regional centers of excellence, and the establishment of an African Virtual University has already started.
It appears reasonable, therefore, to conclude that one may expect quite some growth in the opportunities for involving national and regional staff from the South in future humanitarian assistance operations: there is a growing demand among existing aid organizations, and there is an increasing interest on the part of the regional and sub-regional organizations in the South to take on an expanded operational role.

V. LINKING CAPACITY AND DEMAND: A NETWORK

If, indeed, the demand exists, is there a corresponding institutional and human pool of talent in the South? To obtain a comprehensive picture, one has to look beyond the confines of relief operations in response to the impact of armed conflict, and survey the mechanisms that exist in the South to deal with natural and man-made disasters. To a large extent, these require the same mix of managerial, logistic and technical resources as operations geared to operate in the midst of armed conflict, although the political context is very different. In other words, if there is a capacity to deal with natural disasters, there should be a corresponding ability to deal with most aspects of disasters caused by armed conflict.
Within the scope of this paper, and within the limits of our broad-based but certainly not exhaustive survey, it is difficult to do justice to the rich and wide-spread array of institutions, organizations and entities in the South that are capable of mounting disaster relief operations ˆ and to the wealth of capable and motivated people who staff these organizations. But a sampling of the many that were brought to our attention may demonstrate that the capacity exists, in ample proportions.

Institutional capacities in the South: a sampler

One indicator is the strength of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which has member societies in 169 countries. Much of the Federation,s work is concerned with mobilizing world help in times of disaster, and it sends relief supplies from its strategically located emergency warehouses, calls for other member societies to send help to a stricken area, and coordinates overall relief efforts. Operationally, though, the Federation relies fully on the national capacity of its members. It runs training programs for national societies, and considers capacity building one of its main tasks. Illustrative for this type of growing response capacity is, for example, Bangladesh,s ability - through early warning systems, networks of shelters, food stockpiles, communications networks, and emergency health-care systems ˆ to mitigate the impact of the floods and typhoons that regularly devastate its low-lying areas. The loss of lives, which used to be tremendous only a decade ago, has been reduced dramatically through these integrated strategies.
Another NGO with a widespread network is the International Islamic Relief Organization, based in Saudi Arabia, with more than 100 offices abroad, covering humanitarian activities in more than 120 countries worldwide. It often acts in partnership with UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF, and it operates in disaster areas as diverse as the Commonwealth of Independent States, Tanzania, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Chechniya. A major financial contributor is the Islamic Development Bank, which earmarks interest earnings (deemed usury under Islamic law) for charitable causes through its Islamic Solidarity Fund. 19 This, in turn, is closely linked to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, an international organization with 55 members around the world.
In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), with funding support from CIDA, OFDA/USAID and the Department for International Development (DFID, formerly ODA) in the UK, has established a very sophisticated Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Program. This program focuses on the health sector, but it works very closely with other international and regional organizations, and since it was set up

twenty years ago, it has developed into a highly refined network of health professionals and institutions in the region, trained and prepared to respond to the demands for medical services caused by natural and man-made disasters. This network has links with the civil defense structures and the military in its member states; it is highly computerized, it has web sites, its partners communicate mainly by e-mail, it operates a wealth of training programs, and it is well-established throughout the region. In a region prone to earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, the PAHO program has proven its value time and again.
Similarly, USAID,s Office of Disaster Relief Assistance (ODFDA) has over time helped governments develop disaster response mechanisms, using local expertise, sharing lessons learned, and pre-positioning large stores of relief supplies near disaster prone areas. Thus, when in the 1990,s an earthquake hit the island of Flores, the Indonesian government had trained assessors, and effectively coordinated its military and civilian resources to provide relief and orchestrate the recovery process.
These few examples of effective institutions and organizations should be sufficient to dispel any lingering assumptions that the capacity in the South to provide leadership and expertise to humanitarian assistance operations might be lacking. These organizations are clearly able to draw on a pool of talented professionals to staff their programs. The question then arises: how can one tap into this same reservoir to develop an cadre of well prepared professionals from the South who can be called upon at short notice to lead humanitarian operations in their.country or region in times of armed conflict?

Developing recruitment sources: the need for institutional networks

It is essential to recall at this stage the observation made earlier in this paper that very few humanitarian aid agencies working in war zones offer anything like stable careers. While most agencies have some core functions filled by career staff, the largest part of their work, particularly away from headquarters, is either done by staff on standby arrangements, or by short-term staff, often unkindly described as „cannon fodder‰. These short-term staffers are usually young, overly idealistic, relatively inexperienced, and frequently suffer from burn-out after a few missions. The enormous fluctuations in workload of these organizations does not allow them to retain more than a skeleton staff between assignments.
The most effective organizations, in terms of rapid staffing capability, are those that have stand-by arrangements, such as the World Food Programme, Medecins Sans Frontieres, the ICRC or UNHCR. These can usually benefit from the largesse of one or more donors or institutions (such as hospitals) who keep highly qualified staff on call. Professional staff on standby normally have:

- stable jobs in their own country, so their careers are not dependent on tenure with a volatile aid agency;
- access to government-sponsored training opportunities to study best practice in humanitarian assistance, directly linked to their area of expertise;
- a continuing income in their home base while they are away on mission;
- a pre-negotiated contract, guaranteed by their own government, and adequate coverage for death and disability;
- the opportunity to accept or refuse missions in accordance with their personal schedules and priorities;
- the opportunity to gain experience and to mature over time.

One such prominent donor standby arrangement is CANADEM, whereby the government of Canada manages a resource bank of Canadians with skills in areas such as human rights, peacebuilding and democracy, to serve as a civilian standby mechanism for the UN and other international organizations.
When considering how to create conditions favorable to the employment of national and regional staff, one should take the characteristics of these stand-by arrangements into account. Many of the experts whom we interviewed, in the aid organizations as well as in the donor community, stressed continuity, expertise and stability as the key conditions for the effective staffing of aid operations.
This implies that, in the identification and development of recruitment sources in the South, one should aim at institutions rather than at individual people, and build networks rather than rosters.

Working with institutions, one can:

- identify partner institutions that value the concept of capacity-building;
- select people with specialized competencies who have a verifiable track record;
- work out secondment arrangements with these institutions;
- link the selection and assignment of candidates to the institution,s learning and development plans; and
- build an institutional training capacity in support of the partnership.

Why is a simple roster of qualified candidates, developed centrally or by humanitarian agencies separately, not adequate? Even in those organizations that have ample resources for their recruitment operations, rosters often languish. While some pre-screening takes place before people are placed on the roster, they are usually not interviewed, their references are not checked, and their work experience has not been assessed. Often, rosters are not updated frequently enough. When a vacancy comes up, program managers much prefer to consult their personal „short list", which usually consists of people whom they have used before, or who come highly recommended by trusted colleagues.
It is human nature to shy away from hiring someone you don,t know. Successful job hunters have always known that gaining access to decision makers is half the battle. If there is merit in supporting the recruitment of national and regional staff from areas of armed conflict into relief work, a situation has to be created where the potential employers and the potential employees know each other face to face, and have built trust on a basis of institutional collaboration.
This call for „rosters plus", as exemplified by the register that RedR in the U.K. maintains: candidates are thoroughly pre-screened, their references are checked, they are interviewed, their competencies are assessed, and only those considered suitable for humanitarian work are accepted. The register is regularly updated, returning staff are debriefed and evaluated, and the outcome is reflected in the register.
This also calls for networks of institutions in the North and the South, the West and the East, which have agreed to work together, and which have arranged for the exchange of staff and for the visits back and forth that cement contacts and that build confidence. These networks can be North-South, South-South, West-East or East-East - as long as they bring together potential employers and seconding organizations, much as the current North-North standby arrangements do.
These „releasing" institutions can vary in nature: government agencies, universities, NGOs, professional associations, associations of retirees and organizations in the private sector may all harbor professionals with appropriate competencies. By involving national and regional institutions in the recruitment process, the risk of brain drain is reduced, good people can be found who would not be on the open job market, and the experience gained strengthens institutions and individuals alike.
As to the private sector: many of our interlocutors stressed the importance of involving private firms, since in an era of privatization many skills have migrated from the public sector to private industry. Expertise in telecommunications, civil engineering and trauma medicine, for example, which even a decade ago could usually be found in the civil service, has now moved to the private sector, together with the institutions where they found a home.
It is equally important, as several diplomats pointed out, to focus on people who are no longer in the workforce. With the arrival of structural adjustments, many governments in the South have been forced to reduce staff, and often this has led to the early retirement of very capable and dedicated civil servants. Similarly, many countries have scaled down their military forces, and released large numbers of personnel with outstanding technical and managerial skills. These groups could be approached, through their respective associations, and be brought into the network.
Another recruitment source that deserves close scrutiny is the reservoir of expatriate nationals. UNDP, for example, though its TOKTEN program (Transfer Of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals) has been able to mobilize many professionals who had left their country to return temporarily for development consultancies or project work. Such networks could also play a role in the field of humanitarian assistance.
On a smaller scale, but illustrative of the work that could be done world-wide, there is the directory of Somali professionals compiled by Dr. Kevin Cahill, Director of the Center for International Health and Cooperation in New York. This represents an effort to identify, locate and involve Somali professionals willing to return to their country to participate in the planning

and implementation of relief and rehabilitation projects. This directory was distributed to international agencies as well as NGOs, „who found it indispensable in their search for qualified Somalis," according to Dr. Cahill.

Exemplary in its efforts to create a recruitment network is Africa Humanitarian Action (AHA), a regional, non-sectarian NGO, staffed and managed by a faculty of African professionals, with its headquarters in Addis Ababa. It describes its operational mission as: „to render rapid and effective humanitarian response to emergency situations and to ensure sustainable livelihoods support to post-crisis transition areas in the continent through the provision of direct service delivery, technical assistance/consultation, field based research/dissemination, and indigenous community empowerment through capacity building iniatives." For this purpose, AHA has set up and maintains an up-to-date data base of over one thousand African professionals available for rapid deployment across the continent, in response to humanitarian emergencies, local capacity building needs, and sustainable development endeavors.

Equally promising is the initiative taken by the Norwegian Refugee Council, which has established an African Standby Force (NORAFRIC) of some fifty African nationals with experience in international refugee work. They have been trained and prepared for deployment at short notice, and their skills cover a wide range of specializations, including telecommunications, logistics, security and social services.

The institutional capacity to participate in standby recruitment networks certainly exists in the South, If the situation in Africa is any indication, and there is no doubt that there is a wealth of individual professional talent that could be more effectively mobilized in this context if the gap between potential employers and suitable candidates could be bridged.