Acronyms

CCOAIB   Comité pour la concertation de organisations d'appui
aux initiatives de base

CDA   Collaborative for Development Action

LCPP   Local Capacities for Peace Project

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

OQ   Oxfam Quebec

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Contents

Acronyms

Designing Processes that Promote Reconciliation:
The Results of an NGO/Academic Collaboration Researching
The Role of an International NGO Funding for Reconciliation in Rwanda[1]

By Winifred Fitzgerald[2] and Laura Roper[3]

I. Introduction

The purpose of the Mellon Foundation's small grants program to support research on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Forced Migration is to foster greater collaboration between academics and non-governmental organizations. The belief is that such collaborations can help address some of the pressing research needs of NGOs, which are often challenged by the sheer complexity of addressing the exigencies of refugee and displaced populations. Non-governmental organizations caught up in the day-to-day work of relief and development often have neither the time, funding, nor expertise to carry out research that provides them with useful information on which to improve their practice. Given the density and quality of universities in the greater Boston area, there is a large pool of well-trained and skilled researchers who wish to apply those skills to practical problems.

When Oxfam America was originally recruited to participate on the steering committee of the Mellon-MIT program, we did so with some misgivings. All too often academic-practitioner collaborations ultimately are of little utility to practitioners for a variety of reasons. Part I, reflecting the views of Dr. Roper, explores the challenges of academic-practitioner collaboration. In this case, the results were very positive for a number of reasons. First, involvement in the MIT program drew Oxfam America into the very rich network of academics working on refugee and forced migration issues in the greater Boston area, as well as their colleagues from UNHCR, the World Bank, and other institutions who had occasion to visit Boston/Cambridge at a particularly important time from our institutional perspective.[4] Secondly, the grant provided the funding, the opportunity, and the intellectual resources to tackle an issue that was a priority to our sister Oxfam, Oxfam Quebec (OQ). The initial phase of the work, described in Part II, based on a report prepared by Ms. Fitzgerald, not only was of considerable utility to Oxfam Quebec, but also encouraged us to continue the process of learning and

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[2] Winifred Fitzgerald is the Executive Director of the Harvard Institute for Population and Development.
[3] Laura Roper is Director of Program Planning and Learning and Deputy Director for Global Programs at Oxfam America
[4] Oxfam America had greatly reduced its involvement in humanitarian emergencies (one of the primary causes of forced migration) in part as a result of a decision to focus its funding on long-term development work and in part because—as a relatively small, non-operational organization—the scale and complexity of emergencies was beyond our capacity to intervene effectively. More recently, because our donors often looked to us to respond in countries such as Sudan and the Balkans, and because of our membership in Oxfam International and our increasingly close collaborations with its members (including Oxfam Great Britain and the Dutch organization NOVIB), it became apparent that we needed to re-engage in this field and quickly develop a range of contacts as well as in-house expertise.

reflection by becoming engaged in a major action research study run by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA).[5]

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. One is to discuss the challenges to successful academic-NGO collaboration and, based on the experience with this study and other successful experiences with which we are familiar, to identify practices and criteria for successful collaboration. The second purpose is to share the results of the research that was carried out, because the results do have relevance to many international NGOs working in complex emergencies. By combining the two aspects of this project—the process and the results—we hope to demonstrate the potential for and appeal of the effort to make academic-NGO collaborations work.

II. Achieving Successful Academic-Practitioner Collaborations

A. The Problem

The potential for academic-NGO collaboration is enormous, but such collaboration is much more difficult than it appears on its face, even when collaborators share values supporting, and commitment to, a particular cause or issue. This is a source of puzzlement and confusion to many who have been caught up in an unproductive collaboration. On reflection, the roots of the problem are both intellectual and cultural. Different intellectual approaches combined with unfamiliar styles of discourse and engagement can lead to an impasse.

1. Distinct Concepts of Research

In *Organizational Learning II* Chris Argyris and Donald Schön discuss the problematic aspects of practitioner-academic collaboration, in a chapter entitled, "Turning the Researcher/Practitioner Relationship on Its Head."[6] They start by noting that academic research and practitioner inquiry operate from two different logics. While both are concerned with causal inference, the academic researcher wants to identify generalizable rules that lead to probabilistic predictions. To develop such rules, experimental or quasi-experimental design is required. Sophisticated, multivariate analytic techniques are often used in an attempt to isolate key variables that influence outcomes. In addition, in academia, where inquiry is valued in and of itself, research is often open-ended, iterative, and on-going.

The practitioner, on the other hand, is more often than not trying to solve a particular problem in a particular setting. General rules or laws rarely provide a useful guide to action. An NGO on occasion may compare different sites to determine if an intervention is having an impact, but generally experimentation takes the form of testing a "theory of change" or "model of causality"

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[5] CDA's Local Capacities for Peace Project builds upon earlier work by CDA and Mary B. Anderson, the author of _Do No Harm_ (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), and focuses on training and working with a wide range of international relief and development organizations (including CARE, CRS, World Vision, Oxfam Quebec and others) to develop and practice interventions that do not exacerbate tensions and division in a society, but rather build on connectors.

[6] Chris Agyris and Donald A. Schön, *Organizational Learning II* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996).

within a program context and making adjustments. Finally, inquiry is time-bound and specific and valued only to the extent it produces actionable results.

2. Questions of Status and Culture

Given these two distinct approaches, it is not surprising that academic-practitioner collaborations can be problematic. There are other factors that can act as obstacles to realizing the full potential of a collaboration. There is often a tendency of the practitioner to view the academic as an expert—immersed in the theoretical literature and bringing a tool kit of rigorous methodologies—who will solve an organization's problems. In such circumstances they may take a deferential posture toward the academic researcher and see themselves more as observers than participants in a research process. In the case where the academic does "solve" the problem to the practitioner's satisfaction, an unfortunate dependency is likely to develop, even if the academic was mindful about sharing resources and transferring skills.

Another obstacle can be the difference in how discourse and debate is carried out in the two settings. An academic is accustomed to pressing his/her view in the challenging arena of academic discourse where breadth and depth of knowledge of "the literature" is valued and a certain degree of competitiveness (not always constructive) fuels debate. NGOs often have a very different style of discourse, ranging from very participatory and consensual to more hierarchical, with high deference to leadership authority. In either case, an academic who engages with NGO staff the way s/he might engage with fellow scholars is likely to generate cultural clashes with NGO staff and/or leadership.

This gap becomes particularly wide if the research methodology is complicated and/or sophisticated and not easily understandable by the practitioner. This becomes even more of an issue if the results of the research are not consistent with the practitioner's own experience and analysis. The practitioner (perhaps recalling the famous joke: There are three kinds of lies – Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics) may end up feeling at worst manipulated or mislead by the academic, and at best bewildered and unconfident of the results.[7]

Even with two extremely well disposed and open collaborators, unless both parties are sharing the same logic of inquiry or, at the very least, are clear that they are starting from different logics and design a process that leads to a synthesis of the two approaches, the academic-practitioner collaboration more often than not comes to a less than fully satisfactory end.

B. *Constructing the Collaboration*

1. Being Clear on the Goals of a Collaboration

A collaboration may begin with the shared goal of conducting research to improve the effectiveness of an NGO's intervention. However, an important first step is to "unpack" what both parties mean by this. There are several possible approaches that are distinguished by their scope and by which party defines the terms of the collaboration.

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[7] See Arnold Barnett, "How Numbers Can Trick You," *Technology Review* (Oct., 1994), 38-45.

1. The expert/consultant model in which the academic expert comes in and "solves" a problem and the organization is a passive consumer;

2. The expert/trainer model, in which the academic helps develop organizational skills to deal with a particular set of problems;

3. The joint learning model, in which research around a particular problem is used as a platform for developing skills in conscious or critical inquiry (discussed below);

4. The "best practice" model, in which the researcher is documenting organizational practice for the purpose of sharing that experience more broadly to improve development practice;

5. The theory development model, in which the research is meant to contribute to development of the theoretical literature.

In the first two instances, the NGO is often the initiator and is, in a sense, contracting the services of the academic researcher to focus on very specific areas of organizational performance. In the last two instances, the academic is usually the initiator and may be working with a range of NGOs, or may be building on his/her previous work or the previous work of other researchers. Any individual collaboration is indirectly helping the NGO by contributing to the overall level of knowledge in the field (although depending on the design, the NGO can derive direct benefits through action research).

In the joint learning model, the starting point of the collaboration may be to answer a research question or solve a particular problem, but the long-term interest is to develop a capacity and an organizational culture that promotes and rewards inquiry that tests basic assumptions, practices, and beliefs on an ongoing basis. The participants approach their work with a spirit of humility (no one has a corner on the knowledge market) and with the recognition that each brings expertise, experience, and insights that, when fully deployed, create new knowledge and improved practice. In this model, there is no end product, per se; rather, there are processes, a series of products, and various configurations of relationships that are ongoing, fluid, and adaptable to the needs of the moment.

Each of the models has particular implications for the resources, timing, and types of expertise needed, and for creating and/or relieving stress within an organization. However, the complications increase exponentially if there is a misunderstanding of the approach being adopted. If an NGO thinks an academic expert is coming in to determine how to enhance security in a refugee camp where it is responsible for food deliveries, and he is in fact gathering data in the camp to determine why it is particularly violent as part of a larger study on camp security, there are obviously going to be problems. Another scenario that is not uncommon is that the headquarters agrees on a broader research agenda (for example, documenting best practices in the customizing of education kits), while the interest in the field may be much narrower (simple delivery of those kits and identification of teachers within the camps). Because of poor communication (and understanding) between the headquarters and the field, the staff in the field may have no idea why a researcher is there, what they are supposed to do with him or her, and be suspicious about the stated agenda.

2. Knowing What Is at Stake

This raises another important point about research in an organizational context. Sometimes research is directed at acquiring information about the context or environment in order to provide a better basis for NGO action. Often, however, such research involves analyzing the NGO's capacity and behavior and its ability to intervene constructively in its environment to achieve its goals with a view toward improving the organization's effectiveness. While, rationally, organizational inquiry should be a high priority, in fact organizational learning, and beyond that, change based on that learning, is very difficult to achieve.

There are time and resource constraints, but in addition:

> Organizational inquiry is almost inevitably a political process in which individuals consider…how the inquiry may affect their standing or their reference group's standing, within an organizational world of competition and contention. The attempt to uncover the causes of systems failure is inevitably a perceived test of loyalty to one's subgroup and an opportunity to allocate blame or credit. [Inquiry may lead to] strategies of deception, pre-emptive blame, stone-walling, fogging, camouflage…[which] frequently inhibit inquiry into the causes of organizational events and the reasoning of the actors involved in them.[8]

While this is written about the business sector (and most research and writing on organizational learning focuses on the business sector), an NGO can be just as political a place as any competitive business and engage in the same dysfunctional behaviors described above.

The point here is that research is not necessarily viewed as a benign intervention. Who initiated the activity; who are the key contact people within the agency; is research taking place at a time of programmatic expansion or contraction; is there a culture of learning in the organization or is this a departure from normal practice—all effect the practitioner-academic relationship.

Another complicating factor is that it is not unusual, particularly in activist or community-based NGOs, to find an anti-academic bias. This may not be something that is explicitly held or stated, but it is important for the academic collaborator to determine if such bias in fact exists and what its roots are. Is it because academics are in an "ivory tower" talking "theory," when the NGO staff members are out there "making a difference"? Does it come from latent class conflict or intellectual insecurity in the face of the "expert" with the Ph.D.? Does it come from the belief that the academic may have a lot of knowledge but not much wisdom? Or are strains coming from other sources—such as who has mandated the research (for example, an external funder); an institutional crisis that some are hoping the research will resolve; real ambivalence about the utility of spending scarce resources on research as opposed to direct service, and so forth?

Often academics do not concern themselves with these questions; they are not organizational development specialists, after all. Likewise, NGOs leadership may not be fully aware of these internal issues or conversely may be all too aware of internal dysfunctions and be turning to

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[8] Agyris and Schön, 49.

academic researchers to break logjams within their organization through their rigorous, objective, and "value-free" methods. Regardless, all these factors will shape the nature and the likelihood of success of a collaborative relationship, and sensitivity and insight on the part of all parties is necessary.

3. Calibrating Engagement to the Characteristics and Needs of the Practitioner

There are many different types of non-governmental organizations—small, grassroots activist organizations; multi-million dollar international organizations that rely on government funding; technical organizations that provide services to community groups or other NGOs, and so on. Aside from size and sources of funding, NGOs are distinguished by their ideology, their state of organizational evolution, their capacity as it is matched to the goals it has set for itself, and so on. Finally, as touched on above, there are the internal dynamics within an organization—they may be cohesive or conflictual; consensual or hierarchical; proactive or reactive; reflective or non-reflective.

The academic designs a course based on the overall quality of training of the students, previous work done on similar topics, and level of the course. The good teacher also recognizes that students have different learning styles (some learn through reading, others through lecture, some learn through research or hands-on experience while others need the incentive of exams and grades. Some learn through some combination of these approaches, and others apparently not at all). Likewise, the effective academic collaborator knows his or her NGO and engages with it in ways that match its interests, its data providing capacity, its learning culture, and so on. The practitioner-collaborator responsibilities include identifying the right academic collaborator(s), being aware of how the research is perceived by key stakeholders, and helping structure and manage the institutional relationship appropriately.

A final point in this section is to note that different research interventions may be appropriate at different times, and an implicit goal among those who try to promote academic-practitioner collaborations is that *ongoing* relationships will be established. Given the different world views between academics and practitioners, an initial engagement may be one of building trust by doing some very preliminary work. In keeping with a commitment to developing a capacity for ongoing critical inquiry, the first phase of work may be just to demystify the process of research by using participatory, inductive methods that allow people to systematize what they already know and identify what they do not know. Over time it is possible to develop a relationship in which the practitioner becomes an eager partner in contributing to theory building, sets aside the necessary resources for research, and is proactive in coming up with research ideas and actually recruits colleague institutions to participate.

C. Learning to Learn Together

1. Criteria of Successful Collaboration

All five approaches to research mentioned above are valid. Furthermore, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Of the models, practitioners are perhaps most inclined to view the third model, that of joint learning, as being most likely to contribute to organizational effectiveness.

However, organizations often come to this model only after they have gone through a number of "problem solving" exercises and find that old problems keep re-emerging. Likewise, the academic researcher, who is really committed to NGO-academic collaboration, comes to see the limitations of his/her approach and, through exposure to the day-to-day workings and challenges of practitioners begins to combine, adapt, and create new methods.

A necessary condition for good academic-practitioner collaboration is for both to recognize that they need to learn how to learn together. For the academic this might mean recognizing that NGOs are often looking for the minimum amount of information necessary to make a somewhat better decision (95 percent confidence levels, and the investment it takes to achieve them, are way beyond the pale). It also might mean recognizing that better information is not enough, and that who is consulted, and how information is collected, presented, and reviewed will strongly influence whether learning leads to any change.

For the NGO, good collaboration requires a genuine commitment to questioning underlying assumptions, willingness to make the investment in time and funds to move beyond anecdotal evidence to more systematized information, and at times a recognition that we become victims of our own rhetoric. In other words, because so much of NGO funding depends on convincing others of how well they do, they may begin to believe the content of their direct mail appeals, foundation proposals, and reports as the sum of their experience when, in fact, failure, setbacks, and slow, very incremental progress is a more accurate reflection of reality.

Taking this approach, the success of the academic-NGO collaboration is not measured by the "quality" of the final report in terms of methodological rigor and robustness of results, although this is one important measure. An alternative view is to look at the research activity as a platform for helping an organization develop the capacity for critical inquiry and a learning orientation. For example:

- Did the NGO find the process of inquiry and the results useful and did the NGO *use* the research (results, recommendations, areas for further study)?

- Did more people within the NGO become interested in or directly engaged with the research effort? Did they want to continue the collaboration?

- Was the researcher skillful at affirming the intuitive or experiential knowledge of the practitioner(s), helping them gain confidence in their analytic capacity?

- Was the researcher skillful in a process wherein the researcher does not tell the practitioner what to think or do, but rather facilitates the discovery by the practitioner of areas of weakness and strategies for improvement, and creates a synergy between their different bases of knowledge and experience?

- Did the engagement lead to a constructive questioning of basic assumptions and/or strategies and a strengthened learning orientation?

- Did those who participated in the experience want to share that learning outside the agency with clients, peer organizations, or others?

2. From Research Collaboration to Collaborative Learning

The main body of this report describes the research conducted in collaboration with Oxfam Quebec around the question of the best ways to integrate reconciliation strategies into relief and rehabilitation work in a post-conflict situation. As background, the participating NGO, Oxfam Quebec, has the following characteristics:

1. Oxfam Quebec is relatively small for an international NGO, with a budget of US$14 million, much of it government funds, much of it restricted spending;

2. Oxfam Quebec has a "solidarity" orientation, a people-to-people approach with an emphasis on social justice issues;

3. It operates on a partnership model, where OQ "responds to partners' needs" and does not impose its own agenda;

4. Consistent with points 2 and 3, Oxfam Quebec relies on volunteers in the field who serve a one year, renewable term. Volunteers are highly committed, but vary widely in their degree of experience;

5. Oxfam Quebec generally funds quite small-scale projects and while it seeks longer-term partnerships, is restrained by its reliance on the relatively short-term funding cycles of bilateral aid;

6. Staff are over-committed and have little time for evaluation or research, beyond what is mandated by funders;

7. There is limited in-house research capacity.

Oxfam Quebec was enthusiastic about participating in the Mellon-MIT program because, in the interest of improving the humanitarian relief practice, it was in the process of developing a policy and procedures to incorporate reconciliation into all its relief and rehabilitation activities. It had already hired a consultant, Frederica Martin, to review Oxfam Quebec's program in Rwanda to see how partners had incorporated reconciliation activities in their programs. From this, OQ intended to draw general lessons to inform a corporate policy. OQ asked Oxfam America to help identify an academic collaborator from the Boston-area (as required in the Mellon-MIT program). From a half dozen possible collaborators, Oxfam America identified Winifred Fitzgerald, who is the Executive Director of the Harvard Center for Population and Development, and has academic training in public policy and international development. In addition, she had field experience with the Catholic Relief Service, the United Nations Development Program, and the Peace Corps and had worked in the Great Lakes Region.

Ms. Fitzgerald quickly understood that there were many constraints to doing traditional academic research. Rwanda is a country where a state of crisis had become the norm; where the population was badly traumatized and mistrustful of outsiders, including staff of relief NGOs; where peace was extremely fragile, and uncertainty was the only certainty. In any research, there are sensitive questions, but in this context, almost no question was not sensitive in some respect. For example, not only was asking people their ethnic origin discouraged by the Oxfam Quebec staff, even asking where they were from or where they had been during the fighting could be regarded as sensitive information, because it could serve as a proxy for ethnic identity. In this context the use of surveys, for example, would have been highly problematic, as there would likely have been a low level of response, and sensitive questions either had to be omitted (resulting in missing key elements of data) or, if included, could lead to evasion, non-responsiveness, or even risk to the interviewer.

Moreover, given Oxfam Quebec's partnership model, there was both a great reluctance among the staff to be intrusive and an initial preference which limited engagement only to Oxfam partners. The whole process opened up considerably, with interesting results, when interviewees were expanded to include journalists, local government officials, staff of other international agencies, and some community groups. The research team worked closely with Oxfam staff to explain the purpose of the interviews, keep them apprised of developments, and share results early and frequently as they emerged.

The research team was very talented in making explicit much of the tacit knowledge people engaged in rehabilitation and development work carry in their head but rarely articulate. Moreover, Ms. Fitzgerald was able to take the information gathered and, using her knowledge of the literature, to find articles that helped give sense and order to what seemed, at first glance, very diffuse knowledge. This had the powerful effect of validating practitioners' knowledge and piquing their interest in what the literature had to say, rather than leading with the theoretical literature, which is often intimidating or alienating, particularly to practitioners in the field.

The balance of this paper describes the methods employed and the results. A brief concluding section describes how this very modest research project has led not only to change in practice on the part of Oxfam Quebec, but also to a much deeper process of inquiry and broader set of collaborative relationships.

III. Developing Strategies for Peace Building in a Post-Conflict Situation: Some Lessons from Rwanda

A. Background

The cataclysmic events surrounding the 1994 genocide, in which up to one million people were killed and almost half the population displaced, have taken a devastating toll on the psycho-social well being of the Rwandan people and on the country's socio-economic development. The crisis shocked the world and prompted one of the biggest humanitarian operations since World War II. In the wake of the rapid return of more than one million Rwandan refugees from Zaire and Tanzania at the end of 1996, the imperative of cultivating social harmony and the challenges of reconstruction and rehabilitation became even greater. Now, more than five years

after the events, the repercussions are still being felt within the society. Although most people feel that the country is now moving beyond the emergency phase to one of transition towards long-term development, it is still an extraordinarily difficult and fragile period.

The purpose of the research project was to investigate the ways in which Oxfam Quebec could begin to integrate "peace-building" and "reconciliation" into its program of activities in Rwanda and to identify lessons that Oxfam could apply not only in its continuing attempts to help build Rwandan society, but might also apply in other post-conflict situations.

Oxfam Quebec has had a long history in Rwanda and has had a continuous presence in the country since 1984, except for six months at the height of the genocide when it pulled out. Under normal circumstances, Oxfam Quebec is not an operational agency but works through local partners. In response to the crisis, however, Oxfam Quebec, supported by funding from the Canadian government, has been directly implementing a large relief and rehabilitation program in the Kigali Rural and Byumba Prefectures for returnees and *rescapés* (survivors of the genocide), vulnerable groups, and other conflict-affected populations. This program includes the construction of homes, rehabilitation of community services, capacity building of local NGOs, income-generating activities, and agricultural and livestock production. The housing construction sites, or *imidugudus*, associated with the program are often new settlement areas that regroup homes into village clusters, rather than scattered settlements as is the tradition in rural Rwanda. Of particular interest to Oxfam, and one of the reasons it had been reflecting internally on the concepts and processes of peace-building and reconciliation, is how to identify the kinds of support and interventions the *imidugudus* would need to turn them into socially and economically viable communities. As the construction phase wound down, this clearly was the next pressing challenge Rwandans faced.

Oxfam, like many other international development and relief organizations, suddenly found itself confronted with an increasing number of complex emergencies that involved high levels of violence, large refugee flows, and complex causes that often had deep historic roots and had simmered below the surface for years. Appalled by the level of violence and human suffering, Oxfam Quebec not only wanted to respond effectively to such situations, but it also wanted to develop a public stand, supported by an agency policy, on the primacy of reconciliation as a goal in post-conflict situations. To this end, it had hired a consultant to do some field work in Rwanda, focusing on partners' perceptions of the issues. This undertaking was expanded with the availability of Mellon funding and the availability of Winifred Fitzgerald to join Frederica Martin in Rwanda in the spring of 1998.

B. Methodology

Oxfam Quebec had a very practical question—how to promote reconciliation in post-conflict situations. As a funding and, for the time being, an implementing organization, the question at the field level was, how to build peace-building and reconciliation activities into all Oxfam's interventions? Typical of a practitioner's approach, Oxfam was approaching the question inductively, and the original terms of reference for Oxfam Quebec's consultant was to examine the practices of its partners in Rwanda through interviews with those partners and with beneficiaries. With the involvement of the academic collaborator, under the auspices of the

Mellon grant, the original design was respected, but was also expanded to include a much broader range of interview subjects in Rwanda, including partners, Oxfam Quebec staff, representatives of bilateral and UN agencies, representatives from international agencies such as CARE and Save the Children, local journalists and local government representatives.

The team also reviewed documents, both public and for limited circulation, obtained from Oxfam Quebec, Oxfam America, and other international funders in the United States, Montreal, and Kigali.

The issues the team wanted to explore in the course of the interviews and the focus group discussions were:

- major development challenges and priority interventions, as viewed by different groups;

- threats to stability as well as opportunities for peace;

- perceptions of "peace" and "reconciliation" and potential for achieving them;

- the implications of making "reconciliation" an explicit goal of reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts;

- understanding the relationships between concepts of peace, justice, human rights, security, trust, and social harmony;

- approaches/programs that are viewed as most constructive and positive in reconstructing the social fabric in Rwanda;

- identifying possible contributions and the appropriate role for Oxfam Quebec in Rwanda.

C. Key Learnings for Oxfam Quebec

1. The fragility and complexity of the context

Through the course of the interviews, what came through clearly was the depth and the extent of the impact of the genocide and its aftermath on the breakdown of social cohesion and the rending of the social fabric. The social upheaval has affected interpersonal and community interactions across ethnic, economic, generational, geographic, and political lines. The events of the last years have given rise to a myriad of different sensibilities—between those who stayed in the country between 1994 and 1996 and those who left; between urban and rural populations; between returning exiles from different countries (Tanzania, Burundi, Zaire, Uganda); between French-speaking and English-speaking Rwandans; between those who lost part of their families, and those with largely intact families; and between families with members in prison and the rest of society. Moreover, certain populations have been severely marginalized since the war. Among them are women-headed households, widows, abandoned and orphaned children, and young ex-combatants.

It was also clear that many of the wounds and deficits are not the ones that development or even relief agencies are accustomed to dealing with. Rwanda is a deeply traumatized society suffering a wide range of emotions and attitudes—anger, sadness, grief, hate, guilt, loss, and fear. Combined with the breakdown of traditional support networks, any agency trying to promote reconciliation and peace is facing an enormous challenge, particularly in a context where there are low levels of trust. The difficulty Rwandan informants had in talking about these issues at all, combined with the lack of experience most actors have in dealing with them, suggest that this is a huge unmet need.

Another issue raised by many respondents was that of adequate, fair, and timely legal processes against the 130,000 prisoners suspected of genocide crimes who were detained in Rwandan jails and detention centers at the time the research was being conducted. It was felt to be of critical importance that some of those cases be processed to efface the perception that nothing is being done. At the same time, it was seen as equally important that procedural safeguards be in place so that trials were seen to be fair and just. By and large, respondents who raised this issue were not optimistic, as up to 80 percent of prisoners lacked case files, the criminal justice system was under-resourced, and somehow a "culture of impunity" had to be overcome in these unfavorable circumstances.

A pressing issue, particularly for community members and those who worked at the community level, was overcoming the very high degree of poverty and difficult socio-economic conditions. While these problems predate the conflict, the war, genocide, and the subsequent massive population movements caused fundamental changes in the country's demographic profile. At the time this research was conducted, the World Bank estimated that 70 percent of the population lived below the poverty line, while UNICEF documented a life expectancy of 36 years. Among several emerging and troubling phenomena is the existence of *child-headed* families. Rwanda has always been subject to intense land pressure, and this pressure was exacerbated by internal migration and the return of pre-1994 (old case-load) refugees who returned after July 1994, when the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) army took control of the country. Some occupied the properties of those who had fled to neighboring countries more recently and some were pressing claims to properties they had left as long as 40 years ago. While community members and local NGO workers themselves experienced poverty and socio-economic pressures day-to-day, international development and relief agencies were severely challenged to respond to these pressing needs, quite apart from the psycho-social impacts of the genocide and war.

Another problem identified by respondents was weak governance coupled with continuing violence. The Rwandan government prior to the genocide was highly centralized, authoritarian, and effected control over the national territory; it discouraged the emergence of an independent civil society. With the end of the war, the new government faced many challenges, including establishing its legitimacy as the government of all Rwandans. It was also confronting on-going security threats in the north-west of the country where ex-FAR (*Forces armees rwandaises*) soldiers and *interhamwe* militia were (and continue to be) housed in camps along the border in Zaire. There were many who questioned whether the two groups would be able to achieve reconciliation under military, minority rule.

Civil society organizations, though weak, have been attempting to step into the breach created by a situation of tremendous need and limited government capacity to respond to that need. Because of the country's authoritarian past, civil society was nascent in Rwanda and now, although operating in a freer environment in some respects, is taking up much graver challenges. A number of respondents, beyond Oxfam's existing partners, felt that Oxfam Quebec's practice of working with local NGOs was extremely important because ultimately it would be Rwandans who would have to solve Rwanda's problems and there was a good deal of skepticism about the government's ability to play that role effectively.

2. Reconciliation in a charged context—options and approaches

While respondents identified some positive trends, such as the government's public commitment to national cohesion and reconciliation, gradual reconstruction of public infrastructure, continuing support from the international community, and a gradually emerging civil society, Rwanda remains an extremely difficult context in which to work. Probably the key learning from the research was that, when asked what "peace" and "reconciliation" were, people had many different interpretations and whatever meaning they ascribed to it evoked strong feelings. A wide range of comments about these concepts is reflected below. In addition, the interviews revealed that, although a tenuous peace had been established, few people thought reconciliation was achievable except in the very long term. A number of respondents argued that it was more important to achieve justice, meaning punishment for the perpetrators of the genocide, even if that delayed reconciliation. Several respondents felt it inappropriate for an international organization to presume to "promote" reconciliation, as they were outsiders who had not experienced the genocide (although many of the Oxfam Quebec staff had done so).

Interviews with international actors also revealed a wide range of conceptions of what peace-building and reconciliation consisted of and what the appropriate roles of international relief agencies were. There were a few agencies that were not really grappling with the issues of reconciliation and peace-building at all. They were overwhelmed by the complexity and enormity of the problem and felt it was beyond their capacity to deal with it effectively. Other organizations gave peace-building activities a low public profile, although they gave such activities varying degrees of emphasis within their own programming. In general, groups in this category express a commitment to the goals of peace, but had no specific program labeled "peace-building" or "reconciliation." They did not consider it a separate program area, but in the best cases tried to integrate that concern into all their activities. As with some Rwandans, it was respondents in this group who believed that it was not appropriate for an outside agency to promote reconciliation, nor realistic to speak of reconciliation at this time, given the recentness of events, the scale and manner of the killings, and the intention to "ethnically cleanse" Rwanda. These agencies prefer to focus on "peaceful coexistence," "cohabitation," a "culture of tolerance," or creating conditions favorable for stability.

Among those international agencies most inclined to incorporate peace-building activities into their work were organizations, such as Catholic Relief Services, which had developed a "social harmony impact assessment" tool to assess the potential impact a project might have on social harmony. The "social harmony impact assessment" tool was intended to guide project selection, design and implementation. The tool contains a series of questions that help categorize

conflicts/tensions, pinpoint potentialities for conflict transformation, and assess the potential impact of the project on these tensions. That said, they did not publicly present themselves as agencies working on reconciliation or related areas.

A more activist approach is one in which an agency has more overt involvement in peace-building and reconciliation activities. For example, World Vision had a designated reconciliation program, while Trocaire, an Irish agency, had a Justice Program. Agencies such as these often focus their funding on human rights organizations, support peace commissions, and fund seminars on the causes and consequences of the genocide.

A number of agencies had a growing interest in being more explicit in their peace-building and reconciliation as a result of field experiences through which they had discovered mechanisms that seemed to help with reconciliation. One case was that of Save the Children, which had a program to identify and match foster mothers with orphaned or unaccompanied children. Because of the trauma the children and many of the foster mothers had experienced, the task of parenting the children was overwhelming to many of them. Save the Children began a support group for foster mothers to help them share and develop strategies to deal with the multiple challenges they were facing. As it happened, the foster mothers were both Tutsis and Hutus who met as foster mothers, not as members or representatives of either ethnic group. Save the Children's staff was struck by the bonds created by their common challenges and concerns for their children.

Comité pour la concertation de organisations d'appui aux initiatives de base (CCOAIB) found that its workshops to help communities reflect on and problem solve issues of access to land, poverty, and the imidugudus—when successfully facilitated—had the impact of creating connections and shared interests among participants from the two ethnic groups, without setting out to do so. CCOAIB focused on *gens influents* (mid-wives, doctors, local officials, and teachers) thinking it important to build the skills of local opinion-leaders in negotiation and problem-solving to serve as a model for whole communities. These organizations, nonetheless, would tend to fall in the category of agencies that were trying to incorporate reconciliation in their work without making it a program area in and of itself.

3. Making Sense of the Data

Through the process of conducting the interviews, the researchers generated a great deal of information that was of potential utility to Oxfam Quebec. The research team, in sorting out the material, found several frameworks were useful for making sense of the data. One was that of John Paul Lederach and researchers at the Conflict Analysis and Transformation Program at Eastern Mennonite University.[9] Visually, the framework is represented below:
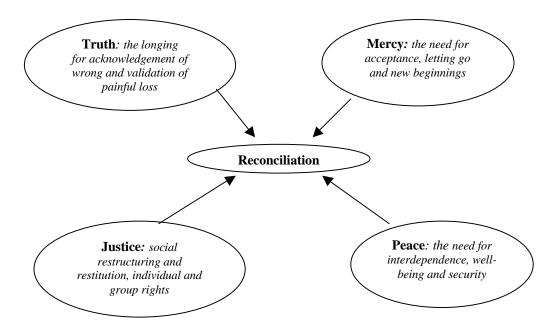
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[9] Unpublished document.

Diagram I. Key Elements of a Reconciliation Process

This framework, when presented to Oxfam Quebec staff at a report-out at the end of the research visit, had two effects. One was to help the staff get greater conceptual clarity on reconciliation's definition and its component elements. This was important because Oxfam Quebec (and many others as well) tend to use the concepts of reconciliation, peace-building, rights promotion, and justice interchangeably. The second important point this model indicated to staff was that many of the activities Oxfam Quebec was supporting already actually could be seen as laying the ground work for reconciliation. That said, while justice, peace, mercy, and truth are constituent elements of reconciliation in this model, what it indicates is that *it is when these different elements converge* that reconciliation can be achieved.

Given that there had been a strong message emerging from the interviews that having an explicit reconciliation policy might be ill-advised given the rawness of feelings, the complexity of the political situation, and the fragility of peace, the framework demonstrated that Oxfam Quebec could still live out its commitment to reconciliation in a variety of ways. At the same time, the research indicated that Oxfam had to use some caution and make a number of strategic decisions. For example, while the pursuit of justice might argue for support of human rights organizations dedicated to holding the leaders of the genocide accountable for their actions, a rights organization that appeared to be pursuing justice in a punitive sense ("an eye for an eye") rather than in the fuller sense of justice articulated in the Lederach model might actually exacerbate conflict and compromise an international funder supporting it.

While Oxfam Quebec had targeted its interventions at the grassroots level, the research exposed them to organizations, both international NGOs as well as official bilateral and multilateral funders, who were working at different levels and with different actors in Rwandan society. This suggested to Oxfam that there might be other strategic interventions that would be useful in helping create conditions for reconciliation.

Another model that Lederach employs is useful for making decisions about the levels within a society with which an organization might engage. It is a very simple pyramid model that assesses the overall situation in terms of the levels of actors concerned with peace-building in affected populations. At the apex of the pyramid are the highly visible, top-level leaders—key political and military leaders for the most part—who engage in peace and/or cease-fire negotiations and broker the transitional situation. Below them are middle-level leaders, such as religious leaders, prominent academics, rights activists, journalists, jurists, as well as external actors such as those responsible for humanitarian relief efforts. These people, generally speaking, are connected to both the top level and
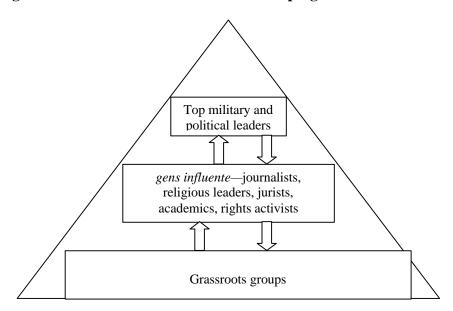
Diagram 2: Levels of Intervention in Developing Reconciliation Activities

Top military and
political leaders

gens influente—journalists,
religious leaders, jurists,
academics, rights activists

Grassroots groups

the grassroots level, but are not bound by either the political calculations that govern the actions of the former nor encumbered with the survival demands of the latter. The Rwanda research confirmed that this level may be a useful target for activities in terms of changing perceptions and building skills of influential people, floating new ideas among actors with connections to the policy-making process, and supporting the innovative ideas and programs emerging from this level that appear to be constructive. At the bottom of the pyramid are the grassroots organizations and communities, which may desperately want peace and stability, but confront many obstacles to translating this desire into a reality, particularly if the top leadership manipulates grassroots groups to perpetuate conflict.

Even if Oxfam Quebec continues its focus at the grassroots, with limited engagement at the other levels, practice can be improved here as well. The research project introduced Oxfam Quebec to the work of Paula Gutlove and her colleagues at the Institute for Resource and Security Studies who have written about reducing conflicts by pursuing "super-ordinate goals"—goals that are urgent and can only be achieved through cooperation between conflicting groups—through

collaborative initiatives.[10] The argument here is that healing can occur as groups identify common needs, plan activities together, and negotiate and resolve differences. In the best cases, people recognize their mutual dependence, stereotypes begin to be dispelled, barriers begin to come down, and adequate levels of trust emerge to allow for a more peaceful co-existence. This academic work, when brought to staff attention, resonated because the staff had already heard numerous examples of positive spin-off benefits from projects that did not have explicit reconciliation goals.

The research project yielded a series of recommendations to help guide Oxfam Quebec planning in the future. These included the need to:

- gain a fuller understanding of the social and political factors causing continuing tensions in the society;

- examine possible points of engagement and leverage using Lederach's pyramid, which might direct Oxfam Quebec beyond its traditional grassroots focus;

- re-examine the organization's emphasis on reconciliation, recognizing that many of its current activities were contributing to reconciliation and that others could better do so with a more intentional focus on reconciliation aspects. At the same time, be more sensitive and perhaps more humble about taking a public position on reconciliation, given its outside actor status in Rwanda;

- further develop mechanisms for communication and opportunities for interaction, particularly focusing on identifying "super-ordinate" goals that can be achieved through collaborative initiatives;

- continue to foster internal agency reflection and staff development.

These recommendations were particularly timely because the construction phase of the *imudugudus* was winding down, and the next task was to support a process to help an agglomeration of households evolve into a community. Designing processes to identify needs, plan activities and negotiate conflicts over such things as allocation of agricultural inputs and resources, siting and maintenance of water wells, location of schools in ways that did not exacerbate or fuel underlying tensions, but rather reduced conflict, presented both a major opportunity and a major challenge for Oxfam Quebec.

Under most circumstances of academic-NGO collaboration, Oxfam Quebec would have been left with these recommendations, but with no further support on how to implement them. In all likelihood, it would have made an attempt, but would have been limited by lack of capacity in how to institutionalize this learning and implement a new strategy. The momentum and interest generated by the research would gradually dissipate as the day-to-day took over, and as there was staff turnover (a particular problem in an agency that relies on bilateral funding which is

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[10] Paula Gutlove and Gordon Thompson, "A Strategy for Conflict Management: Integrated Action in Theory and Practice," Working Paper No. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Institute for Resource and Security Studies, 1999).

generally quite short term, as well as one that relies on volunteers with one and two year assignments).

Fortunately, in the course of the research, Oxfam Quebec was also introduced to the Collaborative for Development Action, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and its Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP).[11] This project is an outgrowth of earlier work by CDA, which examined the ways in which interventions by humanitarian agencies in complex emergencies, such as in Somalia or Sudan, can inadvertently fuel conflict. The LCPP framework asks that agencies carefully analyze the context of a conflict and identify the connectors and dividers in a society.[12] The framework is meant to help international organizations be very conscious about not only the strategic decisions they make, but also the routine ones—who gets hired, what language is used in an office, how beneficiary communities and individuals are selected—as they potentially have an impact on societies that are both highly charged and very fragile.

Oxfam Quebec became a participating agency in the Local Capacities for Peace Project, and Winifred Fitzgerald continued her work with their Rwanda program as one of the LCPP liaisons. The liaisons were contracted by LCPP, trained in the LCPP methodology, and then introduced the LCPP framework to Oxfam Quebec regional staff (as well as staff from some of the other Oxfams operating in Kigali). In her liaison role, Ms. Fitzgerald then supported them in the framework's application through regular visits every four to six months, the last visit in her liaison role being carried out in the summer of 2000. The framework has been incorporated into all of Oxfam Quebec's Rwanda activities and used to describe their approach to funders.

In a recent report prepared for CDA, Oxfam Quebec outlined some of the contributions that the LCPP framework made to their own programming. The report states,

> The one matter that was not addressed in a direct approach was **reconciliation** [in the first phase of recovery work], believing that there were too many other preconditions before confronting this problem more openly. But as soon as basic living conditions were improving, our Rwandan team insisted strongly that we look more deeply into this very touchy but inevitable matter. If the aim of our presence is to promote lasting peace through development, we should do everything possible to bring about the conditions for a peaceful coexistence wherever possible. The Byumba project was then specifically designed to reach that goal.
>
> Activities started with a complete inventory of all forms of associations already existing in the area covered by the project—three new *imidugudus* and their surrounding administrative sectors….This research allowed the team to know all the groups involved better and later find out from them everything in their

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[11] The Collaborative for Development Action is based in Cambridge, MA. For more information see http://www.cdainc.com or phone (617) 661-6130.

[12] Examples of connectors might be a shared language, shared customs, shared external enemies, a high value placed on education for children. Dividers might be different religions (where the differences are emphasized); differential access to a country's wealth, a war economy that creates incentives for those who benefit that economy to make sure the conflict continues.

traditions and ways of life, especially after the war, that they considered to be their strengths and connectors that would improve their local capacities for peace. Many examples of solidarity came up, forming a solid base for the strengthening of inter-community relations. We also inquired about their vulnerabilities and possible tensions that are or could be dividers in their communities.

The research became a permanent platform for dialogue….A concrete result was the decision to unite [the associations'] goals through setting up two *"inter-groupments"*,…structure[s] consisting of elected representatives from all grass-roots associations, representing the interests of their membership in pursuing common goals.[13]

Other changes in practice that application of LCPP analysis caused included:

- improved recruitment procedures—there was a continuous consideration of how each staff member would operate and be perceived by each community;

- In micro-credit, Oxfam Quebec learned from an example of an ethnically mixed women's group. The women believed that they were all victims of the genocide facing survival difficulties, arguing that the Tutsis suffered and were made vulnerable because their husbands had been killed, and the Hutus because many husbands were in prison. Oxfam Quebec decided to apply its limited funds to income generating activities predominantly with ethnically mixed groups. The first example was successfully repeated.

IV. Conclusions

Oxfam Quebec received important information based on this research, which led to a reconsideration of how the organization positioned itself in terms of peace-building and suggested new programming directions for the future, with possible frameworks to help in their thinking. In an environment where there was little time for reflection, where staff and communities were dealing with multiple traumas and losses, and where very little systematic information of any kind was being collected about development practice, strategies and experience on the ground, the research and the collaborative way it was conducted was an important contribution.

From the perspective of Oxfam America and Oxfam Quebec, the learning experience that grew out of the initial research was and continues to be the most important product of the collaboration. In returning to our five categories of research collaborations, Oxfam Quebec began with a variation on the first approach, in which an academic expert is brought in on a consulting basis to help the agency develop a policy on reconciliation in post-conflict situations. In the end, the project evolved into Model 3, in which Oxfam Quebec staff and the researcher, first in her work under the Mellon grant and subsequently as a member of the LCPP project, developed a joint learning strategy.

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[13] Oxfam Quebec, "Byumba Integrated Peace Building Project: Interim Report" (April, 2000).

In keeping with the first model, the original team did make a series of recommendations for Oxfam Quebec to consider when pursuing the issue of reconciliation and peace building. Fortunately, the relationship did not end there, and Oxfam Quebec, with the support of Oxfam America and the LCPP, was able to maintain the working relationship with its academic collaborator and become part of a larger learning initiative, moving the collaboration firmly into Model 3. Judging the experience by the criteria set out in Part I, Section III, A, the collaboration was a successful one along all the dimensions identified:

- Oxfam Quebec did find the process of inquiry and the results useful and did implement the research results and recommendations;

- After some initial skepticism and concern, mainly because of the pressing deadlines of physical reconstruction activities, local Oxfam Quebec staff became interested in and directly engaged with the research effort and were eager to continue the collaboration through LCPP;

- One of the particular skills of the researcher was affirming the intuitive or experiential knowledge of the practitioners, which helped them gain confidence in their analytic capacity;

- The researcher was skillful in letting the data speak for itself and introducing conceptual frameworks, which facilitated discovery by Oxfam staff and allowed them to rethink their approach to reconciliation and develop strategies to reach their ultimate goals, but by different means than originally foreseen;

- The engagement led to a constructive questioning of basic assumptions and/or strategies and a strengthened learning orientation, rather than creating defensiveness and insecurity;

- Oxfam Quebec has been eager to share its learning experiences with others in the Oxfam family and as an active member of the LCPP bi-annual convenings.

The situation in Rwanda remains fragile, both for internal reasons and because of the continuing level of instability and conflict within the Great Lakes region. It is an extremely difficult environment to negotiate and one in which humanitarian and development aid workers can feel both isolated and overwhelmed. Through this research and subsequent work, the Oxfam Quebec team is better equipped to deal with an uncertain environment, both because of knowledge and skills it has gained and because it has become part of a larger community of learners and practitioners.