

# **In Control of Their Future: Community-led Reconciliation and Recovery**

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This Version: 16 April 2007

**Abstract.** – This paper presents a discussion of the issues and challenges facing community-led peace building programs in conflict-affected regions, and describes a framework for community-led reconciliation and recovery (CRR). It also presents steps to implementing a CRR program, including processes for building leadership capacity, practical steps to beginning the process of mending and strengthening relationships between conflicting parties, and an approach to village social and economic development that seeks to build relationships between conflicting groups at different levels of society. Finally, it presents preliminary lessons emerging from an on-going CRR program in Aceh, Indonesia, that engages local communities in peace-building activities and strengthens their ownership of the peace process there. This field experience highlights the importance working with a systems approach that builds relationships between people at all levels; the need to remove barriers to peace by creating a mindset conducive to recovery and reconciliation among a critical mass of leaders; and the importance of building leadership capacity on all sides of the conflict to empower and lead communities to peace and development.

**Keywords** — civil war, post-conflict, reconciliation, governance

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An earlier version of this paper was presented at the WIDER Conference on AID: Principles, Policies and Performance, 16-17 June 2006. The authors thank participants in this conference for their comments. We are also grateful to Gerard Pottebaum and George Wilson for comments provided in conversations on the issues presented in this paper. The views and conclusions expressed in this paper are entirely those of the authors. They do not reflect the views of any agencies or organizations referenced herein. All errors and omissions are solely those of the authors.

# **In Control of Their Future: Community-led Reconciliation and Recovery**

## **1. Introduction**

Development specialists have long recognized that placing decision making and management tasks in the hands of participating communities encourages stakeholder ownership of project outcomes and sustainability of results.<sup>1</sup> Community-driven development is a core feature of the strategies and policies of many aid organizations, including UNDP, the World Bank and numerous non-governmental organizations working in developing countries around the world. Agencies working in conflict settings are increasingly using community-led approaches, as they seek effective methods of delivering quick assistance in areas where they have limited knowledge of local social and cultural systems, as well as needs and priorities.

In stable environments, practitioners use a variety of approaches and tools when implementing community-driven programs. For example, participatory appraisal techniques are used to gather baseline information about a community, to determine strengths and weaknesses of its leaders and of local organizations. Discussions are held with focus groups and key persons to determine initial steps that must be taken to start the program, with particular focus on group formation and management training activities to prepare the community for necessary project management tasks. Close attention is given to the needs and aspirations of marginalized groups, like women and children, and the poorest in the community. As project activities proceed, regular meetings are held to discuss achievements, challenges and future plans, drawing as many representatives of various village constituencies into the conversation as possible. Actions like these help communities make efficient use of donor resources—and, at the same time, alleviate donor concern that money might be lost to corrupt practices or its use manipulated by elite groups.

A number of principles and best-practices for community-driven development have been developed in the recent past, many of which focus on how to increase participation of marginalized groups and thereby increase the spread of benefit across the community. Steps to link local planning results with regional and national efforts have also been documented. Field research and case studies have increased our understanding of the importance of integrating these principles and best-practices into program design, and steps practitioners might take in implementing them. This discussion has largely focused on development interventions and poverty programs in stable societies. Similar programs in conflict situations have received less attention.

Principles and best practices for community-driven development were discerned from program experiences in stable societies, where there exists an environment of relatively stable community structures, NGO actors and civil servants with at least moderate ability to address and act on local development issues, and functional relations between government and civil society. This, unfortunately, is not representative of the environment in countries involved in or emerging from internal conflicts that have divided their populations and destabilized local, regional and national social, economic and political climates.

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<sup>1</sup> In the context of this paper, “community” refers to a group of people bound together by shared social, economic or spiritual needs, goals and aspirations. It encompasses village-centered communities, as well as political groups, government institutions, civil society organizations, ex-combatants, and agricultural producer groups.

In comparison with stable countries, years of war commonly leave affected communities with low levels of human capital and few resources with which to address long-standing needs. Communities and individuals participating or caught in violent conflict adopt survival strategies not typical of stable societies due to increased uncertainty brought on by widespread conflict. As a result, principles and lessons from development initiatives in stable societies, while useful in conflict settings, can fall short of addressing core issues associated with recovery and reconciliation.

Community-led conflict recovery and reconciliation initiatives in many instances focus on “critical groups” seen to be potential spoilers to a peace process, like ex-combatants. Others focus on “victims” of conflict, ignoring ex-combatants. Still others place focus on village communities, side-stepping issues associated with relations between villages and, for example, local government agencies. While such approaches help to address some of the consequences of conflict and perhaps one or more of the potential triggers to renewed conflict, they often fail to deal effectively with more central issues facing peace processes and constraints to building lasting peace. To effectively support peace processes and promote sustainable recovery and reconciliation, we must understand the systematic failures caused by conflict (and which might also be the cause of violent conflict), and take action to treat not the parts but rather the whole system.

## **2. Issues and Challenges**

Donors and practitioners aiming to assist communities emerging from cycles of violent conflict are confronted with a number of challenges. Getting assistance quickly to affected communities can be difficult; ensuring that this assistance addresses priority needs is even more problematic. Learning about conflict-affected communities and designing initial activities with them is not a simple task, as these communities have commonly been cut-off from government programs and development assistance for long periods of time, leaving implementing agencies with little knowledge of the needs and aspirations of these populations. Furthermore, interventions must take account of the core causes of the initial conflict, and how these might continue to impact communities and people as they rebuild their lives and relationships with each other. The depth of knowledge required can be daunting. At the same time, the urgency that tends to accompany the implementation of peace accords implies that key program decisions must be made and resources delivered quickly and with less than optimal information.

The primary challenge is, however, to understand the transition that stakeholder communities, combatants and leaders must make as their life environment changes to peace and stability from one marked by violence and uncertainty. Of course, understanding transition issues is not enough—practitioners must also know how to facilitate the transition through well-timed initiatives at local, regional and national levels.

### ***Non-Combatants and Soldiers—Beliefs and Perceptions***

As violent conflict subsides, communities involved face myriad challenges and risks that they must address quickly if peace and stability are to take hold. During periods of conflict, communities employ strategies to ensure victory, or at the very least survival, over their opponent. Out of necessity, they adopt very rational, narrow and short-term views, and make community and personal life-preserving decisions accordingly. As conflict persists, these strategies become deeply engrained in community members, and come to form core beliefs that are manifested as attitudes and habits. This world view and its associated actions are not limited to former soldiers; they are also characteristic of non-combatants caught in a conflict. These

strategies are highly effective in crisis situations, and many people are alive today because of them.

While survival strategies are effective in conflict situations, they pose a great challenge to peace building efforts in post-conflict settings. Communities affected by sustained conflict often suffer from lack of trust of outsiders, and have little acceptance of values, aspirations, and needs other than their own. Conflict-affected communities and individuals also tend to be unwilling to take risks, and are unable to accept mistakes as normal and necessary parts of progress. An obsessive focus on self and survival makes them passive, indifferent, blameful and fearful of accepting personal responsibility. Focusing on survival today leaves them reluctant or unable to exercise self-control; being proactive, planning for tomorrow, and delaying gratification make sense only when we see the future as stable and predictable.

These characteristics are not confined only to people affected by conflict but are also characteristic of disempowered and disenfranchised people. Deeply held, even the stark changes brought on by peace processes might not be enough to change these attitudes and habits. When peace fails to deliver (usually over-optimistic) change, and conflict-affected communities continue to be marginalized and to suffer from the consequences of past conflict, their perceptions that continued conflict is more likely than peace are vindicated.

Generally more close to the brutality of conflict, combatants take on somewhat different attitudes and perceptions as violence—and their role in it—persists. For the combatant, taking part in “the battle” gives them purpose in life; this is especially true for youth who might have known little or no peace. Violent life experiences and learning to survive and prosper in an environment defined by conflict, come to define “who I am” for the combatant. Personal and direct participation in the conflict gives meaning and purpose to the life of the combatant. The advent of peace brings dramatic changes, and threatens to take this away from the combatant.

Within this context, it is not surprising that ex-combatants sometimes sabotage peace processes, reverting to violence to regain purpose and meaning in their lives. Offerings of material support and livelihoods assistance—standard fare in most peace agreements—usually provide only temporary help, and only address symptomatic issues. Meaning and purpose in life does not come from material gain alone; it must be rebuilt or transformed from within. Donors and practitioners involved must be prepared to support these deeper processes.

### ***Life Systems—Fragmented and Compartmentalized***

Conflict encourages short-term, survival thinking that, in turn, encourages people to compartmentalize aspects of their life. Relationships between communities are severed, between community and family are strained, and between individuals become dehumanized. At the same time, relationships between people in conflict and their environment are strained: local resources, once carefully managed for use by future generations, are depleted to provide for needs today, or left untended and become degraded.

The result is a failure at the individual level to see the inter-connected nature of the world—indeed, this might also be a cause of conflict in some locales. The shift of consciousness from a fragmented to a systems view of the world is required for sustainable peace building. This is not a simple task, as even in stable environments people often have different world-perceptions and associated aspirations. Nonetheless, for peace to take hold, communities must see their interconnectedness—and accept their responsibility for the welfare of others.

### ***Leadership Skills and Actions—Fit for the Situation***

Leaders in times of both war and peace must provide purpose and direction to those under their guidance, aligning them under a common goal. Strong military leaders exercise coercive, one-way power over their followers. The leader establishes the common goal that, by definition, must be starkly contrasted with the goals and aspirations of “the enemy”. Directions on how to achieve this goal are not to be questioned. This is a one-way relationship that is based on reward and punishment, that disempowers followers, and is dehumanizing in its application. In most conflicts, wartime leaders are often not held accountable for their decisions or actions by the persons they lead. Management and resolution of disputes are typically, and most effectively, accomplished through authoritative directives and punishment.

Strong competent leaders and combatants are likely to maintain their position and influence in the post-conflict period. While they might have good intentions and be committed to peace, often they lack the right frame of mind, the understanding and the experience to lead people toward peace and development.

Understanding the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of non-combatants, soldiers and wartime leaders is of paramount importance. The changes these groups undergo as peace takes hold can be very threatening and unsettling to them. In this context, it is easy to understand why providing mere material support to conflict-affected populations, while useful, is not sufficient to support long-lasting peace. Far more is required. Perhaps the most important actions that must be taken are to build the capacity of leaders on all sides of the conflict to empower and lead their communities, and to encourage the change in mindset required to do so.

Strong leadership is needed to create an environment that encourages healthy human interaction and the building of relationships between conflicting parties. At the same time, leaders must also be prepared to be held accountable for their actions. In accepting this, leaders can gain the respect of their communities based on benevolent action rather than through brute force.

### **3. CRR—Engaging Communities and Building Ownership**

Giving communities the power to make critical decisions over the direction and pace of recovery, and making them responsible for associated management tasks provides a framework for transforming the beliefs and perceptions of the populations involved. By placing communities in charge of their future, reconciliation between conflicting parties can begin, as can the mending of relations that is necessary if lasting peace is to take hold. The CRR approach presented here provides an example of how to assist communities to address the challenges of moving from war to peace.

CRR is a holistic approach that aims to put responsibility for recovery and reconciliation in the hands of the communities involved. It employs a “systems mindset” that helps communities rediscover their interconnected nature and responsibility for each other’s welfare. This encourages victims of and participants to conflict to develop healthy productive relationships, and move away from violence that prohibits such relationships. Implementing CRR is a challenge, particularly to donors and government institutions that typically control processes at the local level. The requirement to “let go” is important, but not easily achieved. Donors, like participating communities, must be prepared to accept greater risk and, along with this, realize that mistakes will be made and that they are an acceptable part of the process.

Putting communities in charge is a central to CRR. In wartime, soldiers and non-combatant communities are typically told what to do and how to do it—they had little control over their lives. Violent conflict was, for many, something that “happened to them.” For peace to be sustained, it cannot be something that simply “happens” to the communities involved. They must be engaged in it, and take ownership of it. Giving communities control over recovery planning, management and resources facilitates the beginning of this process.

Equally important is active encouragement to participants in changing the way they view their world-system. Putting a community in charge, for example, of the recovery of its health care system while ignoring other aspects of local livelihoods recovery misses the point—funding recovery of only one of many broken parts does not repair the whole. The CRR focus on life systems extends to relationships between and among villages, government agencies and local civil society organizations. As such, it actively links individuals and communities at all levels of society. Building new and mending old relationships is the beginning of reconciliation.

CRR recognizes and encourages acceptance of the fact that people have different hopes, desires and fears, and strives to ensure participating communities take these into full consideration as they transition from war to peace. These steps facilitate achievement of CRR’s goal: to engage conflict-affected communities in a peace process by building effective relationships between them and other parties to conflict.

Effective leaders are needed to facilitate the recovery and reconciliation processes, and CRR places great emphasis on building the capacity of leaders on all sides of the conflict. While formal training is necessary, it is not sufficient to simply transfer knowledge to participants. New skills and understanding must be transformed into habit through consistent practice. Practice—positive and meaningful participation in the process of social and economic recovery over time—creates ownership and commitment.

The CRR strategy comprises three components. First, *bring not like-minded communities together to discover and express commitment to a common goal, and design a process by which they can work together to achieve it.* Ownership over the goal and the process to achieve it is essential: it ensures commitment to the goal and process, and encourages sustainability of results and outputs. Gaining ownership implies that participants are able to exercise self-control without outside coercion. Self-control is not confined to conflict management, but also encompasses accountability and fairness regarding issues of gender and environment, and in the utilization and management of common resources.

Second, *actively build trust between communities on all sides of the conflict.* Real and perceived injustices of any kind, in particular marginalization and corruption, will inhibit recovery and reconciliation. Jointly negotiated and approved “engagement principles” must be developed to encourage and ensure that standards of conduct exceed prevailing norms.

Third, *bring together a critical mass of leaders and managers from all sides of the conflict to guide recovery and reconciliation processes.* Leaders are not just those who held official appointments; they also include non-formal leaders who by their attitude, actions and contribution are respected by the communities involved. Relying on a broad cross-section of leaders encourages better understanding of the social, cultural and environmental system of the community. Building the skills and capacity of these leaders is critical because many leaders in conflict-affected societies do not possess the necessary mental attitude nor possess sufficient

capacity to lead people toward recovery and reconciliation.<sup>2</sup> Leaders who lack personal power, feel uncertain of their own future or are not accountable cannot empower others. Good governance, effective leadership of the community and efficient management development resources, must be practiced in all levels of society.

As noted earlier, the CRR systems-minded approach implies working with leaders at all levels of society. At the same time, village leaders are typically unable to work as equal partners with government agencies and donors. To address this issue, CRR works with villages to build and strengthen local organizational capacity that will help the community to develop initiatives based on their own assessments of their own needs, and ensure they are able to effectively manage the implementation of their plans and activities, and to assess the impact of their actions. These actions will build a critical mass at the village level that can help shape governance performance and practices at the higher levels that will promote and sustain peace.

Bringing conflicting communities together and building trust between them—and building the leadership skills to facilitate this—are goals not quickly nor easily achieved. Addressing and changing perceptions and attitudes built up over many years of conflict, can take many years of peace to achieve. Changing a community mindset from “victim” to “creator and manager” of the future is critical and will take more than a few training events to achieve. Activities that help communities move from dependency on relief to self-reliance through viable and sustainable economic activity can help transform knowledge gained through training into habit and daily practice.

#### **4. Putting the Community in Charge—Practical Steps**

Knowing how to implement the nuts-and-bolts of a CRR program is of critical importance. With the best of intentions, community-driven programs often fall victim to poor implementation strategies, or lack of understanding of the proper sequencing of activities. They also fall short of expectations when the focus of the program is not on key transition issues, (fearing that addressing them might take too long) but rather on rapid delivery of material resources to conflict-affected populations (e.g., quick impact projects). Knowing what to do and how to do it—and how to manage expectations of all stakeholders—increases the probability of success.

Preparing people for peace is a central theme in CRR. This begins by training local leaders to empower community members by providing them hope and direction, to align them behind a common goal and to resolve conflicts as they arise. Central to this is helping leaders to understand more fully their own perceptions and expectations. Through greater self-awareness, they can learn that everyone has choices in forming their expectations and sense of self and that there are peaceful ways of perceiving and responding to others. Thus, they begin to change from a survival to a development mode, and begin to see that peace is choice and that it cannot be sustained without a concerted and continuing effort from both sides. Self-awareness and leadership training is provided to persons at all levels of society to create a critical mass of people prepared to assist communities in making the war to peace transition.

In doing so, CRR begins bringing together not like-minded groups, mending torn relationships and giving birth to new ones. Together, training and relationship building

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<sup>2</sup> Capacity is the ability to do the right thing whereas capability is the ability to do the thing right. The latter consists of technical skills and the former comprises emotional skills to lead, self-regulate and develop. Effective community leaders must possess both.

facilitates improved governance and sustainable livelihoods development in conflict-affected villages—achievements that provide a foundation for peaceful social and economic change.

#### **4.1. Facilitating the Process**

The process of bringing together and building relations between not like-minded people requires the patient and skillful facilitation of a third party. It also requires adequate time, technical support and financial resources. Once the process has been initiated, it should not be stopped prematurely; to do so could reinforce community beliefs that peace is not really at hand. As stakeholders move through the process, it is essential that they exercise neutrality—particularly funding and implementing agencies—in all aspects of their work.

To be successful, CRR requires a skilled implementation team. Skillful facilitators are important as they are responsible for much of the day-to-day interaction with participating communities. In environments that are largely void of trust and full of suspicion, community members often find it easier to work with third parties. As a result, facilitators can assume the role of mediator, building relations between people on all sides of the conflict. They can also serve as role models for communities, providing offer example of how to interact and negotiate with others without relying on coercion and violence. As is the case in stable environments, the best facilitators are those who understand community belief systems, aspirations and traditions. Because societies emerging from prolonged conflict tend to mistrust outsiders, it is best if facilitators come from the local area. Finally, to facilitate and encourage gender-balanced programming, females should comprise half of the facilitation team.

Facilitators must play multiple roles: they must be a motivator, trainer and technical advisor, and friend to the community. Of course, it is difficult to find people with the range of necessary skills, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Too often, well-designed projects fail because the quality of facilitators is not adequate for the job at hand. As a result, CRR programs should include skills development activities for facilitators at the outset of the program, and for additional training at key stages in the program. Training on how to motivate people, and change their perceptions and attitudes is of particular importance. Mentoring and supervision of facilitators as they use their new skills are also critical.

#### **4.2. Building Leadership Capacity**

Inadequate leadership capacity is the key obstacle facing any community-driven program. Activities to build strong leadership capacity must be included throughout the implementation cycle, and include leaders at all levels of local society. Formal training events and field-based mentoring should prepare participants to assume greater responsibility for and control over their actions, and increase their capacity to empower and develop their communities. To encourage the mending of relationships, leaders from all sides of the conflict should participate in training events together in order to develop a common mental framework for peace and development. Training participants should expand beyond the normal village chief and sub-district officials to include local women's group leaders, youth leaders and respected individuals who reside in local communities.

To enable leadership training to proceed unimpeded, and recognizing that such training can be easily increase existing tensions between communities in conflict, it is important to first obtain formal agreement and support from regional government authorities and combatant leadership. These leaders, and their representatives, are encouraged to participate in initial leadership training events.



With the agreement and support of senior leaders, CRR capacity building formally begins with Personal Empowerment and Leadership training courses in order to build a strong foundation for developing other skills. Leadership problems facing conflict-affected communities typically stem from feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and inability to control the future, which in turn leads to pessimism, self-centeredness, apathy, defensiveness and inaction. These courses are designed to leaders regain hope, changing their perceptions and attitudes to make them more willing to accept risks and challenges, make decisions and take action, and accept associated responsibility.

Participants in this phase of training include formal and informal leaders, typically four to six persons from each level with representatives from each side of the conflict (e.g., four persons from each sub-district, including two rebel group representatives and two government representatives; four persons from each district and four from the province, again with equal representation from rebel groups and the government).

Personal Empowerment training comprises three parts. The first focuses discussion and personal reflection on the principles of human success, including human potentials and limitations; the role of our thoughts and habits in achieving our potential; and of seeing ourselves, our community, our region, nation and ultimately the world as one interconnect living system. This leads to discussion of living systems, and how the growth of any system is tied to its ability to follow several natural laws—*Laws of Universal Governance*—the most important of which are change, differentiation, harmony, self-regulation and expansion.<sup>3</sup> The second part of Personal Empowerment training leads participants through a discussion of reasons why people fail and how they succeed, and then through an analysis of characteristics of low performers and high achievers. The third and final part of this training course summarizes methods people can use to change their thoughts and habits from those that bring failure to ones that promote success.

In Leadership training, participants reflect on the *Laws of Universal Governance* and discuss how they relate to and are relevant to the roles and responsibilities of leaders working with communities in transition. Participants also discuss how transformational leadership that takes account of these laws can lead to successful community social and economic development. The training course instructs participants that strong leadership implies mutually enhancing and supportive relationships between formal and informal leaders and members in the community. Participants also discuss how sustainable prosperity flows from healthy and productive relationships and peace.

These two formal training courses provide a foundation for building the capacity of local leaders, and helps ensure common understanding among leaders on all sides of the conflict as to the new roles and responsibilities they must assume if their communities are to transition successfully from war to peace. Soon after these courses, CRR provides these same participants with additional training to build participatory planning, facilitation and communication skills. After completing this training cycle, participants are engaged in activities during which they

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<sup>3</sup> More specifically, these laws describe what every living systems requires for growth: (1) for growth to occur the system must change over time; (2) as the system changes, it differentiates and become more complex relative to its previous state; (3) all the different parts of the system must work together in harmony; (4) to survive and grow the system must be able to regulate its relationship with its environment and its utilization of common resources to ensure future growth; and (5) the system must be able to expand in physical and non-physical dimensions to survive.

practice their new skills; this facilitates further learning, and helps to transform new lessons learned into daily practice and habit.

As capacity building activities progress, local leaders begin to exercise more benevolent power, empowering their followers to define and achieve genuinely common goals. They encourage community members to participate in establishing local priorities and activities to address them, and give them hope as the community faces challenges on the road to achieving its goals. The relationship between leader and community becomes two-way as each has the ability to question the decisions and actions of the other. It is a relationship that is founded on mutual respect. This respect enables the leader to mitigate and resolve local conflict using peaceful methods.

At the same time, having the shared experience of training and understanding a new approach to leadership, these leaders represent a network of like-minded leaders. Such a network can facilitate a range of peace-building activities and social change. They also begin to act as role models for other leaders in the same locale. They assist each other in monitoring the use of donor resources, and ensure that lessons learned through their experiences are shared among villages. Through effective leadership, they facilitate change and development, and begin to influence regional and provincial leaders.

### **4.3. Mending and Strengthening Relationships**

Following initial capacity building activities, CRR facilitates the formation of district-level coordination teams comprising male and female representatives from all sides of the conflict.<sup>4</sup> This team is responsible for coordinating, supporting and monitoring work at the sub-district level, and to resolve conflicts that might arise.

Next, CRR and district coordination teams conduct meetings at the sub-district level, to explain the CRR process, and to gain agreement and support from leaders at that level. Again, a team is formed—a facilitation team—that takes responsibility for facilitating, coordinating monitoring activities at the village level, and for reporting to the coordination team on the output and impact of these activities. Like the coordination team, membership of the facilitation team consists of equal numbers of men and women of all sides of the conflict.

To initiate the mending and building of relationships between conflicting groups at the district and sub-district levels, CRR conducts team building sessions where coordination and facilitation team members sit and work together to develop a common vision and mission, and to establish a set of development principles to guide them as they work together in developing village communities in their locale.

The team building session is one of the most critical activities in the life of a CRR program because it brings together community leaders from both sides of the conflict to work together as a single living system, often for the first time. The session is conducted immediately after Leadership training so that success principles learned then can be put into practice, and

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<sup>4</sup> Here, we present a CRR institutional framework in terms of district, sub-district and village levels. This can readily be changed to other groupings; for example, province, district and village, or region, district, and village. What is important is for the framework to (1) take account of existing local formal and informal leadership structures and to involve leaders of each level, and (2) move up the government structure to the highest level that has regular contact with villages (ministries located in the capital typically would not have regular contact with villages, while line-agencies in districts usually do). This helps limit suspicion and build commitment to the process among senior government officials.

encouraged to become habit for these leaders. Facilitators guide the process, ensuring that participation is broad and meaningful and that participants are not coerced to follow other people's ideas.

During the team building session, leaders are reminded that with the dawn of peace both sides must strive to change their strategies from survival to development and growth, and from lose-lose and win-lose to win-win. Session facilitators use non-adversarial facilitation processes and tools, like affinity diagrams and pair-wise ranking, to broaden discussion and encourage the expression of different views. They also help minimize the possibility for dialogue to deteriorate into debate that leads to rigidity, the casting of blame, and relentless defending of positions.

Once leaders have fully articulated their hopes and aspirations, facilitators help them to consolidate these into a single vision, mission and set of guiding principles. To signal their agreement and commitment, participants sign their names to these statements. To strengthen the bond between participants and to stress the importance of their agreement, the vision, mission, and principles statements are read at the beginning of every major event.

It is important to note that the guiding principles represent an agreed mechanism for self-regulating interactions and relationships between and among community members, between the community and the earth, as well as for the utilization and distribution of community resources. They provide clarity and ensure transparency and accountability on issues such as non-discrimination, gender equality, protecting the environment, respecting human rights and accountability. Principles that are jointly established are particularly useful in setting a strong foundation for maintaining good working relation and resolving conflicts.

CRR activities in the village proceed similarly: capacity building for leaders is followed by workshops to establish common vision, mission and guiding principles. With this accomplished, conflicting parties have been brought together at each level of society, and links established between these same levels. Common goals and aspirations have begun to be developed, and a foundation has been laid for building trust and constructive and purposeful relationships.

#### **4.4. Community Social and Economic Development**

As initial leadership training activities and team building sessions are completed, focus turns to village livelihoods recovery efforts.<sup>5</sup> To achieve sustainable improvement in livelihoods, regional leaders from all sides of the conflict must work together to assist village leaders in their work to plan for and manage village development activities. In so doing, regional leaders regain a sense of purpose and direction that might have been lost with the dawning of peace. Working in partnership, leaders and villages share the urgency, frustration and finally the joy and pride of local social and economic growth. Furthermore, their experience provides evidence that dialogue, patience and group effort are possible and can contribute to the achievement of local aspirations—a tangible dividend of peace.

In early phases, facilitators play a lead role in community development efforts, gradually turning responsibility for this to sub-district facilitation teams. Assisting villages to plan for and manage local development initiatives provides opportunity for regional and local leaders from all sides of the conflict to practice new leadership skills, turning abstract theories, concepts and

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<sup>5</sup> Conceptually, implies the means, activities, entitlements and assets by which people make a living. Assets are defined as natural (land, water, common property), social and political (community, family, social networks), human (knowledge, skills), and physical (markets, schools, clinics)

principles into practical experiences and concrete results. For the villages involved, attention to and improvements in livelihoods can signal the end of neglect and hardship brought about by conflict. The sight of leaders from all sides of the conflict working together is tangible evidence of peace, and helps create an environment conducive to recovery.

In the context of CRR, recovery and development activities, including participatory planning, implementation and management tasks, become exercises that facilitate the transition of village populations from survival mode to a broad and future-oriented development paradigm. To accomplish this transition, donors and government agencies involved must give decision-making authority to villages, trusting their capacity and ability to lead local recovery and development efforts at a pace and in a direction most appropriate to the villages concerned.

This does not imply that villages are simply left to do as they please. Experience shows that leadership and participation without capacity can be dangerous indeed. As a result, properly managed CRR ensures that village leaders are provided adequate training to strengthen relevant competency and capacity before each phase of the recovery process. In addition, facilitators help mentor and provide advice to leaders as recovery proceeds. It is important to note that the role of facilitators here is not to control leader activity, but merely to guide and monitor the implementation of local development plans and ensure that village leaders adhere closely to principles they established regarding, for example, gender equity, transparency, accountability, and environmental protection.

### ***Village-Based Organizations***

In typical development and post-conflict recovery programs, project funds are delivered to the community through government channels, leaving the community with little control over the end use and management of the funding. To ensure local ownership of program outputs and impact, CRR channels funding directly to the community, through a village-based organization formed by the community with the assistance of CRR. The process of forming of the village-based organization begins at the outset of the program, and is done using participatory, democratic and transparent methods.

A strong and accountable village CSO is an asset to the community for it can attract donor funding for recovery initiatives. Of course, managing cash funds and in-kind resources efficiently and transparently is not easily accomplished, especially in conflict-affected areas where law and order are not fully established and practiced. To meet this challenge, CRR provides training to CSO managers on bookkeeping, financial planning, and organizational management. Training also includes discussion of accountability and transparency in the use of funds. Finally, facilitators assist the process of CSO development by mentoring managers and monitoring their work.

The importance of a village CSO goes well beyond its ability to attract and manage donor resources. It provides a mechanism for broadening community participation in decision making, bringing women, youth and others into the process. At the same time, it more broadly bring these and others more actively into the peace process. As the decision to form a CSO is made by the community, with the consent and active participation of its existing formal and traditional leaders, the CSO is not threatening to existing elites—it thus represents a peaceful way to expand the breadth and composition of the village power structure. Finally, participation in the management and activities of the CSO facilitates the practice of new skills by village leaders (new and old) as they design, implement and monitor recovery and reconciliation projects. As noted above, conflict typically discourages the emergence of new leaders. The CSO provides a

gender-neutral peaceful environment where new leaders can be empowered and their skills nurtured.

In locations where strong systems-minded leadership is present, the formation of village CSOs may not be necessary. However, it is typically the case that local leaders do not possess all the skills necessary to guide their communities through the conflict-to-peace transition. Furthermore, a village-managed CSO helps balance the skills of existing formal leaders (i.e., skills in guiding the community toward a goal) with CSO managers who are more skilled in managing and administering community resources. Great synergy can result from bringing these people and skills together; however, it will not happen by chance. It is important for practitioners to recognize this, and work to facilitate creative interaction between leaders and administrators in communities.

### ***Village Leader Training***

As noted in the previous section, village leaders participate in Personal Empowerment and Leadership training courses (with minor adaptations to ensure the courses are relevant to and practical for participants). Training focuses on strengthening skills related to their four key roles and responsibilities: to plan for the future, to move people together to achieve a common goal, to motivate and empower them to reach their personal goals, and most importantly, to resolve conflicts that occur along the way. Participants include formal as well as non-formal leaders, including women and youth group leaders, business association leaders, and respected elders.

### ***Village Planning***

Planning for village recovery follows leadership training activities. This is a critical activity for participating villages because it provides a long-term framework for their recovery and encourages teamwork in managing local resources with a goal of local development. Village planning begins with the preparation of a simple five-year development plan. Focusing on a holistic medium-term plan encourages participation of the entire community whereas annual sector planning typically brings together only part of the community. At the beginning of the planning process, sub-district facilitation teams together with CRR facilitators assist village leaders to develop a five-year community goal, to formulate a mission statement, and to establish guiding principles (as done at the district and sub-district levels).

With this framework established, various groups within the community prepare sector action plans and expected annual outputs in, for example, health, education, fishing and agriculture. Community leaders ensure that women, youth and other vulnerable groups actively participate in the decision making and planning processes so that their needs and aspirations are represented in the resulting plans. As draft plans are completed, village leaders present them to the community to obtain their agreement and support for the contents of the plan. Following this, leaders jointly consolidate the key elements of the sector plans, including expected outputs, major activities, budget requirements and existing or potential sources of funding, into a single document.

If funds exist, CRR might support implementation of a range of activities presented in the plan. Otherwise, village leaders can prepare proposals for submission to government agencies or donor organizations. At the same time, in order to prevent (or minimize) the dependency on outside resources, communities should be encouraged to implement as many activities as possible using only local resources. Finally, CRR facilitators work with community leaders to design and install mechanisms to monitor the use of donor and village resources, thereby minimizing the potential for corruption in project implementation.

### ***Implementing the Village Development Plan***

Implementing activities presented in the village development plan engages a large cross-section of the community, and offers many opportunities for developing leadership, management and technical skills of the community and its leaders. Village leaders monitor the use of village resources, and assess overall progress of planned activities. The implementation of village development plans will facilitate the improvement of local livelihoods, and, at the same time, strengthen relationships between village communities and their leaders, and between villages and government agencies. It will also lead to changes in participant attitude and perception toward recovery and reconciliation, and in their capacity to work effectively with others in pursuit of a common goal.

## **5. What Does Field Experience Tell Us?**

Community-led recovery and reconciliation initiatives provide valuable lessons for practitioners. On-going CRR efforts in Aceh, Indonesia highlight the central role that leadership at the village-level plays in underpinning efforts to consolidate peace processes, in promoting a sense of security and confidence among community members, and, most importantly, in facilitating hope for a peaceful future.<sup>6</sup>

Focusing first in tsunami-affected communities, and moving later into conflict-affected communities, the USAID Support for Peaceful Democratization Program (SPD) is currently implementing a community-driven initiative that places the design and management of recovery and reconciliation efforts in the hands of local communities<sup>7</sup>. The initiative aims to strengthen civil society at the village level through efforts to rehabilitate and rebuild tsunami and disaster affected-communities, and to build relations between communities on all sides of the conflict. It encourages sustainable recovery through activities that involve jointly all sides of the conflict, and seeks to develop multiple cross-linking relationships that encourage interdependence among people and communities, helping them envision and look forward to a shared future. Focus is placed on helping local communities and government agencies to move away from the lack of trust and hostility that now characterizes their relationship, to a more constructive and purposeful one. Emphasis is also placed on facilitating interaction between affected communities to construct networks of people active in building a new peaceful Aceh.

Some lessons emerging from the USAID SPD initiative in Aceh include the following:

First, *work with a systems approach that builds relationships between people at all levels, creating interdependency among conflicting parties*. Conflict encourages people to compartmentalize all aspects of their lives, severing relations between communities, and between people and the environment. For recovery and reconciliation to flower, individuals and communities must recognize their interconnectedness, and accept their responsibility for the welfare of others.

Second, *remove barriers to peace by creating a mindset conducive to recovery and reconciliation among a critical mass of leaders*. With the proper frame of mind, they will be

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<sup>6</sup> The authors will present results and lessons of field experience in Aceh in a companion paper titled *Community-Led Recovery and Reconciliation in Aceh*.

<sup>7</sup> The Support for Peaceful Democratization Program is funded by USAID through contract no. DOT-I-03-800-00004-00, Task Order No. 800, under the SWIFT II IQC. Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) implements this contract.

able to spark and sustain social change among conflict-affected people. This will help conflicting parties move away from relationships characterized by mistrust and hostility to more constructive and purposeful ones based on mutual respect

Third, *build leadership capacity on all sides of the conflict to empower and lead their communities to peace and development*. Strong leadership is needed to create an environment that encourages healthy human interaction and the building of relations between conflicting parties. Leaders must also be able to mitigate tensions and jealousies that will arise as peace develops, and to give hope to their community as it faces challenges on the road to achieving its goals.

The experiences of USAID SPD in Aceh and of similar initiatives in other conflict-affected countries indicate several characteristics that facilitate quick implementation of a successful CRR program:

- A formal peace or cease fire agreement must be in place, providing a framework for participation for all stakeholders (i.e., conflict-affected communities and donors);
- Safe, near continuous, access to conflict-affected areas and populations by local facilitators, and at least periodic access by outside experts;
- Senior, regional leaders have substantial control over local leaders;
- Donor and practitioner willingness to cede control over fund use and program direction to local leaders and communities, and commitment to invest significantly in activities where the outcome is non-material and not easily observed (e.g., training events that aim to change participant perception of self and environment, and relationship building exercises); and
- Donors working in the same locales must employ a similar program approach—diverging policies and strategies will negatively impact all outcomes.

Of course, an absence of any one or more of these characteristics does not imply that a CRR initiative is doomed to failure. For example, if a formal peace agreement is not present, or agreement to an existing one is not universal, peace entrepreneurs at the regional or national level might be found who are willing to build support for community-led initiatives. Similarly, where senior leaders are unable to exercise control over local leaders, peace entrepreneurs might be able to influence actions in localized areas. Successfully channeled, their efforts can build and strengthen confidence at local levels in nascent peace initiatives, laying a framework for a future CRR initiative.

Where access is limited, leaders residing in conflict-affected locales can travel to locations where outside experts can operate in order to participate in program formation or leadership training events. Local facilitators can then provide necessary follow-up support and encouragement when leaders return to their homes.

While not ideal, these and other measures can allow first-steps to be taken in preparation for more full-scale operations that can occur when the environment becomes suitable.

Finally, experience in Aceh highlights the importance of maintaining stakeholder motivation to participate in training and planning events, and to use their new skills. As these events provide the foundation for CRR it is critical to keep in mind that participation is not cost-free and could be threatening to those involved. In the first months of the program in Aceh, active participation in the peace process through CRR proved to be incentive enough for participants.

Being part of something “big” and taking ownership of the peace process, even if more in perception than reality, encouraged participants to get involved. Indeed, as CRR developed early on, more people wanted to participate than was possible. Early discussion and building of common mission and vision for CRR at the district and sub-district levels—including important “rules of engagement”—helped address threats to participation before problems could arise.

Of course, the question of incentives becomes increasingly important as a CRR program moves beyond its initial activities. In short time, CRR should move focus to village-based activities; in Aceh, focus shifted from district to village level activities in about four to five months. At the same time, formal training activities became less frequent, giving way to village development planning events and implementation of priority community development activities. For all stakeholders, seeing local needs addressed in quick fashion provides great incentive to remain active in the program. As needs are addressed (roads and buildings constructed, agriculture inputs provided, cooperatives strengthened), facilitators assist participants to reflect on the recovery process as they move through it—that is, to step back from the school they are building and consider “what are we doing”. Such reflection helps reinforce the main lessons conveyed during training events, and encourages leaders to use new methods and approaches.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper described some of the key issues and challenges facing peace building programs in conflict-affected regions, and presented a framework for community-led reconciliation and recovery that attempts to address these issues and challenges. It is important to emphasize that implementing CRR is a challenge, particularly for donors and government agencies that, in most places, control processes at the local level—releasing control over the pace and direction of program processes, and program resources, is not easily achieved. Also difficult is the requirement to accept greater risk in program implementation, and to realize that mistakes will be made and that they are an acceptable part of the process.

Finally, it should be stressed that CRR does not offer a short-cut to sustainable reconciliation and recovery. Changing the mindset, attitudes and perceptions of the people involved takes time and continued effort. Building new relationships, and mending torn ones, also takes time and effort. Such change will not come quickly.

It is thus important for donors and practitioners to keep a measure of flexibility in their program frameworks and implementation timeframes. The environment in conflict-affected areas is decidedly dynamic, and unforeseen events can slow or delay key processes. As events on the ground change, perceptions and aspirations of stakeholders will also change. It is important to not become too wedded to plans made in what might have been very different circumstances.

The CRR approach presented here provides an example of how to assist communities to address the challenges of moving from war to peace. Its training activities prepare leaders for community planning exercises that encourage creative dialogue and help individuals build trust and discover common goals. Planning and subsequent implementation activities bring together conflicting parties, mending torn relation and building new ones. Finally, the local development planning process facilitates improved governance and sustainable livelihoods development in conflict-affected areas—achievements that provide a foundation for peaceful social and economic change.