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# **Participation in Disaster Relief**

**by**

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## **Declaration**

Material used in Chapter Four and Chapter Five has appeared in print before in an unpublished form. This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the issue of participation of affected populations in disaster relief, which is receiving increasing attention from researchers, planners and practitioners. This concern comes out of the widely documented experience in development studies that beneficiary participation is essential for programmes to succeed. Similar arguments are being applied to disaster relief. However, despite much rhetoric, examples of genuine grassroots participation both in relief and development continue to be rare. I review the concept of participation in Chapter One and, in Chapter Two, the many possible reasons as to why participation of beneficiaries continues to be a problematic issue. In Chapter Three, I review the concept of humanitarianism and the implications of changes in humanitarian assistance on participation. In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I present three case studies, different by geographical, socio-political context and type of disaster. All the three studies contain material collected through fieldwork involving a qualitative methodology. I have indicated, in each study, the range of data collection tools used. In Chapter Seven, I compare and evaluate the findings of the three case studies. I present overall conclusions of the thesis in Chapter Eight. The main conclusions of the thesis are that beneficiary participation continues to be a problematic issue because groups that have power derived from ownership of economic resources or politics seem unwilling to share that power with the people they seek to assist. Their unwillingness to do so has, in turn, many causes including, lack of trust by aid organisations of local power structures and organisations, poor bureaucratic orientation, a self-given superiority of moral virtue and technical expertise, and sometimes limitations imposed by operational, structural and accounting procedures. I argue that some of these limitations could be addressed through financially supporting and enhancing the capabilities of member-based grassroots structures. I also argue that more effort needs to be devoted to research on how willingness to adhere to the ideals of humanitarian assistance can be generated on the part of aid agencies and donors.

## **Abbreviations/acronyms**

<b>ADMARC</b>	<b>Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation.</b>
<b>ALNAP</b>	<b>Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance.</b>
<b>BBC</b>	<b>British Broadcasting Corporation.</b>
<b>CAFOD</b>	<b>Catholic Agency for Overseas Development</b>
<b>CARD</b>	<b>Church Action in Relief and Development.</b>
<b>CBO</b>	<b>Community Based Organisation.</b>
<b>CEA</b>	<b>Cost Effectiveness Analysis.</b>
<b>CNN</b>	<b>Cable News Network.</b>
<b>CRS</b>	<b>Catholic Relief Services.</b>
<b>CV</b>	<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>
<b>CVA</b>	<b>Capacities and Vulnerability Analysis.</b>
<b>DC</b>	<b>District Commissioner.</b>
<b>DEC</b>	<b>Disasters Emergency Committee.</b>
<b>DFID</b>	<b>Department for International Development.</b>
<b>DHA</b>	<b>Department of Human Affairs.</b>
<b>DMI</b>	<b>Disaster Mitigation Institute.</b>
<b>DWCRA</b>	<b>Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas</b>
<b>EIA</b>	<b>Environmental Impact Assessment.</b>
<b>EPA</b>	<b>Economic Planning Area</b>
<b>EWS</b>	<b>Early Warning Systems.</b>
<b>FAO</b>	<b>Food and Agricultural Organisation.</b>
<b>FEWS</b>	<b>Famine and Early Warning Systems.</b>
<b>FSR</b>	<b>Farming Systems Research.</b>
<b>GDP</b>	<b>Gross Domestic Product.</b>
<b>GFA</b>	<b>Gender Framework Analysis.</b>
<b>GNP</b>	<b>Gross National Product.</b>
<b>GOM</b>	<b>Government Of Malawi.</b>
<b>GoS</b>	<b>Government of Sudan.</b>
<b>GP</b>	<b>Group Monitor.</b>
<b>GRO</b>	<b>Grass Roots Organisation</b>
<b>HYVs</b>	<b>High Yielding Varieties.</b>
<b>ICRC</b>	<b>International Committee of the Red Cross.</b>

<b>IDP</b>	<b>Internal Displaced Person.</b>
<b>IDS</b>	<b>Institute of Development Studies.</b>
<b>IGA</b>	<b>Income Generating Activity.</b>
<b>ILO</b>	<b>International Labour Organisation.</b>
<b>INGO</b>	<b>International Non-Governmental Organisation.</b>
<b>KAP</b>	<b>Knowledge Attitudes and Practice.</b>
<b>KG</b>	<b>Kilogram.</b>
<b>LFA</b>	<b>Logical Framework Analysis.</b>
<b>MBC</b>	<b>Malawi Broadcasting Corporation.</b>
<b>MRRA</b>	<b>Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs.</b>
<b>MSF</b>	<b>Médecins Sans Frontières</b>
<b>MT</b>	<b>Metric Tonne</b>
<b>MUAC</b>	<b>Middle Upper Arm Circumference</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-Governmental Organisation.</b>
<b>ODI</b>	<b>Overseas Development Institute.</b>
<b>OLS</b>	<b>Operation Lifeline Sudan.</b>
<b>ORS</b>	<b>Oral Dehydration Salts</b>
<b>PAME</b>	<b>Participatory Assessment Monitoring and Assessment.</b>
<b>PAR</b>	<b>Participatory Action Research.</b>
<b>PD</b>	<b>Participatory Development.</b>
<b>PPP</b>	<b>People’s Participation Programme.</b>
<b>PRA</b>	<b>Participatory Rural Appraisal</b>
<b>RDP</b>	<b>Rural Development Project</b>
<b>RRA</b>	<b>Rapid Rural Appraisal.</b>
<b>SCF</b>	<b>Save the Children Fund</b>
<b>SCHR</b>	<b>Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response.</b>
<b>SEWA</b>	<b>Self Employed Women’s Association.</b>
<b>SFDP</b>	<b>Small Farmer Development Programme.</b>
<b>SPLA</b>	<b>Sudan People’s Liberation Army.</b>
<b>SPLM</b>	<b>Sudan People’s Liberation Movement.</b>
<b>SRRA</b>	<b>Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency.</b>
<b>TA</b>	<b>Traditional Authority.</b>
<b>TLA</b>	<b>Textile Labour Association.</b>
<b>TLU</b>	<b>Transport and Logistics Unit.</b>
<b>UDF</b>	<b>United Democratic Front.</b>

UK	United Kingdom.
UN	United Nations.
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme.
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees.
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Emergency Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women.
UNRSID	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.
VAM	Vulnerability Assessment Mapping.
VIC	Village Identification Committee.
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation.
WCARRD	World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development.
WFP	World Food Programme.
WHO	World Health Organisation.
WT/HT	Weight for Height.



# **Chapter one. Participation: Historical and theoretical context**

## **Background**

### *Introduction*

Concerns regarding the participation of people in various programmes and projects designed to improve their livelihood statuses seem to be traceable to the field of Rural Development particularly, agrarian development. In many developing countries, the development of agriculture became the prime post-colonial development policy. New governments sought to effect immediate changes to colonial agricultural policy and practice, arguing that the former had failed to take into account important local realities.

At the same time, many newly independent states lacked adequate well-qualified manpower. This was particularly true in the fields of scientific planning and management. This problem arose primarily out of colonial educational policies that restricted indigenous populations from attaining not only higher educational levels, but also particular types of training. For example, in Malawi, colonial educational policy laid emphasis on the acquisition of minimum levels of numeracy and literacy for the local population. Such policies were motivated by the need to fill clerical and other low-level positions in the colonial administration. Colonial education policy was designed to make the African a worker for, and not with, his colonial masters. Many developing nations faced similar problems at independence.

In this regard, part of the process of neo-colonialism was the export of large numbers of 'experts' from the West (or the North, and here after used interchangeably) to developing countries. External input was rationalised in terms of filling the qualified manpower gaps. At this time many governments in developing countries began to concentrate their efforts on sending their citizens abroad and developing their own education systems, including the opening up of universities, in order to provide the required training.

A particularly important influence on these processes was modernisation theory, which was gaining a lot of popularity in efforts to explain the process of development. The basic idea behind this theory was that development was a unilinear process of evolutionary change. Developing countries were at a stage similar to some stage at which the industrialised countries of the West had been at one point in time. Capital in the form of infrastructure and institutional facilities was seen as the prime prerequisite for the development process. Traditional material and non-material culture was seen as a hindrance, rather than a resource to development. Therefore, development would only take place if such traditional elements, especially values and technology, were abandoned in favour of Western ones. Such views led to an emphasis on the mobilisation of the population through mass education and community development programmes to enable developing countries to reach the critical 'take off' stage into self sustained growth. Thus, projects and programmes designed to smooth the path were formulated by urban administrators and planners and little attention was paid to the rural populations who were regarded as traditional, even primitive, and who, in a paternalistic way, needed to be educated out of their ignorance (Redfield, 1947; Smelser, 1959; Rostow, 1960; Hoselitz, 1960; McClelland, 1961; Hagen, 1962; Moore, 1963; Eisensstadt, 1966; Bauer, 1976;

Roxborough, 1979).

In Latin America, an additional concept linked to the development process was the 'marginality thesis'. This concept held that because of their attitudes and values, the poor were trapped on the margins of society and were unable to participate in the mainstream social, economic and political processes. The marginality thesis seems to have developed from Oscar Lewis' pioneering work on the concept of a 'culture of poverty' (Lewis, 1959; 1970; Rogers, 1970). Lewis' argument was that the poor have their own subculture with distinct characteristics such as fatalism, lack of deferred gratification, lack of ambition, lack of empathy, dependence on government authority, lack of innovativeness, mutual distrust in interpersonal relations, etc, which barred them from availing themselves to opportunities.

Empirical research later led to stinging attacks on this concept. Critics argued that the poor were not socially marginal but ignored, not economically marginal, but exploited, and not politically marginal, but oppressed. It was argued that the poor had the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the perseverance of pioneers and the values of patriot but that they lacked an opportunity to fulfil those aspirations (Peattie, 1974; Perlman, 1976; Lomnitz, 1974; 1977).

Without doubt, modernisation and marginality ideas influenced early development initiatives undertaken by Western governments and donors in developing countries. Such initiatives were later characteristically branded 'top-down'. Designing, planning and sometimes even implementation of programmes and projects were done by western 'experts'. The programmes and projects were then transferred pre-packed into communities in developing countries. The concerned communities and sometimes even the host governments had usually little if any input in the planning process. This approach was based on the then popular idea regarding the 'trickle

down' of ideas and technology that would supposedly take place from technocrats and other professionals in the West down to their counterparts and even to the grassroots in the developing countries.

The so-called Green Revolution (which perhaps needed to have been a 'green devolution' in another sense) is a well-known example of these top-down approaches to development. In this particular case 'experts' had determined that the solution to the problems of agrarian development in developing countries was the creation of High Yielding Varieties of seeds (HYVs). Such seeds were developed under laboratory conditions in the West and transferred into the realities of not only weather and topographic conditions in developing countries, but also socio-economic variations. To date, there is no agreement among commentators on the actual successes of the Green Revolution. For while it is acknowledged that gross food production increased, particularly in parts of Asia, this increase was not universal globally. Furthermore the social consequences of the Green Revolution were not always positive. Pearse (1980) argues that there were two main principal failures: one was the emergence of more capital-intensive, higher technology farming and the other, the increasing dissolution of self-provisioning agriculture.

A combination of bitter failures of well-intended programmes and projects and a decline in the popularity of modernisation theory appears to have set the scene for beneficiary participation in development work. Modernisation was seen as an ethnocentric theory whose notion of development, based on the experience of the industrial nations of the West, was inappropriate to the histories and realities of developing nations (Epstein, 1962; Long, 1977; Webster, 1984). So, for example, out of the failures and criticisms of the Green Revolution came Farming Systems Research (FSR). The latter sought to avoid the pitfalls of the former by making the

farmer and his or her physical and socio-economic environment the centre of analysis. To some extent FSR attempted to offer the farmer an opportunity to participate in the process affecting the shape of his/her form of livelihood. Thus Oasaka (1987: 30) states that:

‘Stressing the requirement of understanding the small farmers’ environment, FSR with its socio-economic component is an attempt to deal with the charge that farmers have been losing control of their destinies and decision-making. It emphasises a closer relationship between research and the farmer to enlist his (sic) participation as much as possible’.

When development planners and practitioners realised the necessity of the input of the people whose lives and livelihood were being subjected to externally assisted changes for development programmes to succeed, the age of participation was just beginning.

### *Turning Point.*

The age of participation was greeted with excitement and enthusiasm. Finally, the answer to the failures of planned development in the Third World had been found. The turning point in ‘paternalistic’ and ‘ethnocentric’ conceptualisation of the development process came with what came to be known as dependency theory. Its most well known proponent is Andre Gunder Frank (Frank, 1969; 1971; Long, 1977). Deriving from work in Latin America, Frank’s thesis was that underdevelopment was a consequence of the conditions under which developing countries became incorporated into the world economic system. He identified merchant capitalism and colonialism as the initial processes whose results were the development of the North and the underdevelopment of the South. It was argued that

patron-client relationships existed from the level of the world's metropolises down to the rural poor in the developing countries. These relations played a key role in the exploitation of the rural masses. Dependency theory then constituted a challenge to the notion that underdevelopment resulted from an unfavourable cultural climate within the societies of the developing countries.

Another factor in this change of direction was the debate on the 'limits of growth', which drew attention to the destructive nature of sophisticated technological progress and the negative effects of industrialisation on the environment, advocating more ecologically sound strategies. In addition, demands for employment and the satisfaction of basic needs shifted attention to the rural poor (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 7). Oakley and Marsden observe that these concerns culminated in the adoption of a new development philosophy that stresses the qualitative dimensions of development, i.e. values that give a sense of fulfilment. This dimension is not easily measurable. Participatory democracy becomes the central element in self-reliance. The 'consciousness-gap' between the leaders of society and the masses is narrowed and rather than the object of other people's worlds, man is seen as the subject of his own world:

'This philosophy of a "people-based" development "from below" assumes that participation is not only an end in itself but also a fundamental precondition for and a tool of any development strategy. The failure of past development strategies is fundamentally linked to the absence of this missing ingredient-*participation*' (p 10, emphasis added).

### ***Buzz Words.***

Within the field of development studies buzzwords such as 'bottom-up', 'grassroots'

and 'people-centred' sprouted and began to flourish to mark the age of participation. Cernea (1995: 2) captures the essence of the change when he comments that 'the shift from a virtually exclusive emphasis on physical infrastructure to a recognition of social structures, and from free swinging ethnocentricity in development interventions to recognising indigenous cultures, was part of the shift in the direction of actor (people)-centred development projects'.

However, the popularity, enthusiasm and excitement generated by the new age resulted in uncritical acceptance and use of various ideas, including the buzzwords. Such uncritical acceptance appears to have persisted to present times, although there are also increasing critical voices. Specifically, many have failed to realise that even such well-intended buzzwords could be value loaded. So for example, to consider the term 'bottom-up', the implicit idea, obscure to many of its users and supporters, is that the subjects of development programmes or projects are at the bottom while those facilitating them are at the top. The connotation behind everyday usage of the words is that those at the top are superior in some way to those at the bottom, or conversely, that those at the bottom are inferior to those at the top. Buzzwords such as this one do not develop by chance. They reflect the perceptions of those who coined them. In this regard Harrell-Bond's argument concerning the basic failing in the relief (and also development) process should neither be seen as 'harsh' (Kent, 1987: 16), nor unexpected. Harrell-Bond's argument is that the failures are 'with the ideology of compassion, the unconscious paternalism, superiority and monopoly of moral virtue, which is built into it' (quoted in Kent, 1987: 16).

As regards the term 'people-centred', the implication is that some approaches to programme delivery are people-centred while others are not. But if some approaches are not people-centred, then what are they centred on? It can be argued that all

programmes are people-centred. What matters is which people have been centred and in what ways. Very often, claiming that a programme is people-centred does not guarantee that all the people in need will be centred. There have been many people-centred programmes that have resulted in the further marginalizing of certain groups within a community, for instance, women, children or people without proper or adequate representation.

Another buzzword popular in both development and disaster relief is 'target group'. Ideally this term is supposed to delimit a particular set of individuals as the intended beneficiaries of a particular project or programme. But the application of this term is not as easy as it might appear at first sight. It faces similar problems to those mentioned above. The major shortcoming here again is that 'target group' assumes some kind of social homogeneity of the individuals involved. For example, taking 'smallholders' as a target group fails to recognise and address the specific needs of women farmers and those without supportive structures. Thus, for example, agricultural extension in most developing countries was premised on the assumption that imparting extension messages to male farmers would benefit the whole smallholder category. Yet it was later discovered that women, who account for up to 70% of food production in developing countries, had been by-passed. Therefore, care needs to be exercised when using popular buzzwords to avoid glossing over important distinctions.

### *Changes in professional input.*

On the professional level, the many failures beleaguering development efforts have led to an increasing mainstreaming of sociologists and anthropologists. Cernea (1995) observes that the number of these professionals in the field of development



planning started to pick up pace in the 1980s, resulting in a number of published and unpublished reports and papers on development anthropology and sociology. He states that additional factors exerting a powerful influence in mainstreaming these disciplines in development planning include the rising public concerns for environmental protection, sustainable development and participation, institutional development as well as 'the sharpened criticism of development allocation wasted on half-baked programmes and backfiring inept interventions' (p. 2).

Traditionally, economists have dominated the process of planned development. This might explain why the traditional conceptualisation of development tended to lay emphasis on physical infrastructure and economic, to the neglect of social, processes. Sadly, this conceptualisation has not completely disappeared among development planners and practitioners. One of the major problems appears to be that, although there is an increase in the general recognition of their importance in the process of development, there are still very few sociologists and anthropologists in development organisations. These are often expatriates who may stay in developing countries for short periods. Once they leave or are unavailable there are usually few or no local professionals in these fields to take their places.

Traditional development thinking has so influenced the educational systems in developing countries that a university degree in economics is still regarded as the most marketable (despite experience to the contrary in some cases). Many undergraduates in fact tend to regard anthropology and sociology with a sense of contempt, seeing them as subjects that are concerned with less directly relevant and practical aspects of knowledge. As a result, the number of economics graduates far exceeds those of anthropology and sociology. In fact, some Universities in developing countries do not offer any training in Anthropology.

Yet it would appear that most talk on participation in the processes of development planning and disaster relief management is now centred on the various methods that can be used to incorporate the affected populations in these processes. There are two aspects here to be considered. Firstly, effective mainstreaming of affected population requires an understanding of the social structures and processes of the population in question. Arguably, Anthropologists and Sociologists are better placed here than other professionals. Secondly, the methods commonly being used to solicit people's participation are more familiar to people with this background. This, of course, should not be taken to mean that these professionals necessarily promote participation, only that when they wish to do so, they have an additional body of knowledge from which to draw.

In sum, it can be seen that work on participation appears to start from a handicapped position. The professional landscape is far from even. In addition, as mentioned above, the understanding of the very notion of participation is problematic.

Today, almost every development and relief agency (and sometimes even neither of the two) takes participation as a key issue in their programmes and projects. Their Mission Statements and programme documents contain declarations indicating the commitment of the agency to the participation of their beneficiaries. Beyond theoretical declarations, many of them use participatory methods of some sort in practice, whether by intention or by default. The degree to which participatory approaches are used, and the success thereof, obviously varies among agencies. The factors accounting for this variation are many and just as varied. They may include the nature of the agency, i.e. whether development or relief biased, the period of field experience, the commitment of the leadership of the agency as reflected in its organisational structures and recruitment procedures, the philosophy of the agency of

the importance and the place of participation in programme delivery, or the nature of the project, i.e. whether water and sanitation, nutrition, general food ration, health, education, etc., and a host of other factors which, it is hoped, this study will shed more light on.

However, despite the general consensus among development and relief agencies on the need for increasing the participation of affected populations in their activities there are a number of problems when attempting to achieve this in practice: a) there is no agreed definition of participation. b) There seems to be considerable uncertainty on why participation is needed. There exists a range of purposes that participation can serve but increasingly it appears that many people are not quite aware of this fact. c) Although there is much discussion on what needs to be done to increase participation, there is very little discussion on how to do it or, put another way, how people should participate. d) There appears also to be much uncertainty as to who should participate.

### **Definition of participation.**

*We would agree with several authors who have argued that it is impossible to establish a universal definition of participation (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 18).*

There are severe problems in even just trying to understand what participation is. In practice, some of the problems faced in efforts to implement the idea of participation stem from this lack of agreement. Yet it is important that some idea of what participation is about be developed if the concept is to make sense, let alone be implemented. If the quoted statement above is taken to suggest that the definitional playground for participation is so wide open as to provide everyone with the freedom to develop their own understanding, the inevitable implication is that the scope for

criticism will be severely limited, if not eliminated altogether. The troubling task then is how to arrive at some form of common (if not universal) understanding of at least minimum characteristics of authentic participation.

Below are presented some illustrative statements of the problems involved:

‘Participation is...generally understood as a *process* and not as some kind of static end product. And yet when the dimension of *time* is introduced the positions diverge; one school would argue that “participation” can be manipulated within the context of the time of a particular intervention; whilst others argue the unpredictable nature of authentic “participation” [and] although there is unanimity on the importance of “participation” to achieve the desired redistribution of the benefits of development, there is less unanimity on the nature and content of the “participation” process’ (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 18, emphasis supplied).

Writing in the context of industrial relations, French is quoted as defining participation as ‘a process in which two or more parties influence each other in making certain plans, policies and decisions’ (Hebden and Shaw, 1977: 14). Viewed in this way, the point is that participation must affect the degree of power that can be exercised by different parties. Thus emphasis is not on *control*, but on *influence*, the difference being that the former permits unilateral action by one party, the latter occurs in a social setting in which several parties may participate (p.13).

The World Bank, writing in a development context, would seem to share this view when it defines participation as ‘a process whereby those with legitimate interests in a project *influence* decisions that affect them’ (cited Oxfam, 1995: 14. Emphasis added). From this definition the Bank suggests that there are different levels of

participation namely (p.15):

- *Information sharing*, where people are put in a position to decide on their involvement in a project by being informed about it;
- *Consultation*, where people are consulted on key issues for them to provide feedback to the managers;
- *Decision-making*, where people influence the development of a project at every stage through involvement in its design and implementation;
- *Initiating action*, where people organise themselves to take action in the face of a shared problem or area of interest, rather than responding to the initiative of outsiders.

What is not clear from this characterisation of the World Bank by Oxfam is whether all the levels need to be fulfilled for authentic participation to have occurred or whether there is a minimum number that determines the threshold. Also, the *extent* to which information is shared, people are consulted and involved in decision-making, and the methods used, are all important to the outcome of participation. In fact most of the uncertainties on participation centre on these aspects. The current outcry is that many aid workers have tended to employ these elements in a ‘tokenistic’ fashion.

In addition, attempting to apply in practice the phrase *those with legitimate interests in a project* poses problems of interpretation. The question as to whose perspective of legitimacy is valid will always linger in the air. This problem, and thus its answer also, are not unrelated to the problem of defining beneficiaries in general, which will be discussed in detail in later sections.

In a rural development context, Oakley and Marsden (1984: 19) provide a number of working statements on participation that reflect the various understandings of the

concept. The basic ideas are the same as those expressed above, although there are some statements that are more specific than others. There do not seem to be any special definitions of participation in the literature specific to disaster relief. From the trend above, however, it can reasonably be assumed that the same ideas expressed with respect to other fields apply.

One of the problems involved in defining participation appears to be that the very definition of participation has so far been constructed in a non-participatory way. Professionals implementing programmes and academics providing commentaries and critiques have unilaterally developed concepts of what they think authentic participation should entail. To the best of my knowledge, there appears to have been little if any effort to try to understand participation from the point of view of those for whom assistance is being provided. Uphof (1985: 486) writes: 'In a real project situation... proposals for various kinds of participation should be checked out with the intended beneficiaries to ascertain whether they are feasible and acceptable'.

What this implies is that participation must become a fluid rather than static concept that changes according to the particular circumstances of the beneficiaries involved. After all, the very objective of participation is to ensure sensitivity to the local conditions of beneficiaries. This approach would free practitioners and academics from the (unnecessary) need to theorise *a priori* what authentic participation should involve, and then find that they have come up with meaningless or unworkable statements of the concept.

## Why is participation needed?

### *Means or end?*

The distinction between whether participation is a means to an end or an end in itself is important to understanding the range of purposes that participation can serve. It is argued that interpreting participation as a means leads to a description of a state or an input into a development programme. The objective is to achieve previously established objectives. Where it is interpreted as an end in itself the reference is to a process whose outcome is meaningful participation. Here the objective of the exercise is the achievement of power by the powerless so that they can demand more participation. Participation in the former sense adopts the strategy of reform and improvement while in the latter case structural change is implicitly demanded. Viewed in this way Oakley and Marsden (1984) suggest that the ideal situation is one which incorporates both extremes, but doubt the probability of this happening given the different ideological perspectives reflected by the two positions.

Both views find support in the literature. For example, Chambers (1985: 515) argues that:

‘the case for putting people first... is based not just on ethical grounds, though many find the ethical obligations *sufficient on their own*. It is also highly *practical*. With repeated experience, evidence has built up to demonstrate that where people and their wishes and priorities are not put first, projects that affect and involve them encounter problems. Experience also shows conversely that where they are consulted, where they participate freely, where their needs and priorities are given primacy in project identification, implementation, and monitoring, then economic and social performance are

better and development is more sustainable. There are, and always will be, other environmental and managerial factors that influence how well or how badly a project does. Irrespective of these influences, evidence shows that in rural development, putting people first is *a necessary condition for good performance* whenever local people are involved' (Emphasis added).

Clearly, then, there are many purposes that participation is intended to, and can, achieve. Part of the current confusion and debate on participation appears to stem from a situation in which people are losing sight of this fact and focusing only on one *main* purpose. To begin with, to argue that no meaningful participation can take place if it is interpreted as a means to an end is to suggest that it is impossible for the objectives of the beneficiaries to coincide with those of the aid agency. This may not necessarily always be the case. For, despite the fact that the aid agency may have its own specific aims, the very fact that agencies and beneficiaries can work together means that they have at least a shared ground. This ground is the general desire to either save or improve lives and livelihoods. However, aid agencies by their very nature also have other objectives to fulfil. What usually differs, and therefore needs compromise, are the ways in which this overall objective is to be achieved in a way that allows the beneficiaries to benefit but also enables the agency to harmonise beneficiary priorities with objectives inherent in their organisational structures and operational procedures. In this case participation can become a means of reaching this compromise.

It should also be remembered that the more commonly shared view of participation centres on both parties having some power to influence, and not absolute power to control, the other. In the context of development and relief, the aid agency has power resulting from ownership of resources and technical expertise while the power of the



community emanates from its knowledge of local conditions and the priorities and values existing within it. In this sense the notion that true participation requires the total transfer of power to beneficiaries is both undesirable in principle and not feasible in practice. On the one hand, it is possible that the failure of the 'means' strategy to achieve meaningful participation may not be so much the result of the nature of the strategy itself, but the way in which it is implemented or put into operation. On the other hand, there is no guarantee that meaningful participation will always result from an 'end' strategy when implemented or put into operation in whatever way. The truth is that even where meaningful participation has been achieved it is not clear whether the outcome will match the level desired by the beneficiaries, given that any project must operate within the resource constraints of the aid agency.

Adams (1984), writing in the context of industrial relations, suggests four general categories of purposes that participation can serve, namely democracy, socialist ideals, ethics and morality, and productivity and efficiency. These can be used as a basis for understanding the role of participation even in development and disaster relief contexts. To these can be added public relations, human rights and empowerment/capacity building. Clearly, for some of these purposes participation can be seen as a means while for others, an end. However, it also appears that for some purposes participation can be both a means to certain ends and an end in itself. In this case, caution needs to be exercised when making a simplistic 'means-ends' dichotomy on the concept of participation. For example, with reference to the relationship between participation and empowerment, White (1996: 9) asserts that 'participation is... at one and the same time a *means to empowerment and an end in itself*, so breaking down the division between means and ends which characterises the

other types' (emphasis added).

*Productivity and efficiency.*

Seeing participation as enhancing productivity, efficiency and effectiveness is perhaps on one end of the extreme where participation is regarded as a means. From an industrial relations perspective, research indicates that participation of workers increases efficiency through reduced levels of alienation, dissatisfaction, absenteeism, high turn over and increased sabotage and labour unrest (Adams, 1984: 47). In development (and also in relief), White (1996) sees participation in this form as essentially serving an *instrumental* function. In her view, the major aspect of participation in this form is the provision of labour by the project beneficiaries, which is seen by the agency as local 'counterpart funds', and guarantees people's commitment to the project. In the eyes of the local people this form of participation is viewed as a cost which is paid for by time taken away from other activities such as paid employment, household work and leisure. In a relief setting, this cost may be seen in relation to time taken away from pursuing other survival strategies, given that relief assistance is often inadequate to address all the immediate needs.

An example from Malawi illustrates this point (see Chapter Five). There, a WFP policy, endeavouring to promote a transformation in gender relations, required that family ration cards be distributed in the name of the female spouse. However, flour bags for the general ration distribution were too heavy for most of the women to carry over the very long distances involved. Therefore, both spouses had to be present at a distribution centre, the woman to receive the ration, and the man to carry it. Given the long queues and long travelling distances involved, a lot of time was wasted in which one of the spouses would have been involved in other survival

strategies, such as paid casual work, common at that time.

Apart from leading to ownership and commitment, participation may also lead to effective allocation and use of time and resources as agencies became well informed of the priorities of their beneficiaries. Unlike in industry, however, where efficiency is always measured from the perspective of the employer, this case is not so straightforward in development and relief settings. In the latter, the question of efficiency or effectiveness has to be answered in terms of whose perspective. An agency may feel that the project was efficient because it fulfilled their targets, for example, how much food was delivered, how many babies benefited from a nutrition programme, how many tonnes of seeds were delivered and so on. Yet affected populations may see the project as inefficient or ineffective for creating disruptions in social relations because of the way the project was implemented. For a humanitarian programme this is a particularly difficult issue since humanitarianism is about doing good. In principle, only the affected populations are in a position to judge whether good has been done or not. Participation then, must also be an instrument for aid agencies for being accountable to the people they assist.

### *Public relations.*

It would be unwise to dismiss public relations as a motive for participation among agencies. The literature charting the proliferation of international NGOs makes it clear that beneath the rhetoric of co-operation and co-ordination the spirit of competition flourishes. On such *deadly ground* it is important that an agency creates a good image of itself. Participation is a good instrument since, like gender equality, it is the 'in thing'. Given that 'the assessment procedures of the British Overseas Development Administration [now DFID, but also many other donors P.N.] include

checking what steps have been taken to ensure participation of the beneficiaries in planning, implementing and monitoring the project it funds' (Oxfam, 1995: 14), participation may even be regarded as a survival strategy, not of the poor, but of the aid agency.

More cynically, but perhaps equally true, participation may even be used to legitimate decisions, policies and practices that had already been decided would happen with or without participation. But if it can be said that these aspects of the project were implemented in a participatory fashion, then the agency will gain credibility and respect. White (1996) sees participation in this form as essentially *nominal* where the groups of people involved mainly serve the function of *display*. Thus, even though the requirements by donors for participation are nobly conceived, the absence of any mechanism to ensure that not only participation has occurred, but that it has also occurred appropriately, raises serious questions about their role in promoting the process of participation. And given that inappropriate forms of participation may even be destructive to communities, the extent to which donors and aid agencies achieve their very aim of helping to build or rebuild communities can also be fundamentally questioned.

### ***Democracy.***

*'The fight for political democracy is a proud strand in the history of many countries...and few people would question that democracy in itself is a good thing, a value' (Adams, 1984: 42).*

Participation is increasingly linked to the promotion of the democratic process, strengthening people's capacity to participate in national and international issues. Adams (1984) quotes from a European Community 'Green Book' which noted the increasing recognition being given to the democratic imperative that those who will

be substantially affected by decisions made by social and political institutions must be involved in the making of those decisions. In this sense participation could be seen as an end in itself since democracy is a value. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the general belief is that institutions function more effectively if they are democratically run, making democracy a means to achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

Aid agencies are well aware of their power stemming from their access to, and control of, resources and technical expertise. Their staffs are also aware of their privileged position vis-à-vis the people they seek to assist. Coming from the West where democracy is a deep-rooted value they may feel compelled by their consciousness to conduct themselves democratically. They thus get concerned with providing their beneficiaries with some kind of *voice in the character of the project* (White, 1996). White's view is that this form of participation is *representative*. From the point of view of the agency it may ensure sustainability by avoiding the creation of an inappropriate and dependent project. From the participant's perspective, becoming actively involved in their own meetings and in discussions with the NGO may constitute leverage for influencing both the shape and the subsequent management of the project.

### ***Ethics, morality and human rights.***

The participation of affected populations in development or disaster relief projects could be seen in terms of the ideals of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of whose tenets states that:

‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a

spirit of brotherhood. Everyone, as a member of society is entitled to realisation of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality' (Quoted in Adams, 1984: 48).

Adams notes that this is an ethical and religious position whose essence is that dignity, humane treatment, and the opportunity to develop personality and talents are a moral right by virtue of being human. Ethics and morality in fact lie at the very heart of the humanitarian concept. It is inhuman not to help a suffering human when one is in a position to do so. Similarly, it is unethical and immoral to treat others as if they were animals or objects. This may explain why many humanitarian aid agencies have religious roots. The participation of affected population in projects and programmes that affect them constitutes their treatment as subjects or, more appropriately, as actors, not objects of the processes of development and relief.

### *Empowerment and capacity building.*

A recent development in the literature points to participation as a process of empowerment. This interpretation has ushered in a new set of considerations as regards the extent to which this is possible in practice. For example:

'In theory, empowerment and participation should be different sides of the same coin. In practice, much of what passes for popular participation in development and relief work is not in any way empowering to the poorest and the most disadvantaged people in society' (Oxfam, 1995: 14).

Oxfam views empowerment in terms of a process through which individuals gain the strength, confidence, and vision to work for positive changes in their situations. It is also a measure of the capacity of people to initiate change, whether modest or far-

reaching. What is not clear is how these virtues are acquired. Several examples of empowerment are given (ibid., p12).

- A woman gaining the confidence to seek legal protection from her violent husband.
- Landless farmers organising to occupy idle land.
- Urban slum dwellers compelling the local authorities to provide essential services, such as water and electricity.
- Refugees demanding to return to their home
- Factory workers lobbying for the right to unionise.
- Families forming a committee to campaign for the release of political prisoners.

Oakley and Marsden (1984: 25-26) note that the more common interpretation of empowerment equates participation with achieving power in terms of access to, and control of, the resources necessary to protect livelihood and quote the following statements as illustrative of this understanding:

‘The promotion of popular participation implies a redistribution of power requiring the consideration of political factors, social forces and the role of class in historical processes of social change, and participation is concerned with the distribution of power in society, for it is power which enables groups to determine which needs, and whose needs, will be met through the distribution of resources. Also, power is the central theme of participation and... participatory social action entails widely shared collective power by those who are considered beneficiaries. The people become agents of social

action and the power differentials between those who control and need resources is reduced through participation’.

The obvious idea implied above is that participation can never be real or complete unless empowerment has occurred. This view invites a number of theoretical and practical difficulties.

Theoretically and by definition, the concept of empowerment automatically assumes that the existing state of affairs is one of lack of empowerment. Logically, there can be no need for empowerment if people are already empowered. External agencies are then seen as catalysts to the empowerment process. The problem seems to be that there is lack of clarity as to the source of power that is supposed to be transferred to the affected populations. In the absence of such clarity, examples of empowerment such as those cited by Oxfam in the paragraph above would seem to suggest that the source of empowerment is primarily the acquisition of new knowledge, attitudes, aspirations, values and other ‘positive’ personality traits. The acquisition of these aspects will lead to access to resources, primarily of an economic nature. This view is inevitably paternalistic, ethnocentric and short sighted at any rate. Frequently, people in poverty fail to act in a certain way often precisely because they lack the resources and an opportunity to do so. In this sense, access to economic resources is not the result of, but a pre-condition for, empowerment. Rather than the other way round, it is access to resources that may lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, attitudes, aspirations, and possibly values, if necessary.

Without clarifying the source of power, some of the examples given above by Oxfam, might not make much sense. Thus, for example, a woman in poverty situations may not seek legal protection from a violent husband not because she lacks empowerment (due to lack of confidence for example), but because she is aware of



the consequences of that action. Because of her weak economic position, a woman may avoid any action that might end up in divorce, leaving her without sound economic support. In marriages under customary law, the man might resolve his frustration of a 'confrontational' wife by marrying other wives, and any legal decisions taken may not necessarily be in favour of the woman. These consequences may not be in her interests. As regards the issue of landless farmers, it is quite difficult to see, without stupefying the farmers, how they could stay landless if there were idle land lying about. It is equally difficult to see why an external agency would be needed to set in motion the process of occupying that land. The example of the urban slum dwellers demanding social services faces similar problems. The literature on urban studies in developing countries has shown that very often, the major reasons why slum dwellers do not press for 'essential' services such as electricity and water has nothing to do with lack of empowerment. In many cases such services are not demanded because they exert a strain on the already low incomes of the slum-dwellers. Studies have shown that low-income dwellers might in fact be willing to move out of serviced areas in favour of un-serviced ones where the burden of paying for the services is removed (Gilbert and Gugler, 1981). In addition, people in these areas may prefer to walk to avoid the costs of using the public transport system. An outsider without this knowledge might mistakenly believe that the community lacks empowerment to push for public transport. In major cities in Malawi (and possibly other cities in developing countries too), the sight of large masses of people trekking to places of employment on foot, even with public transport passing them on the very way, is all too common.

The second interpretation of empowerment, as captured by Oakley and Marsden (1984), seems to be directly opposed to the first one. In this case, the source of

empowerment is access to, and control of, economic resources and the political process through which such resources are distributed. Thus, power also stems from the deliberate surrendering of the decision-making monopoly held by the external agency involved. In other words, participation is linked to structural change or the redistribution of basic common assets.

While this characterisation is more appealing than the first one, there appears to be lack of evidence that aid agencies have a serious commitment to transfer a significant amount of their power to the people being impacted: 'There is no shortage of comment in the literature or analysis as to why participation has not been achieved. Some dismiss out of hand the very suggestion that there has even been a genuine commitment to participation' (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 29). In the disaster relief context, the question of *whose* resources is particularly troublesome. Do the resources donated for disaster relief belong to the agencies to be dispensed at their discretion and on their own terms, or do they belong to the affected people to be distributed on their terms? The failure of genuine participation to take place may suggest that a good number of agencies take them to be theirs, to be distributed on their (agencies') own terms.

The following example illustrates this point. During the 1998 emergency relief programme in south Sudan (see Chapter Four), many agencies were aware that the best mechanism for distributing food rations was through the traditional leadership system (the *gol* leaders). These were some kind of clan heads who had jurisdiction over a given section of the community. Their position allowed them to have good knowledge regarding which individuals were 'vulnerable', and therefore needing assistance. Distrusting the effectiveness of this mechanism, one international aid agency committed some resources to be distributed in this way but retained a certain

proportion of the total amount. After the distribution through the traditional structure had been completed the aid agency would then conduct its own independent assessments and distribute the remaining proportion to those it believed had been bypassed by the traditional distribution mechanism. While it can not be denied that there will always be individuals who fail to find representation in traditional structures, or for that matter any social structure, such 'macho-man' tactics are highly questionable as regards the issue of participation. This action would have a lot of questions to answer as regards its impact on social relations within the community as well as on the way in which the agency is viewed. In the context of the present discussion, this example demonstrates how difficult it is for agencies to start the power balancing process.

Oakley and Marsden (1984) sum up:

'The development literature is over-burdened with the documenting of previous participation strategies, most of which it is accepted have failed in terms of giving the majority of rural people any meaningful say in those issues which affect their livelihood. The concept of participation as empowering is a radical departure from years of more traditional practice. Although its conceptualisation is simple and its argument difficult to refute, it is correct to say that it both faces formidable barriers and that it is also difficult to imagine governments and locally established structures offering other than powerful opposition. Historically participation has rarely been willingly conceded to previously excluded groups and the encounter between opposing forces is the inevitable result' (p.27).

Several issues arise from the foregoing discussion. First, it is necessary that the advocates of empowerment always make it clear where the power for the poor will

come from: is it political, social, economic or all of these? Second, 'empowerment' rather than being a positive term can in fact be a demeaning one because of its inherent assumptions. Third, resources, opportunity and opportunity cost rather than a lack of empowerment account for much of the behaviour of the poor. Fourth, empowerment is very difficult to measure. Lack of action on particular issues should not always be seen as a sign of lack of empowerment. Finally, empowerment can depend crucially on the willingness of existing power structures to share power with those previously excluded.

The dominant sense in which people talk about empowerment appears to be related to a sense in which poor people are galvanised to challenge existing social relations such as gender inequality or lack of political representation. The agencies seem to see themselves as catalysts of this process by providing 'enlightenment' lacking in the poor. The problem with this view is that it makes the objectives of participation inconsistent. For example, asking women to challenge a system that excludes them politically contradicts the objectives of respecting and working with existing structures. On the other hand, through their support of existing structures and provision of access to opportunities, agencies can succeed in increasing the participation of women in such structures.

Therefore, it appears more useful to talk about capacity building rather than empowerment, although a more appropriate term could perhaps be 'capacity enhancing', since it is not at all true that poor people lack any capacities at all. Poor people have different capacities some of which may not be immediately apparent because of their lack of opportunities and resources. In this sense, the job of external agencies should be seen as providing support and opportunities for these capacities to be realised and enhanced. Capacity enhancing activities should focus on improving

poor people's access to economic resources, information, education and training that enables them to use existing opportunities and create new ones. These activities are what can 'empower' poor people to challenge certain repressive processes. In this sense, it is not participation that leads to 'empowerment'; rather, 'empowerment' leads to participation. Gradually, participation can transform existing structures in response to new demands.

### **Who should participate?**

In principle, people who will be affected by the project are the ones who must participate or, as others would put it, the beneficiaries of the project. However, this statement is far more difficult to put into practice than it might be assumed. I have already noted the difficulties associated with the World Bank's phrase, *those with legitimate interests in a project*. Any attempt to define beneficiaries, or those who will be affected by a project is accompanied by similar difficult questions: beneficiaries or affected in what way? For example, are the beneficiaries of a food distribution programme only those who have received the food? Are they the only ones who will be affected by the distribution? Are they really the only ones with *legitimate interests* or has this legitimacy been imposed by the agency resulting from its own resource constraints and/or priorities?

The difficulties of identifying those with legitimate interests or those who will be affected by the project become worse when it is remembered that, at least with the exception of purely medical aid agencies, it is not only lives which must be saved or improved in either disaster relief or development, but also, livelihoods. While lives can be considered individually, livelihoods are always linked to the social structure and process of the community and sometimes even to macro-economic and macro-

political processes. In many cases government agents will continue to interact and influence people's lives and affect their livelihoods long after the relief or development project has 'ended' and the agency staff have left. Some of the actions taken may be on issues that directly stem from that project. In such a situation one can sympathise with the host governments if they claim to have a legitimate interest in the project.

Thus, whether we consider government or community power structures, it is clear that the focus on the individual or a collection of individuals as a unit for analysis for development and relief activities will not provide a full picture of who should participate in a relief or a development programme. To say that so many metric tonnes of food were successfully delivered to a 'target' group of people, for example, doesn't say anything about the success of the intervention as a whole. What if the way in which delivery took place ostracised the target group from the other community members? What if such delivery destroyed existing local marketing systems and other systems for co-operation? In some cases, an outsider's interpretation of who has a legitimate interest may in fact differ markedly from that of the very individuals regarded as having this legitimacy.

In addition, there are in fact practical reasons why a focus on the view of beneficiaries as being individuals should not be regarded with much enthusiasm. The basic problem is that this focus leads to an emphasis on using numbers as a measure of success. There are two sides to what has been referred to as 'the numbers game'. First, aid agencies often operate under severe resource constraints. Because of this, small numbers of beneficiaries are always desirable. In many cases, this desire has led to what can be called *institutionalised mistrust* of local assessments of the extent of need. This mistrust is based on the alleged lack of objectivity of local agencies in

their assessment procedures, sometimes blamed on inadequate technical capacity, but more frequently on favouritism, dishonesty and corruption. While one cannot deny that such tendencies may sometimes exist, to assume that they always do and then to always proceed on that premise goes contrary to experience. Two illustrative examples will be cited.

While doing fieldwork in south Sudan during the 1998 famine relief programme, I learned that the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (SRRA), the relief wing of the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), had produced assessments of the food security situation for that year. These assessments showed an impending famine and the need for external food assistance. However, the magical international media had not yet vindicated the situation and the SRRA was, after all, a representative of a rebel movement. The assessment was, of course, rejected even by the international aid agencies working in the area. Analysis of the famine later showed that, even without the fighting which triggered it, the SRRA assessment had been fairly accurate of what was going to happen. Yet nothing had been done until a report had been featured on television broadcasts.

In Malawi (see Chapter Five), floods devastated many areas in the southern part of the country in 1997. Government conducted an assessment of the extent of destruction and need for external assistance and launched an international appeal. The United Nations (UN) responded by sending the Department of Human Affairs (DHA) team from Geneva. In contrast to the government's assessment that had relied on its ground-based network, the DHA team relied on a helicopter, thus literally avoiding the *grassroots*. Thus the poem was right on the mark:

[International bureaucrats as well as]

*... students seeking Ph.D.s*

*believe that everyone agrees*

*that rains don't do for rural study*

*-suits get wet and shoes get muddy*

(Chambers, 1983: 20).

Aware of the limitations of their action, but still suspicious of the government figures, the DHA team recommended certain areas for immediate relief assistance. It also recommended that assistance should be extended to all other affected areas only after a verification of the government assessment, to be conducted by an inter-agency team of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). This verification exercise proved to be one of the key factors why the relief process in general failed to be effective. In spite of the time and resources invested, the results of the verification exercise were later abandoned principally for failing to be representative and the agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), were forced to revert back to the government figures in most cases.

The two examples have been cited to suggest that, for reasons linked to resource constraints, agencies tend to use numbers as the overriding criterion for defining beneficiaries. And because numbers must match available resources, the mistrust of assessments by local structures is inherent (in-built).

Yet when it comes to reporting on the outcome of the project, big numbers are desirable, if not essential. Prendergast (1996: 3) observes that all aid agencies, whether UN, donor-government or NGOs, are under constant pressure to present a picture of the huge amounts of aid inputs delivered to a target population as having a direct impact on saving lives. The result is that logistical targets become ends in



themselves. He argues that quantitative, rather than qualitative, assessment is dictated by reporting and fund-raising priorities resulting in the burying of nuances and portraying of tonnage of commodities delivered as the measure of success.

The foregoing observations lead to the argument that, to be effective, communities, rather than individuals, should form the basis for relief operations (it appears to be mostly already so in development). The principal mandate for deciding who should participate and how, should lie primarily with the community decision-making structure. It is true that, as agencies might fear, not all people in need will be represented in this way, but more harm will be done if the agency were to take on this responsibility. Even during disasters, the social structure usually remains relatively intact. Considering beneficiaries only in terms of numbers of individuals and ignoring the importance of the local power structure and the social structure within which such individuals exist assumes that the affected population has no capacity for decision-making, understanding the needs of the different groups of people in the community and caring for their own vulnerable individuals. In making this assumption, 'one is accusing the social structure of that society of having descended into Hobbesian chaos' (Harragin, 1998: 3).

### **How can people participate?**

Clearly, even if the right participants have been identified, how they participate is crucial if participation is to achieve its various objectives. The very fact that there are a number of purposes that participation can serve suggests that there must also be a range of ways in which people can participate. In general, the form of participation chosen will determine the degree of involvement and should reflect the purpose of participation. The task here is thus to identify the various forms of participation or

involvement and attempt to link them to what they can achieve.

It must be stated at the outset that how people wish to participate in a project will depend on their own assessment of the benefits of being involved as well as the opportunities and risks they can identify. Therefore, it is inappropriate to define beforehand ways in which people ought to participate. Any ideas discussed here should therefore be regarded merely as an attempt to clarify some of the hazy issues rather than as a prescription for practice.

I suggest in Chapter Four that making a distinction between mental and physical involvement may be a useful starting point. While seemingly obvious, this distinction is sometimes taken for granted and, thus, its importance overlooked. Some of the problems attached to the understanding of participation in fact seem to relate to a failure to consider this distinction.

It has already been noted, for example, that the common interpretation of participation lays emphasis on the ability of the affected population to influence decisions that affect them as a key and perhaps the sole aspect. Even the four levels of participation suggested by the World Bank, namely, *information sharing, consultation, decision making and initiating action*, refer primarily if not solely to the mental aspects of the process. Yet clearly, physical involvement in the various activities of the relief process is also necessary. This necessity emanates not least from the insufficient supply of labour usually at the disposal of aid agencies. It can be argued and demonstrated that without the physical involvement of the community the relief process might encounter many problems. For example, community security arrangements for relief food stocks in south Sudan, which relied on community members as guards, proved to be more effective than one that used agency-employed staff.

Since it has been suggested that the community, rather than the individual, should be paramount as the basis of relief activities, mental participation refers to the process by which the 'mind of the community' (more like Durkheim's *conscience collective*) should be engaged at all levels of the relief process. This means providing real opportunities for people either to say how they feel on decisions that have already been made so that adjustments can be made or, wherever possible, to provide opportunities for the people's say before decisions are made. Physical participation, on the other hand, centres on labour contributions by communities.

It can be argued that so far, in spite of the rhetorical premium placed on the former interpretation of participation, the latter has in fact taken precedence, especially when seen from the point of view of many field staff. While influencing decisions is the key aspect in the common interpretations of the participation process, in practice the answers one gets to the question *how did people participate in the project?* often reflects the physical aspect of the process. Responses to this question obtained in field studies in south Sudan and Malawi provided the following examples:

- In a Nutrition programme: *People constructed feeding centres using local materials, that women helped in the management of the centres by cooking food for the children, pounding grain, drawing water, helping to weigh babies etc;*
- In a general ration programme: *that they acted as porters at food distribution sites. Here, some would even claim that an aspect of women's empowerment was introduced because the agency employed a policy of using them, and not men as porters. It was also sometimes said that people participated as guards for the food stocks pending distribution.*

- In a Psychosocial trauma programme: *that they helped build the centres for children to be treated in.*

The list of such answers can go on and on. Of course, it is also true that sometimes one gets answers to the effect that some representatives of the community attended this planning meeting or that co-ordination workshop. However, this happens less often than the physical involvement, and in many cases it occurs when the agency has encountered a problem that it is failing to deal with. So for example, in one case in south Sudan, community members were invited to attend an inter-agency workshop because the agencies had discovered that some people were not being reached in the food distribution programme. In another case, an agency held meetings with male members of the community after discovering that women who were attending feeding centres were having domestic problems with their husbands. There were many other such examples.

For participation to be successful, equal emphasis should be placed on both mental and physical involvement. These aspects of participation can be seen as mutually reinforcing. Greater levels of mental involvement (information sharing, consultation, decision making etc.) will lead to greater commitment in labour mobilisation, while greater levels of physical involvement (provision of labour at various levels in the programme) may lead to a sense of ownership, which may facilitate mental involvement. In all cases, however, communities must be given opportunities to express the forms of participation they feel appropriate and necessary to benefit them. This does not suggest that agencies must agree with everything communities suggest. The resultant practice should be based on a process of negotiation, and not *manipulation*, between the agency and the community, taking into account the key concerns of each.

The more frequent question that has been asked, however, relates to how people can participate in the 'mental sense'. This question can be examined by making reference to the different levels of participation mentioned in the foregoing paragraph.

### *Information sharing and consultation.*

The word *sharing* at this level of the participation process is important. Some refer to the same process as information *gathering*. The difference in practice can be profound. Ideally this is the level at which the agency should learn things about the community it wishes to assist as well as the community learning more about the agency. Very often, only the former applies, i.e. the agency only gathers the information it perceives necessary for its pre-conceived purposes. The agency rarely tells the community about itself, for example, the policy framework within which it operates, its operational procedures, resource as well as staffing limitations, entitlements etc. However, a correct picture of the agency can go a long way towards preventing the creation of 'wrong' expectations in the community.

Agency staff may assume that local people are not interested or do not have the faculties to understand the operational aspects of their organisation. In addition, agencies may fail to realise that knowledge regarding resources, objectives, affiliation, operational procedures etc., may help the community in its own assessment of what is achievable, or to understand why certain decisions and actions are being taken. This can have a profound impact on the success of the programme. For example, during a disaster relief programme in Malawi (Chapter Five), communities that understood that relief items were not being provided by the government had less difficulty understanding why relief was being targeted and were less likely to associate the programme with local and national politics. Those without

this knowledge accused the government of favouritism. In one extreme instance, this resulted in the traditional leader of a particular community barring relief from reaching his area.

As in participation as a whole, information gathering and consultation can be done in various ways and for various purposes. Information can be gathered to fill a knowledge gap, to facilitate an action already in process or even to legitimate an action. For example Harragin (1998: ii) observes that: 'Aid agencies in South Sudan work in an information-poor environment because of a profound lack of communication with the local population. The tendency is therefore to latch onto any information that tries to present local perspectives and twist it to fit the preconceived solutions that agencies come up with'. This is one of the reasons why the notion of sharing rather than gathering information holds more appeal.

#### *Methods of gathering/sharing information.*

Of approaches claimed to be 'participatory' and 'empowering', Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) are the most well known and increasingly becoming popular. Their variants are Participatory Assessment Monitoring and Assessment (PAME) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). Thus: '...an agency committed to women's empowerment may find RRA/PRA techniques immediately appealing...' (Oxfam, 1995: 129). Some people appear to be caught in some kind of frenzy about them. Some bilateral and multilateral donors even make them a pre-condition for funding. Robert Chambers and associates at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex are credited with popularising RRA.

In recent times however, RRA and PRA have come under considerable scrutiny. For

example:

‘It is sometimes claimed that PRA is a tool for people’s empowerment. However, the transfer of power is not a matter of appraisal techniques; power has to be deliberately relinquished by the people and the agencies that hold it...Unless people are involved in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes affecting them, the danger is that NGOs may be using RRA/PRA techniques in a cynical way, as a one-off exercise in participation, or that they are simply unaware of the extent to which their intentions are undermined by their actions’ (Oxfam, 1995: 131).

Ngujiri (1998: 446), who argues that ‘participatory methodologies are double-edged swords that can be used to destroy or to build the capacities of those upon whom they are used’, echoes this criticism. In his view:

‘Asking people to say what their problems are, using all sorts of participatory methodologies is tantamount to asking them to say how useless, weak, empty, powerless and worthless they are in order for them to qualify to be helped. Yet this, to many, is called community involvement or participation. It would be correct to say that the community has participated in its own destruction in that after listing their problems, real, discovered and unreal, they discover how useless they are and feel worse off than before the exercise. They actually discover how poor they are and feel they seriously need external support. This is a negative discovery and however real or otherwise it may be, it can disempower or depress a community. Negative discovery works the same way three people can have a bad effect on you by separately telling you that you look ill. At the end of this you most likely end up feeling ill and

wanting medical attention. It is as serious as that' (ibid., p 468).

Ngujiri's argument is especially relevant in cases where, after conducting the exercise, the agency finds that it has no or inadequate resources to implement the programme in accordance with the 'will of the people'. Then all the agency can display is a spirit of 'open heart but empty pockets'.

Leurs (1997) reviews some of the main challenges facing RRA/PRA. First, he notes that these methods are being used differently by different kinds of people and for different purposes. Some are using them as a research methodology, some as a tool for project appraisal and others as part of a process of participatory development. Obviously this is likely to lead to a certain level of confusion and lack of clarity as to just what these methods can and should achieve. Lack of clarity on the context and purposes for which RRA/PRA are being used is likely to result in inappropriate nature and levels of training, as well as its facilitation. The main challenges currently facing PRA are with regard to:

- Introducing and spreading PRA in communities, especially as regards the training and supporting of local facilitators, as well as ensuring that experience is shared.
- Introducing PRA into development organisations and projects faces problems of unfavourable policy environment, lack of enthusiasm with PRA due to the hierarchical culture of management, or conflict with existing top-down planning and evaluation mechanisms, as well as inflexible or inappropriate accountability requirements of donors, central ministries and politicians.
- Quality and quality assurance are difficult to achieve.



- Lack of methodological critique of PRA.

Despite being perhaps the most popular, RRA/PRA are not the only methods used in development and relief contexts. Appraisal and information gathering can take many forms. These can be informal or formal. The following is a list of some of these methods (Oxfam, 1995: 118-150):

- Meetings and visits.
- Consultation.
- Workshops
- Technical advice.
- Capacities and Vulnerabilities analysis (CVA).
- Gender Framework Analysis (GFA).
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
- Logical Framework Analysis (LFA).
- Cost-effectiveness Analysis (CEA).
- Social and Financial Cost-benefit Analysis.

Chambers (1985: 523-526) produces an even more comprehensive 'menu of methods'

These include: Secondary data reviews; direct observation; do-it-yourself; key indicators; semi-structured interviews; key informants; group interviews; chain of interviews; transect and group walks; mapping and aerial photographs; diagrams; ranking, stratifying and quantification; ethnohistories; stories, portraits, and case studies; team interactions; key probes; and questionnaires. As Chambers himself

observes, most of these methods involve outsiders learning from, and sometimes with, rural people but they are not necessarily participatory in nature.

### *Decision-Making.*

In general it can be said that it appears relatively easier to find ways of involving people at the levels of information sharing or gathering and consultation. These two levels of participation do not necessarily involve the sharing of power between the agency and the affected population. This is perhaps the reason why these two levels happen relatively more often. The real problem appears to start at the level of decision-making, where power is an issue. The question that must be asked here is simply this: *how can people participate so that they are able to influence the decisions taken at every stage of the project?* Framed in this way, however, this question assumes that the answer simply lies in the manner of participation. As the discussion of empowerment has shown, there has to be a genuine willingness of the agency to surrender some of its power to the affected population.

In terms of understanding how people can participate in the decision-making process it is important to clarify the process itself. Decisions about the various stages of the project are usually made either at the headquarters or the regional office level. In emergency situations, issues leading to the making of decisions may sometimes be discussed during relief co-ordination meetings. These meetings usually take place a *safe distance* away from the affected areas. Wherever they take place, there is usually a remarkable absence of any representatives of the communities to be assisted. It appears that no concerted efforts are made to find out who the communities feel would be in a position to represent their interests and then include these people in the various decision-making fora. Excuses to do with language ability might sometimes

be given but this usually ignores the fact that within many communities there are certain local professionals in the fields of education (such as primary school teachers), health, forestry, local government etc who can be recruited as translators. In some cases failure to include affected people in decision-making fora has nothing to do with problems of language.

During the disaster relief programme in Malawi in 1997, for example, the District Commissioners (DCs) of the two districts that were receiving assistance suggested that some of the monthly inter-agency planning and co-ordination meetings be held in one of the two districts rather than the main commercial city where these meetings were being held. The DCs reasoned that this would allow agency and government staff to have a first hand experience of the situation, which would have allowed them to appreciate some of the arguments presented by them (the DCs). Additionally, they suggested that holding meetings in the affected areas would have enabled many traditional leaders to attend and present their thoughts on the relief programme. Everyone agreed that this was a very good idea but nothing was done to respond in practical terms.

In 1998 in south Sudan co-ordination meetings were taking place at the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) base in northern Kenya. There was no evidence that traditional leaders attended these meetings. What they attended were meetings held at the implementation level by agency field staff and their contributions were therefore limited to presenting ideas to already pre-decided agenda. Moreover, it was not clear whether field staff were mandated to handle these contributions on their own, and if so, with what room for manoeuvre or if mechanisms existed to provide feedback to their regional and head offices.

### ***Initiating action.***

It was mentioned earlier that this is the level at which people spontaneously organise themselves to take action because of a shared problem or area of interest, rather than respond to inducement from outside agencies. It is true that communities may spontaneously initiate action in order to respond to certain environmental or social changes. However, the influence of access to resources and knowledge of new opportunities in limiting the actions of the poor should not be forgotten. So rather than using all sorts of participatory approaches to get the community to recognise its problems and start considering ways of solving them, the most empowering action by the agency may be simply to make the community aware of what resources it is in a position to offer and under what conditions, or/and new opportunities that may have arisen beyond the community setting.

This information alone can propel the community into organising itself in various ways in order to access the resources. Such organisation can spark other types of action as well. The community will usually be in a position to judge whether the resources or the conditions under which they are offered are beneficial or disruptive. If the latter is felt to be the case the community may choose not to participate. As White argues (1996: 12), 'Participation is not always in the interest of the poor. Everything depends on the type of participation and the terms on which it is offered. In [some] cases... exit may be the most empowering action'. Rejecting the idea that those who do not 'participate' are passive she argues:

'People have always participated... on the most favourable terms they can obtain. They wait with a mixture of expectation and scepticism what the new agency in their area is offering, and what it will want in return. They have

opted in or out of projects as they suited their interests. At least some of what agencies may see as project 'misbehaviour' can from another standpoint be viewed as their co-optation from below' (p. 14).

Some writers have used the term 'Shared Social Learning' to provide a wider interpretation of what is commonly known as 'beneficiary voice'.

'By "Shared Social Learning"... we mean the process and the products of people working together to discover and understand actual and preferred practice, about, in the case of humanitarian programmes, best ways of meeting immediate survival needs in times of severe stress. Meeting these needs may be through understanding of, and support for, "coping mechanisms", emergency relief goods, providing humanitarian protection or contributing to peace-building processes, or all of these' (Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999a: 12).

This interpretation can also be applied to development situations, if one chose to separate relief and development. Interpreted in this way the issue of beneficiary voice should not be methodologically constricted: 'Rather we would suggest that "shared social learning" by a variety of methods is desirable and possible, where there are no counterproductive effects, whether this is exactly "participatory" or not' (Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999a: 9).

In summary, for development and relief to be successful, agencies need to have adequate knowledge of the communities selected for intervention. Participatory methods of information gathering and appraisal should be used wherever possible. However, there may well be non-participatory methods that can contribute to the process of understanding communities. Therefore, over-emphasis on participatory

methods should not blind people about these.

### **The scope of the research.**

As shown in the foregoing sections there are a number of theoretical issues that surround the issue of participation. In disaster relief, empirical testing of many of these issues tends to be limited to experiences of particular aid workers who may or may not slant their reports in line with their purposes for producing such reports. This study is an attempt to provide, based on three case studies, an expanded understanding of the multiplicity of issues that relate to participation. While it is true that the concept of participation is difficult, if not impossible, to define it would also be difficult to do a systematic study of something that cannot be defined or at least described. Since we know, however, that disaster relief involves an interface between aid organisations and their workers, governments (or de facto organisations) and the people that have been affected by a disaster, this study took as the premise for understanding participation, the theoretical notion of the ability of all of these actors *to influence decisions* regarding the ways in which assistance is provided.

Based on this notion the study attempted to use empirical data to address the uncertainties that surround the concept of participation, namely:

- a) Why is participation needed? Despite the general agreement that ethically, participation is in itself a good thing, is there evidence that disaster relief programmes are more effective when delivered in a participatory fashion? In what ways can 'effectiveness' be meaningfully understood? What can be the role of participation itself in helping us to understand 'effectiveness'?
- b) How can people participate in an emergency situation? Do disasters or emergencies require emergency-specific methodologies or methodological

tools? In what ways might concerns that issues such as time pressures, or complex political situations might limit the extent of participation be justified?

- c) Who should participate? Should participation be limited only to people who receive assistance from agencies or in other words those 'targeted' for assistance? If not, who else should participate? In what ways can such people be identified? Who are the vulnerable? How can they be appropriately identified and assisted in the context of limited resources within which aid agencies operate? How useful is the 'social structure' as a realm for participation in emergencies?
- d) What other issues besides the uncertainties listed above limit participation? What processes foster participation?

## **Chapter Two. Participation in Development Practice: a review of the state of the art with reference to some empirical examples.**

### **Introduction**

If participation is an evolving concept defying any simplistic definitions and interpretations, the concept of development is not any different. Historically and at present, there have never been any easy answers to the question, *what is development?* There appear to be as many interpretations of development as there are of participation. For example, at an annual Xavier Institute Convention held in 1991:

‘Speakers were not unanimous in interpreting the term “development”. One section of them viewed it in terms of economic prosperity and the other in terms of social upliftment. A few others looked at it as a process which enhances human potential’ (Xavier Institute of Social Service, 1991: 1).

This division in fact represents the major rift between academics and professionals globally. In such a scenario, it should be obvious that the double-barrelled concept of *participatory development* should face formidable problems of interpretation. Some have conceptualised participatory development, seen in terms of sustainability, as a process by which people, communities and countries gain voice and move towards enhanced autonomy, going from passiveness or submission to negotiated action (Schneider and Libercier, 1995). This definition is useful because it tells us that there are several separate, if linked, levels at which the attainment of voice and enhanced autonomy is to be understood i.e. at the level of individuals, at the level of



communities and at the level of a country as a whole. This means that to implement participatory development we must endeavour to comprehend the different processes, agenda, values, needs, hopes, fears, aspirations and priorities held at each level, with regard to the dynamic nature of these. Given that ideas regarding participatory development are likely to vary across the different levels, policy makers and practitioners should attempt to bridge the gap in ways that will not make one group the sole loser.

This thesis is primarily concerned with participation in emergency relief, rather than development contexts. However, it is important to review the concept of participation within the context of development because of the traditional relationship with emergency relief. This relationship has led to a lively debate as regards how to reconcile the two both in theory and in practice. Theoretically, commentators have grappled with issues regarding exactly where emergency relief ends and where development begins as well as inherent variations that exist between the two. Practically, it is normally the case that many international NGOs and government agencies are involved in both relief and development and sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between relief and development activities. As a matter of fact, many development NGOs actually started off as relief NGOs, and it appears somewhat paradoxical that relief should learn from development rather than the other way round. Methodologically, questions have been raised as to whether the same participatory methods (if) used successfully in development settings can and should also be used in relief situations. In both development and relief, if more so in the latter than in the former, doubts exist about the practicality and benefits of participatory approaches, in addition to the question of whether such approaches are also empowering, as sometimes claimed.

Apthorpe and Atkinson (1999a: 11) argue that these comparisons are pertinent when considering the potential for participatory approaches in emergency situations since:

‘There is no *a priori* reason why these should borrow uncritically from what is not only a substantively and situationally different area but also one in which far too much has been claimed in theory... At the same time there is no *a priori* reason why humanitarian programmes should not be able to learn much from becoming more collaborative and consultative than they are... the principle conclusion this synthesis paper reaches is that the more collaborative and consultative humanitarian programmes become the better, both ethically and practically’.

The process of development (as also that of emergency relief) has been undergoing an evolutionary process. Traditionally, development was theoretically seen in terms of economic growth. Such growth was regarded as a means through which the society’s economy would meet the basic consumption needs of its population, particularly the underprivileged groups. Subsequent perspectives on development drew attention to the need to raise the self-awareness of the people rather than educating or indoctrinating them, giving them the power to assert their ‘voice’, and stimulating their self-driven action to transform their reality. In addition, some views appeared to draw on Marx’s ideas of the self-emancipation of oppressed groups, while yet others saw development as the release of people’s creativity (Rahman, 1995). According to Rahman, ‘such radical theoretical or philosophical conceptions of popular grassroots mobilisations have, however, lacked a political theory for macro-level social transformation, without which the micro-level assertion of popular power and release of people’s creativity remain heavily circumscribed’

(Rahman, 1995: 25).

Thus, even in practice, a major challenge is to find a balance between development in the macro sense, for example at the level of the nation, and development in the micro sense, that is, at the level of small communities or even groups of individuals. On the one hand, it is quite well known, for example, that high levels of economic growth measured in terms of indices such as rising GDP and GNP per Capita levels do not necessarily mean an improvement in living standards for the majority of the poor people. (Professor Raymond Apthorpe, in a personal communication, suggested that a more accurate social indicator of development should be GHP, i.e. Gross Happiness Product!). On the other hand, peasant demands and their view of development may not be one that necessarily increases production at the national level. This contradiction may be at the heart of situations in which governments are caught up in the rhetoric for participation and increased peasant decision-making, while in reality they continue to pursue a production-focused development approach.

The language of participation has become so part and parcel of development dialogue that it almost sounds redundant to state that many organisations are advocating it. The manuals and policy documents of almost all international as well as local NGOs contain phrases expressing the agencies' commitment to participation. Participatory development has also received a major boost from vigorous support from other international development agencies, most notably, the World Bank. Several UN agencies also actively promote participation either through funding and facilitating the implementation of devolution programmes, funding participatory projects or sponsoring research and academic enterprise into the concepts of participation and development. Included among these agencies are the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Four of these agencies, the FAO, the ILO, UNIFEM and the WHO, are members, under the chairmanship of the ILO, of a United Nations Task Force on Rural Development charged with the specific task of promoting the concept and practice of people's participation in rural development as well as in other UN programmes.

There are also budding regional forums calling for popular participation in development. For example, the Arusha Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa issued the African Charter on Popular Participation in 1990. In Asia, the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation made a call to make participatory development a central strategy, arguing, based on mounting evidence regarding the behaviour of low-income producers, that this will not only lead to poverty alleviation but will also maximise the rate of economic growth (Rahman, 1995: 26) In addition, several universities have established institutes or departments which promote research and dissemination of knowledge on the concept of participation. Most notable among them are the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom and Cornell University in the United States.

But so far, despite strong and growing endorsement of participatory development, cases of successful implementation of genuine participatory programmes and

projects are rare. The concept of participatory development appears to suffer from an apparent paradox. On the one hand, there seems to be a consensus that participatory development offers the potential to succeed where the earlier approaches to development failed, namely to ensure that the underprivileged groups in society are not by-passed in the development process. On the other hand, there are increasing out-cries that participatory development continues to fail to achieve extensive application. The question that many are attempting to answer is *why*.

### **The Politics of Participation.**

To the question why participation fails to gain wide application in practice, there are many answers. Some answers would seem to suggest that this is so because those who are in control of resources do not believe that economic and social development can be internally, rather than externally, induced. Many have seen participation as an instrument that can be used to induct people into the economic and cultural systems of the West. Furthermore, there is an apparent lack of commitment to make the necessary structural reforms that will accord peasants or the urban poor access to and control of resources. Rahman (1995: 26-27) argues that:

‘Participatory development is far from being adopted in practice anywhere in a way which leads to major structural reforms and the transfer of resources away from those vested interests that control dominant social and political structures towards underprivileged people. Dominant lobbies in the Southern countries are accepting PD (Participatory Development) as at best a poverty alleviation strategy, to be implemented sporadically at the micro-level, and then only by mobilising the resources of the poverty groups themselves, supplemented by donor support, rather than redirecting the mainstream of

development resources to support PD on a national scale. Mainstream development efforts supported by the great bulk of foreign development assistance remains very much non-participatory, and *poverty-augmenting* rather than *poverty-alleviating*' (emphasis supplied) (Rahman, 1995: 26-7).

In particular, the author notes that the World Bank's structural adjustment programme followed by many countries as a condition for the Bank's assistance is not concerned with participatory development, among other things. He argues that reliance on the virtue of the free market in allocation of resources favours the specific consumption needs of the affluent rather than those of the poor. In many countries the results of the programme have included, among others, the worsening of the growth performance in the private sector and in the public sector development efforts, and the dominance of bureaucratic and technocratic approaches that don't favour the poor.

### *Doubts*

It is important to note that within the overwhelming endorsement of participation, and despite the fact that many declare their convictions regarding its benefits, it would seem that there is some level of doubt among some as to the benefits of participation. For example: 'Research should be undertaken to try to determine the net benefits of participatory practices. This research should include a test of the hypothesis that lower borrower commitment and low levels of popular participation often lead to high costs later because of low impact or project failure' (Bhatnagar and Williams, 1992: 5). Similarly, Picciotto (1992: 1) comments that, as regards the concept of participatory development, 'more examples are needed to beef up the theory and more theory is needed to illuminate an elusive development reality'.

In some cases, this uncertainty seems to stem from difficulties involved in identifying and quantifying the benefits of participation. Thus: 'This problem is most evident when examining ongoing projects, especially those still in the early stages of implementation; participation related benefits may not be seen until several years of implementation have yielded evidence on, for example, the quality and likely sustainability of the project activities' (Rietbergen-McCracken, 1996: 18). These views may be a clue to a situation in which many tend to endorse participation simply in order not to be seen to go against the tide, but deep down are neither convinced about the benefits of, nor committed to, genuine participation. In part this may also explain why there is so much rhetoric and limited practice in participatory development.

#### *Lack of government interest*

In some cases, it seems that resistance or lack of enthusiasm for participation is generated by fear of losing political control and economic benefit, especially in the case of government officials of the host country and local elites. Oakley et al. (1991: 11-12) note that there are several *structural obstacles* to genuine participation. Firstly, a political environment that results from an ideology that prefers controlled decision-making to encouraging openness or views from the citizens can inhibit participation. Secondly, genuine participation can be severely curtailed by a political system that does not put local administration mechanisms and decision-making in the mainstream. Thirdly, participation can be thwarted through tensions that can be generated by the friction between mechanisms promoted by the state on the local level, aimed at achieving centrally planned objectives, and the development efforts generated informally at the grass-roots level. Fourthly, participation can be frustrated

by the legal system, especially when information on legal rights is not disseminated to the poor and where legislation governing the right of legal associations of different groups of poor workers is withheld. In such a situation efforts by the poor to build organisations to represent their interests will be severely limited, as they would be in a situation where legislation gives the government sweeping powers to disperse 'unlawful assemblies'.

Reviewing a number of studies documenting the experience of the World Bank and other stakeholders on participation in development projects, Reitbergen-McCracken (1996: 4) observes that 'in several of the projects studied the proposed participatory approach met with resistance from government officials... and limited the success of the implementation of the approach'. In the case of a Rural Development Project in Ecuador, the writer reports that government interest in utilising the participatory approach during the early stages of the project was based on seeking financial and labour contributions from the beneficiaries rather than on achieving more meaningful participation. In addition, there was weak commitment on the part of government officials in the implementing agency because of their lack of adequate involvement during the preparation phase of the project and also because they had little experience with participatory approaches. During a change in leadership in the implementing agency brought about by elections, more traditionally minded ministers replaced many who had supported the participatory approach.

Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) have argued that governments may offer varying degrees of resistance with respect to different sectors of the economy. According to this argument, governments are, for example, more likely to accept or tolerate participation in sectors that do not directly jeopardize the position of local elites and



state agents. Such fields include public health and areas whose success requires the active participation of local people such as population control and environmental control. The authors note that participation in the field of public health is gaining ground with support from international organisations such as the WHO and UNICEF. Similarly, the increasing magnitude and seriousness of environmental problems, the inability of government to address them and international advocacy of sustainable development approaches have persuaded governments to be more open to participatory approaches.

To be sure, it is important on the theoretical level that the functioning of the state be seen in a proper perspective to gain a proper understanding as regards its dealings with its population. Here again, the argument put forward by Stiefel and Wolfe (1994: 211) is most illuminating:

‘The state has probably never encountered such diverse ideological attacks and threats to its functioning since the genesis of the modern nation-states two centuries ago. Radical proponents of participatory development and empowerment theories tend to see in it a main cause of continued poverty and inequality, and pursue, consciously or not, an anarchist utopia from which the state would be absent and where only the ‘people’ or the ‘community’ remains. Their opponents from the right join them in this almost visceral anti-state attitude. They advocate further dismantling of the welfare state, deregulation and privatisation, and argue for the inherent curative and productive virtues of the free market and of individual initiative. Historical evidence suggests that both assumptions about the role of the state may be wrong and that a healthy state is probably indispensable both for the

development of the free market economy and for the functioning of a participatory democratic system.

From the standpoint of this inquiry into participation, whatever the recent upheavals and confusions, the state and its agents remain key actors in the development game at the national and sub-regional levels. And key questions relevant to the “organised efforts of the excluded” remain the extent to which the state can become willing and able to promote or tolerate such efforts, and the conditions under which state agents can help the excluded achieve more control over their own livelihoods and an authentic voice in shaping their and the county’s future’.

### *Local elites.*

The argument about local elites is that when they stand to lose a position of advantage socially and economically as a result of a more participatory approach to the development of their community, they are more likely to offer resistance. According to a study of the Northeast Rural Development Programme in Brazil by Kottak et al., for example, (Reported by Rietbergen-McCracken, 1996) high state-level commitment to participation was undermined by the behaviour of a municipal-level politician. The politician had obtained substantial economic gains through middleman activities. The formation of a local association aimed at regulating the sale of local products put middlemen in a disadvantaged position. In an effort to protect his privileged position the politician accused the association of being linked to the Leftist Workers’ Party in an attempt to arouse state-level opposition and reduce the flow of resources to the project.

It would be erroneous, however, to hold the view that all local elites are opposed to all forms of community participation in all circumstances. To begin with, there is no consensus on the model of state-society relations that depicts local elites as obstacles to the democratisation of authority and greater participation in development (Mitra, 1992). Viewing local elites as a dominant force that accumulates benefits because of their control of land, capital and high social status, is just one alternative. This model contradicts alternative models born out of research findings in some parts of the world. With reference to the case of India, for example, Mitra argues that there exists tremendous internal diversity in the social origins of local leaders. In addition, the base of their political support may be fragile and variable, frequently dependent upon their ability to 'deliver the goods'.

The author argues that the available evidence in India shows that there has been a steady broadening of the political arena, considerable turnover of leadership and the entry of hitherto excluded groups into the political process. Concluding his argument regarding the relationship between the peasantry, local elites and the state, Mitra (1992: 209-211) contends that:

'The field data presented here question the apparent supine and abject surrender of the peasantry by drawing upon their ability to manipulate the environment to their benefit; to engage in a covert guerrilla war against their enemies with "weapons of the weak", and even to find allies within the state structure who devise policies that seek to balance central planning with local knowledge and welfare... the crucial intermediaries in this process of social change and development transformation of their economy are local elites... they are political actors, situated at the interface of the modern state and

traditional society, of modernity and tradition and of individual rationality and group solidarity... engaged in a two-way interpretation of norms and political demands. Their methods range between acting as brokers in national, regional and local elections, lobbying and contacting the bureaucracy and higher political elites for the allocation of material resources and seeking to bolster their demands through rhetoric and occasional spells of radical protest'.

Mitra's argument regarding the role of local elites in lobbying for the allocation of material resources is supported by the writings of Gilbert and Gugler (1981) who noted that their absence in poor urban neighbourhoods could result in the absence of an articulate voice leading to their neglect by the national bureaucracy.

The apparent contradiction in the experiences of the behaviour of local elites seem to call for an investigation into the forces that lead them to behave in a particular way. On the one hand, it might be true that individual elites would seek to maximise the advantages of their privileged position by opposing changes that lead to the loss of that position. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that the predominant view that local elites are likely to behave in this way may lead, especially when international agencies are involved, to unwarranted prejudice, suspicion and hostility being directed against them. Thus, instead of being treated as partners in the development of their community, they may be treated as obstacles and be excluded from genuine participation. In the end a self-reinforcing situation can arise as the local elites attempt to react to the sentiments and treatment directed against them.

### *Mistrust.*

It is clear from the literature that there is usually a general mistrust between various stakeholders in the development process. For example, Rietbergen-MacCracken (1996: 4), contends that 'in many instances, the relationship between beneficiaries, NGOs, and government (and in some cases, the World Bank) has been, at least initially, based on mistrust and suspicion.' She cites a case from a study of a waste management programme in Nepal to demonstrate that such mistrust could be based on previous failures experienced by communities.

However, it must be stated that such mistrust is usually mutual rather than unidirectional. There are various reasons why the World Bank and other external agencies are wary of government officials. While they may lack the necessary skills and incentives, one of the most frequently implied, if not openly mentioned, causes of mistrust and suspicion is that government agents are, allegedly, frequently corrupt. Indeed, such allegations sometimes are justified on the basis of reports in the press, regarding the misuse of donor funds by top government officials. In addition, external agencies frequently view 'government and its bureaucratic apparatus as essentially hostile to the whole notion of reducing central control, devolving decisions to local level and supporting demands made by rural people for the kinds of radical changes that might be required to find lasting solutions for the poverty they suffer' (Oakley et al., 1991: 20); and, despite the fact that there are some government ideologies that overtly promote people's participation, such as those of Tanzania, Ethiopia and the Philippines, 'governments are inevitably the main protagonists of a top-down approach to development and the object of much critical comment on the effectiveness of big, donor-supported development projects' (ibid., p.22).

Governments may also be suspicious of the international donor community for various reasons, some of them born out of previous experiences. For example, there are no shortages of reports in the media showing leaders of governments in developing countries accusing foreign envoys of wanting to run their governments for them. Such leaders sometimes argue that foreign envoys lack the internal knowledge necessary for the proper assessment of the feasibility of new ideas. In some cases, political leaders may see ideas emanating from the international community as potentially dangerous with respect to their hold on power. In other cases, these leaders are not happy with the inflexibility of the international community in terms of which programmes to support. There are also cases in which government leaders feel that the international community is more likely to heed proclamations made by internal opposition and watchdog groups on isolated and specific incidences, even if such proclamations are not justified in the context of the wider political processes. The issue of 'strings' attached to aid given to developing countries is also another well-known grounds for government mistrust and suspicion of the international community.

### ***The Role of International Organisations.***

*'International organisations, technical co-operation agencies, and above all international lending institutions such as the World Bank, regional development banks or the International Fund for Agricultural Development, at times exert a decisive influence on national policy' (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 220).*

While not wishing to exonerate governments from the damning accusation that they stand in the way of people's participation, it would be unfair to regard them as the sole villains in this unfolding drama. To begin with, Rahman's discussion has

already made it clear that many governments in the developing world have been forced to adopt structural adjustment programmes, which have nothing to do with participatory development, as a precondition for the World Bank's financial assistance. Secondly, most government staffs in developing countries continue to be trained in top-down models of planning and administration. Furthermore, organisations, particularly the World Bank, appear to put a premium on training economists in order to enhance economic management in developing countries. Such actions can only serve to entrench government agents deeper and deeper into top-down, non-participatory approaches.

Stiefel and Wolfe (1994) note that there is still a wide gap between rhetoric and reality in the behaviour of many international agencies. While they strongly advocate participation in their pronouncements, a good many of them still tend to concentrate exclusively on economic and technical factors to the neglect of political factors and realities. In addition, despite theoretically regarding development as a historical process, these organisations continue to plan and implement their activities within a traditional, a-historical 'project approach'. The following quote sums up the state of affairs aptly:

'Studies conducted recently in various international organisations, both at headquarters and in the field, show that instances of real participation as defined in this book continue to be rare. When it comes to the practical implementation of development policy, international organisations invariably tend to put aside the "empowerment" rhetoric and revert to traditional "beneficiary" or "target group" participation... International organisations continue to have few direct contacts with the actual grassroots communities...

their main partners remain government agencies at central, and possibly down to the district levels, other international agencies, international NGOs, and consultants and technicians. The gap between rhetoric and reality is particularly pathetic in those organisations and agencies that like to maintain a progressive image: while the organisations' top management and their governing bodies call for extensive beneficiary participation in all projects, and while their policy departments translate and legitimise these calls within a flamboyant rhetoric, the agencies' staff at headquarters and in the field are confused or ambivalent, do not know how to translate participation into reality within concrete projects against often practical and political obstacles, and finally put it aside as one of these new "soft" elements that complicate development projects, introduce factors of risk and unpredictability and create difficulties in implementation. What remains is in most cases a traditional top-down and non-participatory approach which focuses on the achievement of physical and financial project targets, sanctified in appropriate statistics, albeit within a new rhetoric' (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 225-226).

Clearly, the key question to be asked is why, despite little action, international organisations continue with this 'flamboyant rhetoric'. One possibility could be that this rhetoric is simply an artificial costume designed to make them look good in the eyes of the poor in relation to their (the poor's) governments who are believed to have let them down. Perhaps international organisations hope that by turning up the volume of rhetoric they are acting as a spokes-person for the poor and putting pressure on governments to act. However, this tactic is unlikely to be successful since with increasing globalisation, the actions of these governments are heavily



dependent on the development agenda, mostly not sympathetic to participatory development, of the very same organisations that are generating the pressure.

It would also appear that international organisations and governments alike fail to transform rhetoric into reality because their staffs are caught up in bureaucratic systems that are not conducive to the promotion of genuine participation by the poor. Korten and Uphof (1981), for example, argue that bureaucratic reorientation is needed as a way of fostering participation in rural development. In their view, the attitudes of superiority and paternalistic postures assumed by many staff can be understood not just in terms of personal dispositions:

‘Here too we must be careful not to *blame the victim*. In part, and sometimes in large part, *the observed behaviour and manifest attitudes of government staff grow out of the bureaucratic context in which they find themselves*: the role expectations communicated through training programmes and contacts with their superiors, the performance measures against which they are assessed, the structure of rewards and the kind of sanctions focused on them.’

(Korten and Uphof, 1981: 5, emphasis supplied).

Korten and Uphoff are not alone in making this argument. At the Annual Xavier Institute Convention (Xavier Institute of Social Service, 1991: 5), ‘most speakers seemed to agree with the view that bureaucracy is nothing but hypocrisy and is the fundamental obstacle to (participatory) development’.

Over and above attempting to change the attitude and values of aid workers, the authors argue that ‘*the more important part involves changes in job definitions, performance criteria, career incentives, bureaucratic procedures, organisational responsibilities and the like*’ (Korten and Uphoff, 1981: 6, emphasis supplied).

The authors argue that prevailing bureaucratic practices and the procedures and reward system that support them tend to be reinforced by three value equations, all of which are often mistaken, reflecting deeply held assumptions regarding the nature of the development process:

- That expenditure = results: 'Even though experience suggests that there is little association in the social realm between the size of government expenditure and the results achieved from that expenditure, administrators and technicians throughout the system are under inexorable pressures to act as if there were such an equivalence to design programmes and implement them with all possible speed so that they and their superiors can report X amount of progress in terms of X amount of money spent' (Korten and Uphoff, 1981: 10).
- That education = superiority: Here, the authors contend that the assumption that formal education makes the possessor superior and that his or her judgement and values should prevail vis-à-vis those with less education, is unwarranted. According to this argument, the knowledge of a well-educated person may be necessary but not sufficient for programme planning and implementation. On the other hand, while local knowledge is unlikely to be sufficient, it is almost always necessary. A blend of the two is thus needed.
- That Projects = Development: In this instance, it is assumed that development will be brought about by a series of finite, discontinuous actions with discreet time-bounded outcomes dependent on special temporary injections of external funds. Planning and implementation are regarded as two separate activities. This is in contrast to an alternative view that sees development as a continuing process of changing relationships where development resources are defined more broadly than just mere capital, and where planning and implementation are seen as a

continuing, iterative effort to deal with changing obstacles and opportunities (ibid., pp.12-13).

While the emphasis of this argument by Korten and Uphoff is government staff, the same is also true for staff working in international organisations. They usually have very high levels of formal education and are frequently addressed as 'experts', which is likely to make them feel superior, and they too have to report to their superiors who expect results based on pre-determined methods of assessment. Thus, this conclusion is just as relevant for staff in international organisations as it is for government staff:

'We also believe that the commonly observed lack of commitment and imagination among the personnel of development agencies is more a consequence of bureaucratic systems which treat creative behaviour as dysfunctional than a reflection of any inherent qualities of their personnel' (Korten and Uphoff, 1981: 14).

However, even this explanation still begs the question why the type of bureaucratic reorientation advocated by Korten and Uphoff has failed to occur. Is it because such reorientation is not compatible with the broader and fundamental aspects of the current form of the capitalist system? And given that there has not been much success with participatory development in previous and existing socialist contexts, is it perhaps the case that new forms of capitalism or socialism are needed for broad-based participation to occur?

## **The Practice of Participation.**

Problems emanating from theoretical dispositions such as those discussed above can be distinguished from views that suggest that there are some external agencies that are not only convinced of the benefits of participation, even if non-quantifiable, but also that they genuinely believe in the capacity and efficacy of indigenous groups and their institutions to initiate social and economic development. For this group of people, the will exists but practical factors constrain their actions.

### ***Cost and Time***

The World Bank explored the idea that participation makes projects more costly than would otherwise be the case. Referring to a study done by Hentschel, Rietbergen-McCracken (1996: 3), notes that participatory projects cost the Bank ten to fifteen percent more, on average, than non-participatory ones. Workshops, consultations and the hiring of participation experts mainly constituted the additional costs. The author implies, however, that this additional cost is likely to have been under-estimated because only identifiable and measurable costs could be included. Costs that could not be measured included, for example, staff time spent in negotiating with sceptical governments to adopt a participatory approach, meeting with local organisations, strengthening their capacity, and building links between different stake holders. In addition, the writer argues that time-accounting procedures are often done in a way to mask the costs of an expensive operation by referring some of the time spent to other, lower cost projects. However, the study is also reported to have shown that there was no significant difference between participatory and non-participatory projects in terms of overall time elapsed between project identification and disbursement of funds, with some participatory projects actually disbursing quicker

than non-participatory ones because of the former's increased stakeholder commitment and better project performance.

### *Expertise/ Methodology*

One of the most frequently encountered obstacles to participation is, it is claimed, lack of adequate numbers of personnel within implementing agencies who have the relevant skills to use participatory approaches in development and relief projects.

'Clearly, if project staff are not provided with the necessary skills and incentives to work in a participatory way with local communities, their willingness and ability to do so will be severely hampered' (Rietbergen-McCracken, 1996: 4). Referring to a study of community management of rural water supply in Indonesia undertaken by Smith, the author noted that NGO staffs were generally better trained in facilitating community action than their government counterparts. As a result, the former were flexible and responsive in their approach. By contrast, the latter were less qualified, needed to cover more communities, resulting in a more top-down approach involving only village leaders or a small group of the local elite.

Such findings have led some to undertake a critical exploration of the precise skills that are needed for enhancing participation. In reviewing the experience of the World Bank on participatory development in 20 of its projects, Bhatnagar (1992: 20) argues that expertise in any one academic field did not appear to be critical for promoting participation. Rather, 'participatory approaches seem often to have resulted from the personal commitment of individual project managers, whether these have been economists, financial analysts, urban planners, sociologists, engineers, anthropologists, demographers, management experts, public administrators, lawyers, psychologists, political scientists, or architects.' According to the writer, World Bank

project managers have identified cultural sensitivity, negotiating skills, vision, perseverance, conviction, and practical work experience as some of the key character traits to the development of a participatory approach. Practical experience is arguably the most critical missing ingredient. The key issue therefore appears to be how to reorient existing staff, given the Bank's limited capacity to hire new staff.

Certain aspects of Bhatnagar's argument appear to raise questions that beg answers.

The argument is set up as follows:

'If it can be demonstrated that individuals with certain characteristics are essential for the success of participatory projects, then the presence of those characteristics should be a criterion in the selection of many Bank staff. And if it can be shown that the motivation and skills in question are acquired rather than inherited, it would be useful to identify what in these individuals' previous experience makes them people-centred' (1992:20).

To begin with the writer appears to be making the assumption that practical work experience is the only generator of the required motivations, character traits and skills in individuals, negating any relevance attached to academic or professional training. This argument seems to overlook the fact that social scientists, particularly sociologists and anthropologists, have played a key role in the development of the whole notion of bringing people to the centre of the development process. Moreover, the premium put on individual character traits would tend to overlook factors that are generated by the environment within which promoters of participation operate. And if it is true that academic or professional training and the social-political environments do not play a key role at the project implementation level, then it should follow that the key elements mentioned above should always be present in

people who have had experience with participatory approaches. Since this is clearly not the case, the only other possible explanation is that the character traits in question are inherited rather than acquired. If the latter is true, then it is obvious that the quest for a wide application of participation is based on chance, and therefore limited primarily because of this fact. It is true that personal commitment, vision, negotiating skills and other personal attributes play a key role in the ability to use participatory approaches, but based on experience and findings by others, it would be a mistake to ignore the role played by training.

Nevertheless, regardless of what makes some individuals more oriented towards a participatory approach than others, the question that continues to perplex many is: *what precisely constitutes a participatory methodology?* For example, although they claim that ‘there are now sufficient examples of participation in practice in development projects for us to begin to discern elements of methodology prevalent in this practice’ (Oakley et al., 1991: 205), Oakley et al. also note that ‘one of the more difficult tasks in a review of project practice is to identify clearly the methodology used in the implementation of participation’ (p.210). And although ‘project files (of agencies) reveal further detail of this practice and give us glimpses of the actual methodological tools used to promote participation’ (p.205), ‘these, however, are scattered randomly across agencies and projects and few have systematically attempted to analyse the practice and present a coherent methodological statement’ (p.206). In a similar vein, Cernea (1992: 96) argues that ‘no matter how intense or loud, the advocacy for people’s participation in development programmes remains gratuitous rhetoric if it is not translated into a how-to *social methodology for making popular participation real*’ (emphasis added).

Drawing from information contained in the Project files of a number of development agencies, Oakley et al. (1991) then set out to extract and isolate the tools for a participatory methodology. And drawing on their work (pp.205-229) the following paragraphs attempt to provide a summary of these tools. The terminology of *tools* or *instruments* for a participatory methodology is important to grasp because frequently such *tools* or *instruments* have been regarded as being synonymous with the methodology itself.

In beginning, the authors note that different methodologies of implementation result from different interpretations of participation, of which three can be identified: (a) Projects which methodologically follow a conventional project-planning cycle and seek to make it more participatory: in these types of projects participation is either non-existent or tokenistic, with an emphasis on participation in benefits; (b) Projects which methodologically seek to involve people in externally managed development projects: here, participation is still interwoven to conventional practice but the methodology is explicit and emphasis is on organisation, the promotion and development of people's awareness, and increasing their involvement, to participate primarily in physical activities; and (c) Projects which seek to promote a base for continuing people's participation: These are projects in which emphasis is on developing, over a period of time, a base among people, and in which the methodology unfolds and responds to the different stages of the process.

Cernea (1992: 96), identifies the specific elements of a social methodology for implementing popular participation as including: the identification of social actors who will carry out the programme; the conceptualisation of the programme goals and participatory principles, in line with the needs of the social actors; the organisation of



adequate linkage systems and forms of co-operation between government agencies and the grassroots social actors; the establishment of information and communication patterns and procedures for joint decision-making, particularly regarding financial resource allocation and priority selection; and mobilisation through structures and authority mechanisms endogenous to the group of social actors.

Several authors have undertaken to pinpoint the actual *tools*, or *tool-kit* or *software* that can be used to implement a participatory methodology (Chambers, 1985; Apthorpe, 2000; Cernea, 1992; Oakley et al., 1991; Oxfam, 1995). I referred to most of these in Chapter One. The following section, relying primarily on the work of Oakley et al. (1991), is a summary of the bases for many of the tools, as well as an attempt in some cases to give empirical examples.

*Economic or physical activities:* In principle, these are seen as important because in addition to providing immediate tangible benefits, they also serve as a basis for building up and strengthening the future base for participation, through the development of group cohesion, solidarity and organisational skills. Involvement in physical economic activities is seen as part of a broader process of participation and as a way of beginning to involve people in the larger process.

This approach appears to have been at the heart of the People's Participation Programme (PPP), a strategy launched by the FAO in 1980, based initially on the realisation of the need to mainstream participation in rural development by the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD), and the successful implementation in the late 1970s of the Small Farmer Development Programme (SFDP) in Nepal (Bortei-Doku, 1991: 61). The key elements of PPP are said to be: a) a focus on the rural poor; b) self-organisation and self-reliance; c)

income-and-employment generating activities; d) small homogeneous groups; e) the existence of a Group Promoter (GP); f) Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME); and the building up of capital through the provision of credit and promotion of savings. In the context of Ghana, where PPP first found its establishment on a pilot basis, the stages of implementation consisted of a baseline survey, selection and training of group promoters, formation of groups, provision of credit, establishment of income-generating activities and PME.

The PPP methodology generated a number of key issues. Firstly, the process of group formation seemed to have emphasised quantity rather than quality. While there was a boom in the number of groups, there was no corresponding growth in key aspects such as self-reliance and sustainability, and several were dormant rather than dynamic. Secondly, the role of the GP, as is usually the case with any other type of facilitator, was clouded in mist. To begin with, project pressure resulted in a shift from a principally facilitating and educating function to an administrative one. Perhaps as a result of this shift the groups tended to see the GPs' role in the light of potential economic benefits and accepted their role on the basis of this potential. In addition, not only was there a considerable turnover of GPs, but also they did not exhibit the supposed dynamism to reflect changes in the degree of self-reliance among the groups.

A key issue as regards these outcomes appears to be the fact that the whole PPP approach hinged on the provision of credit and the establishment of income-generating activities. The assumption that poor people need credit continues to flourish, despite suggestions from some studies that the poor actually find credit from formal lending institutions, with its bureaucratic procedures for repayment,

burdensome. It is true that the provision of credit is an easy way to mobilise people into forming groups but the consequences of this strategy, as regards participation, can be less than desirable. In the Ghanaian case, it was found that it was difficult to withdraw from offering the credit without seriously undermining the project: 'There is evidence that the project's staff at times became bogged down in the sheer demands of credit management and that the availability or otherwise of this credit was the only motivation for some groups to continue to meet' (Bortei-Doku, 1991: 73). The lesson here is possibly that while access to credit is important for participation to occur, the provision of that access should be integrated with other initiatives that can enable the poor to service the credit. In addition, bureaucracy should be kept at a minimum.

*Project group meetings and discussions:* As opposed to the traditionally-styled meetings, which merely aim at communicating information to people of pre-agreed programmes, meetings, held regularly and conducted on the basis of equal partnership between group members and project staff, are aimed at promoting an authentic participation function as a forum for involving people, creating awareness of issues and solutions and serving as a basis for a more formal structure that exhibits solidarity, cohesion and unity of action. The characteristics of such meetings include among other things, use of local language, pace and style fitting the people's way of life, open ended in nature and sometimes an apparent lack of structure.

*Workshops, seminars and camps:* While traditionally these activities are used merely as forums for formal knowledge transfer, as instruments of participation they must be characterised by: the absence of domination by the facilitator; the relating of theory to practical, everyday life experiences; the absence of pre-determined answers and

theories which aim to offer quick-fix solutions; and the ability of participants to structure or restructure the workshop's content and outcomes based on their experience and lessons learnt from the exercise.

*Popular theatre and song:* as opposed to being used to try to persuade people to adopt certain views or undertake particular action, as instruments for participation, these activities should aim at challenging people to look critically at their situation and think about ways of changing or improving it. These activities should be entirely participatory involving people at every stage, for example, in story construction, as actors and stage managers and so on.

*Bible Circles:* 'Given the widespread involvement of the Christian Church in development at the grassroots level... the emergence of a theology closely associated with participation as an act of liberation, it is not surprising to find Bible study as a means for furthering people's awareness and involvement' (Oakley et al (1991: 226).

*Small group Media:* Here, equipment such as video, puppetry, sound slide productions and photographs is used to promote people's involvement. However, the high levels of capital investment as well as technical skill required for operation limit the use of such equipment. Consequently, its use has tended to be limited to urban areas.

*Public meetings and campaigns:* These are usually useful for provoking interest on specific issues in the general population and for seeking people's possible involvement in developing solutions. Such meetings and campaigns aim to have a widespread immediate and powerful impact upon a large group of people on a particular issue. Follow-up with other instruments of participation may be needed to sustain their initial impact.

One writer (Dichter, 1992) has argued with respect to World Bank funded participatory programmes that the existing literature on participation answers the basic questions: which institutional devices to promote participation are most appropriate in different situations? How can government extension services become more demand responsive? How can governments encourage popular participation through public policies to NGOs? However, he believes that the critical issue missing from the literature, and one that needs to be addressed, is the question of quality:

‘While we know a great deal about participation, we don’t act on what we know, and when we do, we compromise on the basics far too often. Thus perhaps what can be of help on the institutional front is not a set of “how to’s,” but rather a guide to some of the cultural mismatches inside institutions (including the Bank) that result in poor quality promotion of participation, and some suggestions on how to alter this situation’ (Dichter, 1992: 91).

Dichter’s own contribution to this task is to identify a number of mismatches that compromise the quality of participation

First, he draws our attention to a mismatch between *Artistry and Science*. On the one hand, there is a tendency among many to focus on the *higher ground of technical rationality*. On the other hand, there is lack of enthusiasm to venture into the *messy swamp* of the *indeterminate zones of practice*. In other words, professionals are called upon to be flexible in their approach to development practice in order to be responsive to changing circumstances and processes rather than adhering to some pre-formulated blue print.

‘It is perhaps because of our unconscious attachment to the norms of technical rationality, and our resistance to the messiness of the swamp, that it

is difficult to cross over to quality in practice. For in practice, popular participation is a messy business... if we were to break out of the confines of technical rationality in which we quite naturally take refuge, we might be freer to deal with the artistry needed in the swamp... we are talking about the *art* of development rather than the *science* of it' (p.92, emphasis supplied).

Second, Dichter (1992) draws our attention to a mismatch between *process* and *technique*. This situation arises when implementers, especially NGOs, sometimes because of their over-zealous inclinations about participation, make the process rigid by transforming it into a technique or a checklist mentality. Participation thus becomes a mere routine and emphasis is upon the letter, rather than the spirit of participation.

In similar vein, Abed (1992: 32) has argued that:

'A development project needs to be flexible enough in its planning and implementation to allow for participation. Flexibility leaves room for operational modifications that might be needed during the project cycle. The main barrier to participatory development lies in the prevailing *blueprint approach* to programming and implementation' (emphasis added).

In practice, the negative effects of the blueprint approach have manifested themselves in many projects. In one example, Sanders (1991) argues with reference to a soil conservation programme in Lesotho that one of the main reasons for limited levels of people's participation was the programme's rigid framework that could not allow for changes that occurred during the course of the project.

Third, there is a conceptual mismatch between the *individual* and the *community*. Dichter (1992) notes that in much of the literature on popular participation, the community rather than the individual is both implied object and subject. He argues that our neglect of the individual makes us prone to diverting our attention away from the very purpose of participation, which is to get individuals involved, to help them to have choices, to empower them as individuals, even though they may be in a group. In addition we make ourselves prone to falling into the trap of thinking that individuals are fundamentally different.

While Dichter's grounds for focusing on the individual are well appreciated, it is also important to keep in mind the problems for participation that are brought about because of this focus. In the case of emergency relief, for example, I have already shown how a focus on individuals leads to using numbers as a measure of success. It can also be argued that it is the very realisation that individuals are not fundamentally different that makes it possible for us to use the community as the object and subject.

Finally, the quality of popular participation is compromised by a mismatch between:

*'Participation as an element of development and participation as the basis for development:* Following the tendency toward technical rationality, we too often make popular participation another element of the development process that we must watch closely, add onto projects, and apply according to specially desired guidelines...In the business world, for example, for all its own disjunctions, there was never a time when getting people to buy the company's product was just another element of the company's work. It was the entire reason for being. Similarly, in all grass-roots development, where

people do not have stake (do not “buy in” to a project) or begin to perceive their stake to be less worthwhile than before, projects will fail’ (Dichter, 1992: 93).

To conclude this section, it is clear that, although some may hold doubts, there is an overwhelming endorsement, based on many different studies, of the value of participation. Moreover, many practitioners are not entirely unaware on how to promote it. Thus: ‘When the reams of paper on the subject [of participation P.N.] are put aside, we development professionals sense intuitively that participation is a good thing, and we know how to foster it’ (Dichter, 1992: 89). Nevertheless, professionals and other practitioners need constantly to review the issues discussed here in order not to lose sight of the key issues that affect participation.

## **Case Studies**

### ***Ujamaa Villages in Tanzania: an attempt at institutionalised participation.***

The case of *ujamaa* villages in Tanzania, which involved the deliberate establishment of self-sustaining communal settlements, has been a subject for much comment with varying degrees of criticism and praise. It is regarded as one of the most outstanding examples of attempts at establishing institutionalised grass-roots participation. There are as many lessons learnt from the implementation of *ujamaa* villages as there are commentaries. The study reviewed here has been chosen for its relevance to issues of participation discussed in this chapter.

Fortman (1980) argues that, despite stated government commitment to the concept of grass-roots participation, there was still a wide gap between rhetoric and reality. For



example, limited government enthusiasm with people's participation manifested itself in the predominance of a bureaucratic definition of development and increased government interference and control in the so-called *ujamaa* villages.

Firstly, she notes that in terms of the former, there has been a gradual replacement of the word '*ujamaa*' with 'production.' In addition, in an apparent attempt to stimulate production, there has been a reactivation of colonial by-laws mandating minimum individual acreages and good cultivation practices, with the possibility of fines or jail sentences for their infraction. Furthermore, 'not only has there been no legislative force applied to communal acreages, but the amount of individual acreage has sometimes precluded participation in communal farming' (p.78-9). The author also notes that an important reason for the bureaucratic predominance is the fact that funding for development plans is controlled at the national level, which leads to regional programmes reflecting national priorities:

'There is also a whole range of decision making processes that are carried on outside the planning structures which have the effect of reducing the scope of village decision-making. These include "operations," localised demonstration efforts and the simple exertion of authority by lower level government and party leaders... In a strict sense it could be said that in these cases government officials are making village decisions' (Fortman, 1980: 79-80).

Secondly, the writer argues that government may use coercion to demonstrate the point to other villages that it is ultimately in control. She gives the following case to support this argument:

'A rather extreme example was in Mtwara village, which was considered a model village but was a fishing village, and therefore its agricultural

production was less than district officials desired. District and ward officials led the villagers into claiming that they had a 90-acre communal farm. When a district official came to inspect the alleged farm, he found the claim to be untrue. A field force unit was then marched in armed with rifles, which they did not use, and hoes, which they did. The villagers were forced to cultivate and plant all 90 acres. Not only was a large demonstration farm established, but also a demonstration of the power of the state and the fruits of non-compliance was made' (p.80).

While this might have been an extreme example, it would appear that the use of force was fairly widespread. As noted by Stiefel and Wolfe (1994: 121), 'between 1973 and 1976 the army was used in a major campaign to relocate half or more of the county's rural population, more than six million people, in some 8,000 *ujamaa* villages.'

Furthermore, Fortman (1980) shows that government control of villages occurred in other ways including, for example, the use of various contributions to government projects and programmes; the establishment of a certain amount of control over village leadership which happens through (a) control of the leaders themselves, and (b) the insertion of government personnel into leadership positions; and (c) the intimidation of the opposition, especially when it speaks against government coercion and control of peasants.

Peasant scope for decision-making is limited and mostly succeeds when the issues raised are personal rather than seriously challenging policy. This manifests itself in various tactics including (Fortman, 1980: 86-89; Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994: 120): (a) *passive resistance*, as in the case of the *ndiyo Bwana* attitude, where peasants display

an attitude of acceptance, understanding, even enthusiasm, followed by resistance of varying degrees of passivity; (b) *non-action*, as in the case of operation *Vijiji* (villagisation) where a dramatic drop in maize production is believed to have been caused primarily by the reversion to subsistence production by peasants in response to the disruptions brought by the operation; (c) *token effort*; (d) '*unfortunate accidents*' or, in other words, sabotage, as in the case of a village in the region of Iringa, which, upon being forced to grow tobacco by the government, 'cured it at 160 degrees Celsius, thereby curing it of all commercial value'; *misunderstanding* of the instructions, which may be seen as a more sophisticated form of sabotage, a case in point being a village, during the colonial era, where villagers claimed that the extension agent had told them to boil their cotton seeds before they planted them; (e) *active resistance*, usually rare; (f) *pre-emptive development*, where a village starts a project and then appeals to government for help to finish it; and (g) *bargaining*, which could also be seen as blackmail, for example, in the case of a village which refused to send its women to the *ujamaa* farm until the government completed a water supply project promised earlier. In addition villagers may use a *squeaky wheel technique* where vigorous and incessant complaining can be used to influence the transfer of disliked officials, an example being in one case where, wanting to get rid of a road foreman who had refused to employ the relative of a party branch chairman, the villagers loudly complained that he had indulged in adultery and corruption.

Concluding on the scope of peasant decision-making in the Tanzanian case, Fortman argues that:

'The power of the villagers has not increased all that much since colonial

times. It is not that all development resources are being exploited to support a luxurious life style for a small elite. To the contrary much effort has gone into improving life in the rural areas. But these efforts are made according to the definitions and timetable of outsider bureaucrats. Such officials tend to try to neutralise peasant involvement in decision-making, as it tends to be unpredictable, time-consuming, and sometimes contrary to central government policy. Hence it is in their interest to keep the peasants under control either through largesse, coercion or manipulation. Development has become an administrative task, rather than the grass-roots effort described in the writings of Nyerere. Peasants have nominal entry into the decision-making system, but de facto they have practically none' (p.85).

Fortman's analysis succeeds in demonstrating the dominance of the bureaucratic definition of development, the control exercised by the government machinery on peasants and the resultant limited scope for peasant decision-making. It is not clear, however, from this analysis whether, and in what ways, the peasants themselves felt that they had become relatively worse off as a result. Moreover, her view is not universal. Some believe that, in spite of the existing problems, peasants in Tanzania have more than nominal entry into the decision-making process. For example, Maeda (1982: 31) writes that, although many hoped-for results have not been achieved for various reasons,

'through the emerging *ujamaa* village structures an increasing number of peasants are being involved in making and implementing decisions that affect their lives and the general welfare of their communities. Likewise, the decentralisation of the government administration has had the effect of

allowing the masses the opportunity to influence both government's actions and, though more indirectly, the government's behaviour at the local level'.

*A Small-scale Farming Project and Rural Credit and Savings Projects in Sri Lanka: a case of NGO-supported participation in targeted projects.*

In a study of a small-scale farming project in Sri Lanka, Fernando (1995) found that a major determinant of participation was the amount of resources and the resultant message that the implementing agency was able to put on offer to the potential participants. Initially, having no financial resources to offer, the aid agency relied on ideological appeal to attract people's participation. The result of this strategy was an initial boom of enthusiasm followed by a steady decline in the number of participating farmers. Acquisition of financial strength enabled the agency to change its message from an ideological appeal to a hardheaded economic one. This strategy resulted in a gradual, but sustained, increase in the number of participating farmers and villages.

The writer points out that an important correlate of this success was that group organisation followed, rather than preceded, economic activity. This finding is a rebuke to usual development practice that proceeds from the assumption that the poor are a homogenous group that can easily be organised around a particular economic activity. He points out that the group normally known singularly as the poor could arguably be divided into three categories at the very least, namely, the very poor, the middle poor and the not so poor. He argues that when group organisation precedes economic activity those who are less poor among the poor find an opportunity to dominate the others and establish patron-client relationships. In addition, this finding lends support to the argument I made earlier, that

empowerment leads to participation, rather than the other way round. In this example, the agency 'empowered' the people by offering opportunities that were previously lacking, enabling the people to galvanise into participation. Note that an earlier approach, based only on an ideological appeal, failed to sustain participation.

In the second study, a review of a rural credit and savings project showed that a major barrier to participation was a mismatch between the quantum of aid provided and the number of families it was supposed to reach, a problem which the author sees as lying at the very heart of the international aid system. In this particular case, the donor had typically stipulated the number of villages, even families that were supposed to benefit from the project. The result was that financial rewards offered by the project were too small to motivate large numbers of families to participate genuinely.

In the third case, a rural women's savings, credit and micro-enterprise development project was introduced in a village that already had a tradition of grass-roots organisations for the mobilisation of community resources for community purposes. The leaders that had emerged before the project started had been motivated by a spirit of sacrifice and voluntary action, expecting only prestige and recognition in return.

'The evidence makes it abundantly clear that participatory processes were present in the village. The community was able to identify its needs and work out its own solutions; there was no passive mentality among the people; external animation was not always needed to release the creative energies of the poor, who were capable of organising themselves on their own' (Fernando, 1995: 176).

However, the need to seek external funding after the project had commenced led to the emergence of a new generation of leaders who assumed the role of village brokers linking the community to external sources of funds. These were motivated by economic gain. In accordance with the expectation of the funding agency, the implementing NGO disregarded these village brokers in favour of the previous generation-type village leaders. In addition, the NGO demanded group cohesion through a humanist spirit of caring and sharing as well as equal participation in planning, implementation and sharing of benefits. This conflicted with many people's realisation that the funds would be obtained only through the application of brokering skills and not village leadership, dedication and voluntary service. Gradually, the leaders of the Community Based Organisation (CBO) who were not interested in a brokering were edged out of their positions, some survived by developing brokering skills, while others began to wield power rapidly and emerge in positions of leadership. The overall end result was the fragmentation of the CBO into different sections wielding different degrees of power. Those who wielded the most power were regarded by the NGO as genuine leaders and were supported through leadership training programmes that only served to strengthen their position and increase their benefits at the expense of the others.

Interviews later showed that all the players were aware of what was happening but avoided raising the issues for various reasons reflecting their own interests. The members of the CBO, for example, stated that they deliberately avoided denouncing the obvious inequities and lack of participation because they did not wish to antagonise the self-elected leaders, especially since even the most equitable distribution would have benefited most members only marginally. NGO officers who had worked on the project stated that they too failed deliberately to take any

corrective measures because of the fear that antagonising the power caucus could easily lead them to link up with a competing NGO that was working in the same area. In addition, the NGO's priority was to attract a second round of funding by demonstrating that it had succeeded in the first phase. Interviews with senior officers of the donor agency revealed that the agency's main concern was the taxpayers of its own country, where the funds had been generated, that the aid had benefited a large number of poor third world families.

Fernando's study provides a good illustration of issues likely to dominate in an attempt to promote participation in the 'project context'. Clearly, one of the most important issues is that various players in the development game are motivated by different agenda, values and priorities. Therefore, the type as well as extent of participation allowed or pursued will be in accordance with these aspects. What comes out clearly also is the fact that as a result of this situation the participation of the population for whom the project is intended can be severely limited, or even disrupted.

The study underlined the importance of a good resource base if genuine and sustainable participation is to be achieved. Goodwill on the part of aid agencies is not enough. People will participate if their access to resources bridges the gap between reality and aspiration. The study also shows that projects likely to promote genuine participation are those that offer relatively high potential for economic improvement. In this regard aid agencies should move away from the practice of spreading resources thinly over a large 'beneficiary population' in order to meet the donor quantitative targets. Instead, they should allocate resources in such a way as to offer individuals substantial economic benefit: 'When the economic stakes are high, people struggle to participate, and the internal that (sic) which is generated prevents a



small group from restraining the participation of others in order to draw a greater share of the benefits themselves. Under these circumstances, ideology and rhetoric have no role in the participatory process' (Fernando, 1995: 180).

In addition, Fernando's study demonstrated that introducing economic activity before group formation prevents those that are less poor from dominating others and establishing patron-client relationships. He also suggests that it is important to take into account inequalities in skill, entrepreneurship, connections with the outside world etc. in efforts to promote participation. Such variations may mean that the way a community may perceive equitable participation may be different from that of the aid agency.

### **Development Dialogue: What relevance for Emergency Relief?**

In attempting to understand the emergence of the need for ensuring the participation of affected populations in disaster relief, it is important to refer briefly to the debate on the differences (or similarities) between relief and development. One dominant view is that there is a real difference between the two. Relief is principally viewed in terms of charity and development as something that has moved beyond that. Others see development and relief as being two ends of a continuum. I would argue that there is scope for a third perspective namely that relief, especially when considering poor countries, is actually part and parcel of the development process, even though this does not suggest that assistance for the two should be given on similar terms. At least two points can be made to support this claim.

First, it can be argued that the social, economic and environmental conditions of certain poor communities already constitute a state of emergency. An emergency does not become one only when a starving child has been featured on BBC or CNN

television, or when a UN-agency has declared a situation so. The existing conditions may already be undesirable and what are sometimes known as emergencies refer merely to a change in degree. This poses a troubling question: how can external agents justify their action of determining the threshold when an emergency begins? If development and relief are to be truly 'people-centred', then only the affected populations have the right and mandate to decide when an emergency begins. Are communities incapable of determining their own humanitarian needs? Obviously, there are those who argue that leaving communities to determine their own needs results in a 'list of unrealistic demands'. This view comes about largely either because the agency does not have adequate resources to address those needs or because the 'needs assessment' procedures have not been done properly by agencies. A properly conducted needs assessment exercise, one that involves fully the community concerned, and explains the volume of resources at the disposal of the agency, should have less likelihood of generating a 'list of unrealistic demands'.

Secondly, if it is agreed that *capacity building* and the construction of *sustainable livelihoods* are major development goals, then relief could be seen as a development activity which ensures the preservation of these aspects under conditions of severe stress. Should large numbers of people who have acquired different skills and ideas die because of a sudden rise in the mortality rate or should community social and economic structures be incapacitated, this would mean that the development process has been curtailed.

Thirdly, there is a tendency among some people to think that relief applies only to the period immediately following a disaster. Such are the people who argue that the relief programme in south Sudan has moved to the development phase because it has now lasted more than ten years. However, this view ignores the important fact that

any situation requiring relief intervention will have several stages, namely: “the emergency phase”, a “rehabilitation phase” and a “post-rehabilitation” phase. Activities and approaches may vary according to these stages. This consideration for example, is a criticism of the view that participation is difficult in relief programmes because of time constraints. The rehabilitation and post-rehabilitation phases of the programme need not necessarily be so urgent as not to present opportunities for participation. Moreover, it will be shown (see Chapter Six) that it is possible for participation to occur even in the emergency phase of the relief programme.

The idea of the ‘relief-development continuum’ is a subject for increasing attention and debate, the details of which it is not necessary to dig into presently. But it is generally accepted that a well-implemented relief programme might pave the way for more successful development programmes. Stated another way, a poorly implemented relief programme could put any forthcoming development efforts in jeopardy. Thus: ‘For instance, the relief products could depreciate the local market and make the beneficiaries dependent on the external assistance. In order to avoid this, the relief operation needs to find distribution mechanisms which are appropriate to local culture and society, involve local people in administration and organisation, and are gender-sensitive’ (Kimura, 1996: 56). On the other hand, a successful development programme might help to better relief. For example, with respect to participation, a successful participatory development project/programme might have strengthened community structures and processes of representation allowing it to cope better with the distribution of relief materials. In addition, a good development programme can in fact be seen partly as disaster mitigation in so far as it addresses issues that prevent a disaster from exerting maximum impact.

To sum up the issue, the following argument by Payne (1998: 173) is apt:

'For any agency, trying to build up capacity from a base of emergency relief work requires a considerable degree of pragmatism, a sense of realism, and the ability to remain flexible. In the current climate, it is increasingly unhelpful to pigeonhole programmes as either "relief or development". In situations of extreme instability, when funding is uncertain and there are threats to the physical security of the programme, nothing is ever really normal. For emergency workers in south Sudan, for example, instability is the norm, yet the programme of response may be of a long-term nature. Perhaps the terms "relief" and "development" should be redefined to take account of the concept of "working in turbulent contexts" '.

Similar views could be expressed with regard to very poor communities, where turbulence does not necessarily result from instability related to war but to weather conditions or disease. In such situations also, things are usually not really normal.

At the conceptual level, the basic features of relief and development are essentially the same. Thus, although it is generally the case that relief is short-term and development long-term in nature, both tend to involve outside intervention and an interface between indigenous populations and foreigners. Both start from a position of power imbalance where a disproportionate amount of power rests in the hands of those with resources at their disposal, in this case the foreigners. Little wonder then that most of the same issues that arise with regard to development are also true for relief. For example, if we recall Harrell-Bond's (1986) argument regarding the failures of relief, she identifies the attitude of superiority of moral virtue as the key factor. In addition, many of the politics of participation encountered in development contexts also feature in emergency relief. The mistrust that exists between donors and governments in the development context is also replicated in relief. In the latter,

the problem of mistrust has been a continuing cause of lack of agreement of the numbers affected by a disaster and in need of assistance. Donors frequently dispute figures generated by host governments or other local counterpart organisations on the basis of fears that such numbers would have been inflated for ulterior motives.

Moreover, some observers have held the view that in many relief programmes, donors only pay serious attention to immediate relief needs but show considerable lack of enthusiasm for rehabilitation and preventive measures. This reluctance only leads to keeping poor governments in a perpetual position of dependence on donors. In the case of the 1998 relief programme in South Sudan (see Chapter 4), donors and other aid agencies disputed reports prepared by a local organisation, denying the very existence of famine. They later agreed with that report only after CNN had featured a story depicting the extent of the famine. This led some to raise questions as to the role of the affected population in arriving at the very assessment of whether a famine exists or not.

There is also much rhetoric in relief about participation, especially on the part of donors and international NGOs, that does not match the level of action observed in the field. The policy documents as well as programme and project documents of aid agencies contain statements indicating how committed they are to participation. However, most such statements are very general in nature, failing to demonstrate exactly the ways in which the agencies will ensure implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the participatory process itself. Indeed, most of the evaluations of relief work are more about whether the programme measured up to its quantitative targets than about the overall qualitative effect on the recipient communities. More seriously, there is frequently no input of the recipient population in such evaluations.

One report on evaluations (Grunewald, de Geoffroy and Lister, 2000: 21) found that 'although agencies involved beneficiaries in the actual implementation of projects, it was not common for their views to be elicited before projects'.

To date, there are very few documented examples of cases that demonstrate a high degree of involvement of affected populations in relief programmes. To my knowledge one of the best examples in this regard was the Oxfam Ikafe/Imvempi refugee settlement programme in Uganda (Payne, 1998). Payne provides a critical account of how Oxfam attempted to foster participation through encouraging the formation of structures representative of various groups within the refugee settlements. She analyses factors that led to either the failure or the success of different initiatives as well as issues pertaining to the extent to which Oxfam could have appropriately acted as a catalyst to some participatory processes.

Another similarity with the development field is that host governments themselves may not actively promote participation in relief for fear of losing control, sometimes related to the political agenda. Indeed politics, rather than corruption, may sometimes lie at the very heart of the temptation by governments to ensure that the relief programme benefits as many people as possible so that they can be seen to be providing equitable welfare.

However, much as there are these similarities, there is also a great deal of uncertainty at the methodological level. Specifically, doubts exist as to whether participatory methods used successfully in the development context can and should be used in relief. For example, Apthorpe and Atkinson (1999a) note that some forums have found that participation in relief may not happen more often because it is:

'regarded as time-consuming in time-pressured contexts and culture,

threatens agency control, is difficult to do in conflict situations, (with what guidance is available having often) been developed in relation to development programmes in stable contexts, (and as a rule is not required by) donors (and implementing agencies) who remain preoccupied with upward accountability' (ALNAP minutes, Quoted in Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999a: 9).

Yet so far, little has been done by way of systematic assessment of various methodologies in emergency to see what works and what doesn't. Thus clearly, there is need for more work in this area given the many types of not only disasters, but also emergency programmes and socio-political contexts, that exist. For example, it may be the case that some of the concerns about participatory methodology may apply more strongly to an emergency complex disaster rather than a slow onset natural disaster, or to a therapeutic feeding programme rather than a general ration or a seeds and tools distribution programme, or in a context where there are weak civic society structures compared to where such structures are strong.

In any case, questions of methodological compatibility between development and emergency relief would have more justification if participation in development had attained broad-based implementation. The fact that this has not been the case and, perhaps more importantly, the fact that the forecast for this to happen is bleak, means that perhaps there is need to focus equally strongly on the politics of participation as on its methodological concerns. Clearly, the emerging methodologies reviewed in this chapter will not achieve much without the political will to change attitudes, behaviour and to share power. On the other hand, efforts at developing methodologies need to continue to prevent methodological inadequacy from becoming a scapegoat to genuine participation while the real barriers lie elsewhere.

## **Conclusion.**

Much of the literature shows that there is agreement that the concept of participation in development continues to suffer from a wide gap between rhetoric and practice. What is more disturbing is that there is little evidence to suggest that this situation might change for the better. In concluding their book, whose title asks the question whether popular participation is a utopia or a necessity, Stiefel and Wolfe (1994: 238) state that:

‘Unfortunately, our exploration suggests that there are as many answers as there are collective social actors and that the different interpretations of “development” and “participation” internalised by these actors perpetuate the “dialogue of the deaf”’.

Further, they also assert that:

‘The decade and a half since UNRISD decided to inquire into participation has brought astonishing transformations but has confirmed the dominance of a “development” that seems very doubtfully compatible with the organised efforts of the excluded. The coming decade will bring its own surprises’ (ibid., p. 242).

It is not certain as to whether one of the surprises anticipated by Stiefel and Wolfe will be a proliferation of genuine broad-based grass-roots participation. Such uncertainty is based partly on observations such as those made by Bonvin (1995: 7) who, noting that participatory development has been on the development agenda since the 1950s and the 1960s, albeit under the disguise of community development, argues that:

‘Participatory development is no “quick fix” but a learning process which



takes time, resources, imagination and sometimes courage to implement. It requires behavioural change on the part of many actors, calls into question old habits and often reveals conflicts of interest because of the need for power sharing'.

So far, it would appear that attempts to achieve participatory development have taken two distinct forms. Firstly, there have been attempts to institutionalise participation. In this context, the main aims of participation appear to be related to democratic governance where people who lack political power are offered an opportunity to participate in influencing the decisions made at state level. The government appears to be the main player with the international aid community as both coaches and referees. In the second instance, there are attempts to promote participation through the introduction of targeted, relatively small-scale development projects. Here, the primary aim appears to be the raising of living standards through the provision of opportunity for access to economic or other physical resources. In this context, the main actors appear to be NGOs, but also increasingly, the World Bank. For example with respect to a review of World Bank projects, Paul (1988: 2) defines community participation as 'an active process by which beneficiary/client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a view to enhancing their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance and other values they cherish'.

From the case studies presented in this chapter, it is clear that one of the principal conclusions that can be made is that a major barrier to genuine participation in both contexts is a lack of convergence of agenda, priorities and values between those who own and control economic and political resources and those that need access to such resources in order to better their lives. For genuine participation to occur, those that

control resources and hold power must change their attitudes and behaviour and demonstrate the sincerity of their concern for the poor by relinquishing some of their power to the latter. Without this power sharing, poor people will continue to become not merely spectators, but victims of the development game since, unlike conventional sport, non-participation means becoming worse-off.

The key question to be asked then is why these changes are not occurring. The fact may well be that those with control of resources are really not interested in sharing them in a way that is meaningful to those that need access to them. This may not always necessarily reflect personal inclinations but rather the requirements of the system in which development and disaster relief take place.

## **Chapter Three. Non-humanitarian Humanitarianism: implications for participation of changes within humanitarian assistance.**

### **Mutant Humanitarianism.**

Theoretically, the motives and principles underlying the concept of humanitarianism should remain unchanged in both time and space. It is believed that it is part of the nature of humans to be kind towards each other. Kindness is therefore the sole basis for humanitarian action. This kindness can be expressed through voluntary expenditure of effort, time and material resources to relieve human suffering. It is inhuman i.e. against the nature of man not to relieve the suffering of others when one is in a position to do so. This is the basis for the so-called *humanitarian imperative*. In other words, failure to relieve human suffering when one can do so is a crime not simply against the suffering person, but against self and thus, ultimately, against humanity itself.

However, the way in which deeds of kindness are performed can harm paradoxically the very individual for which such deeds are intended. The Egyptian hermit Abba Paphnutius is quoted as saying that 'I have seen a man on the bank of a river buried up to his knees in mud and some men came to give him a hand and help him out, but they pushed him further in up to his neck' (Ward, quoted in Slim, 1997: 245). In order to avoid this happening, the 'recipient' must become a full participant in the process of humanitarian action rather than a passive object. A review of the history of the concept shows that, in practice, the traditional conceptualisation of

humanitarianism has gradually become muddled with motives that are not necessarily humanitarian. The result is that the scope for participation for recipients of humanitarian assistance has been severely curtailed. By and large, recipients of humanitarian assistance have become *objects* rather than *subjects or actors* of the process.

While the history of humanitarianism appears to be as long as that of mankind itself there has been an evolution of the concept to the extent that many aspects associated with it have been transformed beyond the realms of traditional practice. The biggest transformations appear to have taken place in the twentieth century. The most important change was perhaps the increase in volume of international humanitarian assistance. Traditional and ancient humanitarian assistance tended to have been circumscribed to the borders of relatively small communities. 'Modern' humanitarianism involves much greater volumes of material transfer, more people involved in the administration of such materials and wider geographic movement. It also involves contact between peoples who differ substantially socially and culturally.

Crucially, perhaps as a result of these changes, modern humanitarianism also involves motives other than humanitarian. We can identify several factors that have contributed to this 'loading' of humanitarianism with non-humanitarian motivations. The two most important ones appear to be the increasingly important role played by NGOs in acting as intermediaries for the dissemination of donor resources and the increasing use of relief as an instrument of foreign policy. In addition, the phenomenal increase in the volume of humanitarian assistance has taken the form of one-way traffic from industrialised Western countries to poor Third World countries.

This one-way traffic appears to have generated views of patron-client rather than partnership relationships, leading to the dominance of Western ethnocentrism in humanitarian operations. By definition, a patron-client relationship excludes the participation of the client in decision-making. Therefore, in these patron-client views may lie the root to the problems of participation.

As humanitarianism has continued to evolve in a world where countries are demarcated by political boundaries, questions of state sovereignty have arisen. Where internal conflicts exist within such states, questions of sovereignty have in turn given rise to questions of neutrality and impartiality on the part of the intervening parties. Its central location in the international system has led humanitarianism also to become entangled in a whole series of non-humanitarian concerns grounded in international politics. To the extent that there are increasing cases where international political concerns are given primacy over humanitarian considerations, it seems fair to start questioning whether we have in fact not witnessed the demise of humanitarianism in its traditional sense.

The central location of humanitarianism in the international system has tended to marginalize its humanitarian concerns while mainstreaming political ones that have their base in the economic, strategic and political interests of the rich nations. This marginalisation plays a key role in inhibiting broad-based participation of people affected by disasters. The dominance of Western ethnocentrism leads to much humanitarian assistance being conducted on the bases of western values and ideas regarding the determination of need, efficiency, vulnerability, entitlements etc. In addition, there is little evidence to suggest that the circumvention of national governments in favour of NGOs to act as intermediaries for resource transfer has

succeeded in making humanitarian aid more relevant by increasing the participation of the affected populations.

### **The role of Northern NGOs**

One of the major changes in international humanitarian assistance in the twentieth century was a shift from direct transfer of resources to recipient governments or communities by donor communities, to the use of NGOs as intermediaries. From the 1980s onwards, international NGOs increasingly acted as vessels for channelling donor funds and also for administering, together with UN agencies, the planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes. The NGOs occupied a similar position as regards the administration of international development aid. Macrae (1996: 7), for example, notes that the proportion of emergency aid allocated to governments by the European commission fell from over 95% in 1976 to only 6% in 1990. 'Donors no longer automatically accord recipient countries with having either the legitimacy or the capacity to respond to emergencies; indeed, they are increasingly being seen as part of the problem. Thus NGOs have become a means of maintaining international engagement in war-affected countries, and of providing a political buffer between donor and recipient governments'.

In similar vein, De Waal (1997: 79) argues that 'the humanitarian international was transformed in the 1980s... as donor governments began to channel emergency funds through NGOs, deliberately circumventing African governments, they radically changed the nature of institutional humanitarianism'. Commenting on the same issue Edwards and Hulme (1995: 4) contend that 'NGOs have always provided welfare services to poor people in countries where governments lacked resources to ensure universal coverage in health and education; the difference is that now they are seen

as the *preferred channel* for service provision in *deliberate substitution* for the state' (emphasis supplied).

Borton (1993) suggests several reasons that account for the increasingly dominant role played by NGOs in resource allocation. These include: the poor economic performance of many developing countries, especially in Africa, which left state structures weakened and led to the need for alternative channels for allocating emergency aid; the perceived flexibility and speed of response of NGOs and their greater accountability to the donors; political instability in many areas which not only reduces the efficiency of government agencies but also introduces risks of diversion of emergency assistance from intended beneficiaries to combatants; and the limited scope for intervention, especially during the cold war, by the UN where nation sovereignty was disputed, which left only the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and NGOs as alternatives.

The rise to prominence of NGOs as channels for donor funds is but an indication of the increasing erosion of state sovereignty in poor countries. Macrae (1996: 6) argues that since 1980, sovereignty has been eroded de facto and de jure. Western countries have reasserted their right to intervene in the affairs of sovereign governments in the Third World. This has been particularly the case in the humanitarian sphere where Western nations have been more willing to intervene on humanitarian grounds, sometimes without the consent of governments and with the use of force.

Macrae suggests that in the light of this trend, humanitarian action is yet to answer the following questions: 'under whose authority and in whose interests is the international humanitarian intervention organised? Who is defining these interests

and mediating potential conflicts of interests between humanitarian, political and military objectives?' (p.7).

Immediately following the NGO-boom in the 1980s there seemed to have followed uncritical acceptance of their role with regard to fulfilling the mission that lay beneath the whole essence of the NGO movement. Such uncritical acceptance gave, and still continues to give, a picture in which 'NGOs are seen as the "favoured child" of official agencies and something of a panacea for the problems of development [and perhaps emergency relief P.N.]... official agencies (and the supporters of Northern NGOs) often see NGOs as a "magic bullet" which can be fired off in any direction and, though often without very much evidence, will still find its target' (Edwards and Hulme, 1995: 5).

De Waal (1997: 79-80) notes that relief NGOs are varied in terms of ethos and methods for example, between operational NGOs and non-operational ones who work through local partners. Some refuse government funding while others subsist almost entirely on official subcontracting. He notes that while less bureaucratic and technically ambitious than the official agencies, and while disavowing legal mandates in favour of energy and flexibility, the specific obligations of relief NGOs to the poor are just as tenuous. And yet, 'the moral logic of charitable famine relief assumes an identity of interest between the NGOs and famine-vulnerable people'. He warns that 'specific NGO successes mask strategic failures. NGOs tend to focus their efforts in areas in which they have specific skills, or which make for good publicity, such as feeding centres and orphanages... the charitable market is unable to fill the full spectrum of relief needs'.



Seaman (1995: 20-21) notes that there exist a number of different 'relief mentalities'. At one extreme is the view which defines the effects of disaster and relief needs purely in material terms, e.g. the number of trauma cases, the numbers of people who are thin or who need immunisations, etc. The role of international relief is thus seen to centre on planning and acting in a quasi-military way to meet these needs, through the provision of medical personnel, blankets, shelter or whatever seems appropriate. The belief behind this view is that the effectiveness of international disaster relief depends crucially on the speed of response and formalised planning, and with the idea of a politically 'neutral' humanitarian response. The basis of such a view is a model that sees a population affected by an emergency as essentially passive and entirely dependent on international relief for its survival and well-being and that relief is confined only to the saving of life.

The competing but less popular view is that the need to meet physical or material needs timely should not blind relief providers to other factors that determine whether the assistance provided is regarded as efficient or not. This view is based on mounting empirical evidence that the stereotype of an affected population ineffectually waiting for relief is both an oversimplification and routinely confounded.

The difference in these two positions has led to two different operational procedures. The first tends to a standardised and short-term response, especially in the case of medical teams, which sometimes lead to actions varying from 'inefficient to the absurd'. The alternative view, sometimes called the 'developmental' approach to relief, takes into account the fact that the greater part of the work will be done by the population of the country concerned. Thus, it tends to seek synergy between

international relief and local efforts and to be more relevant, efficient and effective. Unfortunately, it is usually assumed, erroneously, that most International Non Governmental Organisations (INGOs) adhere to the second mentality of disaster relief and that this is reflected in their operations.

De Waal (1997) argues that non-governmental and official agencies are alike in that they do not commission public evaluations or publicise their internal assessments. The demands for fund-raising and institutional survival make it imperative not to admit failure. The competition is for funds, not successful famine prevention. NGOs contemptuously reject professional standards and self-regulation.

‘One result is that there are no formal barriers to entry to the relief NGO sector: literally anyone can start an NGO, obtain funds by public appeal or other means and try their hand at running feeding centres, clinics or orphanages. NGOs are therefore increasingly becoming subject to manipulation by donor governments’ (p. 80).

In similar vein, Edwards and Hulme (199: 6) argue that there is no evidence to support claims that NGOs and GROs are ‘close to the poor’ partly because ‘internal evaluations are rarely released, and what is released comes closer to propaganda than rigorous assessment’. Can they therefore truly be expected to represent the interests of the poor? And in this light, is the circumventing of governments in favour of NGOs justified? Chapter Two shows that participation has remained a rhetorical exercise, this, despite the participation of NGOs in the development sector for a long time. Is there a case for arguing for a rethink of the role of the state in the administration of emergency relief and development in general?

While there appears to be a general agreement that NGOs play an important role in service provision and 'welfare', an analysis of issues of performance and accountability raises some questions regarding the extent to which the provision of these services occurs in a way that helps to fulfil their stated missions and mandates, especially with regard to participation. In the present context, specific questions relate to the extent to which the operation of NGOs is participatory in a way significantly different from, for example, public or government agencies. Edwards and Hulme (1995) show that many uncertainties exist with regard to assessing the performance and accountability of NGOs. With regard to performance, they argue that NGOs 'often perform less well than their popular image suggests' (p. 8) especially in terms of 'poverty-reach, cost-effectiveness, sustainability and popular participation (including gender), flexibility and innovation' (p. 6). Dependence on official funding for many NGOs leads to emphasis being laid on service-provision rather than advocacy and participation.

A key aspect of NGO legitimacy is the issue of accountability. One of the basic reasons why official donors have deliberately circumvented governments is the view that NGOs are more accountable and thus, generate confidence. However, Edwards and Hulme (1995) distinguish between two forms of accountability namely, functional accountability involving the accounting of resources, resource use and immediate impacts; and strategic accountability, which involves the accounting for the impacts of NGOs on the actions of other organisations and the wider environment. They point out the multiple accounting responsibilities that NGOs and GROs have, namely, 'upward' accountability to their trustees, donors and host governments; and 'downward' accountability to their partners, beneficiaries, staff and supporters.

Clearly, these multiple accounting responsibilities have a bearing on participation. For it is clearly the case that the objectives, agenda, priorities and even values of NGOs as organisations but also their staff as individuals, do not always coincide with those of the people they seek to assist. In addition, the need for NGOs to respond to the accounting requirements of their trustees, donors and host governments may draw them away from the realities of their beneficiaries. In reality, NGOs in fact mostly pay more attention to 'upward' accountability. Accountability 'downwards' is a messy business because it involves qualitative and often subjective assessments of the impact of NGO actions on the livelihood of those assisted. Uphoff (quoted in Edwards and Hulme, 1995: 9) argues that 'NGOs cannot be formally accountable to their beneficiaries, however much they want to be'.

Macrae (1996: 9) asserts that despite the fact that NGOs provide an important source of service provision and advocacy which complements that of donor and recipient states, they 'cannot replace states, and that in the absence of the political and legal framework provided in theory by states it is unclear how NGO provision can be organised in such a way as to ensure equitable coverage and *accountable provision*' (emphasis added).

Following from the fact that NGOs can not substitute the state as regards the equitable distribution of scarce resources; that NGOs have conflicting accountabilities, with accountability to their donors likely to dominate over accountability to their recipients; and that the rise of southern NGOs puts the current role of Northern NGOs in doubt; it seems to be the case that there is room for rethinking the role of the state or other de facto institutions in humanitarian emergencies.

Edwards and Hulme (1995: 14) suggest that lack of knowledge regarding the changing nature of GRO/NGO accountability is a serious matter given that GRO/NGO claims to legitimacy are premised at least in part on the strength of the accountability, particularly to the 'poor': 'If NGOs are becoming more responsive to external concerns, what is happening to the links to their values and mission, and to their supporters and others – through which they claim their right to intervene in development... recent doubts expressed by Southern NGOs about the advocacy role of NGOs in the North (speaking 'on behalf of the poor') provide one illustration of this difficult issue'.

Critics make several conclusions as regards ways in which NGOs and GROs could be helped to stick to their stated goals and mission. Two of them are particularly relevant with regard to the discussion in this chapter: One is that problems relating to organisational growth and accountability may best be handled by a partnership approach which emphasises participation, learning, reciprocity and transparency. They argue that it may be better to channel official donor funds to NGOs and GROs through an independent public institution, which can protect them from undue donor influence. Secondly, they reiterate the importance of negotiation among stakeholders as a key issue in improving accountability among NGOs. Beneficiary communities must take centre stage in this negotiation:

'Increasing the involvement of grassroots constituencies is the only way to correct the weaknesses of downward acceptability... increasing the involvement of grassroots stakeholders also opens up the prospect of major changes in roles, responsibilities and accountabilities, and should not be

undertaken by agencies who have no serious commitment to reform in their own institutions and structures' (Edwards and Hulme, 1995: 221.).

They argue, in addition, that informal mechanisms should be given serious consideration since they are sometimes more effective than formal ones.

Taylor (1995: 93-94) makes a similar argument saying that, with respect to information gathering during humanitarian interventions, difficulties frequently experienced could be addressed by involving 'the affected people themselves in the collection of data and for international organisations to help by providing the technical assistance to do this'. There are always ways of measuring trends towards food deficiency, levels of malnutrition and also the likely future availability of necessary foodstuffs, given probable local harvests and likely alternative provision. This would be part of the process of evaluating what have been called 'entitlements' to various provisions. The point has been stressed that involving local responsible individuals in this is also helpful as a way of sustaining order and preserving a sense of self-reliance. The national political authorities might not, however, welcome such direct links between international organisations and citizens. They would expect to be involved in the system's establishment and management, thus reducing confidence in the information gathered.

### **Humanitarianism muddled and muzzled.**

The rhythm of the discussion in this section is well set by Macrae's (1996: 1) observation regarding the complexities of humanitarian assistance:

'The complexities of the humanitarian landscape and of the international relief system seem to militate against the formulation of a clear consensus on the

meaning of and scope of humanitarian action in the late twentieth century. The broad terrain occupied by humanitarianism is characterised by a multiplicity of actors, including disaster-affected people, each of whom promote different objectives, appeal to diverse (often self-ascribed) mandates, and operate according to different rules of engagement. In the midst of so many different claims, the universality of humanitarian values and principles is itself being questioned'.

One of the immediate casualties of this increase in complexity of the humanitarian terrain is the use of the term *humanitarian* itself. Increasingly, it has become necessary to distinguish between humanitarian assistance and humanitarian intervention. At first sight the two concepts might appear to refer to the same process. But when reviewing literature, it is clear that the two concepts have different meanings. In general, humanitarian assistance refers to the process of providing relief materials to people affected by disasters, whether natural or complex. The provision of such materials may involve the deployment of security forces with the sole aim of protecting relief materials where a situation of insecurity prevails. The term *humanitarian intervention* is increasingly being used to refer to the deployment in a country, usually of foreign military forces, in order to prevent or stop a serious violation of fundamental human rights abuses, particularly involving a threat to life (Verwey in Ramsbotham and Woodhouse, 1996: 8). However, the two authors note that even within this context, the meaning of humanitarian is not as straightforward and different views exist.

The aim of making this distinction is to clarify some of the confusion that might be created by the dual usage in literature of the term *humanitarian intervention*. For example, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse's book *Humanitarian Intervention in*

*Contemporary Conflict* is primarily concerned with military intervention whereas John Harriss's edited book *The Politics of Humanitarian Intervention* focuses on both issues of military intervention and the provision of relief assistance. Indeed it has been noted that sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably and, therefore, misleadingly.

This study is concerned primarily with humanitarianism in the sense of provision of relief materials such as food, clothing, shelter etc. to help communities cope with the devastating effects of war or other disasters such as famine, floods, earthquakes, etc. The task of reviewing the politics involved in providing humanitarian assistance, being a subject on which whole books have been published, is too big to be accomplished successfully in one chapter of a thesis. Therefore, the aim here is merely to highlight the main features of this complex subject for the purposes of aiding our understanding of the issue of participation.

There is no doubt that the moral crisis confronting humanitarianism has resulted in part from the loading of humanitarian aid with non-humanitarian motives. This idea inevitably sounds contradictory, for if the motive is not solely humanitarian, does the action qualify as humanitarian? Henry Kissinger is famously quoted as having laid bare the non-humanitarian motives of humanitarian aid:

'US disaster relief is an important way for the American public, as well as its government, to express its humanitarian concerns for those adversely affected by natural and man-made disasters. *Equally important, disaster relief is becoming increasingly a major instrument of our foreign policy.* The assistance we can provide to various nations may have a long-term impact on US relations with those nations and their friends' (emphasis added) (quoted in Kent, 1987: 81).



This remark was made early in 1973. Writing twenty years later, Awonoor (1993: 64) observed that:

‘Sometimes, humanitarian aid is constructed into intimidating and even primitive foreign policy objectives. The United States publishes an annual register of countries that did not vote with it on all issues. This register is distributed dutifully and unashamedly every year to remind every state of their sins of commission and omission, with loud hints as to possible punishments or rewards to be meted out. During the Persian Gulf debate in the Security Council, Yemen was threatened after it cast a vote opposing the wishes of the United States. The threats were later carried out, and a small package of assistance for educational work in Yemen was withdrawn’.

Such behaviour is in direct contradiction with the key principles of humanitarian aid enshrined in the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. The code underlines the primacy of what is called the ‘humanitarian imperative’. The prime motivation of response to a disaster should be to alleviate human suffering among the most vulnerable. Humanitarian aid should be given or viewed as a non-partisan apolitical act. But the fact that humanitarian assistance should require a ‘code of conduct’ is itself a symptom of the moral crisis facing the concept and we shall return to this aspect later.

Approaching relief with mixed motivations is not limited to governments, as in the case of the United States. It is also a dominant feature among UN agencies and international NGOs. With regard to NGOs, for example, De Waal (1997: 63) argues that the humanitarian international suffers from a lack of adequate sociological analysis and ethical critique:

‘Statements of the goals of non-governmental organisations, in particular, are commonly taken at face value. It is as though the sociological study of the church were undertaken by committed Christians: criticism would be solely within the context of advancing the faith itself... relief agencies, like any institutions, are subject to their own requirements for survival and self-justification requirements, which may contradict higher ideals. Humanitarianism also masks many very mixed personal motives. The challenge of understanding humanitarianism, (and indeed reforming it) is to identify the actual forces at work in the institutions that have taken on the humanitarian mandate’.

Macrae (1996: 8-9) observes that international relations are still confined to their existing, state-centric framework, while at the same time leaving considerable room for manoeuvre for international organisations/donors, UN and NGOs to decide if, when and how they will assist particular groups of people affected by conflict. ‘Importantly, these decisions are not necessarily made on the basis of need; but rather are subject to the influence of strategic, financial, and institutional imperatives within donor countries and relief institutions. That this is the case is reflected in differences in per capita allocations of relief to different emergencies between countries and over time’.

### **Humanitarianism in time and space.**

Isaac (1993) notes that, despite the general tendency to associate humanitarianism with the twentieth-century West, ‘it is a universal phenomenon manifested globally and throughout the ages’ (p.13). He argues that this universality applies both in the case of humanitarianism as a feeling of concern for and benevolence toward fellow human beings, and humanitarianism as practical generosity or philanthropic activities

to promote the well-being of others. Despite having been formalised in the twentieth century, humanitarianism has a long history, having its roots in different religions and cultures. For example, he notes that ancient Egyptians carried out benevolent acts that were seen as having great importance in the eyes of their gods. Similarly, divine will lay behind the performance of benevolent acts in ancient Mesopotamia. According to the author, however, it is in ancient Judaism that benevolent acts were widely institutionalised and received much emphasis. He gives various references to the Hebrew Bible to show how, in ancient Israel, giving was not merely a voluntary act but a religious obligation. In similar fashion, references are given from the New Testament of the Bible and from the Koran to show that Christianity and Islam, both born out of Judaism, inherited, albeit with different emphasis, the values of their predecessor. Indeed in many Christian denominations various structures exist, particularly in the form of women's caucuses aimed at rendering acts of charity to suffering humanity. Examples included the Dorchas women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and counterpart women's groups in other denominations. Isaac (1993.) argues further that humanitarianism is held equally as an important religious value in the other major religions of the world, namely, Hinduism and Buddhism.

In addition to humanitarianism being found in all religions, Isaac argues that it is also found in all cultures. To this end, he refers to records that show how in many African cultures, food was gathered during times of good harvests to be shared with the hungry during periods of famine. He writes:

'Contrary to conventional wisdom, most African peoples who are followers of traditional (i.e. non-Christian, non-Moslem) religions share a great deal of religious and cultural beliefs and values. Their world-view is essentially

sociocentric, not individualistic. Emphasis is not on the private but often the common good. Anthropologists have been impressed by the value of human life among many African peoples' (Isaac, 1993: 18).

The author notes that non-African peoples have similar traditions.

As regards the issue of participation, this background is important because it calls into question authoritarian, non-participatory approaches to humanitarian assistance that proceed from the assumption that affected communities do not know how to identify their own vulnerable individuals and how to assist them. Partly, such approaches appear to have been influenced by increasing poverty levels in the South, which have resulted in massive inflows of humanitarian assistance from the North. For example, Isaac (1993: 18) argues as follows:

'Today, Africa receives so much humanitarian aid that the world does not view Africans as philanthropists. Much of Africa has seemingly become so impoverished that African humanitarianism is invisible. Nonetheless, Africans are still very active, if not in financial aid, then in human energy and mutual assistance. To this day, an important institution of the *Oromo* in Ethiopia is called *dabo*, a communal assistance system of farmers at the time of ploughing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. It is a social and moral obligation for every adult in a village or surrounding regions to participate in *dabo*. Likewise, the *sanbate* among Christian Ethiopians is an old mutual economic assistance system. Similar systems exist elsewhere in Africa'.

In addition he argues that the value of giving is also reflected in folklore:

'Concern only for oneself is valueless. Greed is not only ridiculed, but is also

regarded as a sure path to spiritual and perhaps physical death. The story of the tragic end of three greedy men, who fear even a single fly from sharing their food and plot against each other for total possession of the remnants, is found throughout Africa' (p.18).

In one of the scenes in the Hollywood film *The gods must be crazy*, an African bushman kills one of the goats of a settler farmer. When the settler farmer confiscates the animal, the bushman's interpretation is that the farmer does not want to share it, so he kills another one! The idea of private consumption simply didn't exist in the bushman's way of life. This may have been only a picture show, but it was not a far cry in so far as some such communities are concerned.

The high value placed on sharing and assisting members of the community who lack resources to sustain life is common, not only in African cultures, but also throughout other cultures that are poor in material terms relative to the West. This notion appears to be quite ironic in the sense that apparently, the poorer the community, the more generous, (as a community) and *vice versa*.

However, despite the fact that we find the *humanitarian spirit* universally in space and in time, it would seem that the meaning of the concept of humanitarian aid has, in the twentieth century, shifted to almost becoming synonymous with the North helping the South. Perpetual absolute poverty conditions in the latter have tended to overwhelm the coping capacities of such societies in large-scale disruptions of their livelihood. What has developed is a whole industry of disaster relief geared at enhancing such coping capacities. As we have seen, the development of the 'relief industry' has been accompanied by many complexities, plunging humanitarianism into a moral crisis.

## **Humanitarian Umpires?**

The more established of the attempts to deal with the apparent moral crisis facing humanitarianism include: the Codes of Conduct of the International Red Cross and the Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief; the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the standard response packages of the MSF, and the UK group People in Aid Principles for the Recruitment and Management of Relief Workers; the SPHERE project; the Humanitarian Accountability Project; and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), based in the UK's Overseas Development Institute (ODI). Some of these efforts are examined briefly below.

### ***The Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.***

At the heart of this code of conduct are the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. These principles are particularly problematic in the context of complex emergencies, which involve political and military conflicts. Neutrality requires that relief be distributed without taking sides in hostilities either ideologically, or through participation of any kind. Impartiality requires that assistance should be on the basis of need alone and not on any other criteria. The principle of impartiality is based on 'an absolute morality that people in need should be assisted simply because that is the right thing to do; it is an expression of the fundamental dignity and value of all individuals' (Leader, 2000: 18). However, these principles have led to different forms of dilemmas for relief agencies in situations where, for example, affected civilians are also involved in perpetrating violence or where it is clear that relief given to affected communities is finding its way to soldiers participating in the

conflict: 'Where it is the poor and marginalised, themselves victims of violence and injustice, who have become perpetrators, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify clearly who are the "good guys" and who the "bad". Is it, therefore, feasible or desirable to distinguish between the "deserving" and "undeserving" victim in order to allocate relief?' (Macrae, 1996: 4).

Neutrality also poses problems where engaging with one of the parties in the conflict is necessary for a successful humanitarian programme. Some agencies (see Chapter Four) have used this principle to justify their exclusion from participation of certain individuals affected by the emergency, sometimes to the detriment of the relief programme itself.

This code of conduct is voluntary. Adherence to it depends on the will of the aid agencies. Some of its tenets also need interpretation and, at times, agencies interpret them to suit their actions.

### ***The SPHERE Project***

The SPHERE project was established in 1997 as a programme of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) and InterAction with Voice, ICRC, and ICVA. It set itself the task of developing a set of universal minimum standards in what are regarded as core areas of humanitarian assistance, namely: water supply and sanitation; nutrition; food aid; shelter and site planning; and health services. Its stated aim is to improve the quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters, and to enhance the accountability of the humanitarian system in disaster response. However, although the project claims that it sets out for the first time what people affected by disasters have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance, it is

doubtful if the minimum standards are shared across different types of communities. Arguably too, the minimum standards set out by the SPHERE project are in fact not met in many poor communities in normal times. To this extent, many poor communities can therefore be classified as needing humanitarian assistance even when there is no particular event-led emergency. In addition, it would appear that the success of the SPHERE project depends to a large extent on the resources at the disposal of agencies to meet these 'minimum standards' or their willingness to commit the necessary resources in accordance with the SPHERE framework. But perhaps more importantly, it is not clear how participation of the affected population will be a key feature at the operational level.

### *ALNAP*

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) is an international interagency forum established in 1997 with the aim of improving learning and accountability across the humanitarian system. Its mission statement states that: 'ALNAP, as a unique sector-wide active-learning membership network, is dedicated to improving the quality and accountability of humanitarian action, by sharing lessons; identifying common problems; and, where appropriate, building consensus on approaches' (ALNAP, 2002). Its activities are structured around themes that include: making the evaluation process more effective; strengthening accountability frameworks for the humanitarian system; and improving field-level learning mechanisms. Participation of affected populations is a key concern in the second theme, that is, of strengthening accountability frameworks for the humanitarian system. It was under this theme that the work that forms the basis for Chapter Four of this thesis was carried out. Another piece of work was a synthesis



study on social learning (Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999b). In addition, at the time of writing of this thesis, ALNAP had embarked on a global study which would specifically look at the issue of participation of affected populations in a wide variety of geographical areas as well as different types of emergencies. This work was based on the realisation that downward accountability to beneficiaries and “affected” population was clearly inadequate. ALNAP also embarked on the development of an agenda on mapping accountability as well as developing an annual published Survey of Accountability and Learning in the Humanitarian System.

### *The Humanitarian Accountability Project*

The Humanitarian Accountability project started off as the Ombudsman Project, born out of the broader debate of accountability in humanitarian assistance. At a meeting held in 1997 in London, the World Disasters Forum noted that ‘few existing structures encourage humanitarian agencies to be accountable to their clients... while humanitarian actors have to respond to a wide range of interested bodies to whom they are accountable, the current system is in no way accountable directly to beneficiaries or claimants of assistance’ (Ombudsman Project Working Group, 2000a: 1). While the different ‘tools’ mentioned have provided for a basic guide on how to respond to humanitarian emergencies, a major limitation has been the absence of any organisation to enforce adherence. A consortium of UK-based NGOs in response to this concern launched the Ombudsman project. Its vision was an ambitious one: ‘to act as an impartial and independent voice for those people affected by disaster and conflict... to provide a mechanism through which the concerns of people affected by disaster and conflict can be raised and addressed within the humanitarian community’ (The Ombudsman Project leaflet, no date). The need for

the establishment of the Humanitarian Ombudsman provides another indication that NGOs have not succeeded in acting as voices for the poor, or at least that thus far there has been no mechanism to ascertain this role.

Proponents of the Humanitarian Ombudsman Project were by no means under any illusions regarding the likely difficulties inherent in the concept. 'Research thus far has signalled numerous challenges to establishing an Ombudsman's office that should be addressed in any future pilot project stage' (Ombudsman Project Working Group, 2000a: 4). The key areas of concern included how to ensure beneficiary access; how to design a system that is not muddled by bureaucratisation; balancing facilitation and regulation in a such a way that it does not encourage 'an adversarial environment that places the Ombudsman, beneficiary agencies, or even donors, in a confrontational dilemma'; how to obtain international jurisdiction and international consensus; and financing.

Indeed, it was subsequently concluded that, while the project should concentrate on providing a mechanism for identifying and addressing the concerns of the poor, a 'policing' or compliance component mechanism was not appropriate. The word 'Ombudsman' was regarded as a key source of the confusion regarding how the project would operate, hence the change to 'the Humanitarian Accountability Project'. Nevertheless, many difficulties still remain. As the project's Working Group notes, much of the critique has been based on:

'a consensus that accountability to the rights of beneficiaries must be strengthened, while at the same time acknowledging that the obligations and responsibilities of specific humanitarian actors are currently not clearly defined. Any mechanism to enhance accountability must find its role within

contexts where uncertainty prevails regarding the respective roles of states, NGO's, the UN, and donors, as well as taking into account and respecting the survival strategies of those people targeted by humanitarian assistance. Improved accountability must ultimately rest between a state and its citizenry. The extent to which the international humanitarian community should and can temporarily relieve a given state of these burdens is not clear in current emergency practice...The majority of questions that have emerged from Phase II are not related to whether a mechanism for improved accountability is necessary, but are concerned with *how* it can actually work in practice. Many questions and challenges have been posed which can only be answered through a programme of practical field-testing. Thus, the majority of people involved in the Phase II International Stakeholder Consultation have agreed that the concept must now be properly tested to demonstrate whether or not it can achieve its objectives and add value to humanitarian practice' (The Ombudsman Working Group, 2000b, Section 2.3 and 3.1).

In general it can be argued that, from the point view of accountability, one of the major challenges of the humanitarian accountability project will be how to reinforce a balance between upward and downward accountability on the part of NGOs. The fact that the project has had to shift from the character of a 'policeman' to one of merely promoting accountability not only makes it difficult to see how it will be different from the others, but also demonstrates the difficulties involved in attempting to control the behaviour of aid agencies.

It is likely that efforts to chip away the rough edges of humanitarianism will continue but there are also serious questions to be addressed. To begin with, the existence of some of the instruments developed to ensure that humanitarianism remains

humanitarian, such as the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, do not seem to have succeeded in their objectives. In fact, there are cases in which, in order to reach certain groups affected by disasters, the abandonment of some of its basic principles has been called for. It would seem that it is fair to look at the various instruments aimed at safeguarding the purity of humanitarianism simply as curative medicine, and in this case, apparently not very effective ones, not least because the medicine is to be taken voluntarily and many choose not to take it. It seems the case that the causes of the disease continue to be ignored. In Pathology, the answer to the question why people continue to get disease is not because there is no medicine. Similarly, lack of institutions or instruments to act as umpires of the humanitarian process cannot be regarded as the primary reason why the concept continues to suffer from a moral crisis. The increase in numbers and types of stakeholders involved in humanitarian assistance has brought a myriad of motives, principles, operational procedures and concerns that have distorted the concept of traditional humanitarianism. Dilemmas in complex emergencies, for example, where an agency hesitates to render assistance because such assistance will filter down to the perpetrators of suffering, are based on the erroneous assumption that humanitarian action exists also to solve political problems. This is why some have accused humanitarian assistance of providing a convenient cover for political inaction.

It seems that the sure way to cleanse humanitarianism of its moral impurities is to reassert the principle of kindness for humanity as the sole motivating factor. This means that political and other goals must be addressed by means other than humanitarian assistance. This can only succeed not on the basis of an increasing number of watchdogs only, but also on the basis of a conscious effort on the part of

donors to abandon all non-humanitarian motives in humanitarian assistance. In addition, the key to accountability to people affected by disasters is the willingness by aid agencies and donors to listen and act upon the concerns of such people. As we have seen, humanitarian behaviour and instincts already exist in poor communities. The international humanitarian system should learn to build on these, rather than to impose all sorts of new notions. So far, there is little evidence that such will exists. In addition, given that the involvement of stakeholders with different values, priorities, principles and motives will continue to dominate the humanitarian landscape, the need to re-define and re-conceptualise humanitarianism seems inescapable. This process needs to reflect the views of people affected by disasters. However, the realisation of these suggestions as well as the success of mechanisms for enhancing the accountability of aid workers and agencies, will continue to depend on their willingness to follow the guidelines provided by these mechanisms. Just how to generate this willingness seems to be the key question.

## **Chapter Four. Participation in a complex emergency: the case of south Sudan**

### **Background**

As indicated in the foregoing chapter, the development of various mechanisms has been an important part of current efforts to increase accountability and efficiency in humanitarian programmes. I reviewed the most well known of these that are most relevant with regard to the issue of participation and they included, among others, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP). At its fourth meeting in October 1998, the ALNAP noted that a recurring theme of discussion at its meetings had been the need to improve accountability to those affected by disasters and humanitarian crises. Subsequently, the ALNAP steering committee approved the working up of a proposal which would establish more effective methods for incorporating the views of disaster-affected populations and beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance into the design, monitoring, reporting and evaluation mechanism of donor organisations, UN agencies, NGOs, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement and the local authorities. It was noted that current examples of good beneficiary consultation/participation by agencies appear to be atypical and lack the level of consolidation that can be operationally useful and institutionally feasible (Record of the Meeting, ALNAP Secretariat, November, 1998).

This situation presented the need for a study which would draw from experiences in a wide ranging set of circumstances globally to arrive at some form of 'best'

practices as regards beneficiary consultation/participation. Before that study could begin it was felt necessary that preparatory work be undertaken that would give a clearer articulation of what 'the problem' actually was and to identify the benefits of greater involvement of beneficiaries. This preparatory work would also aim to establish the normative framework against which agency practices might be judged – what is appropriate at what stage of an emergency, and under what circumstances.

The first step in this preparatory work towards a global study on 'beneficiary voice' and humanitarian programmes was an ALNAP Synthesis Study undertaken jointly by Raymond Apthorpe and Philippa Atkinson (Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999b), on what they have termed 'Shared Social Learning', that is, learning in which listening to the affected population plays an important part, and where such populations are treated as subjects and not objects. A study on the experiences of some British NGOs in involving beneficiaries in their programmes during the 1998 famine in south Sudan constituted a second step towards this envisaged global study. I undertook this study in March and April 1999. Both studies were premised on the need for humanitarian programmes to respect their beneficiaries and that there is much to be gained from consultation, participation and other social learning methods as regards the design, management, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian programmes.

### **Historical and political context of South Sudan.**

The political conflict in Sudan has a long history. One account traces the origins of the conflict to the nineteenth century when the Egyptian conquest of Northern Sudan changed the nature of the existing forms of taxation and land rights, opening new opportunities for the economic exploitation of the people of the South by the people of the North who had since become Muslim through trade and other contact with the

Middle East (Johnson, 1997). Johnson points out that the North-South divide was essentially social and political in nature until the introduction of Jihad by the Mahdyya of 1881-1898 who fought against both the non-Mahdist Muslims and non-Muslims.

Prior to independence a distinguishing feature of Sudan, according to Johnson, was the absence of an active broad-based nationalist movement. Such a movement had been made unnecessary by the fact that the process of independence for Sudan was initiated by the outcome of international considerations rather than nationalist parties. Thus, nationalist parties turned to the religious sects, being the only organisations with broad membership. 'National politics in the North thus became organised around sectarian parties, who made little effort to develop a nationalist ideology embracing secularist Muslim as well as non-Muslim' (P4-5).

The causes of the current conflicts, however, seem to be closely connected with the process of independence. Independence in south Sudan was based on the condition of the devolution of considerable administrative and political powers to the southern region. However, the southern Sudanese formed their own Federal Bloc in 1957 after the Northern Parties had rejected the federal system of government immediately following independence. The imposition of a policy of Arabisation and Islamisation in the south by the Military government of the North-South division only resulted in a southern rebellion, which later escalated into full-scale civil war in the 1960s. Economic hardships during the 1970s and 1980s increased the north's interest in the oil-rich southern areas, fuelling the confrontation between the two sides.

Keen (1999) argues that the northern Arab minority essentially employs divide and rule tactics to suppress rebellion among the black majority of the south. This strategy



has mainly been achieved through the Government of Sudan (GoS) policy of using politically restive militias to fight the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and destabilise the south. For example, northern Bar el Ghazal has been a target of sustained Murhalin attacks during most of the 1980s, reaching their peak in 1986 and 1987.

Increased confrontation between 'insider/outsider' factions plus increased pressure on President Nimeiri from Northern Sudanese who were opposed to the creation of the Southern Region later led to the division of the Southern Region into three power blocs, namely Bar al Ghazal, Upper Nile and Equatoria. Subsequently, political developments led to the formation of general guerrilla units with support from several former army officers including John Garang, William Abdallah Cu'ol, Samuel Gai Tuk and a serving officer, Major Keribuno Kuanyin Bol. Efforts were later made to unify these groups into one army. However, some leaders who wanted the separation of south Sudan were opposed to the SPLM/SPLA's stated goal of 'revolution'. The army had therefore inherent disunity.

However, the army managed to hold together because the attempt to establish an Islamic State in Sudan by Sadiq Al Madhi, who succeeded Nimeiri, alienated the southerners. Moreover, the new government was opposed to the creation of a single southern region. The SPLA managed to consolidate by changing its policies and winning some of the tribal militias to its side. However, the fall of the Mengistu government in Ethiopia in 1991, which had supported the SPLA, precipitated new problems. The Mengistu regime had been influential in supporting factional dissent within the SPLA, some actions of which had been the detention of some factional leaders such as Keribuno Kuanyiri Bol and Arok Thon Arok. The fall of Mengistu

gave these and other leaders who had been calling for reforms within the SPLA the opportunity to re-affirm themselves. This event culminated in an announcement on the radio in 1991 of a coup against John Garang, who was the leader at that time. The period from 1991 to the present time has been characterised by defections out of and re-defections into, the SPLA by the various factions. The SPLA continues to attack towns held by the government - the most recent of which was the occupation of Rumbek town in 1997. The government also launches its own offensives, particularly in the dry season.

### **Operation Lifeline Sudan.**

Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was created in 1989 by the UN as a humanitarian programme aimed at 'assisting internally displaced and war-affected civilians during an ongoing conflict in a sovereign country, as opposed to refugees beyond its borders' (Karim et al, 1996). It came into existence after the failure by the international community to prevent the 1988 war-related famine in Bar el Ghazal. It set out to operate on the principle of neutrality, guaranteeing access to all war-affected population whatever their location. However, immediately following its establishment GoS began to see it as benefiting the SPLM/A while the SPLM/A saw it as benefiting GoS. This problem contributed to a change starting from 1992 in the nature of OLS in the direction of increased formalisation. Increasingly, UN co-ordination is seen as confined to south Sudan only while in the North, GoS is seen to play a leading role. With regard to participation, some agencies have tended to see OLS as restrictive because of its failure to cover all geographic areas requiring humanitarian assistance. Consequently, such agencies have chosen to operate outside the OLS umbrella in order to be able to reach out to areas that lie outside it.

## **Study Design.**

This study attempted to identify empirically types of participation by beneficiaries and their communities over a geographically and socially limited area (i.e. south Sudan). This was achieved through analysing the experiences of some of the 12 United Kingdom (UK)-based NGOs covered by the Disasters' Emergency Committee (DEC) evaluation of the south Sudan humanitarian programme in consulting with the beneficiaries and involving them in the planning, management, monitoring and evaluation of their humanitarian programmes. Secondly, an attempt was made to draw out some conclusions regarding the circumstances in which it is appropriate, feasible in practice and desirable in principle for agencies to utilise consultative and participatory approaches and the circumstances under which it is not appropriate, or not required, to utilise such approaches. The study also included an analysis of factors, on a broader (perhaps structural) level that might exert limitations to agencies as regards beneficiary involvement. Finally, the study attempted to draw out any evidence of the benefits or disbenefits to programme quality of utilising participatory approaches.

Specifically, the study addressed the following questions: -

- How were beneficiaries defined, identified and reached?
- What were the types of participation utilised and why?
- What is the relationship between humanitarian space and participatory space?
- Are programmes more effectively delivered if participatory?

- Is there value-added beyond the programme if humanitarian assistance is delivered in a participatory fashion?

*Method of study.*

The method of study involved working in conjunction with ETC (a UK-based consultancy firm) in their overall evaluation of the UK DEC humanitarian appeal in South Sudan. I was a member of a three-person team among the four teams of ETC on the evaluation. While the other members of my team focussed on the evaluation of the programme, I conducted, independently, a study focussed on participation.

Three main activities were involved: a preparatory period at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London and North Shields (with ETC) during which background information was obtained and the field protocol produced; three weeks of field work in Nairobi and Lokichoggio (Kenya) and south Sudan plus one and half weeks of further analysis and write up in London and North Shields. In Nairobi, I held semi-structured interviews with key personnel at the regional head offices of the UK NGOs included in the study. These were Oxfam, SCF, CARE, Merlin, Concern, Christian Aid, World Vision, Tear Fund and MSF- Holland; the third activity was on-going use of documentary information available on the south Sudan humanitarian programme.

Various documents were reviewed including the following:

- 48 Hour, Four Week and Final Programme reports by the agencies to the DEC.
- Agency programme and project reviews and reports.
- OLS reviews and consultancy reports.

- General articles on participation and humanitarian programmes, including the draft ALNAP Synthesis Study (Apthorpe and Atkinson, 1999a); and
- Field reports on various programmes such as nutrition, livestock, water and sanitation, and seeds and tools distribution.

### *Fieldwork.*

I conducted semi-structured interviews at Regional Office level aimed primarily at establishing a broader picture of the programme and obtaining information on areas in south Sudan where the NGOs were operational as well as a list of field staff to be seen in both Lokichoggio and south Sudan. In Lokichoggio contact was made with the NGOs mentioned above. In south Sudan, I, together with the other team members, visited five places, namely Akot, Rumbek, Angangrial, Mapel and Malual Kon. Oxfam were operational in Akot and Rumbek, Tear Fund in Rumbek and Malual Kon, and SCF in Mapel. During these field visits, I held semi-structured interviews with agency field staff and, in a very limited number of cases, individual project beneficiaries. Beneficiaries were mostly women attending feeding programmes. Only two operational projects were also visited, namely, a therapeutic feeding centre and a water project.

The other teams of the ETC were given the ALNAP field protocol to use on programmes undertaken by the other NGOs not covered by our team. This arrangement had problems in that not all agencies outside the coverage of our team were adequately covered as regards this study. In one case the problem arose from lack of access to a particular agency for the ETC team involved. In other cases limited time to address the demands of the DEC evaluation left little opportunity to

address the issues covered by this study adequately. As a result of these constraints only four agencies have been covered in detail. These are Oxfam, Tear Fund, SCF (UK) and Concern World-wide. I visited the first three agencies at both regional office and implementation site levels. Concern was only visited at the regional office level but a fairly detailed coverage has been made possible because of the availability of a fair amount of information from programme reports and interviews in Nairobi. It should be mentioned, however, that the issues covered by the study are generic to all agencies and therefore still relevant despite the limitations in the methodology. It must also be stated that cases cited from the experiences of particular agencies are dictated by information availability and should not be taken to suggest that other agencies did not have similar experiences.

Another major limitation was inability to contact beneficiaries in any substantial way due to time and logistical constraints. Ideally, it would have been helpful to interview people who received assistance from the NGOs as well as the various committees, women's groups, *gol* leaders (clan heads), chiefs and SRRA officials that the agencies were dealing with. In so far as the views of the beneficiaries are concerned, this constituted a shortcoming for the study. Consequently, this study should be seen as presenting only a partial view of the issues at stake, namely, an analysis of the experiences of the aid agencies. Nevertheless, some beneficiary voices came through via reported speech in agency reports or in interviews as regards what beneficiaries had said or how they had acted on particular issues.

### **Defining Beneficiaries.**

A task force was formed for the specific purpose of identifying vulnerable individuals and targeting aid. This task force comprised officials from the SPLM, the

SRRA, and agencies from within the OLS. Clearly absent from this task force were representatives of the beneficiary communities such as the executive chiefs, the *gol* leaders and representatives of women's groups. The SRRA, which in principle was supposed to provide for this representation, could in practice only do so in a limited way because of its own interests arising from the fact that, in reality, it represented the interests of the SPLM. It was in fact because of this reason that some agencies tried to avoid dealing with the SRRA for fear that their neutrality would be viewed as having been compromised. The SPLM/SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force identified the following categories of beneficiaries:

- Indigenous community population affected by events such as war raids, or famine. These were thought to be most likely to find representation in the traditional social structure.
- The internally displaced: these were regarded to be very vulnerable because in most cases they were unlikely to have any resources, food or non-food. They were also regarded as lacking representation in the social structure and therefore more likely to be left out of programmes which used the social structure in creating participatory space.
- Returnees: these were people who had left the towns due to fighting and had come back to their villages. They were regarded as just as vulnerable as the displaced except that they had kin relations to fall back on in the absorbing communities. However, the absorption of the returnees led to the depletion of resources within the recipient communities, increasing their vulnerability, a fact that did not seem to be reflected in the distribution mechanism as only the returnees were targeted for relief aid.

- The old, the sick and the weak: whether returnees, 'indigenous' or internally displaced, these were more likely to lack an entry point into participation.
- The so-called 'C-130 invitees': marginalized individuals travelling from airstrip to airstrip in search of food. These were unlikely to have an entry point into participation.

At the agency level, the definition of beneficiaries varied from agency to agency, sometimes depending on the type of the programme. For those involved in therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes, nutritional assessments (WT/HT and MUAC) played a key role in the defining process. Thus, beneficiaries were essentially children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating mothers. In several cases during the emergency, some agency staff felt that nutritional assessments were quite inappropriate, given the level of suffering observed. In addition, the physical make-up of the *Dinkas* of south Sudan, who are generally very tall and slim, posed problems for the traditional nutritional indicator of Weight for Height. One agency staff commented that using this indicator, nearly the whole population would be classified as malnourished. As a result of these problems some agencies did not adhere strictly to the standards set by UNICEF and OLS. In the case of orphans and abandoned children, nutritional assessments were thought to be most inappropriate.

A number of agencies, particularly SCF, Merlin and the Diocese of Rumbek strongly felt that *observation* was the most appropriate method for defining beneficiaries at the point of entry into the humanitarian programme. For such agencies, the level of suffering observed made participation of beneficiaries (in determining the vulnerable) inappropriate.



One agency defined beneficiaries institutionally. In this particular case, the population of a whole parish became beneficiaries. Removal of the need to target resulted in reaching the defined beneficiaries quickly and efficiently. However, beneficiaries were narrowly defined since church attendance may have affected entry into the programme.

Almost all agencies, but particularly WFP and those that distributed general rations and non-food items, made use of the traditional social structure in defining their beneficiaries. In this case relief items, especially food rations, were given to local executive chiefs to distribute to *gol* leaders who would in turn re-distribute to households.

The executive chief has jurisdiction over a given geographical territory while the *gol* leader has jurisdiction over a social territory (chiefs and *gol* leaders generally appeared to be only men). The latter is some kind of a clan head who knows all the families under his leadership and is therefore best placed to identify the vulnerable. The executive chief being in charge of a geographical area may distribute food to areas (within his territory) that have not necessarily been targeted for distribution. This may result in the targeted area getting inadequate food or other assistance, thereby leaving out some 'genuine beneficiaries'. Nevertheless, the traditional social structure appeared to offer the best opportunities for participation where these were appropriate and required.

In a rather authoritarian fashion, some agencies used *their own judgement* to define beneficiaries. This was mostly the case with regard to the distribution of non-food items such as seeds, tools, fishing equipment and household utensils, and water and sanitation programmes. Apparently, these agencies felt that it was possible to come

up with a reasonable judgement regarding people in need of items such as seeds, tools, household utensils, etc. While this might have been true in some cases, it certainly could not have been true in all cases. More importantly, as will be shown later, while agencies might have fairly accurately determined *who* should receive assistance, the specific aspects of the *type* of assistance given posed more problems than was anticipated. So, for example, while agency judgement could be used to determine the need for seed or tools, it could not easily be used to determine what type of seeds and what kind of tools. In some cases, agencies provided assistance to prevent populations from leaving their areas, thereby creating the problem of a huge displaced population elsewhere. The definition of beneficiaries in this case was also agency-driven.

### **Identification of beneficiaries.**

Beneficiary identification took many forms, not all of which were participatory. Firstly, there were beneficiaries who effectively identified themselves through self-presentation at places where assistance was being given, for example, at mission sites in the case of one church-affiliated agency. It was also not uncommon to find people who defined themselves as needing assistance camping, lingering and loitering around the compounds of some aid agencies. Free rations were not the only reason why these people were found in these places. Some were motivated by the possibility of opportunities for paid casual work made available by the labour requirements of agencies in, for example, the fetching of materials and the construction of their living compounds. Secondly, people presented themselves at feeding centres if they felt that their children needed assistance.

Identification through self-presentation had several problems. In the first instance, only those who were physically strong enough to walk could make it to the places where assistance was found. Some people were also by-passed simply because of a lack of information regarding where to find assistance. Additionally, there were a number of cases where agency staff turned self-presented individuals away as the former determined that the latter did not qualify for assistance. This was particularly true in the case of the therapeutic feeding programme. Based as it was on set indices of what constituted severe malnutrition, agency staff had to refuse to admit children who, in spite of their obvious physical wasting, had not met the required criteria. The difficulties faced by agency staff in dealing with this situation were reflected in a number of reports that several of them began to relax the standards in order to incorporate increased numbers of malnourished children. This practice posed problems for field staff who were at the same time under pressure from their head offices to distribute a finite amount of resources. The worst case was one in which, even using the agreed standard for identifying malnourished children, agency staff found themselves ending up with too many children to admit into the programme relative to available resources. Attempting to solve this dilemma resulted in a situation in which officially severely malnourished children were not classified as such and denied admission into the programme. Such children were returned to their homes and only admitted into the supplementary feeding programme. The fact that the latter programme is, by definition, meant to supplement therapeutic feeding, in addition to the fact that the general ration at times was not timely delivered, agency staff found themselves in the contradictory situation in which they were giving food rations supplementary to *nothing*.

Clearly, the problems faced with regard to self-presented beneficiaries also had much

to do with the method that was used to screen them, in this case, nutrition indices. The experience in south Sudan appears to raise a question that needs careful attention: How appropriate are standard nutritional surveys in identifying beneficiaries in situations of extreme food shortages? The significance of this question is highlighted even further when the issue of adolescent and adult malnutrition is brought into play. The focus on under-five children and pregnant and lactating women often overlooks the vulnerability of children over five years as well as adolescents and adults. Yet, as argued by Salama and Collins (1999), based on experiences in Somalia, Angola, the Great Lakes and Liberia, adolescent and adult malnutrition deserve serious consideration during emergencies. In the case of south Sudan they observe: 'this focus on child malnutrition did not always correspond with the mortality patterns in a given location. In a number of areas these were typical of a late stage in a severe famine, with adult and adolescent deaths out-numbering those of children under the age of five' (p.19). Saving children who are likely to become orphans because their parents have been neglected is an issue that not only raises ethical considerations but also puts question marks on the effectiveness of the whole relief process.

Perhaps recognising the pitfalls of self-presentation as a form of beneficiary identification, some agencies employed the strategy of house-to-house visits. This strategy had the obvious advantage of reaching out to those who could not make it to the feeding and distribution centres during the particular period for a variety of reasons including poor physical/health status, long distance and lack of information. An additional advantage was the possibility of learning more about the community set-up as well as individual household characteristics that could be harnessed to improve the planning and execution of the programmes. The obvious difficulty lay in

the need to mobilise enough resources in terms of manpower and transportation to cover substantially large areas.

Vulnerability workshops were an alternative or an additional strategy for identifying beneficiaries for some agencies. These one-day workshops brought together agency staff, community representatives (principally the executive chiefs and the *gol* leaders) and the representatives of the SRRA. This forum presented opportunities for community representatives to influence the process of identifying beneficiaries and helped to generate information that was key to the effectiveness of the humanitarian programme.

### **Distribution.**

The mode of the distribution of relief items appeared to follow along the lines through which beneficiaries were identified. Agencies that relied on self-presentation of beneficiaries distributed their items through fixed stations such as the mission site and the feeding centres. Beneficiary participation in the process of distribution varied from agency to agency. Some agencies made efforts to involve the local population with varying degrees of extensiveness. Others preferred to rely on large numbers of expatriate staff. In the former case, there were those who undertook, for example, to train the local population in nutritional measurements, feeding and the distribution of food items. In some instances committees were formed composed of local people that administered the day-to-day activities of feeding and distribution centres, including the settling of disputes. However, participation in this case was mostly limited to women whose children had been admitted into the feeding centres. In the latter case, particularly for some medical agencies, expatriate staffs were imported *en masse* to carry out distribution activities. At one point, one agency reportedly

imported a staggering eighty members of expatriate staff, causing considerable anxiety and feelings of chaos not only among some local aid administrators, but also fellow international NGOs. (Some agency staffs reported that the arrival of this contingent at the UN inter-agency compound where all operations were based did cause some problems with regard to accommodation and the general management of the camp).

One agency attempted to overcome the shortcomings of distributing relief items at a fixed centre by designing a mobile feeding programme. Thus, contrary to usual practice in the distribution process, the agency went to the community as opposed to the community going to the agency. This programme involved agency staff travelling to designated outposts in the villages where local people were mobilised and supplied all the labour requirements and only received material and technical assistance from the aid agency. Incidentally, the particular agency involved in running this programme was relatively small without much resource back up. In addition it was the first time it had ever directly operated in the field, having previously only worked through funding local partners. Being a church-affiliated agency, however, it was able to forge quick links in the community through its church partners. But given the limited resource-base of the agency, the programme itself was of a very limited nature, with only one vehicle employed in the feeding rounds.

Nevertheless, the mobile feeding programme demonstrated a number of advantages. Firstly, it offered increased opportunities for participation by the local population as the programme was taking place within their normal social environment. Secondly, opportunities for social learning on the part of the agency were also increased, as

agency staffs were able to hold discussions with members of the community before and after the feeding activity. Thirdly, the programme helped to prevent large concentrations of the population that would have necessitated the introduction of water and sanitation programmes. Fourthly, the programme also contributed to the strengthening of household coping mechanisms by allowing women to use the time they would have spent travelling the long distances and queuing for rations to look for extra food and other supplies. In this sense the burden of a heavy workload for women was also considerably reduced.

Agencies involved in the distribution of the general ration mainly did so through executive chiefs and *gol* leaders. The distribution itself usually took place at the airstrip where the food had been dropped by planes and stored. A day would then be announced when the goods would actually be distributed. On the designated day, agency staff and porters selected from within the local communities would distribute food to the executive chiefs. The executive chiefs would in turn, under no interference from agency staff, distribute the proportion given to them to the *gol* leaders. At the end of the chain, the *gol* leaders would then distribute rations to individuals. Thus, distribution was quite indirect and agencies found it very difficult to know what happened beyond the level of the executive chief, let alone that of the *gol* leader. This lack of knowledge raised some concern among some agency staffs that, because of their lack of knowledge regarding mechanisms for guaranteeing fairness in the community, they were unsure whether the food was reaching what they (the agencies) had defined as vulnerable individuals. On a more serious note, there were fears that the food would find its way to SRRA officials and eventually to the SPLM, thus rendering the agencies a party to the continuation of the conflict through sustenance of the soldiers.

## **Beneficiary participation.**

The participation of beneficiaries varied in extent and type across different agencies and programmes. This section will give examples of agencies and the ways in which they attempted to get their beneficiaries to participate in the various programmes. Given the large number of agencies involved only short summaries will be given. It should also be mentioned that these summaries are by no means exhaustive. Some programmes have deliberately been left out due to lack of adequate information available to me at the time of writing on the role of beneficiaries in these programmes. The account itself is also limited by the amount of available information.

Oxfam carried out several emergency programmes in both the south and northern sectors of Sudan:

### *Emergency Water Supply and Hygiene Promotion.*

This programme involved the provision of clean water at a total of 31 sites in 6 months, mostly feeding centres and food distribution points. The choice of the programme was clearly agency-driven but programme delivery involved some level of beneficiary participation. The main types of participation were:

- Involvement of communities in rehabilitation of water points.
- Female community hygiene motivators (members of the community) who carried hygiene messages into the community.

### *Emergency Food and Nutrition.*



The programme was carried out in Rumbek and Agangrial towns in Rumbek County. The following types of participation were employed: Focus group discussions, a vulnerability workshop and key informant interviews. The vulnerability workshop was particularly important. Planned in consultation with the SRRA, it involved participants from across the county who represented different sectors of the population including women, traditional and community leaders, civil authorities, village councils, farmers, health workers and agricultural extension workers.

Through the vulnerability workshop, a call was made by participants to improve representation on the relief committees and their involvement in distribution. Awareness on groups who were not receiving food was also raised and one practical resolution was made to target, directly and separately, families of children in feeding centres, which was done in subsequent distributions.

#### *OLS Livestock Support Programme.*

The programme's objectives were, among others, to support vulnerable livestock owners through the provision of additional medicines, vaccines, cold chain equipment, and veterinary equipment for increased disease treatment. The main types of participation utilised were:

- Dialogue workshops in all *payams* (districts) with community leaders and livestock owners;
- The formation of a Veterinary Co-ordination Committee (VCC) in each *Payam*; and
- Employment of local supervisors.

Both programme reviews as well as agency staffs hailed the livestock support programme as one of the most successful programmes during the emergency.

*Livestock Epidemic Control (Bahrel Jebel, Northern Sector).*

The main objective of the programme was to improve animal health for stronger livestock resources. Beneficiary participation was sought through community sessions with livestock herders and community based animal health workers. The programme was done in conjunction with two local partner organisations.

**TEAR FUND (Church affiliated agency).**

The south Sudan emergency programme was the first for Tear Fund to be directly operational at the field implementation level. Previously, the agency had only operated through funding local partners. Tear Fund specialised in feeding programmes, particularly dry supplementary feeding. They operated three programmes in three different areas in Bahr el Ghazal namely, Rumbek and Billing in Rumbek County and Malual Kon, north east of Aweil. In Rumbek, Tear Fund inherited beneficiaries from an Oxfam therapeutic feeding programme. Part of the reason for this was that being new in the area, and operating for the first time, the agency lacked adequate information regarding how and where to start what kind of programmes. A community education programme was run concurrently with the feeding programmes. During the initial stages of the programme there was almost no beneficiary participation at all. Beneficiaries were selected using the pre-set criteria of OLS for feeding programmes. The agency found that pressure to start programme activities to win support from local authorities made beneficiary participation difficult. With the programme underway, the agency was able to utilise the following forms of participation: -

- Informal discussions with various groups and community members;
- Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice (KAP) survey with women groups;
- Discussions with women's groups and church groups; and
- Child to child classes.

Tear Fund's programme had two unique features as far as beneficiary participation issues are concerned. Firstly, it was the only agency running a mobile supplementary feeding programme. The programme allowed increased beneficiary participation by making it easy for volunteers to work in the feeding centres. Because the centres were also small, contacts between agency staffs and beneficiaries were close. Secondly, Tear Fund was also the only agency running a child-to-child lessons programme. This programme enabled children over five years of age, often a neglected group during emergencies, to participate in the humanitarian programme.

**MERLIN (a medical relief agency).**

Merlin carried out five activities in their overall programme, namely therapeutic feeding, supplementary feeding, clinic activities, nutritional and health surveillance, and water and sanitation programme.

Beneficiary involvement during the initial stages of the programme was difficult apparently because of a shortage of local staffs that could communicate with the beneficiaries. This problem alone resulted in several weeks' delay to programme commencement. After the programme got off the ground, beneficiary participation was achieved through:

- Extensive employment of local staffs (up to 70 women); and

- Discussions with community leaders.

Merlin believed that language differences and the sheer number of staffs required would have made the programme impossible without major local staff recruitment. In addition, extensive local staff recruitment, many of whom had their own children in the programme, helped the programme's acceptance and its publicity throughout the community. Community involvement also helped to identify other needs. For example, the establishment of a clinic and a health surveillance programme was a direct response to community demand.

The main problems of relying heavily on recruitment within the same community included the following:

- Favouritism by staffs, who were in a position to allocate food, evidenced by the admission of children who did not meet the criteria, and the admission of the same children several times under different names. This obviously reflected social pressures, which these workers were under.
- On the medical side, there was a propensity for Health Workers to administer unnecessarily large amounts of medication.

**Save the Children Fund UK (a Development and Relief agency).**

The SCF mounted several projects, all of which were not necessarily funded by the DEC. Only those that had direct relevance for beneficiary participation are mentioned here. These included:

- Community kitchens for unaccompanied minors;
- Community survival kits;

- Emergency relief items;
- Emergency supplementary food delivery;
- Delivery of seeds and tools;
- Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in South Darfur; and
- Assistance to unaccompanied children in South Darfur.

The targeting and beneficiary selection mechanisms that were used are well documented in SCFs final programme report to the DEC. The local authorities and the representatives of SRRA and another local authority were given the responsibility to work with the communities to decide who would receive assistance and draw up lists of vulnerable individuals. The SCF retained the primary role of analysing the details of the identified beneficiaries and verification by their field staff before delivery of relief items. Field staffs were also used in conducting post-distribution assessments. In some areas distribution was done via Village Identification Committees (VICs) who, in collaboration with SCF, determined criteria for vulnerability in their community. In other areas food distribution was done through the Relief Committees established by WFP and a local authority. Chiefs were an integral part of the whole process.

According to SCF, their experiences in working with beneficiaries revealed several lessons. Firstly, in their opinion, the traditional system of distribution (through chiefs) worked well in a stable community where vulnerability was related to asset losses from raids, floods or drought. The system did not work equitably when there was a large displaced community and another structure, such as the VIC, became necessary. Secondly, SCF had to modify its approach to targeting and delivery to reach out to the most vulnerable who, according to the agency, were people displaced

from their communities and traditional social networks of kinship support. Actions taken included intensifying discussions on selection criteria and follow up on distributions, and the withholding from the general distribution of a proportion of the relief available to the community (about 25%) to be distributed to households which were identified as having been previously neglected during the follow up visits. Thirdly, SCF learned that timely delivery of adequate essential relief items could increase the chances for people to remain stable, reducing the need for the establishment of feeding centres. They argued that one adverse effect of the feeding centres was that it distracted the attention of some agencies to the point where they had to scale down or even close their other ongoing primary health care programmes and outreach capacity, negatively affecting the health status of the communities. However, it may also be true that this reflected poor management and lack of adequate resources on the part of such agencies. Fourthly, working with beneficiaries resulted in the need to develop a fuller understanding of the concept of vulnerability, culminating in a research project (separately funded), which was later published as *The south Sudan vulnerability study* (Harragin, 1998).

**CAFOD (a Church affiliated Development and Relief agency).**

For CAFOD, beneficiary involvement in the programme was dictated by the nature of the delivery structure. In terms of the management framework, Community Based Organisations (CBOs) as opposed to INGOs tended to operate in a structure of governance, sometimes negotiated locally because of knowledge of an area, sometimes imposing a structure from a regional framework. The diocesan structure is an example of the latter allowing quick reaction to a growing emergency situation where there was local knowledge of need. Beneficiary selection was based on local

knowledge, and beneficiary participation was mainly constituted by discussions between people who requested food at the mission, community elders, diocesan staffs and parishioners. Beneficiaries were defined as:

- The poor of the parish, particularly those without work opportunity or the sick; frail and disabled;
- Clinic patients;
- Children in school; and
- Others included at the discretion of the mission.

Given the poor health and physical status of these categories of people, it was sometimes felt that participation was inappropriate at presentation. The agency claimed that some evidence in the south sector programme appeared to suggest that beneficiary recovery was greatly accelerated by an approach that emphasised family delivery of supplementary feeding and other medical inputs rather than isolating the individual patient.

The experiences of the agency were important for learning. For example, the diocese of Rumbek felt that the 1998 disaster produced three critical lessons namely, the need for their own logistics, the need for professional input for therapeutic and supplementary feeding (to use Catholic Relief Services) and to deliver assistance to families and not individuals.

#### **CONCERN (a Development and Relief agency).**

Concern's emergency programme involved three major activities namely, adolescent and adult nutrition, support to sanitation programme and the improvement of capacity for humanitarian management by the SRRA. The latter project also aimed at

improving the relationship between NGOs and the SRRA. During the emergency, Concern operated more like a CBO, forging very close links and social contracts with the community. The programme was carried out in Aweil West and Yirol Counties.

The pre-distribution planning phase of the programme involved, among other activities, consultations with the community leaders and the SSRA to determine the best strategy for targeting, determination of location and coverage of distribution sites, making agreements with local representation regarding target procedures, identification of staffs and community capacity for assistance with distribution, and outlining the process for the dissemination of the distribution plan to the communities. The targeting strategy adopted during the implementation phase was essentially to use traditional chiefs and *gol* leaders to distribute to the most vulnerable in their communities. The local leaders had record cards on which they recorded the names of the households that received items from them.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the programme involved the following activities:

- Three- month progress reports;
- A survey in Yirol county;
- SRRA-Concern joint evaluation workshops in each county. The workshops had a broad range of participants including local civil authorities, women's association representative, SPLM representatives, chiefs, *gol* leaders and other NGO representatives;
- Interviews conducted by community agents attached to decentralised supplementary feeding programmes in Aweil West. These agents would



also be used to collect information to inform policy on 1999 distributions and other food security related issues.

The programme produced several key lessons, among which were:

- Limited literacy levels among *gol* leaders led to their inability to fill in the record cards, limiting the effectiveness of using them in monitoring the targeted individuals;
- Households in villages remote from the distribution point tended to receive less, especially if unaccompanied by their leaders to the distribution points. In some villages, households were not aware that distributions had taken place;
- *Gol* leaders tended to distribute on an equal basis rather than targeting to one group called 'the most vulnerable'. Despite this issue the system was identified as a largely effective way of ensuring that assistance was delivered to the targeted populations;
- Decentralised feeding programmes allowed for a closer relationship between the agency and the community. It was also realised that there was potential for improving and modifying the traditional targeting system. Improvements could be achieved through the identification of literate persons from each *gol* to assist the less literate *gol* leaders. The modification of the system would basically draw from the available knowledge and would involve, for example, the employment of community agents partly in a monitoring and training role.

The capacity building programme implemented by Concern in south Sudan deserves a special note. Traditional practice in emergency relief is to see as emergency activities only the provision of immediate relief needs such as food, other non-food

livelihood materials and health and sanitation needs. Rarely do agencies see capacity building as an emergency activity. Yet, in a complex emergency like south Sudan, Concern's capacity building programme demonstrated that this programme can be valuable in terms of improving relations between the local authorities and aid agencies, enabling the latter to get better access to beneficiary populations. Thus, rather than complain that SRRA were exercising favouritism, or were proving difficult to work with, the capacity building programme enabled Concern to discover that part of the problem related only to a limited capacity in certain areas. Improving such capacities in those areas enabled the SRRA to participate more effectively.

### **Individuals or Communities?**

The key issue addressed in this study related to the extent to which the views of the affected population can be taken into account by agencies involved in humanitarian programmes. The ways in which beneficiaries are defined, identified and reached have implications for the levels and types of participation that can be expected. In the case of south Sudan it seems fair to say that the traditional way of considering as beneficiaries only those who directly received assistance predominated. Yet it could be argued that *beneficiary communities* might sometimes be a more appropriate term, particularly when considering participation.

It is important to understand what may be implied by the terms *beneficiary participation* and *beneficiary involvement*. In Chapter One, I made a distinction between beneficiary involvement, which is primarily related to the supply of physical energies by the affected population to the programme, and involvement or participation that allows for the engagement of the community mind (i.e. social involvement). For example, most of the construction of feeding centres in the south

Sudan programme was done by the affected communities who mobilised their own labour and resources with very little input from the agencies. Women also supplied most of the labour for programme activities, including cooking in therapeutic feeding centres, pounding, drawing water, washing etc. However, the women did not always form part of the consultation process during the planning, monitoring and evaluation phases of the programmes. A number of reports on the programmes in south Sudan expressed concern over the limited involvement of women in these areas and made various recommendations for their inclusion.

Clearly, it is possible on the one hand for much physical involvement or participation to occur without much social learning taking place, that is, without the beneficiaries being able to influence the decisions taken on their behalf by the agencies, and without the agencies learning the vital social information that can improve the effectiveness of their programmes. On the other hand, much social learning could occur without high levels of physical involvement. Thus, the argument that some agency staffs raised, that beneficiary participation was inappropriate in some cases because of poor nutritional status of the beneficiaries, would not hold water at this level. According to this argument, beneficiaries could not have been involved in programme activities because their nutritional status left them physically too weak to work, and involvement in decision-making was inappropriate because of the urgency of food need. However, this argument is largely irrelevant if a broader definition of beneficiaries is allowed that includes the wider community into which a programme is being delivered rather than one which considers as beneficiaries only those individuals who receive assistance directly.

In principle, only women and children are *beneficiaries* of feeding programmes, for example. But for a feeding programme to run well even men need to participate, even if in different ways. Two examples can illustrate this point. Firstly, the SPLM/SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force noted that a lack of proper information regarding the purpose of feeding centres resulted, during the early stages of the programme, in households who were receiving rations from the centres not being given the general food ration. The local distribution structure, dominated by men, failed to realise that feeding centre rations were meant for malnourished under-five children only and not for the whole household.

Secondly, one agency reported from their experiences in feeding centres in Rumbek and Agangrial that a lack of initial engagement with men resulted in family misunderstandings between women attending the feeding centres and their husbands. This experience was also reported by another agency working in Mapel. Women reported that they experienced some resentment from their husbands for staying too long away from home, which sometimes resulted in marital disputes and violence. To address this problem feeding centre staff held discussions with community leaders and made plans to raise awareness among men in the community on this issue. In Agangrial Oxfam also utilised the existing health committee to address the issue. Noteworthy here is the fact that the participation of men was brought on board to deal with a specific problem rather than being conceived, at the outset, as part and parcel of the programme.

The point about *beneficiary communities* can further be illustrated by one project, which was established with the aim of assisting unaccompanied minors (see Discussion Point 2). The beneficiaries of this programme, using the narrow definition

of individuals, were the children who were admitted into the camps. The children participated in the information-gathering activities to establish their identities and family links. However, they did not participate in the decision-making process leading to the construction of the camps. Neither did they participate in the construction of the camps themselves. It was adults who participated in making decisions leading to the construction of the camps. In addition, women participated in supplying most of the labour for the day to day running of the camp, the activities of which included pounding flour, cooking, drawing water, bathing the children, washing and cleaning the dormitories. Adults also dominated the process of repatriation, who, together with agency staffs, determined that this was in the best interests of the children.

The OLS Review (Karim, et. al, 1996: 170-180) also noted the problems of using narrow definitions of beneficiaries. The Review criticised the focus by many agencies on the female-headed household as a specifically vulnerable group. It was argued that there was a total lack of understanding of this concept by many agencies and that this focus was but one example of the tendency of aid agencies to focus on *vulnerable individuals* or groups, rather than *societies*. Theoretically, it was noted that the definition of a female-headed household is a source of on-going controversy. In the case of the social realities of south Sudan it was argued that using current acceptable definitions, marriage customary practices render all south Sudanese households female-headed regardless of the war. Externally influenced views are likely to be problematic, as evidenced by the following recommendation made by a headquarters-based staff of one agency to field-based staffs:

‘Another problem with the distribution lists was that during

compilation, some women who were second/third/fourth wives were mistakenly included as female heads of households (usually widows), which led to confusion during distribution... the lists should be altered to reflect the real status of each beneficiary' (Field reports).

During the 1998 emergency, the general focus on women as heads of households led to specific problems in the distribution of general rations by WFP. Food, after being distributed to women, was subsequently taken to a secondary distribution point where it was redistributed by the traditional leadership structure based on its own definitions of vulnerability. Clearly, the community felt that the people receiving the food were not the only ones vulnerable. The imposition of this distribution strategy stands out as but one example of imported assumptions and models that bear little relevance to the particular situation under consideration. It is important to note that the problems created by this strategy, as well as other problems highlighted above, primarily resulted from emphasising the individual or particular individual social units as beneficiaries without considering these in relation to the wider social context within which they existed.

### **Analytical Issues.**

#### ***Socio-cultural set-up of south Sudan.***

With regard to participation the most important social aspect of south Sudan appears to be the concept of sharing and the way in which vulnerability is regarded in the pre-dominant *Dinka* culture. Harragin's anthropological work (1998) goes into some detail in describing and analysing these concepts. Its usefulness lies in the fact that

the concepts are discussed in the context of a humanitarian intervention. There are a few aspects of *Dinka* culture that appear particularly relevant with regard to participation. These deserve some attention.

To begin with, it is clear that in their local politics, the *Dinka* adhere to the basic democratic principles not incongruent with those of other democratic societies.

Harragin (1998: 6) writes:

‘In local politics it is usually the majority decision that holds sway. Chiefship will normally be in the hand of the most populous group... a chief has authority as the leader of a group of people, not an area, and is more considered for his (sic) personal merits rather than for the authority of his (sic) office. It is a highly consensual society, and the decisions of the court seem to reflect more the desire to keep peace for the majority than to pursue the rights of the individual.’

As regards the concepts of welfare and inequality, the author dares assert that *Dinka society is more egalitarian than western society*, although he makes it clear that this does not mean that everything will be shared amongst everyone. Various mechanisms exist that ensure that people in need are not left completely without support. A high value is placed on the sharing of individual resources, a trait that aid agencies have had to grapple with, as relief aid distributed to the perceived vulnerable individuals was subsequently redistributed to a wider social grouping.

Vulnerability itself is understood in ways that are different from those that aid agency staffs are used to: ‘the kinds of people who are seen as vulnerable in *Dinka* society... are very difficult for someone not from that society to identify without

detailed insider knowledge available only to members of the local community' (Harragin, 1998: v). As a result their targeting of food aid was not accurate:

'Targeting aid to the vulnerable reflects more the logistical and financial constraints of the relief operation... than the belief that 'targeted' aid ensures that it reaches those in need. The very fact that it has been outsiders defining who the needy are has meant that targeting has been a sham in most cases where locals accept the conditions outsiders put on the relief but subsequently redistribute it to all sections of the population, who then redistribute it within their lineages to those who are most in need' (p. iv).

Harragin's conclusion is that, while neutral outsiders can do prioritisation by area on the basis of need, internal targeting should be left to the groups that define themselves as communities.

### ***Vulnerability.***

Many agencies operating in south Sudan appeared to have realised that it was difficult to understand the concept of vulnerability as it applied to the local communities without their participation. This realisation accounted for the central role played by the chiefs and the *gol* leaders in the targeting and distribution mechanisms of many agencies. The importance of understanding this concept was highlighted by at least three major undertakings:

- The establishment of the SPLM/SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force;



- Oxfam's vulnerability workshop involving all sectors of the community and local counterparts; and
- The SCF's South Sudan Vulnerability Study.

The main theme that runs through all these attempts to understand vulnerability is that vulnerability in south Sudan is inextricably connected to kinship structures and social processes. An important cultural orientation of the local people, particularly the *Dinka*, is the sharing of resources to militate against any severe inequalities within specific sections of the social system.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of sharing posed major challenges for aid workers. Assistance targeted to individuals deemed vulnerable by the agencies subsequently underwent a secondary community re-distribution to reflect the communities' own views of vulnerability and fairness. Understanding the concepts of sharing and vulnerability helped some agencies to fine-tune their delivery mechanisms. For example, it helped to put the controversial taxation of relief food into proper perspective. Soldiers from the SPLM, being an integral part of the community are supported through community contributions called *tayeen*. Rations are contributed by households through the chief and community leaders in collaboration with the SPLM. In normal circumstances, the vulnerable households are exempted, and *tayeen* is a one-off payment. However, during an emergency period, *tayeen* is subtracted from the amount to be distributed prior to distribution. This results in burdening the people who are traditionally excluded from the payment. This understanding enabled agencies to take a stand and condemn the practice.

The issue of vulnerability is closely related to the issue of saving not only lives but also livelihoods during emergency programmes. As demonstrated above, a person's vulnerability is very much dependent on social connections and it is those social connections that constitute livelihoods. Therefore, it is important to understand community perceptions on vulnerability for an effective rehabilitation programme, which mainly involves the re-establishment of livelihoods that were destroyed by the disaster.

*Humanitarian space versus participatory space.*

Humanitarian space for the OLS NGOs was negotiated, in principle, by OLS. In practice however, the agencies had to do their own negotiations with the local authorities/local counterparts, i.e. the SRRA/SPLA(M). The SRRA held considerable leverage in terms of deciding where the agencies could establish their programmes and in some cases what could be provided. The NON-OLS agencies had to negotiate humanitarian space directly with the local counterparts. CAFOD appears to be the only organisation that created humanitarian space without the SRRA and other local authorities playing a critical role. The authority of the church through the parish structures created humanitarian space for them.

In practice, therefore, the degree of humanitarian space that could be created for both OLS and NON-OLS agencies depended to a significant extent on the relationship between the agency and the local authorities, in this case the SRRA. This relationship depended in turn on a number of factors, including the agency's view of neutrality, level of trust in the counterpart organisation and attitudes towards other agencies and the recipient community. The relationship between the agency and the local counterpart organisation defined access to humanitarian space. For instance, some

agencies interpreted neutrality to mean disengagement with local counterparts. This led to strained relations and suspicion. World Vision, for example, reported that they had to evacuate from one area due to strained relations with the local authorities. In another instance, it was reported that one of the reasons why MSF-Belgium faced difficulties in Ajiep was a poor working relationship with the local counterparts, which resulted in the latter withholding security information. Disengagement with the local counterparts and unfavourable attitudes towards other agencies may not only result from neutrality concerns but also from a certain measure of 'professional arrogance' where an agency sees itself as a technically and professionally accomplished 'godfather' that has nothing to learn about humanitarian programme practice.

Clearly, an agency's approach to the acquisition of humanitarian space will determine the degree of participatory space. A good working relationship with local counterpart organisations leads to trust and thus, also, access to the community. Such a relationship will be created not by disengaging from the local counterparts but by engagement with them as closely as is possible. Recognising that they are operating in conditions of war, where attitudes are more likely to be shaped by suspicion and lack of capacity, agencies have to make concerted efforts to create a suitable level of understanding between themselves and the local counterparts. This may involve closer co-operation in the planning and execution of activities and actions aimed at improving the technical capacity of the local counterparts. This was the way Concern, for example, chose to operate, and it was clear that the agency was able to foster participation because of this approach. If this approach is considered to constitute a compromise on neutrality, then the choice is between the acquisition of

humanitarian space without much participatory space and the type of humanitarian space that guarantees wide participatory space.

The experiences of OLS have shown that failure to approach the humanitarian issue from the position described above may adversely affect participatory space. For example, Karim et al (1996: 116), reviewing the programme, noted that 'in the early years of OLS, access to civilian population was limited by the respective authorities in both sectors'. They further noted that the inclusion of the affected population as an explicit factor in assessment methodologies did not take place until 1993 when a household questionnaire was developed by OLS. The questionnaire itself generated controversy between the UN and the GoS in the northern sector, for implying that the quality of access was a contentious issue. Similarly, the introduction of RRA methodologies in 1994 caused further friction in both the northern and southern sectors. It is significant to note that problems of access in the south sector were addressed by the inclusion of the SRRA in the training sessions. In the northern sector, attempts to use qualitative methods in the assessment processes were generally resisted by government.

Commenting on similar issues, Murphy and Salama (1999: 5-6) sum up the situation in south Sudan aptly:

'The position of individual agencies, vis-à-vis the SRRA for example, differed greatly. Some within OLS distanced themselves, reluctant to acknowledge their role as partners in the humanitarian response: wary of compromising their professed neutrality. Others argued differently that although the SRRA has its own problems, particularly in terms of resources and capacity, it is only through constructive engagement that such an

organisation can build its capacity to assist in co-ordination, improve its accountability and represent the community more effectively. Similar variances exist among agencies operating outside of the OLS framework. Some agencies choose to be outside the OLS umbrella because it allows greater flexibility, especially in reaching geographic areas that lie outside the UN agreement and consequently receive far less resources and services from the international community (e.g. the Nuba Mountains)'.

Problems of insecurity and access also affected humanitarian space. Insecurity is largely created by attacks and counter attacks between the SPLA and GoS troops, the raiding of civilian populations by government-aided militia groups and fighting between SPLA factions. Specifically, the Baggara militias broke off their temporary reconciliation with the SPLA and resumed raids on the *Dinka* in 1997. In January 1998 fighting broke out between government forces and the SPLA, triggering massive displacements. GoS reaction was to ban all flights to different airstrips. It has been argued that regular flight bans by GoS aim at furthering its own military and political interests rather than to address strictly security concerns (Keen, 1998: 7). The SPLA factions have also been fighting among themselves and attacking civilian populations affiliated with their opponents.

The effect of fighting as regards humanitarian space has been reduced access as agencies have failed to expand the scale of their operations and sometimes have had to undergo evacuations. For example Tear Fund, Oxfam, World Vision and MSF-Holland all experienced evacuation at some point in their emergency programmes. In addition, the banning of flights or their restriction to specific, limited areas has meant that in effect, humanitarian space is created not by OLS, but by GoS.

Thus areas which are insecure, as well as those without access to air food drops, were not receiving adequate humanitarian assistance. There was also a tendency for agencies to 'bunch' together in the 'safer' places. This meant that in some places beneficiaries received a range of services/assistance while in others the assistance was very limited. For example, there were several agencies operating in Rumbek including Oxfam, Tear Fund and CAFOD, while only Christian Aid was operating in the Nuba Mountains. Also, within areas where agencies had theoretically acquired humanitarian space, agency capacity, logistical ability and programme focus tended to determine the extent to which that space was utilised. For example, field interviews indicated that both Oxfam and SCF were initially less enthusiastic to start feeding programmes due to limited existing capacity (in terms of qualified personnel). This may have resulted from a programme focus not originally geared to address famine relief.

### **Emergencies and participation.**

Broadly, it seems useful to make a distinction between complex emergencies and natural disasters. Generally, because local government structures may still be intact and issues of neutrality seldom arise during natural disasters, participation may not present the same challenges as in complex emergencies. In natural disasters, the disruption in general is primarily of a physical nature, although it is true that sometimes significant social disruptions can occur. In complex emergencies social disruptions and suspicions brought about by war may present a different set of challenges. In the case of south Sudan near-chronic massive displacements of populations have led to some degree of disruption, although not to total disintegration in the social structure. A long history of war has also prevented formal

education from flourishing, resulting in a widespread lack of technical capacities and general manpower abilities. The local government structure that normally offers potential for broad-based community participation does not exist. Instead, there is a structure that represents a rebel movement whose internal cohesion is not assured and whose representation of the interest of the population is therefore not guaranteed. This situation may present practical limitations to broad-based participation, as agencies are not sure how well affected populations are represented.

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However, this does not mean that meaningful levels of beneficiary participation cannot be achieved, only that greater efforts will be required to achieve it and that some limitations will be encountered. For example, this study found that in the emergency many agencies found it difficult to utilise participatory approaches during the planning stage of their programmes. The planning was usually agency-dominated either because of the agencies' perception of the needs of the population or because of their technical and logistical ability. Indeed, in many cases it was felt that beneficiary participation was not required at this stage. For example, agencies such as Oxfam, SCF, Tear Fund and MSF felt that the existence of high malnutrition rates necessitated the establishment of therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres. Lack of food-stocks necessitated the provision of seeds and tools, and health and sanitation problems necessitated provision of clean water and sanitary facilities. Examined closely, however, this view may be a dangerous excuse for, as the experiences of the agencies have shown, there may still be aspects of these 'necessary' programmes that can be appreciated only through the involvement of the affected populations.

Specifically, a certain amount of participation was still required for achieving effectiveness. For example, the establishment of therapeutic and supplementary feeding centres without any information flows between the affected communities and the agencies resulted in unintended consequences. The Joint SPLM/SRRA-OLS Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force noted that households with a member in a feeding centre were being excluded from the general rations due to a lack of understanding on the part of some community decision-makers that feeding centre rations were only supplementary to the general rations, and due to the movement (unknowingly) of people from the areas where they were entitled to a general ration. In the second instance lack of information transfer resulted in the supply by some agencies of inappropriate imported tools which were melted down and re-fashioned by beneficiaries to suit local preferences. Tear Fund reported this experience in Malual Kon but information from field reports indicated that this was not the only instance. Related to this case was the initial rejection of foreign seed varieties reported by Oxfam in Rumbek but also said to be fairly common. Thirdly, while the provision of latrines was chosen as an intervention to address the sanitation problem, it was valuable to know that the targeted community did not have a 'latrine-culture' and therefore it was necessary to devise strategies that would facilitate adoption. In the first place, some form of an educational campaign was necessary and secondly, the location of the latrines was crucial given that, according to the local culture, a person should not be seen going to the toilet. Some field staffs in fact reported that as a result of the poor location of the latrines they were only used at night in some cases.

These instances seem to suggest that while beneficiary participation may not be critical to the type of intervention (assuming the agencies got it right), beneficiary



participation is necessary with respect to the quality of intervention at the implementation level. Thus, even if a programme has been designed in an agency-dominated fashion, beneficiary participation is required to fine-tune that programme to ensure that it has no unintended adverse consequences that could affect its effectiveness.

The second broad distinction that can be made is between relief intervention and a rehabilitation intervention. There is a lively debate on how to reconcile the concepts of relief, rehabilitation and development but it is not intended in this chapter to dwell on that debate. However, as regards the concept of participation, the experience is generally that it is limited, whether one considers development or relief situations, although the situation might be worse for the latter.

It can be argued, however, that even in emergency programmes, only in very special circumstances can the absence of participation be excused. This is particularly true in view of the fact that many agencies believed that it was inappropriate to operate a purely relief programme without planting some seeds of recovery which would ensure that the community does not collapse again once the relief intervention comes to an end. This is why many agencies found it necessary to distribute such things as seeds, farming tools, fishing equipment and even make attempts at establishing Income-Generating Activities (IGAs). A discussion was rife on 'exit strategies' among the agencies that appeared to present formidable challenges. (Perhaps reflecting the difficulties involved, one agency's field staff suggested the provision of a chicken to each household, which apparently would in time become a flock, as an exit strategy from the emergency programme!). Indeed, Karim et al (1996: 111), found that the purely relief intervention objectives spelt out in the initial agreement

between GoS and the SPLA were later modified in the south sector 'to include enhancing the lives and livelihoods of the people of south Sudan, and protecting and promoting the rights of war-affected civilians, particularly women and children'. This shift in objectives resulted in the reduction in the quantity of food per person or per household, the restriction of food to specific geographical areas or to specific groups and an increased emphasis on the provision of agricultural inputs for food production.

### **Benefits of participation: some propositions.**

The advocacy for mainstreaming participatory approaches in humanitarian programmes is not a rhetorical exercise. As discussed in Chapter One, it has come out of development studies, where numerous experiences have been documented of programme failures resulting directly from the exclusion of the intended beneficiaries in programme planning, implementation and monitoring. Such experiences have led to the well-known buzzwords of *top-down* approaches and *bottom-up* approaches. It is now accepted in development studies that *bottom-up* approaches that begin from the perspective of the population and build on local knowledge, values and sometimes even resources are the ones most likely to succeed.

Development and relief are qualitatively different, as many commentators continue to point out. Roughly, development has much to do with long-term objectives involving the improvement of people's general standard of living. Relief is essentially short-term and involves the immediate objective of saving lives. Yet, as some have argued in the preceding sections, relief must also include the objective of saving livelihoods so that relief itself does not become a permanent undertaking. On

this point it is important to note that at the time of writing this chapter, Operation Lifeline Sudan, a humanitarian programme, had clocked more than ten years since it was first created in 1989, a period sufficiently long for the completion of some development programmes.

As regards participation, the key point to bear in mind is that while relief and development vary in their objectives, they both involve the idea of outside intervention to save some aspect of a given population. In development the programme endeavours to save the local population from a *less desirable standard of life*. In relief, the programme attempts to save the population from losing their lives and the means for supporting them. In short, both relief and development involve a clash between *insiders* and *outsiders*. This clash is essentially a clash between perceptions, values and priorities. Using this line of understanding it should be possible to draw an analogy between development and relief as regards the buzzwords referred to above. *Top-down* in development corresponds to *supply-driven* in relief whereas *bottom-up* in the former corresponds to *demand-driven* in the latter.

In principle, many agencies place a high value on the participation of their beneficiaries. For example, Concern Worldwide believes that greater participation leads to greater commitment. One of Oxfam's principles of emergency programmes is to be consultative, aware of the concern and capacities of women and, whenever possible, participatory and empowering. In practice, moreover, it has also been shown that many agencies attempted to utilise participatory approaches of some kind, although some may have been more 'successful' than others for a variety of reasons.

However, in examining participation it is important to be aware of the possibility that agencies can manipulate participation to suit their own pre-conceived strategies. Participation frequently involves facilitation by the agencies delivering the programme. (An acquaintance/academic mentor, during personal communication, told me that in the Philippines, some people say that rather than 'facilitation', the word '*facipulation*', i.e., a mixture of facilitation and manipulation, is more appropriate). What then were the benefits of participation?

This question should be approached from two angles. From one angle, it should be answered in terms of what the agencies achieved that could not have been possible in the absence of participation. From another angle, it should be answered in terms of the 'mistakes' or the unintended consequences that resulted from limited levels of participation but which could have been avoided had there been more participation. The following propositions can be made based on the experiences of the various NGOs covered by the study.

*Participation enabled agencies, especially those that utilised the traditional social structure to arrive at a wider, more comprehensive and more accurate understanding of vulnerability and beneficiaries.*

A better understanding of vulnerability and beneficiaries resulted in a practical move namely, the inclusion of some categories of people who had been left out of the programme at the initial agency-dominated stage such as:

- The displaced without the representation of a chief, a *gol* leader or some other authority figure;
- Families or households with a member in a feeding centre;

- Widows; and
- People with very low social status in the society.

The SPLM/SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force, as well as the NGOs were able to obtain this information by using a range of participatory methodologies that included semi-structured key-informant interviews, household visits and interviews, focus group discussions and vulnerability workshops. The community members involved included chiefs, Relief Committee members, resident women and men, displaced women and men and households with children in the feeding centre. Based on these exercises the task force made numerous practical recommendations such as the one captured under ‘Discussion Point 1’ below.

#### Discussion Point 1

*A review of community perceptions of targeting and distribution systems must take place as soon as possible. This should include SRRA/WFP/UNICEF/relevant NGO's and should be facilitated by an external consultant who has a broad background in distribution methodologies and no vested interest in any one particular methodology. To ensure a successful methodology, it is crucial that the community participates and distributes their ideas at every stage of the process. While the Team is not in a position to recommend any specific steps, it was very clear that a new methodology must be established that would include the SRRA, WFP, civil authorities, community representation (particularly by women) and a direct representation of the targeted beneficiaries. In addition to including all relevant parties, a system of checks and balances between the parties must also be built in. Finally, as it was clear to the Team that no targeting and*

*distribution system will ever be totally immune to abuse and leakage, there should also be a mechanism built into the system by which any party, particularly targeted beneficiaries, can safely appeal to higher authorities.*

*(Field reports).*

***Participation Contributed to the protection and efficient use of resources.***

During the initial stages of the general ration distribution, looting of the food was frequently reported after the food was dropped at the drop zones by the C-130 planes. Several days (up to a week) could pass before the beneficiaries could be informed and a distribution organised. It was during this period that looting took place. The Task Force, for example, reported that looting of relief items took place in many areas. In some cases, for example Rumbek, unidentified men looted women coming from distribution points. This problem was addressed by putting the security issue in the hands of the beneficiaries, in this case the local civil administration, the SRRA and the community at large. This action was important in two ways. Firstly, it prevented the loss of resources that would have needed replacement and secondly, it prevented the deployment of external security that would have increased expenditure for agencies. By transferring the security issue to the beneficiaries, some sense of ownership was created and this led to the protection of resources.

At another level a sense of ownership can encourage the spirit of voluntarism. This can improve the cost effectiveness of the programme, in the sense that money is saved in the procurement of both human and material resources. An example of a spirit of voluntarism is captured under Discussion Point 2 below.

**Discussion Point 2: Community Participation and Voluntarism**

*The Save the Children Fund (SCF-UK) established two camps in Mapel and Achong Chong to address the problem of unaccompanied minors. In consultation with the community (through women leaders, chiefs and community leaders) SCF opened the two camps in July 1998. The communities themselves, who also provided their own building materials, built the camps. SCF provided the food and health facilities. Oxfam assisted in the provision of clean water. Labour for the running of the camp's activities that included pounding, cooking and monitoring the health status of the children, was provided by the community on a voluntary basis. The community made contributions to support the workers. A locally based Sudanese was employed as a psychosocial supervisor who facilitated activities such as story telling, local dances, riddles and games. The children who were admitted into these camps were identified through a committee made up of representatives from different payams. Between July and December 1998 up to 1225 unaccompanied children had been admitted and repatriated in the two camps. The repatriation was done through a committee of community workers composed of chiefs, women's association representatives and other community representatives, assisted by the SRRA. Children whose parents were not found were fostered within the community. At the end of the programme the community suggested that the centres be converted into schools. At the time when I visited one of these camps in Mapel, community members were rebuilding the camps for this purpose.*

*This project did, however, encounter some problems. The separation of children from community in the local culture is something not normally acceptable. Children belong to a very broad social grouping to the extent that*

*in practice the issue of orphanhood does not arise. Consequently, because of limited levels of understanding between the community and the agency as to the purpose of these camps, some community members began to secretly remove children and to re-integrate them into the community. Members who did not resort to this practice were only those who had understood and agreed that the camps were only a temporary measure to assist the children who had no care as a result of displacement and general lack of livelihood resources in the community. However, the important point is that attempts to involve the community in the initial stages of the project led to a spirit of voluntarism.*

Volunteers were also used in most of the feeding programmes run by Oxfam, Tear Fund and other agencies. Christian Aid reported that in Twic the community continued with the feeding centre with their own personnel and resources after the agency had closed it down. In Rumbek, I met a Sudanese woman who had opened a feeding centre on her own initiative. She mobilised community support and whatever resources could be found to respond to an acute famine situation that was resulting in many under-five deaths. (She stated for, example, that cooking pots were made by cutting used oil barrels). Oxfam later incorporated this woman in their feeding programmes.

Apart from demonstrating the spirit of voluntarism that can result from participation, the two examples cited above also serve as an indication of how communities can demonstrate resourcefulness and initiative in an emergency, providing some justification for the need to blend agency plans with community social and material resources.



Efficient use of resources may also be seen from the point of view of the ability by agencies to provide relevant materials to communities. If materials provided are not effectively used by the recipients, this constitutes both time and resource wastage. On the south Sudan programme, Grunewald et.al, (1998: 7) noted that: 'it has been frequently reported that the tools provided are not fully meeting local needs'. I confirmed this observation during field visits. In Malual Kon, for example, Tear Fund reported that the tools imported from Kenya were subsequently being melted down after distribution and refashioned to suit local tastes. Included in the package were also Kenyan tilling implements (called *Jembes*) which were not used to a significant extent in this area. One key informant stated that it was a mistake to distribute such implements ahead of any educational programme regarding usage. While the *jembe* was technically a superior tool the local population simply did not know how to use it.

The experience of Tear Fund in Malual Kon is an interesting one. To address the problem of unacceptability of the Kenyan tools, the agency initiated another project that involved provision of raw materials to local blacksmiths for the production of the traditionally acceptable tools. Tear Fund would then buy back the tools for distribution to the targeted beneficiaries. As it turned out, the local production was more expensive than the imported tools. However, there was no evidence that there was any consultation on how to make the imported tools acceptable. Lack of consultation at this level seemed to be common among the agencies. A similar problem was faced in the distribution of seeds. The distribution of foreign varieties of seeds in the absence of prior consultation frequently resulted in rejection.

It is true that local production of seeds and tools frequently fails to meet the demand but the imposition of materials that will not be effectively used does not solve the problem very well. Increased consultation with communities may reveal the causes for dislike as well as channels that can facilitate adoption. A key informant stated, for example, that communities in south Sudan are characterised by rigid social hierarchies with great respect accorded to people in positions of authority. He believed that the ordinary people would easily follow or copy new behaviours if people in authority had first adopted them. This suggests that working with authority figures could provide an important breakthrough.

Participation helped to prevent the creation of community tensions or conflicts among different social groups within the affected communities. In addition, it helped to strengthen existing capacities, making the employment of large numbers of agency staff unnecessary.

One of the problems agencies faced with the feeding centre programme was the development of tension between women who were attending the centres and their husbands. Before opening a feeding programme in Rumbek town, for example, Oxfam used focus group discussions with communities, with traditional leaders representing them, with extension workers and civil authorities as part of the initial assessment. In Agangrial, Village Health Committees were also involved. Continuous discussions were held with the women regarding the progress of the programme. Through these discussions some women raised the issue that their husbands resented their daily absence from the home since it required men to undertake work regarded as women's work. This resentment sometimes resulted in marital disputes and violence. This problem was addressed through discussions

between feeding centre staff and community leaders as well as with the Village Health Committee. MSF-Belgium reported a similar problem in Mapel.

As regards strengthening community structures and building up of capacities, many agencies involved in feeding programmes, including Oxfam, SCF, World Vision and Tear Fund, indicated that as the programme progressed the need for a large agency-personnel input decreased as local people began to master the performance of the various activities carried out at the feeding centres. In Agangrial, Oxfam reported that the beneficiaries of the feeding programme even formed their own disciplinary committee to address issues of misbehaviour connected with the programme. I have also already shown how the building up of capacities was important in fostering understanding between agencies and local authorities/counterpart organisations.

Participation also enabled agency staff to understand important social distinctions among different ethnic groups. This prevented the formulation of standardised programmes that could have led to conflicts among the groups. For example, two different social groupings can be identified among the *Dinkas*. Although they speak the same language, the *Agar* and the *Gok* have substantially different cultural orientations with respect to gender. One group has no problem with strangers talking to their women while the other will not allow it.

***Participation provided some added value beyond immediate relief.***

It would be a mistake to assume that complex emergencies and humanitarian programmes are one-off events. The case of south Sudan, where a humanitarian programme has been going on for over ten years makes this point very clear. Because of this fact several agencies felt that a six-month intervention, dictated by their operational and funding procedures, did not make much sense. The presence of

NGOs in the affected areas changes both the physical and social environments. By their very nature, some interventions begin to rebuild livelihoods and the NGOs place upon themselves a responsibility to ensure that the community does not collapse because of sudden withdrawal. The importance of exit strategies has already been commented upon. In this respect, several important issues were raised by various agencies.

Firstly, beneficiary participation helps the agency to build up experience in terms of the kinds of questions that need to be asked and the type of involvement that will help the organisation to establish the nature of social relations within the affected communities. This is important in minimising the unintended negative consequences of particular action. Secondly, the building up of this experience gives participatory delivery a wide base as agencies share their experiences through inter-agency co-operation. As Harragin (1998) observes, a profound lack of communication with the local population leads to unavailability of information for many aid agencies. Therefore, most tend towards twisting any available information to suit their preconceived solutions. Thirdly, participation can act as a medium for the augmentation of local management systems as a prelude to future stability (IDS, 1999). A participatory training workshop in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, facilitated by the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex), brought together local people from all sections of the community, including soldiers. This work claims to have provided a very useful example of the potential of using participatory principles in a war setting: 'people became able to see things from the others' perspectives... found ways of the powerful working with the disenfranchised to develop solutions to all sorts of problems' (p.1). Fourthly, participation may enable the agency to become an influential partner in rehabilitation and future development.

People develop trust in the agency and are able to open themselves up to a process of continued dialogue and negotiations. Fifthly, Concern Worldwide found that participation led to an improvement of the relationship with its counterparts in the management of the humanitarian programme through sharing of information and joint evaluation.

Where participation of the affected communities has been deemed appropriate, this study only managed to get some hints of 'disbenefits' that might result from such participation. Some of these hints also related more to limitations rather than 'disbenefits' as such. Some agencies indicated that a participatory approach might be time-consuming, resulting in delays in commencing the programme. But a closer examination reveals that this problem had more to do with the type of participatory methodology used as well as the capacity and experience of the agency involved than just the amount of time available. For example, the study found that some of the most important information to programme delivery was generated through one-day workshops that involved the widest possible representation of the community. The involvement of the local authorities also proved useful in terms of bridging the gap between the agency and the community as well as playing a key role in security matters. There seems to be an in-built assumption that only the 'formal' research tools can generate reliable information. Yet some agencies found that a simple meeting under a tree, as long as it was representative, went a long way in generating valuable information as well as providing an indication of local perceptions, expectations and values. On the other hand, it is well known that a very elaborate research methodology that lacks representation of the population can be highly misleading. This suggests that agencies must start small and then build up progressively in the

course of the programme. In addition, they should refrain from restricting themselves to only formalised participatory tools.

One clear limitation of the participatory delivery of relief identified in the study was that in a war situation, where many people have been displaced, true representation is difficult to guarantee. In the south Sudan case, there are always groups who fail to find representation in the social structure. This problem led some agencies, notably SCF, to retain a certain proportion of the total amount of items to be distributed. After the distribution by the community structure, SCF would then carry out independent assessments and distribute the remaining proportion to those that had been bypassed by the community distribution. This, however, seems to be a value-loaded practice. It would need to demonstrate that the communities approved it and that it did not generate any negative views of the agency. Furthermore, it would need to prove that the social relations within the community were not undermined.

Interestingly, whereas SCF sought the solution to the problem of marginalized individuals in decreased levels of participation, Oxfam approached this problem from the opposite direction, i.e. through increased levels of participation. This increase in the level of participation succeeded in bringing out the various groups that were being bypassed because of a lack of representation. Ways were then devised, in collaboration with the communities concerned, to have them registered and included in the delivery mechanisms.

## **Conclusions.**

### *Ethics.*

The issue of participation of affected population or beneficiaries in humanitarian

programmes is not just a matter to do with the practical or operational aspects of a particular programme. It is also a moral and ethical one. The way agencies look at humanitarian aid has important implications in terms of how they will look at their beneficiaries. Do the resources belong to the agency or the beneficiaries? Has the agency the authority to decide how the resources should be used and who should benefit from them, or is this power vested in the beneficiaries? Answers to these questions might help to put participation into a proper perspective. Essentially, the call to seek answers to these questions is a call for agencies to confront the set of ethical issues that pertain to humanitarian assistance and state their stand. Since views of good practice in humanitarian programmes clearly depend on the stand so taken, a neutral position is not an alternative. These questions, however, were not adequately addressed in the south Sudan study and pointed to the need for further work.

### *Structure.*

A strictly *top-down* or *supply-driven* approach to humanitarian programmes implicitly makes the assumption that the affected population has no capacities for decision-making or understanding the needs of the various groups of people in that population. Yet, as many agencies working in south Sudan would agree, war and displacement may have broken social ties for many people but this has not resulted in total disintegration of society. If society has not disintegrated and still retains capacity for making decisions, is it a waste of energy to strive for participation? And if every agency were to conduct relief in their own way and on their own terms what shape would relief take? Yet the experiences in south Sudan only provided one case of participation in a particular state of a particular social structure. A more thorough understanding of the issues involved requires an examination of different social

contexts in order to highlight what might be the *general* features and *salient* features. In this regard, results from ALNAP's Global Study will be important in terms of providing some indications of how participation may be approached in different social contexts as well as pointing to areas needing further investigation.

### *Operations.*

On the operational level, it has been shown how limited levels of participation of beneficiaries can introduce inefficiencies into the programme. Adding the ethical and operational aspects together, the conclusion that can be made is that unless the social structure has been completely disrupted, it is always desirable and appropriate in principle to utilise participatory approaches. But even where the social structure has disintegrated, the objective will be to try and re-establish some social framework, and this would require participation of the affected individuals. In other words, beneficiary participation in programmes intended to assist them simply makes sense.

### *Targeting.*

Unless an agency has unlimited resources and feels no need to target specific groups within a community, beneficiary participation is critical. In practice, the experiences of the British NGOs in this study show that they all started from a situation of limited resources that had to be targeted to the most vulnerable. The south Sudan case provided an excellent example regarding the complex nature of the concept of vulnerability. Agencies came to realise that it was almost impossible to understand this concept without making concerted efforts to involve the affected communities in the defining process. It was only after some understanding of what vulnerability meant and what caused it that better targeting and better delivery of the programme was achieved.



### ***'Smart Relief'.***

Even if targeting is not necessary, participation offers a channel for understanding and addressing issues such as gender relations and understanding the impact of relief on the livelihood system and the social structure in general. Participation also offers the agency the opportunity to disseminate its own messages, for example, health education and sanitation, which may increase the effectiveness of the relief intervention.

The arguments against doing development alongside relief are well appreciated and support is not being advocated in favour of those arguments. Rather, I wish merely to concur with the idea that it possible to do 'smart relief', where relief is not given without asking questions regarding the way in which it is delivered. There is need to understand the different levels of social interaction and power relations that exist among different groups of people in the so-called beneficiary communities. This is particularly true in the case of south Sudan where relief is certainly not a one-off intervention, and where the social structure is far from homogeneous. Moreover, historical and political processes sometimes make it possible to talk in terms of *relief-prone areas*. Because of these considerations many agencies have found it appropriate to engage in both famine-relief and famine-prevention programmes. A study of one such area would help to clarify some of the issues about beneficiary participation in emergency relief. So, for example, does prior knowledge of the possibility of disaster improve participation?

Famine-prevention programmes have to do with saving livelihoods, which is very much a social activity. Most agencies in fact double as both relief and development agencies (e.g. Oxfam, SCF, World Vision, CARE and the CBOs). This means that

participation in the relief programme will pave the way for more effective rehabilitation and development programmes.

It is important, however, to establish the extent to which participation and social learning can be used as a tool for addressing more general issues relating to social change. In their paper on Shared Social Learning, Apthorpe and Atkinson (1999a) question whether a policy of social change (e.g. of gender relations) ought to be mixed up with service provision, the extent to which this can be done and what risks could be confronted. Thus, it is interesting to note the following recommendation made by an Oxfam headquarters-based staff to field officers after visiting some feeding programmes in south Sudan:

‘Women are naturally subservient and do not speak out; they are marginalized and their opinions are considered unimportant. Oxfam should therefore take the opportunity to challenge these traditional inequalities in the implementation of this programme, and indeed make this one of the core objectives of the programme’ (Field reports).

Such views are also frequently coupled with the idea that participation leads to empowerment. To what extent is this the case in emergencies? Who would get empowered and with what consequences? Again, there was no opportunity to address these questions in this study. However, the case of SEWA’s involvement in disaster relief programmes in India, as will be shown in Chapter Six, provided an opportunity to address this question and appeared to suggest that empowerment leads to participation rather than the other way round.

*Information.*

Agencies moving into new areas of operation frequently find that there is very limited, if not total lack of social and geographical information available. Even where other agencies have been operating for some time, a new agency may find that the critical information as regards their intended programme is not available. One of the problems involved seems to relate to lack of institutional memory within agencies because of very short contract periods of staff. Thus, Grunewald et. al (1998: 38), noted that:

‘Staff in the field have contracts which are too short for them to plan coherent and lasting programmes, and consultation with local communities and implementing partners. All field monitors should have the maximum contracts available, i.e. one year, given the one-year funding horizon of OLS. This would allow them to develop better working relationships with community leaders and with staff of counterpart agencies and individual farmers’.

Merlin in fact found that efforts to ask questions to already established agencies in one area were not welcomed with much enthusiasm. Moreover, even if information from other agencies were made available it would be difficult to know the extent to which such information might have been influenced by the priorities of the agencies involved. In such a situation, engagement with the local people offers a way out of the problem. At any rate, the community is arguably the best source of information about itself!

### ***Accountability.***

In principle, it is desirable to involve beneficiaries in monitoring and evaluation of the programme but sometimes difficult to achieve in practice. The major difficulty in

the south Sudan case related to the identification of individuals within the community who could take on monitoring and evaluation responsibilities. Nevertheless, the experiences of some agencies demonstrated that increased participation of beneficiaries in the programme in fact constituted an in-built monitoring and evaluation mechanism. An atmosphere of openness, trust and responsibility resulting from greater involvement created information channels where beneficiaries were able to communicate to agencies as regards what happened beyond what they were able to follow. The SPLM/SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force noted that there was a gap in almost all areas by all agencies and institutions involved in food distributions in monitoring the impact of interventions. However, the task force also noted that in some cases this resulted from the fact that the different levels of the community were not aware of the total amount of food being brought in, and what their entitlement was, making it almost impossible for beneficiaries to monitor food movements.

### *Need to act?*

The general belief is that there are some special circumstances in which participation may be deemed inappropriate or undesirable. Some agencies indicated that this would be the case where there are unusually high rates of morbidity and mortality. Agencies may find it appropriate to provide food, medical assistance and other survival kits without much consultation. Participation becomes appropriate when the situation improves and people are in a state in which they can participate effectively. In other cases participation may be deemed undesirable because agencies feel that they can make reasonable judgements of what should be done based on their observations, technical knowledge, previous experience, or even common sense. For

example, SCF and Merlin argued that nutritional assessments were not required during the acute stages of the emergency. Observations alone were adequate to justify the establishment of feeding programmes. Most of the survival kits were also pre-decided based on common knowledge, for example, that a displaced person would need household utilities. However, even if the decision of what to provide was not made in a participatory manner, the effective distribution of the materials required some level of beneficiary participation.

Moreover, the basis upon which agencies can make unilateral judgements regarding intervention is yet to be developed in a systematic way. Another issue that also deserves consideration is the extent to which particular types of investigation and participation might result in loss of time and introduce inefficiencies into the programme. Could it also be the case that agencies are reluctant to use participatory approaches for fear of generating unrealisable expectations? In south Sudan, for example, beneficiaries of tools and seeds programmes requested some agencies to give them the tools ahead of the seeds so that they had enough time to work in their fields. Invariably, the agencies stated that they were not prepared to do the double distribution this request would involve. At another level, are some forms of participation disruptive to community relations in terms of say, gender and the local political economy?

## **Chapter Five. Local capacity and the international system: participation in a flood disaster in Malawi.**

### **Introduction.**

On the global level, Malawi will not be immediately recognisable as a country that is frequented by large-scale disasters, natural or man-made. One of the major disasters in living memory was a countrywide famine in the 1940s. This famine did not involve a large international humanitarian relief operation. The largest humanitarian programme ever mounted in Malawi was with regard to an influx of refugees from neighbouring Mozambique following civil fighting during the early 1990s. However, there have been other disasters of smaller magnitude over the years, mostly in the form of floods or drought affecting particular areas within the country. In 1997 one such flood affected two districts in the southern part of Malawi, namely Nsanje and Chikwawa. The area covered by these two districts is commonly known as the Lower Shire valley. This area is subjected to frequent flooding because of its low-lying nature but it was widely believed that the 1997 floods were amongst the worst in recent history.

### **Background to the study.**

The study was commissioned by the UNDP, Malawi who provided administrative support to the relief programme. The main aim was to analyse the various aspects of the programme with a view to identifying efficient and inefficient elements and provide some lessons for the future.

Perhaps because of the absence of a history of large-scale disasters, the main issues brought out by the study centred on levels of preparedness and the extent to which co-operation was effected among the various parties involved in the relief programme that followed. The different parties involved included the Malawi government, the international donor community, particularly WFP and the Department of Human Affairs (DHA) of the UN, NGOs, and local structures/communities. The study covered a wide range of issues regarding the implementation of the entire relief programme but only those issues that are directly related to participation will be discussed in this chapter. In particular, the discussion in this chapter is intended to provide an empirical illustration of some of the theoretical issues raised in previous chapters, for example, with regard to the nature of the relationships between the international donor community, NGOs, government and affected communities, and how these relationships affect the issue of participation. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how suspicion and lack of trust as well as the absence of meaningful engagement with affected communities created inefficiency in the overall delivery of the programme. To this extent, this study is also an illustration of what can be expected in cases where there are only minimum or token levels of participation by the affected population, especially at the grassroots level.

### **Method of study.**

Information for the study was collected through interviews with representatives of various parties concerned: government (mostly officials from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs), donors and NGOs. Interviews were also held with relevant field staff. I also spent about a month in the affected communities talking to

traditional leaders, local planning agents, affected households, attending actual distribution activities at various centres as well as making observations. Prior to, and after all these activities I spent some time reading background materials, which included minutes of meetings on the management of relief operations. I also actually attended one such meeting after fieldwork.

### **Disaster management in Malawi: a brief present and historical overview.**

In recent years, a few efforts have been made to gather information and to put a system in place that is capable not only of responding swiftly to a disaster but also of providing advance warning. By far the most important work is perhaps the 'National Disaster Management Plan for Malawi' (Chiotha et al, 1996) compiled in 1996 by a team of University of Malawi personnel for the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs (MRRA). This report divided the causes of disasters into five categories viz.: weather and climatic hazards; hydrological hazards; pest hazards; geological hazards and social hazards. Floods fall under 'hydrological hazards'. Within each category detailed descriptions and analyses of strategies for reducing the effects of disasters are presented. Each strategy has at least five essential elements namely: Mitigation, Preparedness, Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction.

The report emphasises that in flood disasters preparedness is of paramount importance since flood hazards cannot be prevented. The elements of preparedness should include: prediction of flood stage, identification of threatened areas, assistance required, quick dissemination of information to concerned persons, evacuation of affected persons, assessment of flood damage, repair and rehabilitation and public awareness and training. The report also outlines various activities that constitute a National Disaster Preparedness Plan for Floods to be followed in the



event of a flood disaster. Preparedness refers to the minimisation of the adverse effects of a hazard through effective precautionary actions to ensure timely, appropriate, efficient and safe organisation and delivery. Its principal element is good Early Warning Systems (EWS). The operation of the Early Warning Systems for the Lower Shire Valley is well described in the Disaster Management Plan for Malawi. For example, the plan suggests that at some point in the system 'the flood officers enquire from the Department of Meteorology about any cyclone, storms and other heavy rainfall conditions predicted or observed... establish and identify areas to be flooded, immediately report the deteriorating situation to the Controller of Water Services and eventually get the flood warning issued on (Malawi Broadcasting Co-operation) MBC' (Chiotha et.al, 1986: 40).

However, clearly missing in the *Disaster Management Plan* is the role of communities in both disaster mitigation and response. It is noted for example that: 'The institutional framework for disaster management in Malawi as created by Act No. 28, the Disaster Preparedness and Relief Act, 1991, has not been fully implemented, notably, the functioning of the Civil Protection Committees aimed at involving the community at grass-root level, as well as poor intra-governmental linkages which lead to poor information flow' (Chiotha et.al, 1986: v).

Other documents that attempt to provide information that can be used in disaster management are equally deficient in terms of defining the role of communities. Most such documents centre on technical assessment of vulnerability of particular areas to different types of hazards and also provide baseline information that could be useful in planning an emergency response. The Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) done by Famine and Early Warning Systems (FEWS) (1996) is one such

report. This report includes an assessment of the vulnerability of the Lower Shire Valley in terms of poverty, food deficiency, malnutrition and other food security elements. However, the report suffers from the all too familiar problem of analysing vulnerability from a 'technical' point of view. Vulnerability is not analysed in terms of how it is viewed by the various communities.

With respect to the 1997 floods, FEWS did an assessment for flood mitigation, which included elements such as length of season, drought-resistant planting, average daily per capita kilocalories produced, access to adequate sanitation and livestock holdings. Another was the Risk MAP Report by the Save the Children Fund (UK) (1996) which analyses food economy zones for various parts of Malawi, including the Lower Shire Valley. The report identifies this area as an area of grain and cereal deficit for most households and discusses a number of survival mechanisms employed by people in affected communities. The Socio-economic and Production System Study of Wetland Use (of which I was part) by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) (1996) analyses prevailing production systems for various regions in Malawi, including the Lower Shire Valley. In the Lower Shire Valley, the report describes production aspects which include: Cropping patterns for both dry land and wetland, rainy season and dry season cropping patterns, as well as the role of livestock.

The District Development Office for Nsanje (1996) carried out a report on the socio-economic profile and situation analysis for the district. This is a useful document that describes physical features of the district, political and administrative structures, demographic characteristics, settlement patterns and the land-use system. Also described is the economy of Nsanje district in terms of agriculture, livestock, forestry

and natural resources, fisheries, commerce and industry, and employment and income. Other sections of the report look at social services. It concludes by discussing the major problems of the district and strategies for development.

However, it is Mandala's work (1990) that is probably the most detailed and comprehensive historical account of the economy of the Lower Shire Valley. Covering the period between 1859 and 1960, this work analyses aspects of the Lower Shire Valley peasant economy such as the ecological conditions of production, gender and generational conflicts and the division of labour between and within households.

Mandala's account shows that the people of the Lower Shire Valley have grappled with the problems of uncertain weather conditions for a long time. He cites the Bomani floods of 1939 as being one of the events that caused an ecological crisis in the past century. One result of those floods was a demographic change. Many people left the marsh areas of Nsanje (then Port Herald) to the drier areas, especially those of southern Chikwawa. Yet there were also some people who would return to the marshes as soon as they were dry. Another result of the ecological changes was the diversification of the productive base. Labour migration, cattle raising and fishing replaced cotton as the main source of money. Flooding is reported to have occurred also in 1943, 1957 and some years thereafter. Chiotha et. al (1986) in fact suggest that the Lower Shire valley has an average floods return period of five years.

The 1948-9 famine, probably the worst in recent history, also affected the Lower Shire Valley in a severe way. Peasant responses to this famine provided an opportunity for understanding their ability to cope with recurrent crises in the food economy. In addition to adapting to climatic changes in the form of changes in

cropping patterns, 'villagers survived the famine without much assistance from the state or migrant workers. Their only insurance was their resourcefulness. Some bartered property such as goats, fowls, and earthenware. Some worked in the fields of friends and relatives within and outside the valley. But the majority lived on fruits of nature' (Mandala, 1990: 247).

Being an area of uncertain weather conditions (frequent floods/droughts) the Lower Shire Valley has been subjected to relief concerns at certain times in history. However, not much is available by way of documentation of these past relief processes. Most of the relief appears to have been ad hoc rather than organised. Moreover, it would appear from the foregoing section that there continues to be a predominance of technocratic aspects to current efforts to establish a systematic disaster management plan. Some of the problems faced in the 1997 relief programme could be related to the lack of the 'human element' i.e. grassroots participation in the response procedures.

### **The 1997 Emergency Relief Programme.**

#### *Onset of floods and immediate coping strategies.*

Many parts of the country had experienced increased rainfall during the months of January, February and March. However, the rains seemed to have been particularly heavy towards the end of January and the beginning of February. The Lower Shire Valley floods appear to have been caused by these rains coming in both the highlands (such as Blantyre, Zomba, Mwanza etc.) and in the Shire Valley itself. Flooding in the Lower Shire Valley was first noticed around the 7th of February 1997. By the 9th many areas in both Chikwawa and Nsanje districts had been

affected. In Chikwawa, seriously affected areas included the Economic Planning Areas (EPAs) of Kalambo, Mbewe, Mikalango, Dolo, in the West Bank and Livunzu, (East Bank), and Mitole (both Banks). In Nsanje, most seriously affected areas included the EPAs of Makhanga on the East Bank and Magoti, Mpatsa, Nsanje and Nyachilenda in the West Bank. The floods affected almost every aspect of livelihood. A number of houses in several communities fell. Many households also lost food stocks from water sweeping through the houses.

A distinct characteristic during the onset of the floods was a total lack of preparedness on the part of both communities and the government. A newspaper reporter who visited the area described the situation aptly:

‘On Sunday afternoon, two rivers conspired with the forces of nature to send torrents of water down the Lower Shire Valley with singular ferocity and wreaked untold havoc...In the floods, said to be the worst in living memory... houses have collapsed, leaving hundreds of people homeless. Cattle, goats and other livestock which form the principal wealth of the Valley's people, have been washed away and crops... have been uprooted. Food that was kept in the houses was either swept away or soaked in swirls of muddy water. Today, the villages stand desolate and the people destitute. Hours after the tragedy... government officials were nowhere in sight... Officials from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation were conspicuously absent from the scene. No one [was] providing any emergency aid to the desperate children and mothers. The plight of the people of Chikwawa from Sunday through Tuesday is a sad commentary on the office of the Commissioner of Relief and Disaster Preparedness... Perhaps it is time the role of the office of the

Commissioner of Relief and Disaster Preparedness and how it works were revisited in earnest.' (The Nation, Feb.12: 8).

Although a newspaper report, and notwithstanding its journalistic tone, the description presented is not in contradiction with what was found during the field study. Some officials from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs did in fact admit that they were ill prepared to handle disasters in so far as an effective, consolidated response system is concerned. Although heavy rains had started towards the end of January 1997, serious flooding was reported on the morning of the 9th February. It was not until 13th February that government officials visited the area (the Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation Affairs, Minister of Lands and Valuation and Deputy Minister of Education). The Cabinet Committee on Disaster Management met on 14th and directed the declaration of the Nsanje and Chikwawa as disaster districts. The President visited the flood areas on the 16th of February and made a public appeal for relief assistance.

This degree of lack of preparedness was somewhat paradoxical given that there had been considerable effort in terms of training personnel and investment in equipment to develop an Early Warning System. This study identified several factors that contributed to the problem.

To begin with, it appeared that the procedures for responding to a flood disaster as outlined above were not strictly followed. The Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development indicated that information leading to the flood warning was collected manually (i.e. it relied on reports on rising water levels). Difficulties in communication and transport for field staffs meant very long time lags in updating information. The Early Warning Systems referred to earlier were not utilised,

reportedly due to malfunctioning of field equipment. The revitalisation of the system was reported to be in process.

Meteorological reports on the radio indicated continuing heavy rains but there was nothing specific in terms of flood warning. Rising water levels were not a cause for alarm in some cases as people thought the water would soon recede, as was normally the case in previous years. This view was backed by a popular saying in the vernacular, which states that: '*Madzi ndi mulendo, sachedwa kupita*' (flowing water is like a visitor, it soon goes away). Clearly then, there were no concerted efforts made to provide clear information about the impending floods nor to gain an understanding of how the communities were viewing the continuing rains and the possible preparations they might have been making. At this stage, opportunities for involving communities in disaster preparedness were missed.

The absence of a clear message about possible flooding was difficult to understand in the light of the fact that, according to the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development, the probability of floods had been established some hours before the onset. In actual fact, the information had reached the Malawi Broadcasting Co-operation radio (the only national radio station) some fourteen hours before any warning was issued. When the warning was issued it came through the 6.00 PM news bulletin (in English) rather than being fitted into the broadcasting schedule as an urgent emergency message. Apparently, the MBC management did not want any unscheduled flood warnings to interfere with their scheduled programmes, or it may be that because of bureaucracy, simply no one was available to make the decision.

In any event, the idea of issuing a flood warning during an English news bulletin did not reflect reality. For one thing, illiteracy levels in the Lower Shire Valley are

amongst the highest in the country resulting in a very low proportion of the population that can speak and understand English. For another, radio listening surveys have shown that the proportion owning working radios countrywide is very small. Even smaller is the proportion of people that actually listen to radios. In the Lower Shire Valley, the situation is complicated by the fact that the Mozambican radio is quite close and quite a few people tune in to that radio, given language similarities. It was little surprising therefore when interviews with the affected communities revealed that they were unaware that any flood warnings had been issued. Some people indicated that the message they got was simply that the heavy rains would continue (which was consistent with the meteorological reports on the radio). Given that this is an area where people also frequently experience drought, this was welcome news to them as it implied a good crop. In the light of these facts it would have perhaps been useful to work with the local government machinery and the communities to try and establish the most effective ways of quickly getting flood warnings across to as large a population as possible. When I was in the area I discovered that the villagers had very good ways of spreading news, using local messengers, forms of transport, even methods such as drumming or hooting with traditional tools such as a bull's horns. This is also true of other areas in rural Malawi.

The absence of any organised system of response resulted in a considerable degree of haphazardness as regards immediate coping strategies. Because there was no flood warning heard, there were apparently no preliminary arrangements made in terms of evacuation plans. The flooding reached its peak in the middle of the night (around 11.00 pm) while people were sleeping. Most people initially had to take refuge on roof-tops and in trees. In most cases, fishermen who owned canoes did the



evacuation. These fishermen were free to charge any fee they wished, although there were some who also voluntarily assisted others. The canoes were of a very limited capacity and could only rescue people. Mostly, property was left behind. Very few people managed to escape with some food stocks. In one case, the Malawi Police (at Nsanje Boma) helped in the rescue operations using one motorboat. In another case in Chikwawa the District Commissioners (DC's) office hired a motorboat for rescuing some stranded families. After being rescued from the flooding areas, most people sought refuge in school buildings, community halls, old refugee shelters, etc. There, they survived on whatever food items had been salvaged as they fled. There were no immediate provisions for sanitary or water services. There were no special arrangements for people in vulnerable conditions such as pregnant women and cases of babies being born in these temporary shelters were reported.

First contact from the outside world with affected communities appears to have come from the offices of the District Commissioners in the form of registering flood victims who took refuge at various centres. In Nsanje NGOs followed this response, notably the Church Action in Relief and Development (CARD) and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). About two weeks after the flooding incident CARD responded by mounting tents at Bangula, Lalanje, Phokera, Tengani, Nsanje Boma, Mankhokwe and Mpisamanja. MSF visited the area at about the same time and pledged medical assistance

***Determination of extent of destruction and identification of affected population.***

Determining the extent of destruction and identification of affected population appeared to be the most problematic area in the whole process of relief delivery. There was much less contention on what was destroyed than on who was affected. It

was clear that the flood had touched almost every aspect of the people's livelihoods. Most households lost livestock, be they cattle, goats, pigs, ducks or chickens, even though the actual extent of loss was not well known. The inter-agency verification report indicated, however, that livestock losses in Chikwawa appeared not to be significant, although there were official reports that at least 3 cows, 220 goats and 1063 chickens got lost in the floods. These numbers may not have been significant for the district as a whole but could have been quite significant for specific communities. In Nsanje district the interviews suggested that the situation was likely to have been worse, especially in the marsh areas where most people were rescued by canoes. The possibilities of rescuing livestock in such conditions were extremely limited.

Families whose houses collapsed also lost whatever property was in them. This included everything from cooking utensils, clothes, bedding, and furniture to radios and in some cases bicycles. Those whose houses did not collapse had most of their property damaged by water getting into the houses. An undetermined number of households had their food stocks damaged because of water that got into the houses in one way or another. Crops still growing in the field were also destroyed. Interviews indicated that in the case of maize, the main food crop, maturity had been expected within two weeks when the flood came. Other types of crops destroyed in the fields included beans, sweet potatoes, rice and other minor crops. Figures from the Ministry of Agriculture suggested that about 17,153.2 hectares of land in the Chikwawa Rural Development Project (RDP) and 7,052 in Nsanje were damaged.

There were no reports of large numbers of human casualties either by the MRRA, the DCs' offices or from the affected communities. Only isolated incidences of

suspected casualties were reported. It would appear that the major reason for this was the relatively low tide, and perhaps velocity of the floodwaters; otherwise the unexpectedness of the flood would have resulted in a large number of casualties.

The identification of who was affected was not so straightforward. The original beneficiaries (i.e. those who benefited from immediate government assistance) were identified through the offices of the District Commissioners in the two affected districts. The registration exercise was done at the centres where people fleeing from the floods had sheltered (schools, community halls, camps etc.). In theory, without the interference of politics and other sources of bias, this exercise should achieve a considerable level of accuracy regarding people needing immediate assistance. In practice, however, the figures obtained were doubted on the basis of the fact that the international community did not regard the local government agency (office of the DC) involved in registration as an objective force. A preliminary assessment by the government estimated that the floods had affected 80,000 Malawian families (approximately 400,000 individuals) and had displaced into Malawi 20,000 Mozambicans. An appeal for international assistance was made based on these figures. While awaiting this assistance, the government, through MRRA, began distributing some food (maize flour and beans) to some of the affected people already registered. Some NGOs (e.g. Red Cross and CARD) also began to distribute non-food items such as blankets, tents and plastic sheets.

In responding to the government's international appeal, the United Nations Department of Human Affairs (UN-DHA) sent in a team of experts from Geneva to assess the flood damage. Based on their assessment, the government figures of 80,000 families (400,000 Malawians) and 20,000 Mozambicans were heavily

contested. The DHA team argued that government figures did not distinguish between losses of food stores, crops and homes. The DHA team reported that according to their assessment, only 102,500 persons i.e. 20,500 families (11,000 persons in Chikwawa and 91,000 persons in Nsanje) were identified to be in immediate need of food assistance and in some cases poles and plastic sheets. About 50,000 Mozambicans were reported in Nsanje by the District Commissioner's office, a figure which the DHA team recommended for verification, together with the other government figures. The distribution of this 'immediate' assistance through WFP started on 27th February in Chikwawa and on 4th March in Nsanje. The food distributed was meant to cater for two weeks.

### ***Targeting and Distribution.***

The whole distribution programme had four phases:

i) Pre-phase one. This involved the distribution of maize flour and beans to flood victims assembled in various places in the affected areas. The government using its own resources, including Army helicopters and vehicles from other government departments, supplied the relief materials in this phase. Some 843 Metric Tonnes (MT) of flour were distributed during this phase. However, the European Community was committed to reimbursing 360 MT of the amount supplied by the government. The amount distributed was a two-week ration. The distribution began on 10th February in Chikwawa District and on 17th February in Nsanje District, although some centres were not to receive any relief items until three weeks later due to a combination of factors, including poor roads, lack of adequate personnel and lack of adequate transportation.

ii) Phase one. During this phase the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed 700.6 MT of maize and 84.07 MT of beans to 28,026 families, including 7,506 Mozambican families, based on the initial assessment conducted by the UNDHA. The amount distributed was also a two-week ration.

iii) Phase two (a). WFP distributed two-month rations to Malawians and two-week take-home rations to displaced Mozambicans.

iv) Phase two (b) this would involve a food-for-work programme targeting some 1,500 individuals over a period of 4 months.

Included in the distribution programme was the distribution of various non-food items such as blankets, soap, seeds, clothes etc. by NGOs at various times.

The relief programme was co-ordinated by a committee of government, NGOs and UN agencies under the chairmanship of the Commissioner for Disaster Preparedness Relief and Rehabilitation of the MRRA. This committee held regular meetings to review the progress of activities of various agencies in the relief programme. It was agreed that all donations would go through MRRA. WFP was responsible for the delivery of all food items in phase one and phase two. WFP ensured the transportation of items to distribution centres. Red Cross carried out the distribution exercise. Government, through MRRA, delivered pre-phase-one food items and was also responsible for the delivery of all non-food items. Similarly, government ensured transportation of materials and the Red Cross distributed them. However, a few NGOs, for example, CARD and Concern Universal, delivered their own food and non-food items, but efforts were made to have these donations registered within the relief programme. Such NGOs resorted to distributing items themselves when the Red Cross suspended its operations to wait for the verification exercise to be

completed. A special commodity-tracking unit known as the Transport and Logistics Unit (TLU) in the MRRA kept records on quantities of commodities delivered to beneficiaries. The tracking system appears to have worked well although the data was usually about five days behind the actual, because of delays in the communication process. The installation of fax machines, especially at Bangula Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) Depot, was suggested in order to improve the system.

Beyond phase one, the timetable of the relief programme was dictated by the verification exercise commissioned by donors to authenticate figures generated by the government. This exercise, which was carried out by a team of staffs from different NGOs and co-ordinated by Concern Universal, commenced on the 12th of March and ended towards the end of that month. This exercise identified 66,074 families (40,613 in Chikwawa and 25,461 in Nsanje) or 330,370 Malawians in total, (as opposed to the original figure of 400,000) to have been affected by the floods. The issuing of ration cards and then distribution of relief materials followed the verification exercise. The following calendar of events is useful in terms of understanding the sequence of significant events and the time lags between them.

*A Calendar of some significant events in the 1997 flood relief process.*

7th-9th February	On-set of floods.
9th February	Government aware of serious flooding in the lower Shire Valley through reports from the District Commissioners' offices.
9th February	Registration of flood victims by offices of District Commissioners commences.
10th February	Pre-phase one distribution commences in Chikwawa District.
13th February	Three cabinet ministers visit the area affected by floods.
16th February	The country's President visits the flood area and declares it a disaster area, appeals for international assistance.
17th February	Pre-phase one distribution commences in Nsanje District.
19th February	MSF, a French medical NGO, visits the area, pledges medical Assistance
21st February	UNDHA team carries out rapid aerial assessment of damage in the flood area.
28th February	Phase one distribution begins in Chikwawa district.
4th March	Phase one distribution begins in Nsanje District
5th March	Phase one distribution ends in Chikwawa District.
12th March	Inter-agency verification exercise begins.
22nd March	Phase one distribution ends in Nsanje district.
3rd April	Ration card distribution begins in Nsanje District
7th April	Ration card distribution begins in Chikwawa District.
13th April	Ration card distribution ends in Nsanje District.
17th April	Phase two (April) distribution begins in Nsanje District.
21st April	Ration card distribution ends in Chikwawa District.
3rd May	Phase two (April) distribution begins in Chikwawa District.
13th May	Phase two (April) distribution ends in Nsanje District.
17th May	Phase two (May) distribution begins in Nsanje District.

Note: The calendar is incomplete because the period of the relief programme extended beyond the period of study.

In an apparent attempt to match resources that donors were prepared to commit to the relief process in the second phase of the distribution process, the government and NGOs were forced to agree with donors that assistance be given only to those whose houses and property had been damaged, leaving out those who lost only crops in their gardens. This arrangement meant that for Chikwawa only 12,000 out of about 40,000 families would be assisted, and for Nsanje the figure would be 23,000 out of

about 25,000. This meant that only half (175,000) of the people identified by the very verification exercise ordered by donors would be targeted for assistance.

Here was a clear example of the classic case in emergency relief where policy drives numbers rather than numbers driving policy. Apparently, the donors were under the (possibly deliberately erroneous) assumption that people had food stores in their houses and thus, it was only those whose houses had collapsed who were left without food. The government was of the view that this assumption and its resultant form of targeting beneficiaries did not correspond to reality:

‘The scenario shows that all people who either lost their houses and properties, or those who lost their gardens only should all be considered as having been affected by the floods and therefore, legible (sic) for relief assistance until such time when both groups are able to get food from other sources’ (MRRA Progress Report, 1997).

The Government’s view made sense when considering that crops were within two weeks of maturity when the floods destroyed them. This meant that many households had already exhausted their food stores. Many studies in Malawi have shown that many households in most rural areas run out of food several months before the next harvest and have to rely on a range of coping mechanisms.

The top-down nature of this decision also implied a lack of recognition of the fact that communities have their own ideas and views regarding fairness that could have been harnessed to address the problem of limited resources. Thus, perhaps it was not totally surprising that one traditional chief rejected the verification exercise altogether and no food was distributed in his area of jurisdiction during the second phase. Another village headman branded the whole relief programme as



'segregationist'. Some people I interviewed suggested that assistance should have targeted whole communities even if it meant a reduction in individual entitlements. They argued that the amount of food given to the targeted individuals was already inadequate and such individuals had to supplement it with other coping strategies, notably, casual work which could be paid in cash or kind. That the quantities of relief food delivered sometimes made no difference may have been evidenced by the fact that there were no reports of mass starvation in the area of the traditional chief who rejected the distribution. In such cases, relief materials may have only succeeded in creating resentment and tension not only between targeted and non-targeted individuals within communities but also of the relief process itself by the communities in general.

The difficulties experienced in targeting beneficiaries had at least two further profound effects on the process of relief delivery. First, the verification exercise and the issuing of ration cards were identified as the major element in the delays that were experienced in delivering relief items. It was noted that for some communities a period of at least two months elapsed after phase-one food distributions, which were meant for only two weeks. It can be noted, for example, from the calendar of events that phase-one distribution in Chikwawa commenced on 28th February while phase-two distribution commenced on 3rd of May. Thus, it can be assumed that people ran out of food six weeks before the next distribution. In some cases food meant for the month of April was delivered in May and food meant for the month of May was delivered in June.

Secondly, difficulties in targeting beneficiaries interfered with the working relationship between government and donors. It was clear that the government was

not in favour of the verification exercise, even though officials came short of admitting this fact during interviews. Thus, in spite of donor insistence that the exercise was only meant to complement government efforts, disagreement over the number of affected population nevertheless disappointed the government. Government felt that donors did not trust it. For example, government questioned the point of the verification exercise in Nsanje where eventually, due to some problems in the exercise, donors had to revert back to government figures. The only importance attached to the verification exercise by the government was with regard to its inclusion of eligible beneficiaries, rather than its exclusion of them. Thus:

‘The verification exercise has been very important in that those areas and villages which were left out during the registration exercise have now been covered and included... However, it is not clear on the number of displaced Mozambicans who are in Nsanje district... From the report, one hopes that those verified numbers of the flood victims will now be given necessary assistance in terms of food, agricultural inputs, and other non-food items such as blankets, pots, plates etc. One would want to believe that since [the] verification exercise was done by an independent body of NGOs, more donors would now be forthcoming. One also hopes that with these figures in our hands, we have now come to the end of the road regarding questions of which figures should be used to target relief assistance to relief flood victims’ (MRRA Progress Report, 1997).

But, as shown above, the end of the road did not seem to have been reached since donors had to slash their own verified figures to target assistance to only those who had lost their houses and property, and exclude those who had lost their crops in the

field. Government argued that people who lost their gardens would by then be harvesting crops such as green maize, pumpkins, cucumbers, sweet potatoes etc. which would have enabled them to survive the period.

In general, government was of the view that the initial response of donors to the international appeal for assistance was very quick and impressive, in spite of the mistrust placed in government figures. This response was in the form of assessment of damage and production of numbers of people to be given relief assistance. However, this process was slowed down during the implementation phase. It would appear that part of the reason for donor retreat lay in the fact that figures generated by the verification exercise they had themselves commissioned did not come down low enough to match their plans. As shown above, the government figure of 400,000 Malawians came down to 330,370 after the verification exercise. From this figure, donors targeted only 175,000 for assistance, a figure which was only moderately above the 102,500 people identified through their preliminary assessment. Donor enthusiasm further waned when issues of rehabilitation were raised. For example it was difficult to source funds for rehabilitation of roads, especially the West bank road in Chikwawa.

The verification exercise and the slashing of beneficiary numbers together with a lack of proper information dissemination and consultation with the communities further gave rise to a situation in which some people began to relate the relief programme to politics. To begin with interviews indicated that most people were not aware that, although the government had contributed a small proportion, the bulk of assistance had come from external donors and government was merely an instrument for the management of the distribution process. During field interviews, the answer

to the question *'where is the assistance coming from?'* was almost invariably *'government'*. Indeed, it was found that in the few cases where people were aware that the assistance did not come from the government, people were less critical of the targeting process and did not tie relief to politics.

For those who lacked this knowledge (but perhaps also justifiably in their own right) the situation was different. Many failed to see the purpose of the verification exercise asking: *'If I do not need assistance, why did they give it to me during the first phase?'* Such sentiments were reinforced by messages from some politicians who, in order to win votes for impending by-elections, were telling people that everyone would receive relief assistance. The fact that it was politicians in the ruling government who were making such pronouncements only helped to convince the people that indeed it was the government that was providing the assistance. One village headman expressed the view that if only the government could give just one bag of flour to every family in the area where the by-election was to take place, then the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) would definitely win. Such sentiments revealed a total lack of understanding of the relief process in general and the need for targeting in particular, in this case brought about by a lack of meaningful levels of participation of the affected communities.

The conduct of the political opposition only served to further fuel such sentiments and views. Through the media, they expressed the view that: *'The Lower Shire area is known to be pro-Malawi Congress Party. The UDF will want to make it known to people that they will be given assistance only if the people will support it'* (The Daily Times, 26th February, 1997: 8). Such views may have given people the impression that targeting was being done on the basis of political inclinations rather than priority

of need, or more accurately, on the basis of a limited amount of resources available to donors. Had the communities participated fully in the relief process, and had the government wanted to be sincere, the people would have been told that resources were provided by external donors and they were cutting beneficiary numbers simply because the resources were inadequate. Silence on the part of the government officials on this matter could easily have been taken to mean that they wanted to take advantage of the people's ignorance regarding the source of assistance in order to achieve political goals.

Government also lost an opportunity to clear misunderstandings on the part of the people regarding quantities of relief materials received at various points during the relief programme. Radio reports, which only mentioned that a particular organisation had donated some items to help flood victims in the 'Lower Shire Valley', were interpreted as suggesting that everyone would benefit from such donations. When the materials were not forthcoming (either because the government was trying to find suitable distribution plans, or because the materials had already been distributed elsewhere) people in other affected areas began to accuse the government of '*receiving materials and just storing them away*'. Some even began to suspect foul play, creating suspicion of government intentions. Such suspicions did not encourage people to view the relief process positively, an aspect that was necessary to release people's energies for meaningful participation.

### ***Relief materials versus relief needs.***

In general, relief needs were accurately identified, with food assistance being considered a priority. Many people who needed shelter were also given plastic sheeting for the construction of temporary dwellings. However, the necessary poles

were not provided, which prompted complaints from the beneficiaries that it was difficult to get poles in this area of near desertification. Blankets were provided to individuals in some communities, although some of these came two months after the flood disaster because of the need to wait for the verification exercise to be completed. Also, only one blanket per family was given regardless of the number of people in the family. Much as this was understandable from the point-view of limited resources at the disposal of the aid agencies, no attempt was made to consult the communities to see if they could come up with alternative ways of distributing these items fairly. Thus, it was not surprising to find the blankets on sale at the local market soon after leaving a distribution centre. Interviews indicated that people preferred the blankets to be given to children rather than adults who could find alternative coping mechanisms such as staying up late drinking or around a fire in the open. Indeed, when asked how they were going to use their one blanket, most families who had a child said that they would let the child use it or that they would divide the blanket into pieces according to the number of children needing it. Strangely though some adults stated unashamedly that, although they had children, they would use the blanket themselves! Such behaviour could only have been addressed through village mechanisms for social control if the relief process had been so participatory as to allow communities to utilise mechanisms for protecting vulnerable individuals such as children.

The MSF provided some medicines and medical personnel to Nsanje District hospital, which boosted the hospital's capacity to deal with increased patient numbers resulting from the disaster, even though there were no reports of serious outbreaks of diseases. Other NGOs, notably CARD, provided two-week *Likuni*

*Phala* rations (nutritionally fortified baby porridge) to under-five children to boost their nutritional status. The coverage of this project was very limited.

However, in spite of the general effectiveness of relief delivered in meeting relief needs, a few problems remained. First, some people questioned the usefulness of uniform food rations. They argued that giving uniform rations regardless of family size did not make sense since some families had more members than others. In reality, a one-month ration based on a family of five meant only half that period for a family of ten. Yet there was no arrangement to compensate for this discrepancy.

The government also faced a dilemma on how to distribute foodstuffs that had remained from pre-phase one distributions. MRRA simply made no decision as to how these foodstuffs were to be distributed. Up to the time of the fieldwork for this study 685 bags of cream of maize (13.7 MT), which was by then damaged and unfit for human consumption, were still lying in the ADMARC warehouses at Bangula. The paradox was that just outside these warehouses there were camps of starving flood victims who scavenged on grains of maize dropping from truckloads. Furthermore, government was being charged for storage space for this consignment. Again, there was no attempt to consult any section of the community to see if they could come up with alternative ways of distributing these foodstuffs.

A related dilemma concerned the distribution of various food and non-food items in small quantities donated by various organisations. These included 50 cartons of spaghetti, 50 cartons of canned tomatoes, 15 bales of mixed clothes, 9 bags of mixed shoes, 2 cartons of ladies' high-heeled shoes, 20 cartons of soap bars, 600 KGs maize flour, 600 KGs salt, 1/2 packet dried fish; 99 cartons of biscuits and other such items. It was also difficult to account for these items since exact numbers were not known

or some cartons got burst during loading. Government was also being charged storage space for these materials. Problems in distributing these materials reflected the need for government to devise ways of turning 'unusable' donations into usable ones. Organisations and individuals often donate what they have at their disposal. Some of what they donate might not be useful for affected communities in an emergency. For example, I would have been surprised if anyone had even heard of spaghetti, donated by the State House, in rural Malawi, given the possibility that even the majority of the urban population have no knowledge of this imported food. Similarly, the usefulness of high-heeled shoes (also donated by the State House) for rural people in Nsanje, could be questioned.

There were also other materials available in larger quantities such as 7 MT of cream of maize flour and bars of soap. A programme for distributing these materials had not yet been drawn. Worse still, there were some needs that were entirely unmet. Minutes of meetings of NGOs and donors indicated that the need for non-food items such as pots, pails and hoes was identified, but the procurement of these materials never took place.

There were also some instances where the relief items delivered did not match people's expectations. A case in point occurred at Bangula where an aid agency's unilateral decision to reduce the size of plastic sheeting led to people's refusal to accept them. The people argued that the size of sheeting provided would not serve any useful purpose. Consequently, the distribution of these materials had to be abandoned.

An example of inefficiency and ineffectiveness resulting from failure to consult the affected communities was the action taken by Action Aid in their seeds distribution



programme. Maize seed was to be distributed to communities to enable them to re-plant their gardens. Action Aid decided that people in communities that suffered 100% crop loss would receive 10 KGs of maize seed each. Where crop loss was 50% everybody would receive 5 KGs of seed. And if a community suffered 25 % crop losses then everybody would receive 2.5 KGs seed. This of course, meant that in the latter cases some seed went to people who did not suffer any crop loss while others who suffered a total crop loss got an inadequate amount of seed. Action Aid argued that even 5 KGs of seed was assumed to be adequate, given landholding sizes in these areas. If that was the case, then it could also be argued that it would have been possible to distribute 5 KGs of seed to all communities regardless of the degree of crop loss. This arrangement would have had the advantage of allowing distributions to go ahead of donor-verified beneficiary figures, thus providing seeds to affected people when they needed them most. Additionally, this would have reduced the total tonnage of seed distributed. For example, total district tonnage in Nsanje District would have reduced from 215.284 MT to 107.64 MT. In Chikwawa District it would have reduced from 346.723MT to 173.36 MT. Overall tonnages for both districts would have gone down from 562.007 MT to just 281 MT, thus, avoiding bringing a 'seed flood' to the area. The provision of too much seed was not only inefficient for the relief programme, but also dangerous. There was no shortage of reports that some people were eating seed, which had been dusted with poisonous preservation chemicals.

It would also appear that much premium was placed on the provision of food and clothing materials to the neglect of sanitary facilities, which people felt were also important. According to health personnel in both districts, there was a considerable increase in the cases of water and sanitation-related diseases, for example, diarrhoea.

They attributed these to lack of provision for sanitary and hygiene facilities, most of which had been washed away by the floods. It was observed that in most camping places there were long time-lags between settlement and the provision of communal water and toilet facilities. In addition, in some places the number of toilet facilities did not correspond to the number of people. Overcrowding compounded the health risks. In some cases a tent meant for ten people could accommodate up to 30-50 people.

Apart from the unhealthy conditions stated above, malnutrition could have also contributed to infectious diseases among the flood victims, especially children. Infectious diseases and parasitic diseases are linked with malnutrition. It is especially common for people suffering from malnutrition to contract another illness. Infections in turn worsen malnutrition. It has been found that the frequent episodes of diarrhoea and other infections decrease nutrient absorption and increase nutrient loss. Therefore, it may be the case that lack of food put the affected communities more vulnerable to infectious diseases.

In response to health, water and sanitation problems faced by the victims in Nsanje, the Water and Sanitation Project (WATSAN) did an assessment and found that the floods destroyed 10% of the sanitary facilities. As a result, a task force was formed to help in the provision of safe water and communal toilets to some of the camps. However, WATSAN project would not visit some of the affected areas due to transport problems and the impassable roads. In addition, according to the WATSAN Co-ordinator, it took them several days to implement the relief help due to lack of co-ordination among the NGOs involved. MSF teamed up with Save the Children and the government Department of Health to provide water and sanitary structures to

the people at all the assembled points. The Save the Children and Water Development repaired broken pumps and installed pumps where there were none. The MSF set up a water tank together with a drainage system at Nsanje Community Centre Hall and a deep pit latrine and refuse pit. The same was done at Ndamera/Mankhokwe, Tengani, Mpisamanja, Bangula and Nkotamu.

In an interview with Chief Kasambwe of Chikwawa district, whose area was flooded, he revealed that they were not given good water or access to protected wells. They had to dig shallow unprotected wells themselves. In addition, communal toilets were not provided to Chikwawa flood disaster victims. As a result, almost all the assembling places experienced diarrhoea cases and measles because of overcrowding in their temporary shelters. Coughs and eye infections were among the diseases common in the assembling places as well.

#### ***Volume of Relief Materials Supplied.***

Procedurally, all relief donations were to be made through the MRRA. NGOs could do their own distributions but were supposed to report to the MRRA the nature, quantities and value of materials distributed. The MRRA produced tabulated information that showed requirements, pledges, receipts and shortfalls. One drawback, however, was that no dates were included on the information sheets to allow one to know the period to which the information referred. In total, government relief requirements, including rehabilitation, were valued at MK195, 366,000. By 6th May, 1997, only K14, 311,000 had been received from various donors, suggesting a shortfall of K173, 083,000. The donations received at this point represented only 7.6 % of the total requirements.

### ***Other survival mechanisms.***

The study concluded, on the basis of the quantity of relief materials supplied and the time lags between distribution phases, that people did not cope primarily on the basis of the relief programme itself. Not only were the quantities of the relief materials too small to satisfy the subsistence needs of the affected people but also long periods of time elapsed without any food assistance being given to the people. A significant contribution came from the people's own resourcefulness in employing other survival mechanisms. A number of coping mechanisms were identified, similar to those contained in the Inter-Agency Verification Exercise report. These included *ganyu* labour (paid casual work), by far the most common coping mechanism, selling firewood and fishing. In terms of fishing, the study showed that, as a coping mechanism and not a regular activity, even women were involved. This is in contrast to the Inter-Agency report, which stated that only men fished. Another coping mechanism was the reduction of meal frequency from three to only one per day. Consumption and selling of livestock and use of green maize, usual coping mechanisms in previous times, were not possible in the flood disaster since most people had lost most of their livestock and crops. While not possible to quantify, it was apparent that social and kinship networks also played an important role as a coping mechanism. To many, relatives and friends living in upland areas provided temporary shelter and initial food assistance. Many also reported receiving assistance in terms of clothing from friends and relatives. The whole issue of coping strategies is an area that needs consideration in terms of how people's participation can be used to incorporate it into any disaster mitigation, emergency and rehabilitation plans.

Survival mechanisms employed by the communities also revealed that greater participation of the affected population could help to find ways in which community efforts could complement government and donor efforts in relief programmes. For example, in order to facilitate access to *ganyu* one traditional leader declared that all boat trips for *ganyu* seekers should be free during the flood disaster. In addition, as mentioned earlier, local initiatives were important during evacuation.

### **Scope for participation.**

What emerges from this study is that there were many problems that the relief programme faced, despite the fact that there was a lot of scope for incorporating the affected population into the relief programme. Attempts to address many of the problems faced could perhaps have benefited from forging closer links and establishing channels of communication and participation with grassroots structures.

The most problematic area in the relief process was the determination of beneficiary numbers and their registration. It was clear that there was a need to develop a system that could ensure quick and accurate registration of affected persons immediately after a flood had occurred. Government felt that donors have usually been reluctant to accept its initial beneficiary figures and that this reluctance is likely to continue. Donors' mistrust and suspicion of the government appears to be inherent in all relief endeavours.

To remedy this problem, government proposed joint assessment and registration exercises with donors when floods (or other kinds of disasters) occur. However, it is unlikely that donors would find such a proposal attractive given that they have very few staff at their disposal and are always operating within pressured time contexts.

Also, the assessment of damage and determination of disaster victims is a messy business and, as shown in Chapter Two, donors are keen to avoid this messy swamp. What could possibly be attractive for donors is the streamlining of a ministry such as MRRA into a small unit capable of marshalling NGO systems. NGOs like Red Cross already have manpower and infrastructure that they could quickly deploy for such exercises. In addition, many NGOs are already working with community structures and these could be utilised. The MRRA would then merely provide any needed back-up support to these NGO systems. For example, once declared a disaster area, the DC's office in that area could be mandated to mobilise transport and logistical support to any NGOs conducting assessment and registration exercises. This arrangement may reduce the controversy that usually surrounds beneficiary numbers, since NGOs are regarded as objective forces. This will also avoid the politicisation of the issue. However, the NGOs also need to demonstrate that they see the participation of affected communities in their planning and implementation processes as a priority. Without incorporating affected people's views regarding vulnerability, need and fairness, government and NGOs may find that they have become popular with donors but unpopular with affected communities. In such a case, government, NGOs and donors may be seen to have conspired against the very people they seek to assist.

Decentralisation, with the aim of giving the local planning agencies more resources and room for manoeuvre in terms of decision-making, needs serious consideration. The DCs' offices in both districts, for example, lamented the situation in which duties were delegated to their offices without or with little resource back-up. Decentralisation needs to provide machinery that can bring together the formal local planning agencies and the various grassroots structures for the purposes of planning

and executing both development and relief work. Community structures are usually very well informed in terms of particular areas of families in need of particular forms of assistance and their involvement could improve the targeting process. For example, community structures could have been used for the distribution of 'miscellaneous' donations which government failed to distribute on the basis of failure to find a suitable distribution mechanism. Community structures, e.g. the village leadership, formal and informal village committees, could have been involved in determining which families had been affected and in what ways.

The non-involvement of the affected people in determining vulnerable individuals, in addition to failure to recognise the vulnerability of those who had lost only their crops and not their dwelling, led to their exclusion from the relief process. In addition, it led to the exclusion of other vulnerable people such as the elderly and the handicapped. A visit to some distribution centres revealed that most of these were being left unattended. Perhaps as a result of the problems experienced during targeting, it was quite apparent that less deserving individuals were receiving relief items. For example, it was not unheard of to find relief blankets being sold on a nearby market immediately following a distribution exercise. (Of course, it may also be the case that in some cases this was done in order to buy food from the cash realised). Red Cross field staff could only lament this situation but could not exercise any discretion since their mandate was to distribute only to registered individuals.

It was also clear that NGOs that failed to utilise people's participation in determining the vulnerable had problems distributing their relief materials in time. Action Aid, for example, could not distribute seed in time because they were awaiting figures from the verification exercise demanded by the donors. Yet since seeds were in

smaller quantities, it would have been easier, based on initial assessment reports, to target whole communities for distribution, or at least work out a formula for distribution in consultation with the affected communities. Some NGOs, in cooperation with community leaders, went ahead and distributed non-food items regardless of the verification exercise and ration cards. In this way they were able to distribute materials quickly in periods when they were needed most. For most agencies the village leadership was only used to inform villagers of distribution dates and venues as well as for maintaining order at the distribution sites. Their involvement in the planning process was missing.

In any event, even the limited ways in which communities were involved were problematic. In several communities, people complained that there was poor communication from the NGOs as to the exact dates for distribution either of ration cards or other relief materials. People were not informed in time and sometimes it was not very clear which villages particular messages were meant for. In one example, that I witnessed, poor communication had resulted in two villages responding to a message meant for one village to go for ration-card distribution. The result was severe difficulties in the distribution of materials, which necessitated a considerable level of security provision. Some community leaders felt that the NGOs could have made more use of the traditional systems of communication to dispatch messages rather than relying on their own staff, who were not only few in number but also under-equipped in terms of transportation.

The whole issue of security was itself problematic. Unlike south Sudan, where efforts were made to use community structures for the security of relief materials and helping with orderly distributions, the Malawi case involved the use of the military



for these purposes. At some of the distribution sites that I visited, Malawi Army soldiers, clad in camouflage attire and brandishing fully-fledged machine guns, were in attendance, creating the contradictory situation of *helping victims at gunpoint*. This situation gave the impression that beneficiaries were villainous, to be closely watched, rather than actors to collaborate with.

Where large numbers of people were involved at distribution points, beneficiaries also complained of long waiting times on queues. In some cases, NGO personnel would fail to turn up altogether due to logistical problems such as lack of transport. Thus people could wait all day to register or receive ration cards. This meant loss of valuable time during which they could go out to do *ganyu* or to look for food in other ways. People felt that if the community communication channels had been used properly, more effectiveness and efficiency would have been achieved not only in terms of informing different villages of distribution dates, but also to inform them of any difficulties encountered by the NGOs.

Activities pertaining to preparedness could also have benefited from people's participation. For example, mitigating plans for monitoring the conditions of infrastructure such as bridges and roads could be developed with community involvement. It should be known beforehand, for instance, if a bridge is in danger of being washed away or if certain important roads are becoming impassable. These are issues that could be handled at community level and with community involvement. Once such information is available, preliminary mitigation and rehabilitation plans where possible could already be set in motion (for example, mobilising community's labour for this purpose). In addition, plans for sheltering victims could be put in

place (for example, positioning containers on safer ground, as was done in the 1960s), and mobilising the communities for the up-keep of these.

The Disaster Management Plan for Malawi advises that once a flood is imminent (assuming the Early Warning System is effective) evacuation of people in potential flood areas should be mandatory rather than by choice. The advantages of a mandatory evacuation include the preservation of food stocks, livestock and even property, which would reduce the need for relief assistance. Human casualties would also be avoided. However, a mandatory evacuation cannot be achieved without some degree of co-operation from the affected communities, given that it is difficult and unethical, for example, to move people under gunpoint. This is the area where there is a strong need for participation and dialogue between government and communities. I have already noted the important role played by local people in evacuation during the 1997 flood disaster.

Related to the idea of mandatory evacuation is a long-standing feeling of the government that certain communities need to be re-settled altogether. Some communities are located in areas that are in constant danger of flooding (at the time of writing this chapter in 2001, there were reports that some of the same areas that had been affected by floods in 1997 had been hit by floods again). However, government views as regards re-settlement have not been translated into active engagement with communities to determine why such communities are reluctant to re-locate and develop alternative plans that can militate against the frequent floods. The participation of the affected communities could hold the key to striking a compromise as regards the peoples' unwillingness to move out of the flood-prone areas. This study brought to light some reasons why many people were unwilling to

re-locate to safer areas. It was clear, however, that there was no serious attempt on the part of the government to discuss with the communities the issues raised by them. Firstly, many people from the affected areas stated that Chikwawa, and especially Nsanje, being areas of frequent drought, the wet areas in the marshes and along the main rivers offer excellent farming opportunities. Not only are these areas well watered but very fertile as well. Crops are usually grown twice a year and no fertiliser is used. Secondly, fishing appears to be a very lucrative economic activity. Informal inquiries indicated that annual income from fishing for many fishermen could be quite substantial, especially in the Ndindi and Elephant marshes. It was noted that fish from these areas is exported to far away major cities such as Blantyre and Lilongwe. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the traditional chiefs are reluctant to move. While the above factors may be important, another consideration relates to the sovereignty of their chieftainship once they move out of their areas of jurisdiction. It appears that fears exist among traditional leaders that relocation will signal the end of their authority if they have to be subsumed under other traditional leaders. The following caption from a newspaper report expresses very well the sentiments of one of these traditional leaders:

‘Village headman Nyachikadza whose village was one of the worst hit by floods in Nsanje, says he will go back to the river banks as soon as the place dries up. “We will all go back to our village soon after these floods and when the place has dried up. We are not worried with these floods since they come once in a while,” said the village headman in an interview. He said it is along the riverbanks only where one can find fertile soil and this is why most of the people who stay along the riverbanks grow a lot of crops. “We grow almost

all the crops in my village, that's why we are not all that poor compared to our friends who stay in the upper areas," he said. Village Headman Nyachikadza said he would not tolerate the government's move to evacuate his people from the riverbanks. "I can't accept it. Where does the government want us to go? We will continue living where we came from," he said. He, however, admitted that this year's floods are the worst in living memory. "In 1989, we had floods but these are the worst since I became chief 19 years ago," he said, adding that in his village over 20 houses were completely destroyed displacing over 200 people.' (Malawi News, March 22-28, 1997: 8).

The government on the other hand appears to be more concerned with the ecological viability of mass movement of people into new areas. If not properly planned and implemented, the government fears that this move could result in destabilisation of the catchments and other environmental systems existing in the receiving areas, which would create other problems.

In general then, permanent mass movement of people from flood-prone areas to safer ground appears to attract less enthusiasm from the concerned communities as well as government. What could possibly find wider acceptance would be the idea of dual homes. Government of Malawi (GoM) and communities could discuss this arrangement in which people would have permanent homes upland and only temporary homes close to the water. Such an arrangement could mean that any available food stocks not immediately needed as well as some livestock could be kept upland as a form of security in times of disaster. If this idea succeeded the need for relief assistance during such times could be significantly reduced. Since upland

relatives proved to be important in coping with the immediate effects of the disaster, full community participation could reveal ways in which this kind of cooperation could be incorporated into the relief programme.

There was also scope for the local planning agencies to work more closely with communities in order to build up capacity for responding to disasters. One of the components of the UNDP 5th Country Programme "Management for Development" is directed at assisting communities to develop institutional capacity at the local level. This programme covers Nsanje district. As part of developing institutional capacity, development committees are supposed to be revitalised and trained so that they can be active agents of development. Although these committees existed in Nsanje it was noted during the study that they did not play a specific role in the management of the flood disaster. According to the DC's office the major problem had been the lack of training on the specific issues dealing with disaster management. This lack of training on the part of the local committees may, however, have resulted from limited contact with the responsible offices to the extent that the training needs were not identified. Thus, in terms of flood management, there were no significant differences between Nsanje (covered by the programme) and Chikwawa (not covered) that could be attributed to the District Focus Programme.

Even some of the problems faced by NGOs resulted from a limited involvement of the affected people in the relief programme, for example, as regards the process of distributing relief materials vis-à-vis other existing programmes within the affected communities. Two examples can be cited to illustrate this point. Firstly, there were cases in which two different NGOs were carrying out two different activities in the same community. In one community in Nsanje, Red Cross were issuing blankets in

one place at the same time as CARD were distributing *Likuni Phala* in another place. In another community in Chikwawa, Concern Universal were distributing blankets in one place at the same time as Red Cross were distributing ration cards in another place. This resulted in people missing out on one item in some cases as they could only attend one distribution at a time.

Related to this problem was a case in which there was need to fit relief assistance into existing programmes by other NGOs. A good example was a seed credit programme being run by CARD in Nsanje as part of the drought rehabilitation programme. The coming in of free seed distributions from Action Aid in the same areas meant the disruption of the on-going credit programme. Perhaps the two NGOs, together with the communities concerned, could have co-operated to work out the best possible ways of assisting those families that needed free seed. In any event, as shown earlier, Action Aid were in fact guilty of distributing more seed than was actually needed in the communities.

For both government and NGOs, absence of meaningful participation from affected communities resulted in difficulties in providing relief assistance to flood victims who had been displaced from Mozambique into Malawi. Assessing the number of Mozambicans who crossed into Malawi because of the floods was also surrounded by the controversies affecting the numbers of Malawian flood victims. Initially, a figure of 50,000 Mozambicans was reported by the DC's office in Nsanje. The verification exercise report in Nsanje was not very clear on the exact number of Mozambicans, but WFP's records showed that 7,506 Mozambican families (37,530 individuals) received food assistance during phase one. A similar number was targeted for phase-two distributions. During phase one Mozambicans got the same

rations as Malawians but in phase two Mozambicans received a two week 25 kg per family as a take-home package, contrary to a one month 50 kg package originally planned for them.

A visit to Mozambican refugee camps revealed that the Mozambicans felt more comfortable to live in Malawi than return home. It appeared, however, that the government, the donors and many NGOs were unaware of this fact and the reasons behind it. No effort was made to initiate a dialogue with the Mozambicans to find out how they viewed the relief process and how their views could be incorporated into the planning process.

This study found that the Mozambicans lacked proper information regarding the relief programme. It seemed clear that it was not initially made known to them that the flood relief was only a temporary exercise. In some camps, the refugees spoke of their anticipation of receiving assistance for at least six months. This view could have been influenced by the experience during the previous refugee crisis and the resultant relief programme in the district, which took several years. The lack of proper information was compounded by needs assessment exercises by agencies, which were interpreted to mean that assistance would follow automatically. Additionally, the refugees were never told that the tents were only temporary and they would be expected to move out once the situation had improved. The attitude of CARD (the NGO which mounted most of these tents) was that the refugees would leave the tents whenever they felt they no longer needed them. This led to a practice whereby, instead of constructing temporary shelter across the border where most had returned to work in the fields, most opted to commute from the tents, hoping to receive assistance. Also, Mozambicans preferred to stay because of opportunities for

*ganyu* and access to services such as grocery shops, maize mills, clinics and produce markets absent on the Mozambican side. However, there were many difficulties in obtaining *ganyu*, given that they were foreigners, and they also did not have relatives to fall back on for assistance. As a result Mozambican camps appeared to have been in greater need of food assistance than other areas targeted for distribution. Acute hunger was apparent in the camps and children were acutely malnourished. Rather than view them with hostility, getting them to participate more meaningfully in the programme might have not only allowed for the dissemination of proper information to them but could also have opened up possibilities of incorporating them, in collaboration with recipient communities, within local survival strategies.

If the quality of the relief programme was adversely affected by failure on the part of the government and many of the NGOs to foster participation of affected people in their activities, the case was more so with respect to the conduct of WFP and other international donors. It was obvious that the assistance that the affected people received was not enough (quantity) and not timely. Both facets of the problem could, in large measure, be attributable to the unilateral decision-making behaviour of WFP and the other donors. WFP argued that the objective of the relief food was simply to regenerate the nutritional status of people to normal levels. It is doubtful if this objective was achieved. It appears that lack of enough resources led to discrimination against some individuals who were clearly in need. In Chikwawa for instance, the DC's office observed (supported by the study) that the figure of 12,000 families targeted for assistance was far below reality.

If greater levels of participation could not have influenced the quantity of the volume of relief materials provided (assuming, as it appeared in this case, that the donors



were prepared to make available a pre-decided amount to the relief process), it could at least have helped in timely delivery, especially in the case of food assistance and seed distribution. One way of ensuring timely delivery of food assistance would have been to start distribution to areas where targeting and ration card distribution had been accomplished, rather than to do distribution on a district basis. This would, of course, require additional resources but it could be a possible alternative. But more importantly, the donors needed to find ways of effectively incorporating the participation of affected communities. Rather than unilaterally making decisions regarding who needed assistance most, targeting scarce resources should take into account community views about vulnerability and fairness. Such participation could have helped to ensure not only appropriate, but also timely delivery of relief assistance.

Timely delivery of relief materials is crucial. In the present case, provision of assistance to people long after a disaster had occurred made relief make less sense and increased potentials for politicisation. Additionally, people failed to appreciate the need for targeting. Increased participation could also be a way of identifying a targeting mechanism that does not disrupt social relations existing within and between communities. Village leaders, for example, raised concerns that it would be difficult to get people who did not receive relief food but were clearly in need to work on existing community projects. In cases where two adjacent villages were co-operating on a community project such as the building of a school block or the construction and rehabilitation of village roads, distributing food to only one village threatened such co-operation.

As indicated above, some village leaders suggested that perhaps a better way would have been to target whole communities that were affected, even if that meant reducing the food rations. The food rations that the actual victims received were regarded as grossly inadequate. And given that many people survived because of *ganyu*, it is possible that food given to those "not so much in need" would still have found its way to the intended beneficiaries through this mechanism.

As in many other emergencies, WFP attempted to use the relief programme as a mechanism for fostering changes in gender relations within the affected communities by giving special roles to women. In order to ensure that the food reaches the household, GoM and WFP agreed to target the senior female in the targeted households during the distribution exercise. Apparently, this strategy was also devised to avoid cases in which men could sell the food or give it to other wives in the case of polygamously married men. According to WFP reports, this strategy appeared to have been successful as 60% of the food was distributed through this process. This study also revealed that women welcomed this strategy and it did not seem to pose any serious problems with men. In any case, men were still supposed to carry the items home if they were bulky (e.g. 50 kg maize bags). However, WFP felt that it could do more than just targeting the senior female of the household. Women's involvement in the actual distribution exercise, for example, would be one way of increasing their participation at the community level. The Distribution Point Supervisors and the Tippers all came from the affected communities and more women could have been appointed for these positions. While the intentions of such a practice were noble, the decision was again made without consultation with the affected population and thus not much appears to have been achieved. In addition, as

I have maintained throughout this thesis, the very idea of attempting to mix social change objectives with relief objectives needs to be considered carefully.

### **Conclusion.**

This study showed that although people and communities in the affected area demonstrated great capacity to cope with the flood disaster, they were not incorporated into the relief programme as actors who could make valuable contributions through their participation in the planning, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the relief process. Participation was limited to the formal involvement of official local leaders. Much energy was devoted to an antagonistic relationship between the government and the donor community. In Malawi, a local proverb says that *when two elephants fight it is the grass underneath that suffers*. In the case of the flood relief programme, when the two elephants fought (government and donors), it was the *grassroots* that suffered.

The chapter constitutes an empirical demonstration of some of the theoretical issues that surround the participation of affected populations in emergency relief. Specifically, the problems of mistrust and suspicion between government and international aid organisations and their implications for participation have been highlighted. In addition, the chapter has provided concrete examples of government, NGOs and international aid donors failing to incorporate participation, even though there was considerable scope for doing so. The whole relief programme was managed without much input from grassroots structures and processes. Even the management meetings that called together all the stakeholders in the programme failed to include significant representation from affected communities. Such meetings took place in the main city, away from the literal messy swamp of the

floods. A suggestion by one of the District Commissioners whose district was affected to hold one of such meetings in the affected districts to enable the traditional leaders to attend, for example, did not go beyond being welcomed as a good idea. It appears clear that, in addition to limited knowledge on how to incorporate communities in the relief programme, failure of grassroots participation to take place resulted also from a limited enthusiasm and effort to incorporate it. Partly this could be explained by a spirit of superiority that leads to undermining the importance of local knowledge. Partly, especially on the part of donors, lack of participation was related to their need to support distribution policies that were in line with the quantity of their resources. In both cases therefore, grassroots participation was not seen as part and parcel of the emergency relief programme.

# **Chapter Six. Grassroots organisation and participation in disaster relief: The case of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Gujarat, India.**

## **Introduction**

The response of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) to the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India appears to offer an alternative model of disaster relief when compared with the two case studies presented in the previous chapters. The salient feature of this model is the absence of external organisations, international or national, in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the relief programme. This in contrast to the case of south Sudan, where international aid agencies dominated the scene, and Malawi, where the wrangle between the dominant players, WFP and the government, completely sidelined affected communities in programme implementation. SEWA's operations involve participation through grassroots structures. In addition, SEWA's experience offers a new dimension to disaster relief in that women, traditionally ignored, underrepresented or disadvantaged in many relief programmes, take centre stage. This chapter details the ways in which SEWA was able to use its existing structures to bring the affected population to participate fully in the relief programme.

## **Background and Method**

Fieldwork for the study was undertaken from mid October to beginning of November

2001. The earthquake-affected state of Gujarat was selected for two main reasons. Firstly, through personal meetings with its director, I had previous links with the Disaster Mitigation Institute, based in the area. Through these meetings I became aware of the work that had already been going on in terms of cyclone and drought relief. Secondly, I felt that having done two case studies on the relief process in Africa, a study in Asia would provide a good comparative base given some general differences in terms of political and cultural organisation between the two. Additionally, working with SEWA, a women's organisation, would bring in a new dimension in the whole relief process since the current norm is one in which women are generally underrepresented.

Several methodological tools were employed in the study: I conducted semi-structured interviews with key SEWA personnel at the headquarters, including the executive secretary and district-based coordinators. I also conducted similar interviews with district-based coordinators, team leaders, spearhead team members as well as village-based members belonging to various SEWA activity groups such as Savings, Childcare, Health, Insurance, Craft etc. Focus group discussions were conducted with spearhead teams and activity groups; village meetings; village transect walks; and observation. In addition, I made use of various reports produced by the SEWA Academy covering the various stages of the relief process. Because I have had to 'pick and mix' information from these reports to achieve coherence I have chosen not to put specific references in the text, except where I have made direct quotations. However, all reports used appear in the bibliography. In addition, the information I collected through field visits was quite similar to that contained in the reports. Therefore it would be difficult (and perhaps not necessary) to distinguish between the documented information and information collected through field visits.

Even though the reports were produced by SEWA itself, I was quite confident of the accuracy of the information they contained particularly because in many cases I became aware of the reports after I had already collected my own information.

### **Some important features of Gujarat.**

Gujarat state is located in north west India. Relative to other states, Gujarat appears to experience frequent disasters. A chronic drought has become a dominant feature of the state but other forms of disasters such as cyclones, malaria epidemics and earthquakes affect it from time to time. The northern part of the state is generally semi-arid. The majority of the population depend on rain-fed agriculture, although a few irrigation schemes exist.

Gujarat has several economic activities. The majority of the population is engaged in agriculture, growing both food and cash crops. Farmers are divided into a minority of relatively well-to-do land holders, and the majority who are landless. The latter are forced to become labourers. Animal husbandry among some involves the rearing of animals such as cattle, goats, sheep, buffalo, and fowl. The state of Gujarat produces 70% of India's salt, so many people are also employed in salt farming. Gum collection is also an important economic activity for a considerable number of the population. In certain districts, such as Banaskantha and Kutch, there are traditions of world-famous craft production spanning centuries and this provides a source of income for many households.

The failure of rains has a chain effect on many of these production activities. For example, salt production suffers due to low water tables, fodder production suffers severely affecting livestock production and gum collection also becomes difficult. Craft production appears to be the only activity that is not affected by rainfall. As a

result, it has become an increasingly important weapon in fighting disasters such as drought and others that lead to water shortages.

Socially, the caste system operates in Gujarat that puts certain classes of people in positions of permanent relative disadvantage. These classes have little voice as regards the operation of the state machinery in activities that affect their lives. This is where SEWA becomes important as it attempts to mobilise such classes and incorporate them into decision-making structures where they can have a voice.

Much like all other States in India, people's participation in government development programmes is institutionalised through the *panchayat*, which is an elected body of village leaders. Communities always retain the power to elect new *panchayat* members, which, in theory, should make it important for them to behave in the interests of the community.

There is a lot of literature analysing the *panchayat* and its related forms of government at village level. While various authors applaud or criticise with varying degrees the extent to which village government in India accords the rural masses with an opportunity for participation both in the political and development process, it is true to say that the *panchayat* system is quite unique when compared with many countries within the developing world. Recognising its central role in the village setting, SEWA attempts to seek the approval of the *panchayat* in its own programmes through its inclusion in village-level planning meetings. So, for example, SEWA village committees deliberate on issues and make decisions that the village *panchayat* is supposed to endorse. To facilitate acceptance of their plans, SEWA committees often invite members of the village *panchayat* to their meetings so that they become part and parcel of the deliberations.



## **Historical background and organisation of SEWA**

### *History*

Registered as a trade union in 1972, SEWA is a member-based organisation of women who work in the informal economic sector. Its members are women with no employer or fixed employer-employee relationships. They may be daily wage earners or self-employed. Through a demand-based operational framework, the organisation attracts women who are at the base of society in terms of economic resources as well as having limited ability to find a voice in the wider political and social processes. Many of the women who become members of SEWA often have low or no working capital and poor work tools. Thus, despite having various skills and knowledge, their work is characterised by low productivity and very low incomes.

Based on the 'Gandhian' philosophy which embodies the principles of truth, non-violence, simplicity and self-reliance, SEWA'S main goals are two fold: first, to organise women for full employment at the household level that provides them with work, income, food and social security. Social security is defined in terms of access to health and childcare, insurance and shelter. Second, to accord women with economic self-reliance in order to increase their bargaining power as well as their control over the decision-making process and thus, ultimately, better control over their lives.

If SEWA offers both economic and social advantages to its members, why do some people choose not to join? In answer to this question I was told that those who choose not to join SEWA are generally the relatively affluent who probably have already a measure of influence socially and politically as well. SEWA also offers

people the flexibility of joining only the activities that will benefit them given their specific circumstances. For example, some may chose to be members of childcare activities only while others may become members of several activities. In all cases poor people are provided with the opportunity to become involved in the decision-making process and their various capacities are enhanced.

Rose's (1992) account of the history, development and organisation of SEWA is probably the most comprehensive on the organisation to date. Her book traces the development of the organisation over a period of twenty years from its embryonic stages. In this account, the author documents SEWA's struggles to help poor women improve their lives through influencing policy at the local, regional and even international levels. She refers to many instances that demonstrate how SEWA has consistently put into operation the principles embodied in the Gandhian philosophy to become a powerful force through which women's voices are not only heard but also through which they find dignity through the realisation of their dreams, goals and aspirations.

A detailed look at its history reveals that SEWA owes its birth and growth in great measure to the personal dedication and charismatic leadership of its founder, Ela Bhatt, a lawyer who had headed the women's wing of the Textile Labour Association (TLA). The TLA is India's oldest and largest union of textile workers. Ela Bhatt had become acquainted with and sympathetic to the problems of women textile cart-pullers and head-loaders. Presented with the appeals of these women for assistance, she responded by providing them with the necessary organisational help to establish what has now become one of the most well-known women's trade unions in the world.

Funding information was not easy to obtain but Rose's account mentions briefly that international aid organisations have played a role in the development of SEWA through provision of financial grants, supporting SEWA's policy intervention initiative as well as providing training support. Other sources of funding have included private donations, government and membership fees. However, SEWA leaders, who always provide the members with management support, capacity building needs, generation of alternative employment activities and favourable policy initiatives, internally generate much of the development process.

SEWA's growth has been quite steady, starting out with 320 members in 1973 to 318,527 in 2000 in all India. With 205,985 members (about 65%), Gujarat has by far the greatest membership. The members are both rural and urban-based. In the state of Gujarat, 38.36% of the membership is rural against 61.64% urban. SEWA's model has since begun to be adopted internationally in some countries, for example, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

### *Structure*

A two-tier level of elected representation governs SEWA. The members of each trade elect their representatives in the ratio of one representative per one hundred members. These representatives comprise the Trade Council (Pratinidhi Manal). Parallel to the Trade Council are Trade Committees (Dhandha Samit) in each trade whose membership is not fixed but varies between 25 and 50. The Trade Committees meet every month. Every three years the Trade Council elects an Executive Committee of 25 members, reflecting the proportions of the membership. The office bearers of the trade union are elected from among the executive members.

Operationally, the general secretary at the headquarters heads SEWA. Each of the eleven districts in which SEWA operates have two-levels of coordination: headquarters-based and district-based. Depending on the needs of the membership each district then has various activity groups that may include Savings, Craft, Insurance, Childcare, Salt Production, Health, etc. In turn, each activity group has a team leader, an organiser and a spearhead team. This organisational structure offers many pathways of communication to ensure that people at the grassroots have the opportunity to articulate their real needs as well as getting involved in the planning and implementation processes. SEWA's organisers, being village-based, are always in close touch with the members. There are many fora of elected union representatives that cut across occupations, districts, sectors (urban and rural) and levels of the organisation, bringing together women from all contexts and focussing programmes according to their needs. Monthly Pratinthi Milan meetings of union organisers and members serve as pathways of communication through which information on disasters and relief-programme implementation can be disseminated quickly and effectively. In addition, at village level, women grassroots leaders known as *aagewans* are always in constant communication with organisers as part of carrying out their routine work on existing projects.

### *The spearhead teams*

One of the core objectives of SEWA is to adopt the kind of planning, development and implementation of enterprises in a manner that facilitates its members to become not only producers and users but also controllers and managers of their work and products. The spearhead team plays a pivotal role in translating these objectives into reality. The spearhead team comprises the *aagewans*, who develop their knowledge

and skill in a particular activity, and SEWA organisers in the ratio of 80-20. The abilities of these *aagewans* as well as their management skills are enhanced through SEWA's planned capacity-building schemes. For example, the spearhead team for managerial, accounting and marketing activities needs to have corresponding skills. Such skills are provided by the SEWA Academy and other affiliated federations through various training programmes. Each spearhead team has a leader whose task is to convene village-level meetings and conduct training as well as undertake periodic visits in the districts. She conducts weekly meetings with her team to identify issues needing attention and to draw out plans for tackling such issues. In addition, she also conducts monthly meetings at the district level in liaison with the district co-ordinators. All SEWA teams are made up of women. In 1999 there were 500 spearhead teams for the various activities including, Embroidery, Healthcare, Childcare, Savings etc.

### ***Relations with government***

The state government of Gujarat has the ultimate responsibility for fostering development as well as providing disaster relief and rehabilitation. Therefore, SEWA has always worked complementarily, rather than parallel to government in development and relief efforts. SEWA is itself at pains to point out that its role is not merely to agitate and protest but to provide a forum through which members can strengthen themselves through the solidarity of the union and express their collective needs to policy makers. This role becomes critical during periods of scarcity:

“As a strong community-based organisation SEWA's... organisers can present the needs of members to government officials, who may not be aware of the particular situations of women and children. Likewise the government

benefits from this communication as they can formulate more appropriate response measures... Community based organisations that involve the key participation of the local people should also be involved in disaster intervention and prevention measures... a partnership between grassroots organisations like SEWA and the government is the most effective approach to ensuring sustainable intervention measures that meet the needs of rural communities” (SEWA, no date: 34).

Traditionally, SEWA’s links with government were established through the former’s efforts to lobby the latter on policy and legislation affecting poor women. In time, the government began to hand over the management of some of its development projects to SEWA. And although SEWA’s suggestion that it be made the official distribution agent of government relief failed to materialise during the cyclone disaster relief of 1998, there have been many channels through which SEWA has linked up with the government in disaster relief. Such links have included communication and cooperation with the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, the Relief Commissioner, the Rural Development Ministry and other departments concerned with relief and rehabilitation. During the earthquake disaster relief operation of 2001, a government liaison team was set up at state level to foster cooperation with SEWA and other organisations involved. The Relief Commissioner and Secretary were contact points for SEWA, especially as regards the transportation of relief materials and coordination with other NGO’s. At district level, SEWA’s coordinators are always in touch with government district authorities through the collector’s office.

SEWA’s paid organisers act as a link between government officials and SEWA members. They try to bridge the gap in communication between high-level state

officials and members in remote villages. They are very familiar with the resources at the disposal of the communities as well as the needs of members and they try to maintain a constant awareness among the membership of government schemes that could benefit them. The organisers also try to awaken policy makers to the realities of members so that actual needs are reflected in planning.

Several issues come out of SEWA's experience in working with the government in disaster relief. One observation has been a divergence of relief philosophy between the two. Whereas SEWA's philosophy embodies the principles of participation, capacity building and creation of alternative sources of employment to enable communities to respond effectively to disasters, government adheres to the orthodox relief mentality characterised by scarcity recognition, assessment, declaration, and response. The latter essentially involves the provision of material goods at the height of distress and does not foster participation. As a result it leaves much room for inconsistency and inefficiency.

Several examples can be drawn to demonstrate the sort of inefficiencies that can attend the orthodox relief mentality. With regard to drought relief, the conventional procedure in Gujarat is to wait until the official withdrawal of the South West Monsoon winds before calling on district collectors to appraise the situation in their jurisdiction. In 1999 the fact that the rains didn't come led some commentators to assert that: 'It seems a ridiculous and unnecessary formality to await the end of a rainy season that in fact never was before taking concrete action' (SEWA, no date: 23). Thus, although it was the case that rural people had begun to feel the effects of the drought in July and August, drought was only officially declared in December, at which time the mobilisation of relief had to start. SEWA is engaged in continuing

efforts to use the existing channels of communication and cooperation to influence a change in the government's approach to disaster relief. For example, in April 2000 the government accepted SEWA's proposal to include craftwork as an alternative to the then manual labour of pit digging. SEWA petitioned the state government to widen the scope of relief work to include skilled labour or provide training to those in need, for example in masonry and plantation work. Government have since started funding craftwork. These changes enable people at grassroots level to participate in government activities since demand for them is generated at community level via SEWA's structures.

Similar examples can be drawn from the 1998 cyclone relief programme (Polzer, 1998). In that programme, assessing the extent of damage and determining the number of beneficiaries faced problems typical of situations where either government or external aid agencies play a leading role. In some areas figures of affected people produced by SEWA and other NGOs, on the one hand, and government, on the other, varied widely. Government reports suggested only approximately 1000 dead and 1500 missing whereas eyewitness accounts obtained by SEWA suggested between 10,000 and 20,000. This variation in figures had a direct impact on the number of people eligible for compensation. In addition, it contributed to fund-raising problems for SEWA, since international aid agencies did not consider the original death figures produced by the government as constituting a major disaster.

Yet SEWA demonstrated that the government figures, based as they were on the number of dead bodies that were actually recovered and the number of registered workers in the affected areas, were grossly inaccurate. Eyewitness reports covering



the number of houses washed out to sea by the tidal wave gave a much more accurate picture. In addition, through contact with eyewitnesses, SEWA was able to recognise that there were many working families who were not registered and could therefore not be accounted for in the government official registers.

In similar vein, SEWA challenged the government's approach to the issue of missing persons. SEWA and other NGO's argued that the government's definition of missing people, which referred to people whose bodies could not be found, did not reflect people's experiences. In many cases people had their relatives swept by the tide before their very eyes, and sometimes even from their very arms. In some cases people had to leave bodies behind fleeing from rumours about a major gas leak. As a result many bodies were never found. Yet the government's policy was to regard missing persons as dead only if the person has not been traced for seven years. This would have meant that many people who lost their relatives would never have received compensation in good time. SEWA, working through its community-based members, was able to identify such people and succeeded in lobbying the government to start paying compensation to affected people as part of the disaster relief programme. Such efforts included lobbying the government to use the community social structure in attempts to find alternative ways of identifying deceased persons who did not have the kind of documentation that the government required.

As a result of SEWA's interaction with government and through its own activities, several disaster mitigation programmes managed at the grassroots level were already in place when the earthquake disaster occurred. Thus, part of the relief process for the earthquake disaster consisted of merely strengthening the existing programmes

rather than starting new ones from scratch. For example, as part of drought-proofing activities, SEWA members from 9 districts presented a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Gujarat in which they requested the implementation of many programmes in the areas of fodder security, employment generation, water harvesting and conservation, development of rural infrastructure, afforestation, skills training, craft activities and health and child care activities. The state government did not respond favourably to all of these requests. However, SEWA implemented some of them through their district associations, in some cases taking up partnership with government, in others working independently. At district level SEWA set up several operational teams for the implementation of certain activities such as craftwork. These included: procurement teams, production teams, distribution teams and marketing teams. The picture presented is thus one of an integrated programme implemented and managed at the grassroots level. Such a programme went a long way to building the capacities of the people and communities involved and were thus better prepared to handle the earthquake disaster. For example, with regard to a SEWA-managed government fodder scheme, it was reported that:

‘SEWA organisers quickly learned the technicalities of management, and were able to smooth out controversies instigated by aggressive farmers. The responsibility of running a smooth distribution system for 12,000 farmers and their 40,000 cattle has been gargantuan. In fact, their management has been so impressive that the Santalpur fodder depot became a focal point. Whenever visitors come to witness government relief efforts in this district they are taken here’ (SEWA, no date: 55).

It was these same people who were involved in the management of the drought-

proofing schemes that were able to use their acquired management skills to expand some of the activities and to initiate and participate in new ones during the 2001 earthquake disaster.

### *SEWA's involvement in disasters*

Though created primarily to foster socio-economic development among the rural and urban poor, SEWA is increasingly becoming involved in disaster relief as well. This trend is particularly true for Gujarat, which has witnessed an increased number and frequency of natural disasters. The history of involvement in disasters since the creation of the organisation dates back to 1986 when there was a severe drought in the state of Gujarat. That drought lasted for three years. In 1996 floods devastated some parts of the state. A devastating cyclone hit the state in 1998 leaving more than 10,000 people dead and many homes and crops destroyed. A combination of a cyclone and a drought hit the area again in 1999. In 2000, there was drought in the districts of Kutch, Banaskantha and Surendranagar. In previous years people had responded to drought by migrating to the southern districts of Gujarat to find work. This option was not available in 2000, as the drought had also affected the southern areas. Migrants had to return to their home areas empty handed and destitute.

However, it appears that the principle of self-reliance had become so internalised among many community members that their greatest demand was not for relief: 'At every monthly meeting, the members' demands became louder and more strident: "Give us work, not relief", they said' (SEWA, 2000: 9) In response to these demands, alongside the relief programme of distributing nutritious food to more than 23,000 labourers at the relief work sites, SEWA also commenced the provision of craft-related employment, mainly embroidery and the provision of fodder at

subsidised rates and in adequate quantities to at least 35,125 animals. In addition, water conservation activities were begun as a long-term strategy for countering water shortages. These activities constituted what came to be known as the 'Campaign Against Drought', which was run and managed by SEWA members.

With the 'Campaign Against Drought' barely underway, the organisation was again called upon to respond to floods in some parts of the state. In conjunction with the local municipal corporation, SEWA worked to pump out water from streets and houses, distributing chlorine tablets and Oral Dehydration Salts (ORS) packets to people in affected areas and in cleaning up and related activities.

However, although natural disasters have been part of the recent history of Gujarat, SEWA claimed that the earthquake disaster of January 26 2001 was unprecedented in nature. Drought left people without food, floods brought health risks and cyclones damaged crops and rooftops but never before had they dealt with an extensive collapse of houses and physical injury to the affected.

### **The 2001 earthquake disaster.**

#### **Extent of destruction.**

The earthquake, measuring 7.9 on the Richter Scale, occurred on the morning of 26 January 2001 in the state of Gujarat. The most severely affected areas were the districts of Kutch, Patan, Surendranagar and Ahmedabad. Kutch experienced the heaviest losses. By the afternoon of that day SEWA's teams were already on the scene talking to people and gathering preliminary information. On the 27<sup>th</sup> a team of about 50 SEWA organisers conducted a house-to-house survey of the villages in the

affected districts. The survey centred on assessing: the extent of damage to the houses; extent of loss of household goods, including food stocks, tools and equipment; extent of injuries; and extent of damage to child-care centres and community centres.

The survey revealed that at least 60,000 SEWA members had been affected. Many houses either collapsed completely or suffered at least 80% damage, leaving them uninhabitable. Heavy losses in household tools and utensils meant that many lacked both food and accommodation. In the meanwhile, affected families were camping in the open in makeshift shelters. In an effort to help, some town dwellers began to send cooked food to the villages, transporting it over a distance of up to 5 hours. In many cases the food was damaged and not fit for consumption when it arrived. To counter this problem, community kitchens were set up. One such kitchen had been set up by a religious-based organisation through which individual donations of food were made.

Many of those involved in salt production had their salt pans damaged and needed rebuilding. The salt already produced got mixed up with sand. The brine wells also caved in and the pump sets for pumping out the brine also got damaged. There was a need to re-dig the wells and replace the diesel pump sets immediately to resume production and restore the livelihood base of these salt producers. In agriculture many small and marginal farmers suffered losses in terms of cracked fields, damaged wells and motor pumps as well as damaged boreholes. Several cattle also suffered injuries from collapsed cattle sheds. Damage to water resources included caved-in or cracked wells, cracked rainwater harvesting tanks and cracked check dams. All the 30 child-care centres in the villages sustained heavy damage. In two child-care

centres in the district of Surendranagar at least three children were buried under collapsed buildings.

### **Response to the disaster.**

The response to the disaster took place in three phases namely, the immediate response, the mid-phase relief and rehabilitation response and the rehabilitation phase. The latter involved the rebuilding of livelihoods and a housing reconstruction plan.

#### ***Immediate response.***

SEWA's immediate response action was geared at addressing the immediate needs identified in the assessment exercise. This response comprised the following actions: Provision of shelter material, including tents and tarpaulin sheets; family kits; food supplies; blankets; medical aid; and water. Functioning round the clock, SEWA field teams, supported by their district centres and field offices, carried out these activities. SEWA field teams also worked out the distribution systems to ensure that assistance from the government reached the affected villages and individuals in the various districts. For this phase, the Government of Gujarat provided relief materials in the form of food packets, medical aid and cash doles. UNICEF provided 25,000 blankets, 12,000 family kits and 48,000 tarpaulin sheets. Peace Winds Japan provided 6000 tents. In providing such materials, these organisations sometimes responded to appeals for assistance from SEWA but sometimes gave of their own accord based on their own previous experience and knowledge of what people might need in a disaster of this nature. In both cases the distribution of all materials received was conducted by SEWA's village-based teams. In cases where there were

limited relief materials these teams had the responsibility of liaising with community members to target materials to the most needy.

By the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, one week after the disaster, the following quantities of relief materials had been distributed:

- Up to 800 items of tents and tarpaulin materials in 50 villages in Kutch district, and 3500 tarpaulin sheets in 20 villages in Patan district.
- Blankets numbering 8600, 4600 and 3990 respectively in 50 villages in Kutch, 50 villages in Surendranagar, and 20 villages in Patan.
- Family kits in 50 villages in Kutch and 1500 in another 50 villages in Surendranagar.
- Up to 1670 Kg of food as well as 3034 food packets and a number of boxes of biscuits in a total of 70 villages in the three districts.
- A total of 91 bags of clothes in 100 villages in Kutch and Surendranagar districts.

In addition, on the very day of the disaster, SEWA, with the help of the Community Health Centre and the Indian Medical Association, set up a medical camp with a fully fledged operating theatre where more than 1500 injured persons were either treated or referred.

The SEWA office headquarters assumed a co-ordination function to ensure timely delivery of appropriate and adequate relief assistance to the affected communities. Co-ordination systems were established with other agencies involved in the relief process, among them the following: the government control room; the government

external aid cell; donor agencies; UN agencies; private institutions and agencies; NGOs; and health units.

A team of 20 paid organisers in each of the affected districts were at the heart of the distribution system. These teams carried out the roles of co-ordination with government agents, the actual distribution of items to villages and maintaining of distribution and stock records. Relief materials were first transported from Ahmedabad, the nearest big city, to district centres at Bhuj, Dhrangadhra, and Raadhampur, from where they were forwarded to the affected villages.

Distribution proceeded on the basis of lists and registration cards prepared and issued during the easement exercise. Distribution teams had a four-day rotation system to allow members enough time to rest before carrying on with the demanding work.

### *Mid-Phase Action*

Mid-term relief action involved the continuation of some of the activities already started during the immediate phase. These activities included continuing the provision of temporary shelter to respond to the damage that was caused by after-shocks, provision of more food rations and provision of emergency livelihood opportunities. However, new activities were also begun, including a campaign on scientific building practices and the mobilisation of community workers.

### *Provision of Temporary Shelter.*

The provision of temporary shelter to the affected families continued, awaiting the formulation of a government policy on housing reconstruction. Under this programme SEWA provided a total of 11,320 units of temporary shelter in a total of



184 villages divided as follows: 1083 units in 117 villages in the district of Kutch; 7000 units in 34 villages in Patan district; and 937 units in 34 villages in Surendranagar district. It is important to mention that the provision of these units involved the full participation of the affected people, with many of them involved in identifying the beneficiaries and in distributing materials and actual construction.

*Campaign on scientific building practices.*

This initiative was launched on 26<sup>th</sup> February, exactly a month after the earthquake struck. SEWA's grassroots community leaders, organisers and housing technical teams became involved in a vigorous campaign to encourage people to build houses on scientific principles of safety, especially as regards the construction of earthquake-resistant houses. The People's Science Institute and the Disaster Mitigation Institute, both local organisations, trained SEWA's teams. Different techniques and models of construction were discussed with community members from which they could choose the appropriate ones. The campaign involved the entire village community, including the *panchayats*, other government agents, women's producers' groups and the dairy co-operatives.

*Provision of family kits*

The distribution of family kits provided by UNICEF continued. The family kits comprised blankets and household utensils namely, plates, glasses and bowls. The mid-term programme involved the distribution of such kits to some 10,100 households in 125 villages divided as follows: 1,940 households in 109 villages in Kutch district; 5,405 households in 34 villages in Patan district; and 2,762 in Surendranagar district.

### *Child Care Centres and counselling.*

While the survey conducted by the assessment teams of SEWA revealed the extent of damage to property, resources and physical injuries to people, daily contacts with them revealed that many were continuing to suffer from shock, fear and anxiety. Children's mental condition was particularly affected since all the school buildings had collapsed and schools had consequently closed. Having witnessed buildings collapse in their very sight, many children, and some adults, were afraid to enter buildings. There were reports of people sleeping outside houses that were still standing for fear of being caught out by another earthquake. To address this problem the mid-term relief action included psychosocial counselling, information dissemination regarding how to respond if there was another earthquake and intensification of day-care activities for children. In order to increase the effectiveness of these day-care centres SEWA initiated training in counselling and education for its existing health workers, childcare workers, organisers and trainers. SEWA training teams developed modules that took into account not only the cultural experiences of the people but also ensured that these were appropriate and workable in the particular rural setting. These modules included activities such as the sharing of experiences, discussion on what an earthquake really was and its causes, how to rebuild by examining success stories and cases and the role of collective action in overcoming challenges.

The effectiveness of these child day-care centres was demonstrated by an increased demand to have them established where they were nonexistent before the earthquake. Responding to demand from village communities in Surendrenagar and Patan districts, SEWA, through its district associations (the Surendranagar Mahila Balvikas

Mandal and the Banaskantha Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) Mahila SEWA Association), established 26 new centres each attending to between 50 and 70 children. In addition, session hours were extended from only 4 to 5 hours to 10 hours a day. Furthermore, the age of children in the day care centres was also raised from the usual 2-6 years to 15 years to cater for the school-going children. Children attending the centres benefited from counselling services and activities geared at lessening the impact of their trauma such as singing, dancing, story telling, poetry recitals and so on. The day-care centres also provided a forum for village schoolteachers to provide school lessons to children. SEWA also established a mobile school to cater for some villages in Surendranagar district that were not able immediately to establish day care centres.

The impact of these day-care centres, as well as the counselling sessions conducted by SEWA, was profound on both children and adults. At a village meeting in Dabhi village, when asked what their immediate thoughts were when the earthquake was taking place, some replied 'we thought it was a big plane passing overhead and causing a rumble'. Others said 'electric shock waves'. Most said that as a result of these assumptions they had not come out of their houses. However, with the education and counselling they received, they were now aware of what an earthquake was and their first reaction would be to get out of the houses. At the time of my interview many had gone back to sleeping in their houses, although the after shocks were still occurring. There were still some, however, who were yet to overcome their fear and were still sleeping outside.

### ***The housing reconstruction Plan***

The housing reconstruction plan began as part of the mid-term phase of the relief programme and continued throughout the rehabilitation phase. In this plan SEWA targeted some 161 villages in the three districts of Surendranagar, Kutch and Patan. The total number of completely damaged houses in these districts was 16,000. Another 12,000 were rendered uninhabitable from severe cracks bringing the total of houses needing reconstruction to 28,000. Priority in the selection of villages was given based on the extent of damage and the strength of SEWA membership. Areas that were not covered by SEWA came under different management systems administered either by the state government or other NGOs. The reconstruction policy that was finally agreed between SEWA and the government was that the former would provide a flat amount of 45,000 Rupees to every beneficiary for the construction of a room and a veranda. Government would provide the remaining funds for the completion of the entire dwelling based on its own assessment of the size and extent of damage to the previous building.

The SEWA-managed part of the scheme was owner-driven and involved broad-based participation of the affected people. There are at least ten major communities in the three districts concerned, each with its own housing style and design. The role of the SEWA administration was the provision of materials as well as a team of qualified civil engineers and architects from the Mahila Housing Trust, another local organisation, to work in consultation with the communities in the development of community-specific housing models. This was done to preserve the original integrity of the communities by avoiding scattered housing colonies. The variations of housing were quite apparent in different communities. I observed that in Patan and

Surendranagar most new housing units were detached, while in Kutch, there were several semi-detached houses. I was told that designs in the latter case were initiated by those villages where, traditionally, married brothers lived in the same compound.

Through its district associations, SEWA identified 'peer groups' in the villages. These were groups of elderly couples from families representative of different communities that would act as pace setters in the design, layout, building materials and construction methods of the agreed traditional designs. Knowledge gained from collaboration with professional engineers and architects from the Mahila Housing Trust and The Disaster Mitigation Institute would be used to adapt the traditional housing designs to earthquake resistant standards.

SEWA's district association field teams underwent orientation programmes to conduct *sandesh yatras* in the villages. *Sandesh yatras* are meetings aimed at orienting villagers on scientific and safe building standards. *Gram sabhas* followed the *sandesh yatras* in each of the villages. SEWA village-based organisers mobilised all village members to participate in the *gram sabhas*. The participation of SEWA members in the *gram sabha* represents one front where SEWA interfaces with village government. *Gram sabhas* are traditional meetings of all adult members of the community. Participation in these meetings was important because it was in the *gram sabha* that the main issues were discussed including the following:

- The entire work plan and methodology to be followed in the reconstruction plan;
- The need for total involvement and integrated village planning;
- The identification of possible aspects and areas for the re-use of debris;

- The formulation of the village committee with at least 50% women and agreement on the representative basis of this committee;
- The restoration of the heritage monuments and the preservation of the village heritage;
- The preparation by the whole village of the village plan to integrate housing reconstruction, natural resource management and livelihood. Here the village would also plan the revival of wastelands, development of fodder farms, reviving and maintaining water resources, village roads and community and demonstration centres;
- The preparation of the time plans for the different stages of implementation namely: the identification phase, removal of debris, assessment of water availability, identification of local masons and their rates, and the procurement of construction materials;
- The finalisation of village plans, preparation of cost estimates and discussion of the type of facilitation needed to get these plans and cost estimates approved by the government as well as facilitation needed during the procurement of construction materials;
- Selection of masons to be trained by the Mahila Housing Trust.

Each district had a fully-fledged housing team composed of village-based individuals. The village team was charged with the responsibility of re-assessment of damage to specific buildings, identification of families to benefit from the reconstruction programme, monitoring the legal aspects involved in the construction

process, rendering assistance in the procurement of materials, supervision and the maintenance of various types of records.

The facilitation provided by these housing teams was quite impressive. I interviewed members of one such team in one village in the Radhanpur area in Patan district. This area has 45 villages. The team had seven members and I was told that this was standard for every village. Supervised by the Housing Team Leader, the team was also involved in the selection of the types of materials to be used in the construction process to reduce the susceptibility of houses to earthquakes. On this particular occasion I had the opportunity of seeing some stock of materials that had actually been rejected by the housing team.

The team also monitored construction standards. Each team member was well versed with the technical aspects of construction, including the acceptable height of the house; type, quality, quantity and cost of materials; time needed to complete the housing unit with given amounts of labour; etc. The team also kept meticulous records of various activities. I inspected at least four types, namely a purchase register, a distribution register and a receipt book, and a stock register maintained by the Housing Team Leader. These registers contained detailed information including, for example, name and signature of recipient, quantity and type of materials delivered, where materials were purchased, registration of vehicle and name of driver delivering materials etc. The Housing Team Leader would then periodically consolidate these registers and submit them to the Mahila Housing Trust for auditing.

In addition to these activities, the housing team initiated a cost-sharing programme in which house owners would pay 2,500 Rupees out of the 40,000 Rupees provided by SEWA as part of the housing reconstruction relief programme. The initiative was

taken in order to translate into practical action SEWA's philosophy of ownership and beneficiary participation. Village-level meetings were held to discuss the creation of a community fund with the money collected from this programme. A separate account for this purpose was created and maintained by the village team. The money would be used to fund future village development plans. At a village meeting in Patan district, in order to enable as many people as possible to find it easier to participate in this cost-sharing scheme, the village level meeting decided that 1000 out of the agreed 2,500 Rupees could be paid as a labour input equivalent.

I asked the village members if they were happy with this cost-sharing idea. They admitted that the amount involved was high relative to their financial standing but that they felt the programme made sense since contributing to the house reconstruction programme would increase their pride in the completed product. In addition to making them feel attached to their houses because of the contribution they had made, they could also look forward to initiating certain plans in the village that had stalled because of lack of funding. One woman in Chhanasara village commented: *'we are very proud of these new houses. I never dreamed of having a house like this but now my children and grandchildren will have a strong house'*.

The high levels of participation made it easy to spot any malpractices as well as to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the housing programme in reaching the targeted population. Full participation of the affected population in programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation ensured ownership and success of the programme. By contrast, in several of the villages I visited people were complaining with the government handling of its part of the house reconstruction scheme. There were several allegations to the effect that government officials



exercised favouritism in the allocation of funds. Controlling for the size of previous building and extent of damage, people felt that not only were high status individuals attended to more quickly but they were also given larger amounts of money compared to low status ones. While I was in the area visiting villages I came across a UNDP mission that was going around introducing supportive and monitoring activities in villages covered by the housing reconstruction programme. The mission specifically told me that SEWA-covered areas were excluded from this mission because no problems were being faced in these areas.

SEWA took several initiatives to complement the efforts made by the communities. One was the provision of a two-month training in masonry and construction not only to women but also to men and the youth. Each affected district had 10 batches of training, with at least 20 people being trained in each batch. This training was vital in enabling the villagers to undertake the reconstruction of a large number of buildings including houses, *panchayat* buildings, schools and water-harvesting structures. In addition, in anticipation of a heavy demand for building materials, SEWA also conducted training sessions on the making of some building materials such as roof tiles and concrete blocks.

***The rehabilitation of earthquake survivors through livelihood security.***

As pointed out earlier, assessment surveys immediately following the earthquake revealed that people's greatest demand was for employment. In response, and based on its experience with the previous year's drought mitigation programme, SEWA launched an integrated programme involving several schemes discussed below. The general implementation strategy involved several stages.

The village-level micro planning stage involved field teams using participatory procedures, such as those discussed in the previous sections, in assessment, planning and implementation. The lead participants in the implementation process were the village *panchayats*, the Self-help Group, the producer groups and collectives, the village water committees, the village watershed committees, forestry campaign groups and dairy cooperatives. This broad-based participation ensured that the village-level micro planning integrated livelihoods, animal husbandry, water resources, fodder and forestry.

At the district-level planning and implementation stage the district-level federations and associations that are hierarchically above the community organisations consolidated the village micro plans into district rehabilitation and rebuilding plans. The district-level organisations were: the Kutch Craft Association, a membership-based local organisation working in 64 villages and with a membership of about 10,000; the Banaskantha DWCRA Association, a 35,000-member strong local organisation active in 110 villages in Patan district; and the Mahila and Balvikas Mandal, active in 32 villages and with a membership of 6,000. These district-level federations were the main field-level implementation agencies, receiving facilitation and support from SEWA.

SEWA also mobilised technical inputs to support the grassroots organisations in the areas of: housing; production and marketing for livelihood programmes; research and documentation; disaster preparedness; health and child development; and management and administration. These inputs were provided through SEWA's support organisations: the SEWA Bank, a registered 150,000-member cooperative bank owned and managed by the shareholders, with a capital of about \$8 million

provided financial management inputs as well as meeting some of the credit requirements; the Mahila Housing Trust, an autonomous registered public trust, through its team of qualified engineers and researchers in the field of housing and construction, provided inputs in design and monitoring in construction; the SEWA Academy, a training, research and documentation wing of SEWA, provided inputs in training of trainers, designing participatory planning methods, and in research and documentation of the programme process; the Disaster Mitigation Institute, a community-based disaster mitigation organisation aimed at institutionalising local practices and knowledge in mitigation, management, preparedness and reduction of disasters, provided technical inputs in methods for preparing village micro plans, district plans, and designing the required training materials; The SEWA-AMA Centre, created primarily to provide management inputs and aid capacity building in CBOs, fulfilled this purpose. There were also other organisations that were consulted to provide various amounts and types of inputs. As a result of this institutional arrangement and implementation strategy, which involved the participation of grassroots communities, NGOs and CBOs the following further programmes were implemented:

*The craft work programme.*

Under this scheme 15,000 artisans in the three affected districts were targeted as follows: 7,700 in Kutch; 6,800 in Patan; and 500 in Surendranagar. Each family was provided with a craft packet/bag containing raw materials for one week's work. At the end of each week the spearhead teams collected the finished products and provided the families with a new consignment of raw materials. Payment was made upon collection in cash or kind, the components of which included food grains or

clothes or both depending on family needs. The artisan families were encouraged to initially produce items in line with local demand since many people had lost their clothes and belongings. For the non-artisans, SEWA initiated a training scheme in masonry and construction techniques. In collaboration with village structures, men and women, including boys and girls, were identified from each village and trained by a technical team of engineers. The trainees were provided with some cash and food grains to compensate for the time lost in searching for food. These schemes went on for five months.

*The gokul gram-linkage with ongoing self-employment programme.*

The government of Gujarat launched a programme of self-employment for families below the poverty line. This programme involved the provision of inputs such as credit, tools, technical training and market linkages based on a detailed needs assessment. Under this programme every village formed a representative Village Implementation Committee to facilitate its implementation.

SEWA complemented this programme by conducting its own needs assessment of 28,000 families and providing material packages to these families to start various livelihood activities. SEWA also strengthened the Village Implementation Committees by providing them with training in planning and disaster management and preparedness. In addition, SEWA planned district-wide federations of the Village Implementation Committees to strengthen the viability and sustainability of the programme in the long term. Known as *gokul gram*, these federations would play an active role in disaster preparedness and mitigation, whether such disasters came in the form of drought, earthquakes or cyclones. These federations would effectively

become CBOs with which the government and NGOs could work in liaison and co-ordination in disaster relief programmes.

#### *Water Regeneration.*

Water security became one of the paramount community needs, given that many areas in the state of Gujarat were facing a drought for three consecutive years. Therefore, it was planned that part of the rehabilitation and rebuilding of livelihood security should include the construction of rainwater harvesting structures. This scheme involved a large-scale programme of: deepening and construction of village ponds for rainwater harvesting; construction of rainwater harvesting structures at the village level as well as at the household level; and village watershed development. Apart from improving the water resource base this scheme would also provide an important source of employment to communities because of the labour-intensive nature of the activities involved.

#### *Fodder Security.*

In this scheme SEWA planned to link up with the government fodder provision programme, which was part of drought relief. The scheme included plans to procure fodder locally or if necessary from other states. The latter would involve working out procedures for obtaining inter-state permits for the movement of fodder and transportation procedures. For the long term, village-wide fodder farms were planned.

### *Natural resource management campaign.*

A campaign was initiated to revive and improve the conservation of natural resources including land, water, forest and fodder. Village leaders and spearhead teams were strengthened to launch this campaign. *Gram sabhas* were conducted where the entire village was sensitised to the importance of village planning and the need for reviving village natural resources. This was followed by the mobilisation of the entire village to become involved in the campaign. Village committees were formed for any necessary follow-up activities: 'the entire earthquake rehabilitation (programme) will be turned into a village development programme exercise' (SEWA no dated: 4)

### *Nutrition.*

The nutrition programme was introduced to militate against the expected decline in people's nutritional status that usually follows a disaster. The earthquake disaster resulted in losses of food stocks in many households. A nutrition programme was commenced to ensure that the required daily calorie and protein requirements, especially in women and children who tend to be more adversely affected, were maintained. The nutrition programme involved the following activities:

- Provision of low-cost mobile rations managed by the village women;
- Provision at child-care centres of foods of high nutritious content to infants, young children and pregnant and lactating mothers;
- Screening of anaemia and other nutritional deficiency diseases, such as night blindness, as well as the provision of vitamin A, iron and folic acid supplements;

- Provision in part of food-payments of women's earnings through craftwork, salt production and training stipends. The *shakti packet* programme was also expanded. The *shakti packet* is an on-going programme that involves the provision of daily necessities to women who work in the desert areas where there are no grocery stores. It is run by one of the women who are provided with transport and groceries by SEWA at a subsidised rate;
- Provision of nutrition education and the promotion of local foods and feeding practices that were in line with the objectives of the nutrition programme.

#### *Health care.*

This programme involved the promotion and monitoring of the health status of the people in the affected areas. Two of the districts (Surendranagar and Patan) already had spearhead teams engaged in health promotion and facilitating the implementation of health activities. In these districts, the programme concentrated on the expansion of the existing activities while in the one district without a health spearhead team (Kutch), new activities were initiated. The specific activities conducted included the following:

- Strengthening and building up of spearhead teams and the so called 'barefoot doctors', including the provision to forty women of training in primary health care;
- Provision of primary health care and health education to the community by the spearhead teams;
- Immunisation of all children and pregnant women;

- Growth and health monitoring of children as well as monitoring the health and weight of pregnant women;
- Identification of village midwives (*dais*) and providing them with upgraded training, including providing and replenishing them with safe delivery kits;
- Strengthening of linkages with government health services to facilitate referrals and immunisations.

### *Savings and Insurance Services.*

As regards the insurance programme, SEWA initiated the insuring of up to 15,000 women in the affected districts against risks related to health, accidents, assets and even death. Such insurance would be extended to husbands for those women wishing to go for this option. The insurance scheme was operated through developing and strengthening spearhead teams in all the affected districts to promote insurance services as well as serving as a link between the women and the SEWA Insurance Scheme. The spearhead teams also helped in imparting knowledge regarding claim applications and procedures. In addition, SEWA provided short training programmes in the villages to explain the concept of insurance.

Following the relief programme there was a surge of membership in certain activity groups, including insurance. Savings groups and Insurance groups almost doubled in villages where they were already existent while new ones mushroomed where there were none. For example, immediately following the earthquake, 435 new savings groups mushroomed with a total membership of 9,190 and total savings amounting to some 565,460 Rupees. Similarly, 20,000 new members joined the insurance programme. Within two weeks of the disaster SEWA was already looking into 2,500



claims relating to damage and loss (mostly related to damaged houses). In Bhuj, where there were no insurance activities prior to the earthquake, 8,000 new members registered.

The benefits of belonging to such groups became apparent in efforts to deal with the effects of the disaster. Women who belonged to savings and insurance groups were able to recover more quickly than those who did not. Some were able to draw from their savings to meet the most pressing of needs that were not met by the relief programme. Others were able to claim damages from their insurance schemes. Still others who belonged to both savings and insurance groups were able to utilise both sources for the recovery process. Those who had neither saving nor insurance cover had to make do with the relief materials provided or borrow from official moneylenders for up to 10% interest compared to only 2% for SEWA members.

One woman from Surendrenagar district stated: *'It was just a matter of 2 minutes. We lost an entire life's savings – all of our assets. There is no support system on which we can fall back. We feel very vulnerable'*.

Another woman from the same village declared: *'Now I realise the importance of savings. I had a savings account of my own – at least I had some security and support'*.

Clearly, part of the long-term consequences of SEWA's involvement in disaster relief is the further and rapid expansion of the organisation:

'SEWA's experience has shown time and again that disasters can be seen as an opportunity for social mobilisation and the empowerment of women and communities. More women become aware of their multiple vulnerabilities as

individuals and come to recognise the benefits of the solidarity and strength of the union. Therefore, while SEWA's responsibility is to its members, relief is extended to all affected poor and self-employed women and their families who are, after all, potential members' (Polzer, 1998: 14).

One implication of this organisational expansion is that participation becomes more and more broad-based as entire communities become re-organised through the organisation's structural framework. Thus, properly managed disasters can, ironically, provide an opportunity for strengthening forms of community planning that bring into the mainstream the neglected and vulnerable members of the community.

#### **Capacity building and participation: The case of Puriben.**

Part of SEWA's success in organising communities for participation lies in the emphasis placed on capacity building. Training and social mobilisation are core activities in daily operations. The demand-based nature of its operational framework encourages decision-making to occur at the very grassroots through the various leaders, organisers and committees. The story of Puriben provides an example of how SEWA has managed to empower women to take control of their own lives in normal circumstances as well as in times of disasters.

*I encountered Puriben in Vauva village in Patan district. The word Ben or Behn means sister in Gujarat. Puriben thus means sister Puri. Puriben is a married woman with three sons. Like many rural women she is illiterate. She has been a member of SEWA for thirteen years, joining as a craft worker and becoming organiser two years after joining the organisation. She was the first SEWA member*

*in Vauva village. Soon after her joining, one other woman joined. Her influence as an organiser has been such that today, every woman in the village is a member.*

*Puriben's success story did not, however, come easy. I was told that Gujarat society is an extremely male-dominated one. Perhaps a good indication of male domination is the fact that upon marriage a woman must not only pay dowry ('groom wealth' as opposed to the more familiar bride wealth) to the groom's family but she must also move to her husband's village. A woman's place is strictly in the kitchen, or, if not cooking, generally around the home. Some men I talked to informally told me that in urban areas unmarried girls even in their twenties are not allowed to be away from home on their own beyond five o'clock in the evening. Strict curfews in both rural and urban areas exist, barring women from going beyond certain distances.*

*Against this background, becoming a SEWA craft worker posed obvious immediate problems. Firstly, it meant moving out of the kitchen, her culturally legitimate place. Secondly, it meant travelling outside the village to the city to procure materials, sell products and sometimes attend training sessions at SEWA offices. The village would have none of this 'nonsense'. Opposition came from all fronts: her husband, her mother in-law and the community at large. But Puriben would not be deterred. She began her work, at first working around the home and avoiding travelling outside the village. But the time bomb was ticking. Soon SEWA invited her to attend a training workshop in Delhi. Not only would she be a long way from home, but she would also be gone for several days! Who would cook for the family? Who would draw water, wash dishes, and look after the children? She had gone too far. Her farewell message, representing the sentiments in the community at large, came from her mother in-law, apparently the staunchest defender of tradition: 'you have insulted*

*our society. You go to Delhi, but don't come back.' Incredibly, Puriben left for Delhi, risking being ostracised upon her return.*

*But her determination was about to pay off thanks, ironically, to a prolonged drought that hit the entire state of Gujarat. The traditional farming role of men became redundant. Men found themselves unable to do anything that could bring income and food into their families. Many poor families suffered severe hunger. Puriben's family could have been among them but income from craft production militated against the famine. In fact her family began to be seen as better off. Her husband became the first convert. Full support was declared for his wife, not just morally but physically too. Not only did he encourage his wife, but also he went straight into the kitchen, an abominable place for men. He cooked for the family, took care of the children and carried out the array of domestic chores. I would have gone back certain that it was all a good story designed specifically to impress me had it not been that mid-way through my interview, Puriben's husband emerged from the kitchen, teapot in hand. Assisted by his son, they served us tea as I talked to his wife and a group of about fifteen women craft workers from four villages. He made it clear to me that tea was not the only thing he had learned to cook but the entire range of traditional dishes and, if I could stay till suppertime, he would teach me how. I hadn't the slightest impression that he was joking.*

*The standard of life of Puriben's family compared to others performed miracles. Converts came from both far and near. Within her village much of the resentment she had suffered gave way to admiration. Several men began to encourage their wives to start craft production, supporting them in ways similar to Puriben's husband, trying to make Puribens of them.*

*But old habits die hard. A big order for crafts brought the women into a sharp conflict with community elders. The order had a strict but very short deadline. Meeting it meant working non-stop and travelling intensively in the surrounding areas to procure materials. This tight-schedule conflicted with the regular traditional cooking of community food. The men protested. A few might be willing to help their wives in their households but cooking community food went beyond acceptable bounds, as was, the en masse absence of women from the village. From the village leadership a directive went out that women be allowed to work on the order only after fulfilling their duty of cooking community food and a 10,000 Rupee fine was imposed on any woman found outside her village. However, it was impossible for the women to meet the order if they had to do the cooking as well, and without travelling out of their villages.*

*The women were not about to be intimidated. Led by Puriben they employed a new, and powerful weapon: collective bargaining. Women from 24 villages mobilised and with a united front made it known to the village leadership that preventing them from meeting this big order would only be counterproductive since they were not going to listen. The power of this united front was such that the village leadership was left with no option but to give the women an unconditional go ahead.*

*Such has been the influence of Puriben. From the comments and attitude of the villagers, there was no doubting that Puriben has become a phenomenon, an enigma, and a living legend. This woman who can neither read nor write has since attended international conferences in such far away and developed countries as Australia and the United States, where her story has mesmerised thousands. She has become the pride of the village and its claim to fame. I was told that it is an honour for one to be*

*able to say that 'Puriben comes from my village'. Having served us with tea, her husband sat watching me as I interviewed her. There was no hiding the pride, contentment and importance he was feeling. Villagers say that they couldn't have fathomed that not just one of their own, but an illiterate woman would fly to such countries, an experience which almost all of them do not even dream about.*

*Puriben says that the greatest satisfaction and pride from her struggle has been the ability to assert her individuality and attain her true identity. To be addressed or known as Puriben represents the realisation of these goals. Before that her individuality and identity were submerged beneath that of someone else. She was known and addressed only as somebody's wife or somebody's daughter. Now people know her for who she really is: Puriben.*

The example of village leadership in collective action captured in the story of Puriben was not an isolated incident. Previously, a group of 100 women from Puriben's village had held a rally at the Gujarat Water Supply and demanded water from a pipeline the villagers knew passed near by. The force of 100 voices influenced the local legislative assembly to agree to this demand.

There were other examples of women taking the initiative to address some of the problems arising from the earthquake disaster. Among such examples was the *jeevanshala*. This was a school started by self-employed women in six villages in the worst affected area of Santalpur. Every afternoon, the women came together and got some lessons. The teacher was one of the village women who was literate and had had an opportunity to be trained by SEWA. The women said that the idea of the school was one way of spending their lives meaningfully and coming out of the grief caused by the earthquake.

In addition the women also started a debris-clearing activity. The activity involved retrieving reusable materials such as roof tiles, wood, bricks and piling them separately from materials requiring disposal. At the village meetings, the village community decided on where to deposit the debris. Families brought in their equipment, such as bullock carts, camel carts and tractors to transport the debris to the designated sites.

## **Conclusion**

The extent to which the affected population participated in the relief programme that followed the earthquake disaster appears to be clearly above that witnessed and reported in many emergency situations. Through a gradual process, SEWA has succeeded in building up grassroots structures and capacities that are actively involved in efforts to improve personal and community life. An integrated approach allows people to participate in a range of activities designed to address various needs. Affected people themselves determine their own needs through a demand-based mode of operation. This operational framework makes full use of local knowledge and culture and integrates it with modern scientific knowledge in dealing with problems.

The case of SEWA is also further evidence of what participation can achieve in both development and disaster relief. It can be asserted that SEWA's response to the earthquake disaster was swift as it was efficient and effective in addressing the real needs of the affected population. Being a member-based organisation, it is in fact more accurate to say that the affected population itself, with material support from outside, gave a swift and effective response to the alleviation of its own suffering. It is true that the affected population was provided with relief materials from external

sources, but the determination of how, when and who as regards their use was done by the recipients. In addition, the communities initiated other actions that were not necessarily dependent on external help. Such activities included the treatment of psychosocial trauma, which, conducted by community members in a culturally appropriate way, was more effective than is usually the case in emergency situations. The case of SEWA also reveals that the participation of affected people in alleviating their own suffering is a powerful capacity enhancing element. The capacities developed and enhanced limit the need for external intervention in programme implementation only to very special circumstances.

Rose notes SEWA's success in mainstreaming women when she writes that:

'I find myself continually impressed not only by what SEWA has accomplished in its 20 years of existence, but also by the magnitude of what it takes on. Based in Ahmedabad, the largest city of India's Western state of Gujarat, and working under a name which translates as "service", SEWA successfully integrates a complex myriad of lives, occupations and issues into one union' (Rose, 1992: 16).

She also writes that:

'Now as editor of a US-based journal for women on the economy, I am a happy (but not surprised) witness to the value of SEWA's model in communities and countries at all stages of development – women from Africa, the US, Thailand, Mexico, Poland and others – all places where the rapidly changing economy has left women with a vested interest in developing new and equitable solutions' (p.10-11).



The obvious important issue is the question of whether the SEWA model is replicable elsewhere. SEWA's leaders believe it is, not in terms of its specific features, historical development and operational environment, but in terms of its basic philosophy and principles. As shown above, its value is already becoming apparent in countries with diverse socio-economic characteristics. SEWA's leaders realise that there is no simple formula for replicating the model. However, what they believe is replicable is that 'people anywhere can organise, plan, pressure, and act together' (Rose, 1992: 270).

It is true that SEWA's origins lie in charismatic leadership. But it is also probably true that people with leadership qualities, though not as charismatic as SEWA's founder, exist in all poor countries. The key issue appears to be the extent to which aid agencies can support potential leaders to develop structures for accountability of resources and for ensuring that the poor are brought into the mainstream. Again, while it is true that the State government of Gujarat, although not pro-active, has been relatively receptive and tolerant to SEWA's suggestions and initiatives, this has only come under tactful lobbying and the pressure generated by the power of the women's union. Thus, unionising, which, as the SEWA case has shown, need not follow the conventional models, can become a powerful tool through which the poor can influence policy in the direction of their realities.

It is also true to say that the socio-economic conditions that exist in India have been important to the development of SEWA. In Gujarat, there are traditions of world-famous craft production non-existent in many poor communities. Owing to the pressures generated by SEWA, the informal economic sector, which is relatively large, is recognised and supported. This is in contrast to many developing countries, particularly in Africa, where the informal sector, though significantly large, is

generally left either unrecognised, or actively persecuted by the government. This means that, compared to many developing countries, India provides a relatively favourable market for goods produced in the informal economic sector, and thus a good basis for organisation for informal sector workers. As discussed in Chapter Two, studies have shown that organisations for the poor are likely to take root if organised around some economic activity.

Nevertheless, while certainly different in nature, many types of informal economic opportunities exist in many developing countries that can form a basis for unionisation. The important feature about SEWA is that it brings together a myriad of informal sector activities into one large union to generate power that can then be harnessed to draw attention to the needs of specific groups. This is a feature that could be utilised in many varied socio-economic as well as political environments.

Some of SEWA's activities are in fact neither directly economic in nature nor unique to Indian tradition. For example, childcare centres, which are in fact more associated with western culture, have been adapted to the traditional way of life. Such centres attain economic importance only because they allow women more time to engage in economic activities. In many developing countries childcare continues to be an important bottleneck for women's involvement in economic activities. In this respect, childcare centres could become an important avenue to establishing viable economic activities. Therefore, looking at community development in an integrated way (as done by SEWA) can provide a way forward for particular communities to come up with a combination of undertakings that are likely to lead to longer lasting organisation of the SEWA model.

The key issue, as demonstrated in this chapter, is that any organisation must learn to listen and appreciate the demands of women, having provided a climate and

opportunity for women to articulate their views in the first place. The facilitating organisation should then commit itself not to a patron-oriented management of the newly organising women, but get the women to enhance their capacities through participatory training and education. Providing a climate that makes women feel free to articulate their concerns has helped to increase confidence and commitment to the organisation. Personal commitment is also created through members' involvement in all SEWA's campaigns and all processes that affect their lives. In addition, part of SEWA's capacity building strategy involves educating its members about the lives of other self-employed women and creating an understanding and acceptance of women from different castes and religions (Polzer, 1998: 41).

SEWA women talk of their organisation as their mother, a place of warmth and safety, where women feel welcome, relaxed and free. Part of the reason for this feeling appears to be the fact that much of SEWA's operational process is informal. Bureaucracy is almost non-existent. Any SEWA member regardless of their social standing can approach any member of staff or the executive when the need arises without having to make an appointment. Interactions between staffs and members are very informal, relaxed and cordial, which encourages open communication. This aspect of the organisation has played a key role in attracting more and more poor women, many of whom are illiterate and have low social standing in society.

Personal commitment is also generated by SEWA's emphasis on solidarity and participation. While it is true that some of SEWA's key personnel such as the organisers are paid, it appears that pay is not the sole motivation for the high degrees of personal commitment and dedication observed. Rose (1992) observes that some workers in fact complained about salary levels but that SEWA's reputation for being an interesting place to work, as well as SEWA's patience in waiting for the right

individuals to take up certain jobs, have helped to build up a strong team of professional and non-professional managers. During disasters the personal commitment of SEWA workers is demonstrated not only in terms of long hours spent in relief work but also financial contributions. Every SEWA worker contributes at least a day's wage to the relief efforts.

Training and education programmes enable SEWA's members to build up capacities and become confident to make decisions in everyday life. SEWA has strengthened its education and training programme by linking itself to locally based technical support organisations with various kinds of expertise. Such organisations provide technical training to SEWA members when demand arises. In addition, SEWA has developed its own structures that take on training and education functions. As Rose (1992: 274) observed:

'Training is an integral part of organising women, formalising their skills, and involving them in shaping their occupations, incomes, and social policies. SEWA conducts standardised training for a broad section of women, and also specific training programmes for specialised skills.'

One indication of SEWA's success at capacity building is the mushrooming of semi-autonomous, production-based organisations such as the Kutch Craft Association and the Banascraft Association. Its success also results from linkages with other locally based organisations with different expertise. During the earthquake relief programme, SEWA continued to draw on such linkages to address some of the training and education needs of its members. For example, the Mahila Housing Trust provided training in housing re-construction, the SEWA Academy provided training for trainers and the Disaster Mitigation Institute was called upon to provide inputs in methods of village micro-planning as well as in training materials design.

The SEWA model brings into focus how, through this process, women can take centre stage in both development and relief, in contrast to their traditional positions of neglect and disadvantage. In addition, the model also appears to offer possibilities for re-structuring gender relations within communities so that both men and women become partners in meeting personal and collective needs both in normal times and in times of disaster. Rose (1992: 271-273) writes:

‘SEWA’s work at changing women’s work and living conditions owes to its grassroots, Indian soil origin, and women’s ability to translate their values into working systems. Indian traditions are deeply imbedded in women, and SEWA starts from where women are: from their strengths, their needs, and their weaknesses... SEWA women... resist the process of change that marginalizes and downgrades the people who are part of the traditional system... (At SEWA) a woman learns to stand up, say her name out loud, address a group, and recognise her strength, both individually and collectively as a group’.

Perhaps because it draws its membership from among women who see themselves as having a common base in terms of their socio-economic needs and status, SEWA also helps to forge a strong social cohesion among women who come from diverse backgrounds. One notable example is the way in which SEWA manages to get the majority Hindu women to work in partnership with their Muslim minority counterparts. In the various villages I visited the people I interviewed claimed that there was no discrimination between the two religious sects. I came across at least one Muslim organiser who verified this claim. Rose (1992), who spent a year and a half working with SEWA, seems to have made a similar observation when she states that:

'The spirit and diversity of SEWA would presently be hard to come by anywhere else, though this is what its members are working on promoting across India. Tribal Hindu, Harijan, migrant, and Muslim women; tattooed Vaghari women, women in purdah; sinewed (sic) muscular smiths; sun-darkened cart-pullers and agricultural labourers; young nimble girl bidi rollers with their mothers and grandmothers, progressively more thin and bent from years of sitting over their rolling work; street-wise and bawdy vendors alongside of women emerging from home-bound communities; all in different dress; speaking different languages and dialects; practicing different trades – all are coming together to generate strength. It is quite an amazing convergence to witness' (p.20).

Indeed other examples from Rose's account show that SEWA has in fact played a key role not only in mediating a number of Hindu-Moslem conflicts, but also in actively fighting against the discrimination and promoting the legal rights of Muslim women in government policy and other social processes.

In so far as much of SEWA's action during disasters comprises the expansion of existing development programmes, this case study contributes towards existing efforts to understand the degree of convergence that exists between relief and development in general at the practical level. From a participation point of view, the linkages between development and relief appear to be even closer than some might suggest. Participation, already well instituted in ongoing programmes, only got strengthened during the disaster as more and more affected people came forward to join the existing structures.

Given that many agencies that implement disaster relief programmes are also involved in development, the message coming out of this study, and indeed from

many other research findings, is that they need to re-think their traditional implementation strategies. Perhaps less effort should be made at direct implementation but more effort should be geared instead towards supporting organisations that can demonstrate intimate links with target communities. Indeed, there may well be a need for aid agencies to support the very development of such organisations. If there are no guarantees that specific organisations will foster the participation and well-being of intended populations, more efforts should be designed to identifying processes that can ensure such guarantees, other than to decide unilaterally that the solution therefore lies outside the affected communities. As research continues to demonstrate, direct implementation by aid agencies no longer holds much promise to addressing the problem of limited levels of participation in developing countries, be it in development or disaster relief.

However, this does not suggest that participation cannot take place in disasters where there are no established organisations of the SEWA type. As I have shown in the cases of both Malawi and Sudan, even if the populations were displaced, the social structure remained relatively intact. Aid agencies must therefore pay serious attention to ways in which they can incorporate existing social organisation in their programming. In addition, depending on the nature of the disaster, the case of SEWA has demonstrated that not only is it possible to carry out education and training, i.e. capacity building, during relief programmes, but disaster can in fact also provide an opportunity for imparting new forms of technical knowledge as well as new opportunities for community organisation and solidarity. As Polzer observes:

‘Ironically, crises... serve to strengthen SEWA as an organisation. Organisers, leaders and members are brought together in solidarity, working tirelessly day and night to help their sisters. Through the constant interaction

of planning and action as well as through sharing the emotional strain of witnessing such great suffering, deep personal ties are created within SEWA. Participating in the relief work was a major learning experience for many of the younger organisers from Ahmedabad, who were exposed to SEWA's rural operations for the first time. Communication channels are developed, and procedures, such as carrying out surveys or creating an action plan under time pressure, are practiced... Connections to other organisations are also solidified... The intense correspondence with individual government officials concerning relief co-ordination, compensation, etc. can lead to useful contacts for future work' (Polzer, 1998: 41-42).

It is evident, then, that despite the historical specificity of some of the processes that led to the creation of SEWA, there are many aspects in the organisation's evolution that can offer valuable lessons in establishing an organisation that responds directly to the needs of poor people in general, and poor women in particular. The same principles discussed above could be used as a framework within which to support potential leaders in establishing new organisations or in streamlining existing organisations to make them fora for providing a voice for the poor and according them with an opportunity to influence the direction of their lives within the constraints and opportunities offered in their community, region and nation and beyond.



## **Chapter Seven. Comparison and Evaluation.**

### **Introduction**

In the foregoing three chapters, I have presented three case studies of participation of the affected population in disaster relief programmes. The contexts for these three studies are different, yet there are also many similarities with regard to the general features of disaster relief. In this chapter, I attempt to draw out comparisons and evaluate these case studies in terms of their contribution to the understanding of the issue of participation.

Within the field of disaster relief and humanitarian aid, a primary distinction is made between complex emergencies and natural disasters. Complex emergencies are usually considered to be those that involve internal political and usually military conflict. Such conflicts may lead to displacement of populations internally or externally or may result in famine, as people are not able to carry out usual livelihood activities. Natural disasters are those generally resulting from the forces of nature such as cyclones, floods, earthquakes, drought etc. Natural disasters can be divided roughly into quick onset, like an earthquake and slow onset, like drought.

The distinction between complex and natural disasters is useful because factors that affect issues of access, the distribution of relief materials and participation may sometimes crucially depend on the extent to which political factors impinge on the relief process. The case of famine in south Sudan (Chapter Four) is an example of a complex disaster or, as is more commonly known, complex emergency while the cases of floods in Malawi (Chapter Five) and earthquake in Gujarat, India (Chapter Six) are examples of natural disasters, both of which are quick on-set.

The south Sudan relief programme, typical of complex emergencies, was dominated by big international NGOs as well as UN agencies. In addition, it was managed under the UN negotiated access programme of Operation Lifeline Sudan containing agreements and ground rules for agencies that accepted to work under the programme. International NGOs played an almost exclusive leading role in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the relief process. This situation was somewhat similar to the Malawi flood relief programme, where the World Food Programme, with inputs from the government and NGOs, dominated the relief process. By contrast, a locally based women's trade union, (SEWA) using community-based structures, and with resources from the government and international and local aid agencies, dominated the earthquake relief process in the state of Gujarat, India.

In India, SEWA had become involved in poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihood activities, collaborating with, as well as lobbying, government to change policies in favour of poor women. For the four years preceding the time of the study, SEWA had become involved in disaster relief as various disasters began to affect its members. The situation in south Sudan was more varied than in India. There, some agencies like Oxfam and SCF had a long history of implementing both development and relief programmes while others went in specifically in response to the 1998 famine relief. In the absence of a legitimate government there were equally varied attitudes among agencies towards the local 'de facto' authorities. The variations in attitude towards the local authorities inevitably affected issues of access, security and participation. In Malawi, the NGOs and government agencies had been involved with development issues at community level but there was an apparent lack of experience with disaster relief. A comparison and evaluation of the three cases helps to shed

more light on not only the role of participation but also factors that facilitated the process.

### **The role of participation in assessment and identification of 'beneficiaries'.**

In general, assessing the extent of damage and particularly identifying the people who need to be assisted appear to be the most problematic stages of disaster relief. At one level, this difficulty is tied to the need for aid agencies to limit beneficiary numbers in line with resources at their disposal. At another, a feeling of mistrust between local authorities and aid agencies compounds the problem. In natural disasters, like in the case of Malawi, aid agencies are usually worried about inflated numbers of people in need, whether this is related to a lack of capacity, local politics, or corruption. In complex emergencies, as in the case of south Sudan, the concern may be with how to ensure that the conflict is not fuelled through relief aid reaching combatants. At a sociological and anthropological level, assessment of need may be hampered by the inability of aid agencies accurately to understand vulnerability in relation to the totality of social processes within a given community, resulting in narrowly conceived definitions of beneficiaries. Difficulties in assessing damage and identifying people in need of assistance are a serious setback to any relief effort because they are directly linked to efficiency and effectiveness issues. Unless beneficiaries have been accurately identified, distribution of relief material cannot be appropriate.

One of the hypotheses underlying this thesis is that a relief programme that involves a high degree of the affected population within its management framework is more likely to experience minimal problems with understanding vulnerability and,

consequently, with determining who needs to be assisted. This hypothesis appears to be supported in a comparison of how beneficiaries were identified in the three case studies.

In Malawi, where there was almost no participation of affected people at the grassroots in the planning and implementation of the relief programme, identifying people in need of assistance was most problematic. That the identification process was complicated was clear from the fact that the process itself involved at least three stages separated by considerable time-gaps.

The first phase of the identification took place two days following the floods. This stage consisted of registration, by the office of the District Commissioner, of flood victims who had fled for refuge in various centres such as school blocks, church buildings and community centres. This was the most undisputed part of the identification exercise as it was basically through self-presentation. However, this stage did not present the opportunity for comprehensive determination of affected numbers for several reasons. To begin with, this identification procedure did not take into account many who had taken refuge in friends' or relatives' accommodation. Secondly, it failed to capture those who did not evacuate their houses because they were still standing but who were, nevertheless, in need of assistance because they had lost most of their food stocks in the floods. In addition, there were some whose houses were not damaged by the floods but whose field crops were washed away. So even though preliminary food distribution began almost immediately, the distribution was extremely limited in coverage. Furthermore, the non-food requirements of most of the flood victims were unmet at this stage, for example, health and sanitation provisions as well as household utensils.

In the second stage of the identification process, carried out within three weeks of the floods, the government attempted to come up with a more comprehensive and extensive plan. Through the office of the District Commissioner and with help from the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture, government agents used known data on family size and areas covered by the floods to assess the extent of damage and the number of people in need of relief assistance. This assessment also included numbers of Mozambicans who had displaced into Malawi from across the border. The government's assessment defined as affected all households who had lost either a home or crops in the field. The third and final stage, coming approximately two months after the floods, emanated from the international community's dissatisfaction with the government's assessment and culminated in defining as needing assistance only those whose houses had collapsed. This narrow definition showed a limited understanding of vulnerability by the international community.

Evidently missing in the Malawi case was any attempt to consult with local structures of power and representation such as traditional leaders, grassroots development committees (e.g. school committees, health committees, water committees etc), all of which have various knowledge about people in their communities as well as knowledge regarding poverty and social equity. Furthermore, these community-based structures have various capabilities for community mobilisation that would have proved useful in determining the extent of need.

One principal problem in the Malawi case was the lack of agreement on vulnerable individuals. International donors defined it in terms of loss of dwellings. Government and communities defined it in terms of loss of both dwelling units and crops still growing in the field. The latter view took into account the fact that the harvest of

crops was just weeks away when the floods came. Food security household surveys had shown that the majority of rural households run out of food several months before the next harvest. This finding had led to numerous studies into the survival or coping strategies of the poor that enable them to make it to the next harvest when food ran out. In view of this knowledge, donor insistence on assisting only those who lost dwelling units, and assuming that those whose dwellings were still intact had food, did not correspond to reality. It is possible that this view could have resulted from a lack of understanding but it appeared strongly that the main reason was the need to bring down numbers to match the amount of resources the donors were prepared to commit to the relief effort. This view seemed to be supported by the fact that donors had to slash the number of beneficiaries identified through an inter-agency verification exercise, which they (the donors) had themselves commissioned. It seems important therefore for donors and aid agencies to provide information regarding the amount of resources at their disposal to other parties in the relief process, including local authorities and recipients. Doing this might enable communities to come up with alternative ideas on how to distribute scarce resources. Knowledge of the quantity of material supplies might also help to involve communities in monitoring the effectiveness of the distribution process.

The problem of the understanding of vulnerability also surfaced in the south Sudan case. To begin with, aid agencies failed to recognise the high degree of egalitarianism that already existed in *Dinka* society. Sharing of resources with vulnerable individuals, instituted within an intricate network of kinship relations, guarded against any severe inequalities within the society. The local definition of vulnerability itself did not correspond to conventional views. The result was that food received from aid agencies underwent a redistribution process to reflect local

views of vulnerability and fairness. Many agencies were uncomfortable with this system. It put them in no position to know just how fair and egalitarian the system was in order to be assured that the most vulnerable would be reached. Thus, one agency withheld a proportion of the total amount of materials to be distributed. After the first distribution through the local structure, agency staff carried out secondary distributions based on their own views and assessment of vulnerability. It was clear therefore that in using local social systems for participation, agencies must realise that they may lose a good measure of control over parts of the relief process. This means that aid agencies must develop trust in the local social systems they are dealing with. Acquiring this trust implies forging ever-closer links with communities informally as well as engaging in formal efforts geared at understanding social processes. For example, in south Sudan, the south Sudan Vulnerability Study, carried out by an anthropologist over a twelve-month period under the auspices of the Save the Children Fund, provided a wealth of knowledge on *Dinka* concepts of vulnerability and fairness. But the process of developing trust also requires that instead of complaining about the unreliability of local structures, aid agencies should invest in training and enhancing the organisational capacities of local people in ways acceptable to them.

In addition, there are other possibilities for gaining a considerable amount of knowledge for programme implementation. In south Sudan, one such tool was the formation of the SRRA-OLS Joint Targeting and Vulnerabilities Task Force. Although the task force offered only a partial picture of people in need of assistance, it was nevertheless instrumental in easing some of the problems regarding the targeting of assistance.

In contrast to south Sudan and Malawi, there were no serious problems in determining or registering people in need of assistance in the Indian earthquake disaster in districts in which SEWA was active. The issue of vulnerability almost did not arise, perhaps because women who join SEWA are those that already consider themselves vulnerable. Thus, at the time of the disaster, it was only a question of the vulnerable themselves identifying those that were seriously affected by the earthquake. Whereas the process of identifying people in need of assistance consisted of three stages and extended over a period of two months in Malawi, and was even more complicated in south Sudan, the identification process in India had only one stage that began one day following the earthquake and extended over a period of only one week. In addition, a fully-fledged operating theatre was set up in one of the affected areas on the day of the earthquake itself to cater for the health needs of the affected. Because the participation structure networked across the affected region, it was possible to mobilise human resources to conduct a comprehensive and extensive assessment of the extent of need and identify 'beneficiaries' swiftly.

### **Participation and Distribution.**

Contrary to common practice of judging the success of a relief programme in terms of the number of people directly receiving relief materials, many evaluations of relief aid point to the importance of timely delivery as well as the appropriateness of the various activities initiated. It is obvious that unless relief materials can be delivered at the time they are required most, many lives may be lost and livelihoods destroyed. A similar importance is attached to ensuring that activities initiated and materials provided match the needs of the target population. Examining the three case studies presented, it is possible to see the ways in which participation (or lack of it) affected



issues of coverage, timeliness and appropriateness.

The relationship between participation and capacity building comes out clearly in the Indian case when compared to the other two cases. This case reveals how, through training, education and daily involvement in planning and making decisions on issues that affect their lives, women in Gujarat have become capable of taking initiatives on their own to address common problems or influence village decision-making processes. Women like Puriben, who are illiterate, are able to organise other women to form a collective force to challenge discriminatory practices in village power structures as well as exert pressure on government authorities for the provision of essential services. In the earthquake disaster of 2001, I have shown that women were able to start on their own activities that were not initiated by government or even SEWA headquarters. Examples of such activities included the *jeevanshala*, a school managed on a voluntary basis designed to teach illiterate women, and the debris-clearing activity designed to retrieve reusable materials from the rubble of fallen buildings.

An additional indication of the decision-making capacities acquired by women was the frequency with which meetings took place in order to discuss courses of action throughout the relief process. Village meetings, well attended by women, were held as frequently as needed to come up with a consensus of what actions needed to be taken to address specific issues, such as the initiatives cited above. Other meetings were held to discuss the new role of the childcare centres during the disaster period as well as the contribution to be made to the housing reconstruction plan by all beneficiaries and ways in which such contributions could form a community fund to be used to address other community needs. Women also formed part and parcel of *sandesh yatras*, meetings designed to orient villagers to scientific and safe building

standards, as well as *gram sabhas*, meetings comprising all the adult members of the community at which a comprehensive implementation plan was discussed, debated and formulated. That women were active participants in these meetings was clear from their conduct when I conducted my own village meetings in several areas as part of the methodology of the study. In all the meetings I conducted, men were present but it was mostly women who spoke because they were the ones who had been directly involved in all the decisions regarding the relief process. Men had largely taken a complementary role, supporting women with the transportation of materials and taking on the more strenuous activities such as construction.

Some examples from the south Sudan and Malawi case studies reveal the existence of capacities and potential for similar initiatives, albeit less organised than examples drawn from the Indian case study. In south Sudan, there were cases of volunteers working for several aid agencies in their feeding centres. Only the level of suffering observed and a sense of responsibility to the close-knit community of which they were a part motivated such volunteers. Three examples stood out: A Sudanese woman in Rumbek town who, on her own initiative, mobilised community support and local resources to open a feeding centre to respond to the problem of an increasing number of under-five deaths due to acute malnutrition; a community in Twic that, based on their own assessment of need, continued with a feeding centre programme using local personnel and resources long after Christian Aid had closed it down; In Mapel community members mobilised to turn into a school, a camp that had been originally built as part of a programme of treating traumatised unaccompanied minors. Rather than being seen as merely isolated instances (it is quite probable that there were other examples of this nature which I did not come

across) these incidences should be seen as an indication of the potential for a higher degree of local organisation, given support in terms of training and education.

With regard to the example of the Sudanese woman who opened her own feeding centre, I noted that she was later incorporated into Oxfam's feeding programmes. One could argue that in so doing the potential for participation was curtailed. Perhaps a way of promoting wider participation would have been to support this woman to mobilise others from within the community and then provide them with technical as well as material support. This would have ensured that when Oxfam discontinued the programme, there was already an organised group of women who had the necessary knowledge to run feeding centres and transfer the skills to others. As it happened, the Sudanese woman was probably merely turned into an employee of Oxfam, and thus had to behave, not in accordance with community values only, but also with those of Oxfam.

Meetings were also a feature of the south Sudan relief programme. Aid agencies tried hard to include local community representatives as well as representatives of the local authority in some of the meetings that took place in the affected areas. Many agencies conducted dialogue meetings with community leaders of target groups such as livestock owners, women's groups, and church groups. The one-day vulnerability workshops constituted one of the major fora through which community leaders interfaced with agency staff as well as members of the local authority (SRRA).

However, there are important differences between the meetings in the south Sudan and Indian cases. Firstly, many of the south Sudan meetings only accorded the opportunity to articulate needs and influence decisions to community leaders, principally the executive chiefs and *gol* leaders, clan heads who were assumed to

have extensive knowledge of a given kinship group and thus able accurately to represent its interests. While this was generally true, the chiefs and *gol* leaders, because they looked only into the interests of the general community, sometimes could not effectively represent the specific needs of women and other groups. In practice, I noted that the executive chiefs and *gol* leaders played a key role mainly in the distribution process of the general ration and other items. A similar dominant role was missing in other programmes such as therapeutic feeding and health, in which pre-determined agency criteria dictated implementation. That the representative framework was too general and thus quite limited to address some specific needs was evident from two examples: one was that one of the most successful programmes from the point of view of both programme reviews and agency staff was the livestock support programme which involved the direct participation of livestock owners. The other was the fact that the involvement of women (decided by men) initially caused problems for women in their family relationships, requiring further meetings to address. In addition, it is important to reiterate what one agency felt to be the key lessons learnt as regards the role of *gol* leaders in the relief process. Firstly, many of them were illiterate and unable to fill in the record cards, limiting their involvement in monitoring activities. Secondly, households in remote villages did not always have their *gol* leaders present and, coupled with the fact that they were unable to contribute individuals to assist in portering materials, tended to receive less than others. *Gol* leaders tended to distribute on an equal basis and there was no way of knowing if the needs of all needy persons had been equally met. These observations led the agency to plan the modification of the distribution process through identification of literate persons from each *gol* to work with the *gol* leaders, and through employing community agents partly in a monitoring and training role.

This latter structure compares well with the case of SEWA in India where education and training, coupled with forging close working relationships between literate and illiterate individuals, have enabled even illiterate women, exemplified by the case of Puriben, to become leaders in planning and implementation of new initiatives.

Clearly, much as representative participation offers many opportunities in its feasibility and practicality, it is important not to make the representation too general. From the evidence above, more promise lies in what can be termed *stratified representation* based on groups likely to have similar needs. One of the advantages offered by the SEWA model is that its members already belong to different activities and are thus familiar with the needs of a wide range of activity groups. Where feasible, whole village meetings are also necessary where all members can have an opportunity to contribute to unfolding decisions. Even though there was some degree of population movement in south Sudan, it was not a case of a floating population and much of the social structure was still intact. This was in fact the reason why the *gol* leaders were relevant at all.

There is another important difference between meetings in India and in south Sudan. In India SEWA members held meetings to discuss plans and make decisions they would themselves implement. In south Sudan, agencies held meetings principally as an information-gathering tool designed to fill certain knowledge gaps and, in some cases, to vindicate pre-decided implementation plans. This was particularly true since some of the main planning meetings took place at their field offices in Kenya without any contributions from the communities. Therefore, the south Sudan framework thwarted, rather than promoted, local organisation and participation. Thus, even after ten years of Operation Lifeline Sudan, and despite signs of tremendous potential,

there were still no organised community responses to the 1998 emergency programme.

The situation in Malawi was even worse than that in south Sudan. There, the vehicle for the participation of affected communities was limited to the presence of the Traditional Authority (TA) at the interagency meetings under the chairmanship of the District Commissioner. Held daily, these meetings in essence only focused on discussing logistics since the real planning had already been done by headquarter-WFP, agency and government staff at monthly meetings held in the major city of Blantyre. Therefore, even if the TA was able to attend the district-level meetings regularly, he was already made redundant by the fact that he could only influence logistics, not the structural aspects of the relief process. In practice, the TA could neither attend the meetings regularly due to transportation problems, nor represent the communities fully for reasons similar to those discussed above with regard to *gol* leaders in south Sudan. In one example, in order to be seen to be adopting egalitarian principles, one traditional leader refused to allow the targeted distribution of relief materials in his area. The community at large may not have supported such a unilateral decision. In addition, political by-elections in some areas had politicised relief to some degree and the TAs, being an extension of government administration, were likely to toe the government line.

Several committees for addressing development issues at the grassroots level already existed in the affected areas including, for example, the Village Action Committees and the Area Action Committees, which are part of the local government machinery, as well as various committees for specific areas such as health, water and schools. Not much effort was made to encourage the participation of these committees. For

example, an increase in sanitation and water-related diseases immediately following the floods was partly attributable to a lack of sanitary and hygiene facilities and education, some of which could have been provided by the community members themselves. With the provision of tools, it was possible for affected people to dig their own pit latrines or supplement those provided by aid agencies, which were frequently found to be inadequate. Similarly, locally based primary health care personnel could have been mobilised to provide health education. As in the case of south Sudan, there were indications that the potential for an organised community response existed. As I have noted before, community members carried out much of the rescue operation using locally available resources such as canoes, bicycles and ox carts. In addition, there was one example of traditional leadership facilitating relief activities by lobbying with local canoe operators to provide free rides for any trip connected with looking for work or food to meet relief needs.

It was clear from the way the relief programme was run in Malawi that aid agencies, government and WFP treated flood-affected people as passive objects rather than active participants in the relief process. Officials were obsessed with providing for the needs of the affected people, evidenced by a large number of paid staff in every aspect of programme implementation as opposed to delegating some of the activities to the affected people themselves, who had already shown willingness and ability to contribute to the alleviation of their own suffering. As a result, opportunities for building capacities for future response to disaster were lost.

In south Sudan the majority of aid agencies used the employment of local staffs as another attempt to increase the participation of affected communities. For example, Oxfam employed local supervisors for its OLS Livestock programme while Merlin

employed up to 70 women for its therapeutic feeding programme. This method for increasing participation had some strengths but also some weakness.

In the specific case of Merlin, I have mentioned some of the weaknesses of using local staffs in programme implementation in Chapter Four. These included, among others, the admission into feeding programmes by local staffs of children who did not meet the agency's admission criteria. The agency claimed that this practice reflected favouritism born of the social pressures and obligations these staffs were under. However, it could have also resulted from the staffs' own assessment of vulnerability which was different from the agency's. Another problem was that local health workers, apparently due to lack of proper training, tended to dispense unnecessarily large amounts of medicines. It is probable that other agencies had similar experiences that did not come to my notice during the short period of study.

An inherent disadvantage with the employment of local staffs as a strategy for increasing participation is that, not properly done, its potential for a broad-based self-driven organisation may be limited. To begin with, some agencies employ local staffs as a matter of necessity rather than a strategy for allowing more participation by the affected people. While not wrong in itself, it is unlikely that such a framework can result in an aid agency using such local staff as a tool for forging closer links with beneficiary communities. Should such links occur, they are likely to be by default rather than by design and thus, unlikely to be well organised. Secondly, the employed individuals must behave according to the dictates of their agency superiors who are already motivated differently. Thirdly, participating local staffs acquire training as individuals, and because they are managed rather than becoming managers, there is no lasting organisational framework once the agency has



discontinued the programme. Fourthly, because they are employed in specific programmes, local individuals acquire only narrowly defined technical skills. Should another disaster occur, there is no mechanism through which the various technical competences can be organised in a unified response.

The disadvantages of employing local staffs are, of course, no justification for employing none at all. The absence of local staffs can be a serious setback to programme implementation. I have noted in the south Sudan case the example of a medical agency that imported expatriate staff numbering eighty, resulting in chaotic logistical arrangements. In addition, it is sometimes true that a good number of such staffs are usually interns out to gain a bit of practical experience for the purposes of inflating their Curriculum Vitae (CV). As noted in Chapter Four, the OLS programme review showed that the average contract for expatriate staffs in south Sudan was only three months. This situation can offer neither the continuity in agency knowledge nor real commitment and opportunity for agency staffs to strengthen community structures. Apthorpe (no date) argues that 'the merits of finding and using local expertise for social learning, where institutional barriers to this can be surmounted, are likely to outweigh its limits considerably' (p.4). He notes, however, that this balance of merits and limits is likely to vary from case to case. In addition, we have already noted that participation serves different purposes. In some emergency situations broad-based participation may not be feasible in the short run. In such cases, the involvement of local staff could be one of the best available alternative forms of participation by the affected communities. Below, I discuss some of the merits of using local staffs.

To begin with, in the case of south Sudan, local staffs acted as sources of immediate knowledge about some general local conditions that needed to be taken into account in programme planning. For this reason, almost all agencies employed local staffs and expertise in various numbers. As reported in the case of Merlin, their clinic and health surveillance activities were direct responses to community demand. Local staffs also bridged the language gap between agency staffs and community leaders. In addition, local staffs were crucial for the very implementation of certain programmes because of the sheer amounts of labour that were needed to run them. Merlin, for example, conceded that labour requirements were so great that they would not have been able to run the programme without extensive local staff recruitment. The aid agency also claimed that extensive employment of local staffs helped to promote the acceptance of the programme in the community.

In addition to these examples, the south Sudan case also showed that involvement of local people in the relief process could help to inspire a sense of ownership and the security of relief materials. For example, putting security issues in the hands of local civil administration and recipient communities solved the problem of looting of relief materials from the storage point as well as from women on their way from a distribution point. Similarly in India, beneficiaries played a key role in procurement and storage of materials. Participation in these activities did not only help to create a sense of ownership of materials but it saved the agencies money in terms of extra resources that would have been deployed to ensure security. For example, in Malawi the army was used to provide security for both storage and distribution, costing the government considerable amounts of money in transportation and allowances for soldiers.

## **Participation and appropriateness of the relief process.**

Another argument that has been used in favour of increased levels of participation is that it helps to improve the effectiveness of relief by making it more appropriate to the recipients. Evaluations and reviews of relief programmes are full of instances in which inappropriate materials were supplied to affected populations and in some cases where entire activities were ill conceived. What evidence from the three case studies I have presented supports this argument?

In south Sudan, there were in fact several examples of mismatches between needs and provisions made to meet them. One such example was the way in which one aid agency attempted to treat the psychological trauma suffered by children whose parents had either been killed in the war or simply went missing. It should be mentioned that there is a general difficulty and sometimes neglect on the part of aid agencies to address the trauma, whether of adults or children, that results from experiencing the terrible events of disasters. In many cases such efforts have centred on either the construction of centres where foreign 'experts' conduct various forms of Western psychotherapy. Such therapy is also done in refugee camps. However, it is generally true that children's (of the adolescent age) psycho-social, as well as educational needs have tended to be neglected during disaster relief as agencies get pre-occupied with administering therapeutic rations to under-fives, distributing supplementary and general food rations, and mounting health, sanitation, tools and seeds distribution, and livestock programmes.

In the south Sudan case, the Save the Children Fund (UK) constructed a camp where unaccompanied minors were taken for care and some form of counselling until aid workers had managed to trace the children's parents or other guardians. The camps

appeared to have an initial appeal but subsequently lost support as community members who felt that putting children in such camps contravened their child rearing customs secretly whisked children away by night. The camp had to close and, as mentioned above, be turned into a school at the community members' own initiative.

South Sudanese local staffs told me that because of the customarily strong and extended kinship ties that exist in south Sudanese communities it is anathema to consider any child as having no parents. Because the adult relations of the child hold the same responsibility for care as the child's dead parents, the concept of an orphan is non-existent. Putting a child in somebody else's care is thus equal to abdicating one's duty and responsibility and therefore regarded as something shameful and abhorrent. Such sentiments also exist in the Indian case and yet the childcare centres there experienced a high degree of success. What factors might have accounted for this difference?

The answer seems to lie in the fact that whereas in the south Sudan case childcare camps were an exotic import introduced during the emergency itself, albeit in consultation with community members, the Indian childcare centres had been established as part of an integrated approach to the process of building livelihoods to allow mothers more time for economic activities. The kind of resistance faced by the south Sudan camps had long been dealt with in a gradual process of education, social mobilisation, trust winning and experience. Indian women had, as in the case of south Sudan, initially resisted the idea of committing children to the care of someone else outside the family circle, expressing sentiments such as the following (quoted in Parikh, 1996: 14):

*'It is good to keep the child with the mother only! How can we trust our child in*

*anybody's hand?'*

*'Children are god's (sic) gift. Who knows what will they feed or teach in Balwadi?'*

*'Ben, we have been toiling in mud since many generations. Our children get used to hardships'.*

Such sentiments and fears had resulted in women either leaving children at home unattended, leaving them with another sibling or a neighbour, or taking the children with them to play in the hazardous dust and desert heat.

Educational and social mobilisation campaigns centring on the dangers of leaving children unattended at home or exposed to salty dust and desert heat, and the economic benefits to be had from leaving children in a childcare centre slowly yielded fruit and the first centre was established with six to seven children whose mothers would sneak around to make spot checks on how their children were being treated. Gradually the women's trust was won. Coupled with experiences that women who had put their children in the childcare centres were becoming economically well off as a result of having more quality time to spend on their economic activities, more women began to send their children in.

By the year 2000 there were some 117 centres in four districts with a total of 5750 children and 289 childcare workers (SEWA, 2000). It is important to note that the opening up of new childcare centres has long become demand-based. Poor women themselves mobilise and submit requests to SEWA for the establishment of new childcare centres in their villages when they feel that they are ready to run them. SEWA provides backing in terms of resources, education and training to help the women blend the running of these centres with their own cultural experiences. A

1996 survey to determine the changes that had taken place in the lives and income of the salt workers as a result of the establishment of the childcare centres reported that 'these centres have become quite favourite (sic) both among parents and children. They love to play there' (Parikh, 1996: 15).

Clearly, one lesson for aid agencies working in both development and relief is the need for an integrated approach to programme implementation. Such an approach can dissolve resistances to certain activities through participation and the experiences of the programme beneficiaries. Through a process of education and negotiation, aid agencies can assist some members of the community to take a lead and become catalysts of new initiatives. It is easier for other members of the community to accept new initiatives based on the experiences and advocacy of some of their own.

In addition, the SEWA example also offers some lessons even for agencies working in emergencies that want to establish certain projects not previously established as part of their development work. Firstly, the examples point to the need to establish through participation local views about the project to be initiated and the bases for such views. This would enable agency staffs to adopt implementation strategies that facilitate adoption. In the south Sudan case, for example, rather than presenting them as primarily centres for trauma treatment, one way of facilitating acceptance might have been to clarify with concerned communities that the camps were merely temporary and principally a tool for re-unification between children and their guardians. In addition, community members, rather than foreign experts, should have been used extensively as child carers. Because of the extended kin ties, this would have made the community members more comfortable as they would have, in principle, been looking after their own children. Since later action by the community demonstrated that they had no misgivings about sending children to the camp when it

was turned into a school, with community involvement, the camps could have been initially established as such. In time the agency would have been able to demonstrate the economic benefits of the camp as a reduced childcare workload would have allowed parents more time for supplementary survival strategies to the relief assistance.

The roots of the problems faced in south Sudan lay in the attempt to implement a blueprint programme of childcare and trauma treatment. I have noted, for example, how some agency staffs, writing in independent capacities (e.g. Salama and Collins, 1999), have argued that the popular practice of ignoring adolescent and adult malnutrition did not correspond to reality in certain areas and certain stages of the emergency, where deaths resulting from malnutrition were higher than in children. However, there were no attempts to involve communities to address this problem or to adjust this blueprint approach. By contrast, in the case of SEWA in India, implementation did not follow traditional assumptions of what is likely to happen in emergency situations. Thus, experiences that even adults needed treatment for trauma led to a programme that incorporated both adults and children.

But even if programmes or activities are appropriately conceived, there is also evidence suggesting that participation can be a tool for fine-tuning them. There are many examples of cases in disaster relief where materials provided fail to meet the specific needs of recipients. It is not uncommon, for example, to find relief materials branded 'not to be sold' right on the market. One example in south Sudan was the provision of Kenyan tilling tools (called *Jembes*) to south Sudanese, which, despite being superior to local tools, were never used because of lack of knowledge of their use. The local population was melting down other similar tools in order to make

more appropriate ones. There was also a case in which aid agencies were providing unpopular varieties of seed that were being rejected by the recipients. Had there been a market for them it is possible these items might have found their way there too.

These examples contrast with the implementation of the earthquake disaster relief programme in India where participation ensured that activities were tailored to suit local conditions and way of life at the planning stage. For example, with regard to the housing reconstruction plan, *sandesh yatra* and *gram sabha* meetings gave the affected people the opportunity to plan housing units that were commensurate with culturally acceptable settlement patterns. In addition, they were able to integrate the housing reconstruction plan with natural resource management and livelihood activities. Similarly, in the livelihood security programme, village-level micro-plans formulated with the participation of village *panchayats*, and various committees for water, forestry, watershed, dairy cooperatives, producer groups etc., provided the basis for fine-tuning macro-plans and integrating livelihoods, animal husbandry, water resources, fodder and forestry programmes.

### **Participation and 'exit strategies'.**

In beginning, it is important to recall that relief programmes usually have three phases, namely, the immediate emergency phase, the mid-term relief phase and the rehabilitation phase. The rehabilitation phase partly covers activities sometimes referred to as 'exit strategies'. Simply speaking, it is inappropriate for agencies just abruptly to shut down emergency activities without introducing other activities that will ensure continuity to the time when communities can revert back to their usual livelihood activities. In the foregoing sections, I have discussed how issues of vulnerability, beneficiary identification and the distributional aspects of coverage,



timeliness, and appropriateness, dominate the first two phases. I have provided examples from the three case studies demonstrating the advantages and sometimes the disadvantages of participation in these stages.

The emergency and mid-term stages of the relief programme tend to attract more attention and enthusiasm from both aid agencies and donors. Frequently, disproportionately little attention is paid to the equally important stage of rehabilitation. There may be several reasons why this is the case. It is possible that a reduction or an end to the initial images of acute suffering in the media, coupled with new images and reports of so much aid reaching so many affected people, wane the urge to help in the rehabilitation phase. Another possibility is that its close interface with development activities obscures the urgency of the rehabilitation phase to aid agencies and donors. A third strong possibility is that, since agencies and donors are keen to avoid huge expenditures, they deliberately give a blind eye to rehabilitation activities. Since the images of starving children may have stopped showing, and everyone has seen how caring they are through their swift response to the emergency phase, no one can accuse them of non-action. However, rehabilitation is a crucial aspect of relief that can reduce vulnerability and determine a community's resistance or response to another disaster. In this phase, as in the other two, participation plays a key role.

In Malawi, rehabilitation did not seem to have received serious attention. Attempts to infuse rehabilitation activities into the relief programme appear to have been limited to the distribution of seeds by Action Aid to flood victims. However, unilateral planning and the need to conform to demands from international donors for the verification of beneficiary figures led to too much seed being distributed too late (an unusual departure from the more common *too little too late*). In addition, lack of

engagement between government, aid agencies and traditional leaders resulted in failure to find a viable rehabilitation plan for people permanently living in flood prone areas. As it stood, another flood the following year or the year after would have necessitated a similar relief programme.

Possibilities for using an envisaged food for work programme as a means for rehabilitation were curtailed because the programme had encountered problems in its embryonic phase when it was being planned as part of drought rehabilitation. The study revealed that part of the reason for the problems faced was the lack of participation by communities. Firstly, in planning the implementation of the programme, WFP created a laborious bureaucratic procedure that discouraged possible participants. Additionally, there was a failure to agree beforehand with communities as regards the difference between activities that would qualify for the programme and those that could be regarded as part of on-going self-help programmes. The latter problem resulted in people rejecting the programme when WFP started refusing to give food for certain activities, arguing that such activities fell under traditional self-help community programmes. In general, it was clear that the relief programme did not result in the communities either becoming more organised and prepared for the floods and drought, or developing resistance through enhanced local-level organisation. Given that the affected area was prone to both floods and drought, the need for integrated micro-level planning was paramount.

In the case of south Sudan there was a blurred picture of the rehabilitation programme. This lack of clarity could have been due to the fact that the emergency and mid-term phases of the relief programme were still in process at the time of the study. However, it seemed also to have resulted from a narrow focus by aid agencies

that did not include rehabilitation activities in the planning process. This lack of adequate planning was reflected in a shift of objectives in the later phases of the relief programme from purely relief ones to those that included enhancing livelihoods and promoting and protecting the rights of war-affected civilians. An increased emphasis on the provision of agricultural inputs and a reduction in the provision of food items was one result of this change in objectives. Yet, as observed in Chapter Four, many agencies were facing problems finding suitable exit strategies.

One of the recommendations that came out of the Programme Design Consultancy on OLS (Grunewald et. al, 1998) was that agencies should ensure that priority to food in the short-term does not harm equally important priorities for raising productive potentials. The consultancy team noted that:

‘When logistics are the limiting factor, it is too often the case that the contradicting priorities bring about frustrations at the institutional and personal levels. But the real issue is what has to be preserved and protected during the crisis? Lives or livelihood? The answer is both. A proper mechanism to arbitrate between the two (life-saving food and support to survival means) needs to be put in place, which does not depend solely on WFP requests or priorities. In fact one of the most striking weaknesses of OLS is its propensity to be drawn into complex implementation details and maintain a capacity to keep up with the global picture in a proactive manner’  
(p19).

While it may be possible to save lives without much beneficiary participation, the experiences of the agencies show that beneficiary participation may be almost indispensable in any attempts to save livelihoods. A complex web of socio-cultural relations that criss-cross with environmental conditions constitutes livelihoods. This means that local views are key to any efforts geared at saving livelihoods. This might suggest that *exit strategies* might not pose particularly difficult challenges to CBOs or organisations working through local partners. In the first instance, the knowledge gained during the emergency stays within the community and can be used for recovery initiatives. Secondly, the local organisations remain within the area after aid agencies have left, ensuring programme continuity. Moreover, on-going rehabilitation programmes for these organisations establish a network for participation and social learning and constitute in-built exit strategies. International NGOs, particularly those without any experience in the targeted community, need to make extra efforts to establish an effective participatory framework that incorporates local organisations or representation.

The key role that participation and local organisation can play in rehabilitation was again clear in the case of the relief programme in India. To begin with, because of their experiences in participating actively in previous relief programmes, communities in India were already aware that rehabilitation activities need to be built into the relief programme at the outset, hence, the frequently heard request from the affected people: *'give us work, not relief'*. As a result, we find that rehabilitation activities in the Indian case were introduced much earlier in the relief process in comparison with not only south Sudan and Malawi but many disaster relief situations as well. Examples of these activities, established in response to the direct demands of the affected people, included the craftwork programme, the *gokul gram*-linkage with

ongoing self-employment programme, water regeneration, fodder security, natural resource management campaigns, nutrition, healthcare, and savings and insurance.

The implementation of these programmes demonstrated how participation gave various activities potential for sustainability way beyond the relief period. To mention just a few cases, self-employment programmes would, for example, be sustained through strengthened Village Implementation Committees. The *gokul gram*, a federation of Village Implementation Committees, would attain the status of CBOs with which the government and NGOs would work. Through *gram sabhas*, village committees were formed for the implementation of the natural resource management campaign with the primary objective of transforming the earthquake rehabilitation programme into a development programme.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have examined the strengths and weaknesses of participation (or lack of it) in three different case studies. In essence the three case studies could be seen as having three different forms of participation. In the Malawi case study, there was an absence of any meaningful levels of direct participation or consultation with grassroots structures in the affected communities. On the part of government there was neither the will nor know-how for participation. The government lacked proper organisation for the involvement of affected communities. On the part of the international community, there is strong evidence to suggest that lack of consultation and participation was not merely a matter of technical know-how. It also resulted from the fear that participation was going to lead to views of assistance that would not match the level of resources they were prepared to commit. Consequently, participation was limited to the formal involvement of official local leaders who

were not given the opportunity to participate effectively. This participatory framework was not very effective because such leaders were not part of an active and representative community organisational structure. Their participation was also limited by practical problems such as difficulties in travel to attend planning and coordination meetings. It was also evident that the local leaders had limited influence over the decision-making process. In many cases, they attended meetings only to be told of distribution plans that had already been decided so that they could pass on the message to their respective villages, or to organise people at distribution centres.

In south Sudan, there was an attempted integration of the local decision-making machinery into agency programmes. To a large extent, participation was used to fill knowledge gaps, staff requirements, solve emerging problems and fine-tune specific aspects of implementation. Different agencies used different participation procedures with different degrees of intensity. Participation offered clear advantages, but there were also instances where participation presented causes for discomfort for aid agencies. A major problem for agencies appears to be the extent to which they can trust local systems in ensuring that relief reaches what the agencies consider to be vulnerable individuals. This is particularly true with complex emergencies that provide many possibilities and motivations for misusing or diverting aid. But while some agencies sought the solution to this problem in disengaging with communities and local authorities, others approached it through increased levels of engagement. In general, those that followed the latter alternative faced fewer and less serious problems than those who used the former approach.

In the Indian case, participation was instituted through delegation of control and responsibility to a well-established local organisation that had grass-roots

participatory structures already in place when a disaster occurred. This led to relief needs and beneficiaries being identified and met quickly. Also, it was possible to integrate relief with other livelihood programmes to enhance sustainability. Participation of beneficiaries in planning and implementation also made it possible to tailor activities to local conditions. Ongoing involvement in decision-making processes, together with on-going education and training of village-based people, built local capacities and enhanced the degree of community organisation enabling them, in turn, to participate effectively in issues affecting their lives and livelihoods.

A close look at the three case studies reveals that key to the issue of participation is the extent to which aid agencies can trust local structures and thus be in a position to give up a considerable measure of control of how the resources will be used. Accountability is thus a key issue defining the participation process. On the one hand, agencies have to be sure of the egalitarianism and accountability of local structures. On the other hand, they must themselves be accountable to their donors in a particular fashion that does not necessarily coincide with the accountability procedures and priorities of local structures. On the basis of evidence from all the three case studies it appears that, in so far as tackling these accountability problems is concerned, training, education and capacity building of local community structures must be a key ingredient of the relief process. The rehabilitation phase of emergency programmes could include this training-education component that could be carried over as part of the development process. For some disasters, as shown in the case of India, even the emergency phase provides opportunities for training, education and reorganisation of community structures.

## **Chapter Eight. Conclusion.**

It is important to keep in mind that much of what has been and can be said, and indeed much of what is happening with regard to disaster relief, is taking place in the context of a changing humanitarian landscape. Clearly, modern humanitarianism transcends philanthropy in its traditional sense. As indicated in Chapter Three, not only has the volume and movement of humanitarian assistance increased immensely, but also assistance is increasingly being provided not solely on humanitarian grounds. Politically oriented and other motivations have become increasingly enmeshed in humanitarian assistance.

One of the latest examples, although an extreme case, was the simultaneous dropping of bombs and relief packages by the United States military in Afghanistan in its war on terror following the terrorist attack on New York on September 11 2001. The 'food bombs' were dropped so indiscriminately, prompting one aid worker to assert, during a television interview, that this method of distributing relief was analogous to dropping a bunch of five pound notes on Oxford Street in London from a helicopter and expecting them to benefit the most vulnerable! It may be true that there was a genuine concern to help people who had already been suffering from the effects of drought exaggerated by the war, but there were also some who saw the simultaneous dropping of food and bombs as politically motivated. This example serves to show how combining humanitarian motives with political or other motivations in humanitarian assistance can affect participation. In all respects, the distribution in this example was truly non-participatory. The degree of non-participation or participation is of course likely to vary with different programmes, but it appears certain that participation will necessarily be limited when motives other than



humanitarian find their way into disaster relief.

Relief programmes that include non-humanitarian motives will find it hard to conform to the key aspects of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (ICRC, 1996), which many see as a true representation of the humanitarian spirit. With respect to participation, it is important here to recall some of its tenets. The code states that:

- *The humanitarian imperative comes first;*
- *Aid is given regardless of race, creed or nationality of the recipients without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone;*
- *Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious stand point;*
- *We shall respect culture and custom;*
- *We shall attempt to build response on local capacities;*
- *Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid;*
- *Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs;*
- *We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.*

Being a voluntary code, conformity to it, of course, depends on the willingness of organisations that accept to work within its tenets. However, that this has not necessarily taken place at an acceptable scale is evident in the mushrooming of several other projects and initiatives, reviewed in this thesis, aimed at increasing the

accountability to affected populations of the very organisations that have agreed to work under the code. Paradoxically, it is these same organisations that are going about forming new 'humanitarian umpires'. But unlike umpires in sport who can enforce the rules of the game, 'humanitarian umpires' can only blow the whistle while the play continues on the basis of the players' preferences. But however rough the humanitarian terrain (or because of it) efforts devoted to understanding participation must continue to clear the uncertainties that surround it.

So what issues come out of the three case studies in terms of the uncertainties of participation highlighted at the beginning? The fore-going chapter has already answered many of the key questions asked by making reference to specific examples drawn from the cases. The following discussion provides a summary only and places the findings in the broader context of planning and implementing relief programmes.

In terms of *why participation?* The data analysed in all the three case studies demonstrate the value of participation in making relief programmes more effective.

Effectiveness may be with regard to:

- a) Providing appropriate types of assistance: For example, culturally appropriate tools or projects (south Sudan) and culturally appropriate housing units (Gujarat).
- b) Timeliness: grassroots participation in Gujarat led to a swift response compared to the severe delays in responding to a flood disaster in Malawi. The response in Gujarat was much quicker despite the fact the very quick onset and lack of predictability of an earthquake disaster. By contrast, the slow response in Malawi involved floods whose onset is that as quick and which can also be fairly accurately predicted.

- c) Utilisation of existing humanitarian instincts of as well as the resourcefulness of individuals, communities and societies: All the three case studies demonstrate the willingness of people to use their own material resources, time and energy to help others in times of heightened need.
- d) Provision of assistance in ways that do not create further problems for individuals and communities that receive assistance: participation can prevent potential conflicts in households and in communities. (For example with respect to gender relations and cooperation between adjoining villages). However, participation during disaster relief must not be loaded with issues that go beyond humanitarian assistance, for example, attempting to transform societal gender relations (discussed in more detail later).

It must be noted here that 'effectiveness' as discussed above is conceptualised from the perspective of beneficiaries of assistance through analysing their own statements, their behaviour during a disaster as well as the experiences of aid agencies in trying to involve beneficiaries in their programmes.

As regards the determination of *who* should participate, the data presented point to the need to involve both directly affected individuals as well as those with whom such individuals have social relations. The wider the circle of social relations, the more the likelihood of understanding what participation will mean for a particular 'affected population', and who the 'affected' actually are. While the social relations may change during a disaster (changes of which need further in-depth study) the three case studies presented show that the social structure may not be easily destroyed, even where populations have been displaced. Thus rather than focusing on individuals, their social relations need to be established.

As demonstrated by the case studies, where participation was minimal (Malawi and Sudan) externally imposed pre-conceived notions of vulnerability, some of which did fit the reality on the ground, predominated. Such notions only succeeded in creating tensions between aid agencies and affected people. Where there were high levels of participation (Gujarat), the question of vulnerability seemed to pose no problems. The behaviour of aid agencies Malawi shows that their notions of vulnerability may be constructed to match beneficiary numbers with available resources.

Part of the answer to the question of who should participate lies in understanding the ways in which individuals and communities understand the concept of vulnerability. Many agencies claim that their interests are aligned with those of the so-called vulnerable groups. They frequently state that, in the face of limited resources, their priority is to target the vulnerable. While the idea is nobly conceived, putting this claim into practice presents difficulties that could undermine the success of the relief programme. From the case studies presented, as well as from the available literature, the heart of the problem appears to lie in the fact that many aid agencies attempt to define, unilaterally, who the vulnerable of a particular emergency or community are. Development literature, for example, is full of cases where aid agencies pre-select certain sections of a community or certain individuals, such as female-headed or landless households, as vulnerable. In emergency relief, as seen in the case of south Sudan, female-headed households, under-five children, and women in general, were all usually defined as vulnerable. Pre-conceived definitions of vulnerability tend to blind aid workers to realities in different emergency or development contexts. So for example, despite the traditional focus on under-five children as a vulnerable category in emergencies, adult deaths resulting from famine exceeded under-five deaths at some stages of the emergency in south Sudan and yet nothing was done to address

this problem. Also, many recommendations were made by headquarter gender 'experts' on how female-headed households should have been registered in the relief process, ways which were, with respect to realities in south Sudan, not quite appropriate. In Malawi, false assumptions regarding people's supply of food stocks in various seasons resulted in a narrow definition of vulnerable individuals and created problems in targeting assistance.

Preconceived ideas regarding vulnerability on the part of aid agencies result from the fact that agency staffs have not allowed the affected populations to become involved in the defining process. The exclusion of affected populations from the defining process can have multiple causes. In the case of south Sudan this was sometimes due to the fact that the staffs had limited capability to interpret local conditions and engage with the appropriate social structures that would have enabled them to understand how vulnerability was understood locally. It cannot be ruled out that a spirit of superiority, one that gave agency staffs the belief that they already knew who the vulnerable were, played a part in this situation. Hence, I have noted that some staffs made recommendations on how to register female-headed households without any consultation with affected communities. Others reserved a proportion of relief items to be distributed to those who had not received relief assistance distributed through the local structures but whom the agency staff regarded as vulnerable. Apart from the sheer spirit of superiority and lack of capability, aid agencies can exclude affected populations from the defining process deliberately so that their definition of vulnerability coincides with the resources at their disposal. This was certainly the case in Malawi, where WFP's definition of vulnerability excluded many who had been affected in a different way but who clearly needed similar assistance.

The lesson for aid agencies is clearly that they need to make genuine efforts to understand how affected communities understand vulnerability and incorporate this understanding in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating relief programmes. This requires close linkages with and participation of the affected people. The definition of vulnerability, like that of participation generally, will change with changing emergency contexts and, therefore, agencies should refrain from putting a premium on pre-conceived definitions or perceptions. This does not mean that they should totally abandon existing knowledge and experience. Indeed, an idea of who is likely to be affected in different types of emergencies and in what ways is important since it helps agencies to develop pre-packed kits that can be shipped away swiftly when an emergency takes place. However, the urgency is not sustained throughout all the stages of the relief programme and some aspects of distribution, such as the general ration, have very little to do with pre-packaging. Therefore, existing knowledge and experiences of aid agencies should again merely be used as guiding principles which can be adjusted according to realities in different contexts.

Related to the problem of preconceptions regarding vulnerability and who should receive assistance is the practice by aid agencies in many emergencies of having standardised tools for identifying such individuals or groups. For example, nutritional assessments such as Weight for Height (WT/HT) and Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) have long been taken for granted as indicators of need for therapeutic and supplementary feeding for under-five children. I have already noted how this standard practice may overlook the problem of adult malnutrition. The same can be said of adolescent malnutrition. But in the case of south Sudan, attempting to use these indicators to measure adult malnutrition posed additional problems for aid

workers. The tall but lean physical stature of the *Dinkas* automatically placed large sections of the population below the desired nourishment levels, leading some agencies to abandon the standardised measurements prescribed by UNICEF and OLS.

For children, standardised nutritional assessments resulted in two practices. Agencies that had a good supply of resources were able to relax the rules and admit children that the method of observation revealed needed immediate attention despite falling outside the threshold of nutritional indicators. Agencies with limited resources found the same rules too relaxed and tightened them to bring down the number of children to be assisted, thus denying assistance to deserving ones. Clearly in this instance, the definition of who was vulnerable had nothing to do with realities on the ground. It had everything to do with the amount of resources at the disposal of the agency.

In this example lies a key point as regards the realm for participation for affected communities. Both the Malawi and the south Sudan case studies lend support to the argument by several commentators that in disaster relief it is policy that defines the numbers (or even groups) of affected persons rather than the numbers and groups of affected populations defining policy. The amount of available resources plays a key role in the definition of policy. Given that aid agencies are unlikely to have enough resources to assist all those affected, it would seem that the solution to the problem should be sought not in developing standard ideas and indices for identifying need but in ever-closer engagement with community structures. It has already been indicated that even in emergencies communities do not lose the capacity to identify and care for their vulnerable individuals. Unscrupulous behaviour by a few should not be used to stigmatise whole communities. For many poor communities the distribution of scarce goods is a frequent undertaking. If egalitarianism cannot be

guaranteed, it is the agency's job to work with existing structures to see how this can be improved rather than to replace them with totally new processes. What is being advocated here, therefore, is not total transfer of responsibility to community structures but close collaboration with them. It may well be that in the collaboration alternative many people still do not receive assistance, but the community is left feeling that the best that could be done was done. This feeling might prove crucial for cooperation between the community and the agency in any subsequent rehabilitation, rebuilding and development programmes.

The issue of preconceived views regarding vulnerability is also not unrelated to the view by some agencies that emergencies can be used as a vehicle for social transformation, particularly as regards gender relations. For example, as shown in the cases of Malawi and south Sudan, WFP and Oxfam have tended to take the view that the implementation of emergency programmes should contain objectives that relate to the transformation of gender relations within affected communities in order to improve the status of women, who frequently occupy a disadvantaged position in many poor societies. The prevailing view is that putting women in the forefront of the relief process or assigning certain types of activities to them will help to empower them, despite the fact that, usually, there is no attempt to understand the specific ways in which women in specific communities are not empowered. Thus in Malawi, for example, WFP claimed that distributing ration cards to women rather than to men was a step towards women's empowerment. In south Sudan, an Oxfam nutritionist specifically advised that the implementation of the relief programme should not only challenge traditional inequalities between men and women as regards the latter's alleged subservient role and marginalisation in the community, but should actually make the transformation of gender relations one of the core objectives.



It is true that women occupy a disadvantaged position in many poor communities vis-à-vis men, and that emergencies can be used as opportunities for encouraging attitudinal and behavioural changes. It is also true that women as a group face unique problems in emergencies. Any relief programme should definitely endeavour to establish how the unique problems of women ought to be addressed. However, it is doubtful whether the most beneficial way of doing this is for external 'gender experts' to introduce such issues in an almost authoritarian fashion. In any case, a distinction should be made between problems that arise or are accentuated for women because of the emergency and general issues of gender relations that are part and parcel of a particular community's social process.

Gender relations in any community are always a complicated issue and it is important to be sure that any efforts to achieve this will not introduce frictions that will last long after the emergency programme has ended. It appears in fact doubtful if long-lasting social changes, particularly the empowerment of women, can occur without their acquisition of, or improved access to, economic resources. The Indian case study demonstrates that the process of transformation of gender relations that benefited women had, as its key, new and improved access to economic resources. In addition, SEWA's educational and training programmes, and allowing women to participate freely in women-only community-based structures equipped women with new knowledge and skills to negotiate and assert themselves in the existing male-dominated community.

In both Malawi and south Sudan there was lack of trust of local social structures and government structures (de facto government in the case of the latter) by international aid agencies, in contrast to Gujarat where international agencies as well as the government put high levels of trust in a grassroots-based organisation. It is possible

that reports and experiences of misuse of relief funds and materials may play an important role in defining the behaviour of aid agencies towards recipient populations. Thus, recipient populations are stigmatised and their real overall problems and strengths overlooked. Recipient or affected populations are not in essence crooks bent on playing a cat and mouse game to outwit those who are trying to assist them. Much of their behaviour is defined by the sheer need to survive under adverse livelihood conditions. It is true that in some complex emergencies, relief may be diverted to assist combatants but such problems may occur in unique rather than all circumstances. Much of the mistrust of recipient populations is thus unjustified and yet its effects on participation can be profound.

Mistrust can result in aid agencies not giving serious consideration to local social structures in emergency programmes as partners in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Local structures are seen as a serpent that can strike unpredictably, and thus to be treated with caution, rather than an advantage to be utilised to benefit the programme. Any contact with them is thus limited to only the level that the aid agency feels necessary to fulfil its own mandate defined in its own terms. Local people are intelligent and observant enough and they quickly recognise the lack of trust that the behaviour of agency staffs represents. Thus in turn, local people may develop their own resentment and suspicion of aid agencies. The experiences of some aid agencies in south Sudan show that closer cooperation, rather than disengagement from local structures, including local authorities (government or default), may be the way forward to resolve some of the issues of mistrust between the agency and affected populations. Agencies that forged closer links with local community structures as well as local authorities found it easier to deal with issues of access, beneficiary and needs identification, resource utilisation, security, and how to

interpret neutrality in a complex political situation. By contrast, those that did not forge such links faced more serious difficulties on such issues. For example, some had difficulties implementing appropriate programmes while others had severe security and access problems, sometimes resulting in closure of operations altogether. This means that in complex emergencies aid agencies must be careful in the way they interpret 'neutrality' otherwise their interpretations can greatly affect participation and thus, the programme as a whole.

Organisations that can be trusted cannot mushroom out of the blue. SEWA's case, depicting an organisation that, through development work, has successfully brought women's participation to the forefront through technical support, training, education and creation of an enabling environment where poor women feel free, stands as a rebuke to many international development agencies who have continued to prefer direct implementation and only paid lip service, if at all, to enhancing of capacities, even supporting the creation, of viable grassroots structures. The case of SEWA points the way forward to the linking of development to relief.

In addition, one of the advantages of the SEWA model lies in the fact that 'facilitators' of various activities have daily contact with the members over long periods of time. The operational procedures of international aid agencies may put their staff in a position not well suited to understanding social concepts such as vulnerability. Specifically, the practice of many aid agencies of sending young and inexperienced staffs, sometimes not even appropriately trained, goes some way to limiting the agency's ability to forge the necessary links with community structures for authentic participation. The limited capacity of young and inexperienced staff to foster participation may be due not only to their lack of know-how but also to the possibility that their overall motives are more aligned with inflating their own CVs

for a better job later rather than a genuine concern for the poor. Such staffs cannot be expected to spend time and make concerted efforts to understand the social context within which the aid programme is situated and achieve the necessary balance between community priorities and agency accountability requirements. Any experience (or interest for the poor) such staffs might have acquired, even for those not necessarily young, is usually limited by very short contracts (about three months in the case of many agencies in south Sudan) available to field staffs. Thus, one of the defining features of many aid agencies is lack of institutional memory that only worsens the situation.

In terms of understanding how participation should be done, we must begin by observing that in many emergency situations, including the two case studies of Malawi and south Sudan presented here, not much effort is made by agencies to understand the various notions of participation held by the people who will be assisted. Unless aid agencies are clear on how participation should be understood we should, even if they were genuinely interested in it, expect a myriad of interpretations (and thus practices) among them, with each one claiming, as they often do, that their programmes are participatory. Given that aid agencies have various reasons for claiming to be participatory, some of which have very little to do with the interests of the poor or the affected populations, they cannot be entrusted with the responsibility of defining the ways in which participation ought to be understood. Neither can we take as blue prints the a priori theoretical concepts developed by academics and some practitioners on what authentic participation entails.

The fact seems to be that the ways in which affected populations can and wish to participate are governed by many factors, including their own understanding of the social and political environment within which they live, their livelihood priorities,

and their perceptions regarding the agency providing them with assistance. Therefore, it is apparent that participation even from the point of view of affected populations will have various interpretations and practices. In this scenario, aid agencies will do well to use theoretical concepts and their own experiences only as guiding principles. In the field the practice of participation should proceed from what is actually found on the ground, incorporating affected people's views of what participation will actually mean in the specific context in which the relief programme is taking place.

Understanding that forms of participation can and will vary in different contexts means that it is also erroneous to assume that there is a predefined package of methodological tools that can be used to foster participation. The question of what methods are feasible and appropriate in emergencies is a key feature of the concern for increasing participation of affected communities. As discussed in previous sections, there are problems and limitations associated with almost every method.

To begin with, many methodological tools have been borrowed from the development field where, as discussed earlier, broad-based participation has only managed to find limited examples. Part of the problem in both development and emergencies appears to be the tendency by many implementers to think that the use of the tools will in itself bring about a desirable nature and level of participation. This feeling has led to the use of methodological tools in a checklist, technical fashion, without backing them with the passion and spirit to listen to voices of people, as well as taking into consideration the social and geographical conditions that transcend the methodology itself.

Much has been said, for example, regarding how PRA methodologies can provide effective tools for participation. In northern Sudan, I have noted how, by implying

that the quality of assistance was an issue, a household questionnaire became the centre of controversy between the UN and the government of Sudan. In both the northern and southern sectors, PRA methodologies specifically, and qualitative methodologies in general, also generated frictions. In any case it has already been mentioned that PRA methodologies need to be used with caution for they may sometimes achieve results quite contrary to the intended ones. In Colombia, a researcher reported at a workshop that focus group discussions could not be used in many cases because any gathering beyond two to three individuals carried undesirable and dangerous political implications.

In contrast to these examples, an Action Aid workshop report (1999) documents how in south Sudan civilians have been able to make peace between warring factions using traditional methods that include story telling and potent symbols. In one instance people used the white Ador Bull, an age-old symbol of peace and reconciliation, in order to trace their common heritage and bury their more recent affiliation. The report asserts that:

‘This method is very effective for people-to-people negotiation and not so easily applicable in government-to-government or people-to-government situations. It does have potential to operate well between rebels and paramilitaries. Its primary function is to breakdown the element of “myth making” that is present in all conflicts and develop new perceptions among and between protagonists. It is a method that requires much time, commitment and conviction based on a general pressure for peace among the local population. Then all you have to do is listen and allow it to happen’ (p.9).

Yet, in spite of the potential for traditional methods exemplified above, it is very rare

for one to come across examples where aid agencies attempt to integrate traditional methods for participation and decision-making in their programmes.

In many cases, aid agencies are quick to give lack of enough time and the urgency of the programme as key factors limiting the use of participatory methodological tools.

However, different emergencies provide different possibilities for using different methods. The case of south Sudan shows how, in prolonged emergencies, it is possible to conduct an anthropological study for a deeper understanding of social issues. The use of local expertise, despite its limitations, also proved to be an important part of programme planning and implementation in south Sudan. Some of the most successful programmes were those that had made extensive use of local expertise. Done properly, use of local expertise has the additional advantage of contributing towards capacity building in the affected communities.

Collaboration with local structures, including local authorities, apart from generating valuable information regarding local conditions and helping to involve local people, is also important with regard to the issue of access. In complex emergencies like south Sudan where security is an issue, international aid agencies tend to bunch up in the 'safe' areas, thus providing a range of services in such areas and depriving those that are deemed to be unsafe. In such situations, certain local organisations may know how to or be in a position to send assistance to such areas. Indeed such organisations may already be operating in these unsafe areas. In natural disasters, international agencies may fail to reach certain areas because of difficult geographical features and poor transportation conditions. In most cases, international agencies rely on four-wheel drive vehicles for travel, but even these become unusable in certain conditions such as floods or very steep terrain where no roads exist. Local people are able to use local forms of transportation such as canoes,

oxcarts, horses etc. to reach such areas. For example, canoes became an important part of transportation in the Malawi floods not only for evacuation purposes but also for transporting relief goods that people had received as well as for going to areas where people could find paid casual work.

The examples and issues mentioned above mean that it is not appropriate to go into an area having already decided that such and such a method will be used to foster participation. Methodologies should be decided and modified according to different contexts, taking into account political, social, climatic and even geographical factors.

In any case, questions of how participation can be done in disaster relief appear more relevant where external agencies are involved in implementing programmes at the local level. The case of SEWA suggests that where grassroots structures are already involved in participation, such questions would have already been dealt with during the course of implementing development programmes and the people affected will already be aware of the ways in which they can participate.

### **Areas for further research.**

A study that could be conducted in several different communities could focus on ways of identifying and assisting vulnerable members. Who is involved and at what levels? How have these processes worked in times of less severe disasters where external assistance has not been involved? How does external aid impact the existing processes?

The current study provides an indication that certain processes in a community might change during disasters. However, there is need for more in-depth studies of what changes occur in various social systems under conditions of stress? Are changes structural or is it a matter of changes in degree only? This question could be



examined in terms of long-term (e.g. prolonged drought or civil war) versus short-term disasters.

Further research could also focus on views of external aid held at different levels within affected countries e.g. government, local government, NGOs, village leadership and individuals. This aspect could also include views, perceptions and attitudes of people about the work of aid agencies, including the conduct of their personnel, working in their area as well as people's perceptions on how scarce external resources can be distributed during disasters. This work could be part of a broader investigation into the principles behind, and the efficacy of, various targeting methods employed by aid agencies. A related area of study could be with regard to the perceptions and attitudes of people affected by disasters on the various methodological tools used by aid workers to enable them to participate in relief programmes.

There also seems to be need for an interagency study (not specifically sociological) with regard to organisational structures, lines of command and, recruitment and staffing policies and procedures. This work could produce knowledge on the extent to which field-level experiences permeate through the decision making structure. In addition, this work would also assess the extent to which aid agencies keep abreast of, and consider work on participation being done by various forums and structures, some of them reviewed in this thesis, created with the purpose of promoting their accountability to the people they assist.

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