

## **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FOUR BREAKOUT SESSIONS**

### **Breakout Session One: “Beginning Community Engagement”**

This session examined how transition actors appraise, assess, and analyze existing conditions in order to determine the most critical issues facing the community. Participants considered such topics as:

- utilizing various methods and experiences when introducing oneself to the community;
- gaining full community participation from the very beginning;
- learning about the underlying issues that face the community and the ways in which conflict has affected them;
- recognizing the need for quick impact in transition settings.

The following issues and recommendations emerged during the first breakout session.

#### **1. An accurate understanding of local community conditions and issues is essential to designing a program that both meets needs and is appropriate.**

##### **Recommendations:**

- Conduct a complete conflict analysis of the community to examine the root causes of the conflict, and the ways in which the conflict has affected the society.
  - Identify and build on the natural social structures that exist, rather than establish new ones.
  - Donors should maintain a field presence outside the capital to ensure that regional actors are represented.
  - Donors should refrain from making long-term commitments to the community, especially when donor resources are short-term or unpredictable.
- 2. The local community should be encouraged to direct the process of community engagement. Donors should be flexible in all phases of community engagement in complex and fluid environments, and recognize the inherent conflict between respecting/retaining cultural norms and changing the social fabric in a culture recently consumed by violence. Often there is a slow process of change in conflict-ridden societies.**

##### **Recommendations:**

- Advocate for sustainable commitment to conflict-affected populations, and look at the long-term vision as well as the short-term needs of the community in the initial phase of engagement.
  - Improve communication, collaboration, and relations between the relief and development actors.
  - Include community involvement throughout the entire spectrum of engagement, beginning with the first phase of humanitarian assistance, so they can take root when the transition phase begins.
- 3. While community development can have a positive effect, it can also raise the expectations of the population and change the structure of governance, both positively and negatively.**

##### **Recommendations:**

- A one-size-fits-all approach to program design may not suit in all cases, since different constituencies from the community require different approaches to development.
- Using local staff during the start-up phase and throughout the program to develop a common vision can help guard against some of the negative impacts of international assistance.

- Local ownership (by both national staff and the community) of the program and process is critical to its success and ultimate hand-off to local communities.
- 4. International actors may impose a western bias on the community and are dependent on local staff for guidance, vision development, problem solving, and hand-off of the program. However, selecting staff can often be problematic when international organizations create a western and class bias by selecting local staff whose language and skills represent western norms.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Increase awareness of inherent cultural biases, and ensure that the local staff is representative of the community.
- Be mindful of political biases of local staff as they factor into reconciliation components of the program.
- Engage the community in the selection of the staff, training staff, and reaching out to other segments of the population.
- Work through local organizations to avoid individual staff biases in sensitive areas.

#### **Breakout Session Two: “Designing A Program Strategy or Framework”**

This session examined how transition practitioners conceptualize and develop a program. It included such topics as:

- identifying change agents and community counterparts;
- deciding on geographic locations;
- establishing flexible time frames and elements of the activity design process;
- considering indicators or goal posts;
- broadening the level of participation;
- including input from local authorities.

The following issues emerged during the course of the discussions.

- 5. The lack of significant international media attention on a region directly affects the political imperatives and subsequently the amount of resources available for programming. When the “CNN factor” is low, the ability to design the best, most appropriate programs may decrease. At the other extreme, a high profile environment can put pressure on international organizations to spend quickly and show immediate results. Communities, however, may not be able to mobilize in such a short period of time.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop approaches for transition work in both low-resource conditions, as well as in high-resource situations.
  - Work to educate donors, and the public, on the conditions in post-conflict countries that have not drawn the attention of the media.
  - Communicate with donors and policy-makers on the nature, problems, and accomplishments of a program in order to reduce their expectations for quick results.
- 6. To avoid conflicting agendas, donors should develop a national strategy that includes a broad spectrum of geographic as well as constituent communities.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Conduct joint planning assessments with donors, UN agencies, and NGOs, as well as with grassroots and national level actors.
  - Seek the involvement of local NGOs, local authorities, academics and research organizations, and other local experts. Do not rely on the political elite in the design of the program, instead, solicit the opinions of a broad representation of the community. Such inclusiveness helps to minimize marginalizing different groups and prevent cleavages among groups.
- 7. The design phase should consider the multi-ethnic and/or religious nature of the society and incorporate dispute resolution mechanisms, cross-group reconciliation, consensus, and empowerment into the program. The multi-faceted, conflict context can provide opportunities for increasing the awareness of communities and leaders, which in turn impacts the longer-term prospects for development.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Sensitivity is required especially when the community has experienced atrocities.
  - The fact that it may take years for a community to begin to advocate on its own in order to influence the government or for authorities to understand the purpose and the basis of its approach, necessitates an extended perspective during the design phase.
- 8. Neutrality is often affected by international peacekeepers. While an international presence may itself negate a pretense of neutrality, the addition of military troops can threaten the notion further by blurring the distinction between peacekeepers and humanitarian and development actors. In Kosovo, Somalia, and Rwanda, peacekeepers posed problems for the humanitarian and development communities by making undue promises or preventing government access to the local population, participants said.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Peacekeepers and international donors should maintain open communication and should educate the other on the organization's mandate and mission.

### **Breakout Session Three: "Linking Local Involvement to the National Level"**

This session explored the need for, and the process of, connecting community based activities at the local level to the regional and national level, in an attempt to avoid simply creating localized "islands of success". The discussion included topics such as:

- establishing and working with a national post-conflict reconstruction strategy;
- supporting the country's overall peace process through community-based initiatives;
- linking relief to development activities at the community and national level;
- understanding the bigger national picture (economically and politically);
- collaborating with other organizations, national and international, working throughout the country;
- working with national civil society organizations.

The following issues emerged in the course of this session's discussions.

- 9. In planning community-based activities, international organizations must make an early and conscious effort in the initial planning process to foresee and, eventually, actualize linkages between the local and national level.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Do not assume that linkages between the local and national level will occur as a natural progression of the community participation progress, especially in countries with a weak or absent government at the local, regional, and/or national level.
- Conduct an analysis of political and economic realities on the ground before designing a program.
- Design programs to take into account the level of trauma and dependency existing within the community as a result of the conflict and its aftermath, especially since these considerations may slow the process of linking community activities to a regional or national program.

**10. Community development should not create “islands of success” that are contained at the local community level. Programs should strive to bridge regions, and involve the government at all levels to ensure maximum impact and sustainability.**

### **Recommendations:**

- International assistance should not be overly focused on one region to the exclusion of others.
- In linking local programs to the national level, programs should not focus assistance on specific line ministries within the government. To do so may create or exacerbate tensions within the government.

**11. Different actors may focus their initiatives on different levels of engagement within the country: local, regional and national level. However, there needs to be a common vision and strategy among the actors to ensure that there are synergies and linkages between the different programs, and the different levels within the country. In doing so, national organizations should be encouraged to be involved on the community level to ensure sustained linkages, and community members should be encouraged to voice their concerns at the national level.**

### **Recommendations:**

- Strong donor coordination can help to create these linkages by funding activities that exist as components of a larger harmonized framework.
- International actors should encourage a dialogue that is constructive, not one that creates further challenges among local, regional and national authorities.
- International actors should help to empower representatives at the community level to draw the attention of the government to their needs.
- Similarly, international actors should assist the national level with mobilizing resources to address recovery needs identified at the community level. This mutually beneficial process creates linkages between the local and national level through capacity building and collaborative efforts.
- Regional or national authorities should be encouraged to visit local communities involved in community-based processes to observe the participation element, and to carry away ideas that can strengthen the local-national linkage.
- Media should be seen as a tool to access wider populations, and can be used for advocacy efforts by publicizing successes made at the community and national level in the recovery process.
- Local NGOs can create space to monitor government policy, raise awareness for government involvement, and empower local communities to be advocates of their needs.

## **Breakout Session Four: “Letting go”**

This session looked at how international actors devolve from their role as catalysts and eventually hand-off their program to others. Given the concept of community ownership, “Letting go” implies the transition of the program’s implementation from international actors to the local community. Nevertheless, it is often difficult to ensure that the programs endure once the international actor has departed. Still, it is important to establish from the beginning the requisite strategic changes and conditions necessary for transition such as changing the mindset of government authorities, and establishing political, financial, and institutional sustainability. Specifically the discussion included such topics as:

- dealing with institutional time limits;
- the conflict between an end date and an end state;
- recognizing appropriate timing;
- relinquishing all decision making to others;
- accepting programmatic changes as needed;
- handing off to other development partners;
- establishing close linkages with local organizations to carry forth;
- promoting long-term sustainability.

### **12. The final phase of the project should incorporate a hand-off strategy and should be viewed more as a transition, rather than as an exit.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Consider who will continue activities after the international organization has departed.
- Incorporate capacity building and support to local NGOs during project design and implementation.
- Recognize that pre-establishing a program framework inhibits the flexibility required to allow the community to gain full ownership of the process—there is no quick fix to conflict and no ready toolbox for reconciliation.
- Ensure that the local community participates in the design, implementation, and transition phases. Empowering the community to assume the project involves building in local capacity. Community ownership for a program is important for leveraging additional funds in the long run.
- Recognize that tension exists between designing a process and strategy, and maintaining a flexible approach and timeframe.
- Good intentions do not always translate into good outcomes. In designing programs, build in a strong monitoring and evaluation system to measure impact, and maintain the flexibility to change course as needed.

### **13. Important questions to ask include: To “Whom” do we transition and more importantly “How” do we ensure sustainability? The answers to the first question covered a full range of actors, including the private sector, local organizations, missions, other donors, local government and the community itself. However, identification of prospective partners to maintain the process is critical in terms of sustainability, as is avoiding dependency on the international organization as the “driving force” behind the process.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Identifying an “end point” becomes easier when the local actors have been involved in setting priorities throughout the program. The more detached the community is from local ownership of the project, the more difficult it is for the local community to sustain it.
- Build into the program capacity building skills of the community, so that the project eventually belongs to the community, not to international organisations.

- Assist communities to form foundations or NGOs, complete with funding, as another mechanism.
- Create an exit strategy from the start. In other cases, it may be difficult to know when pre-established criteria have been met.
- Conduct an end point analysis to ensure the community or organization is prepared to assume the program and that the conditions are ripe for transition.

**14. The international community needs to consciously include the “letting go” process in the design and strategy process. The transition phase and mechanisms may involve negotiations between donors and the national government on how to conduct the hand-off.**

**Recommendations:**

- Involve all actors, including private and civil sectors, at the table from the beginning. Together they should share economic analysis for sustainability, draw on lessons from development, and in general prepare the community, partners, and government for the exit of the international organization.
- Leave in place what has been put in place, such as staff and relationships, in order to build on the credibility and experiences of the program.

**15. To ensure continuity, programs need to operate as a business that attracts enough resources, is cost effective, and produces tangible results. The programs should also be designed in a way that incorporates capacity building to enable partners to mobilize their own resources once the international donors have left.**

**Recommendations:**

- Various funding options need to be explored, including involving the local authorities in generating internal revenue so that the region is not overly dependent on international funding.
- Advocacy organizations need to create their own income, and involve the community in resource mobilization at the local and national levels.
- Consider establishing an escrow tax generated from international organizations for matching purposes to plan and finance the gap between international funding sources. Communities would form advisory boards for managing the funds during this period, thereby increasing their ownership over the programs.

## **V. SUMMARY OF NEXT STEPS**

In discussing the Roundtable results, participants raised a number of suggestions on potential “next steps” for consideration by the two organizing agencies, UNDP/ERD and USAID/OTI, and the international community. These “next steps” are defined as institutional, procedural and operational actions.

### **Institutional actions:**

- Conduct an institutional self-examination of the internal procedures in post-conflict programs and report the results.
- Examine and reduce internal organization barriers between transition and development offices, and mainstream a common approach to community-based mechanisms that can be adapted to post-conflict and more “typical” development situations. This will help to ensure continuity of approach and funding.
- Examine potential UNDP/ERD and USAID/OTI collaboration in a field-based pilot initiative to incorporate the points raised during the Roundtable.

### **Procedural actions:**

- Track critical change elements over a long period of time and then incorporate the findings into future programming.
- Demonstrate and document successes in the field.
- Establish a single, though flexible, process for post-conflict reintegration and use it as a road map. This process should incorporate community development into transition programs.

### **Operational actions:**

- Conduct a similar Roundtable at strategic intervals to examine what has been learned to date and new innovations in post-conflict reintegration and rehabilitation.
- Publicize the discussions from this and other such meetings to encourage others to consider the points, issues, and best practices garnered during the Roundtable.
- Build up thematic expertise through inter-agency working groups, including UNDP, USAID, UNHCR, and the World Bank.
- Prepare a manual with extensive field input on all phases of international programming in post-conflict arenas from entry to exit, which could be used as a basis for programming and in dialogue with governments.

In conclusion, the Directors of UNDP/ERD and USAID/OTI made the following specific suggestions for follow-up to the Roundtable:

- USAID/OTI and UNDP/ERD will prepare a Training Manual that would be made available on their respective websites and provided to field offices. This manual would serve to mainstream lessons learned and best practices in the development and implementation of community-based programs;
- USAID/OTI and UNDP/ERD could design and implement a joint community-based rehabilitation and reintegration program in a specific country (proposed: Serbia) to test the assumptions set forth in the course of the Roundtable discussions.