



## POINTS OF VIEW



*CAP international meeting, Colombia*

# 11. GOOD PARTNERSHIPS

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

International agencies are rightly praised for their dedication and capacity to provide much needed relief in conflict situations. Without this help the suffering and deaths caused by war would be much higher. However, these outside organizations can have a complicated impact. Compared with local groups, their access to funding and resources are very high and with that comes a corresponding level of influence and power.

In recent years critics have complained that, however good their intentions, aid agency staff can make mistakes as they do not understand the complexities of the political situations in which they work. In some cases their actions have fuelled the very war they are trying to stop. In others their approach has clashed with local ways of dealing with conflict. Western notions of development can be at odds with the priorities set by other cultures. Countries weakened by war are likely to rely on the advice of outsiders rather than having faith in local ways of being. Countries ridden with huge debt loads can become overly dependent on the resources international agencies have to offer.

We have discussed these issues in CAP workshops. CAP youth emphasize that this is a two-way street with pluses and minuses on both sides. They greatly value international support and solidarity and see how useful it is for their work. At the same time they identify complications and some problems that need to be discussed and resolved. The following quotes are provided in that spirit – one of partnership where both sides are committed to finding more effective ways to work together.

### ISSUE: THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE PRESENCE OF INTERNATIONAL WORKERS

“In our camp, there is so much gossiping – you realize this when you are a child. Even if you cut your hair -they comment on everything. Everyone watches you, looking for what you are doing wrong.

The foreign presence in the camps is good because they don't gossip, they don't get involved with this. They encourage youth to improve themselves. The youth now are learning about the outside and the foreign teachers in the camps help with this.

The hard part is that the foreigners in the camp do what they like – they are not afraid, they are not scared of anything. But we can't. We have to obey our leaders. Even if you want to go somewhere you must get permission from the leaders. The elders find the foreign culture hard. The youth feel differently.”

*Karen refugee youth*

### **ISSUE: THE EFFECT OF INTERNATIONAL FUNDING**

“There is a lot of international attention when there is a high level of conflict. But in post-conflict times people forget. Their attitude is that the local area should work it out. They forget what has been left behind because of the war. Often the violence is still there. There are still violations against human rights, young people’s rights. And probably there are two or three generations who have been affected by the violence.

The international community sees conflict in terms of numbers. How many people are killed? How many people have been injured? How many are raped?

In Central America people say at least during the war there was something to eat because the international agencies were here, now there is nothing. And the local organizations had some support. But now they have nothing. And so in a funny way the war becomes a way of life because it provides resources and attention.”

*Youth worker from El Salvador*

### **ISSUE: WHO DEFINES THE ISSUES?**

“The international community has had a big influence on Cambodia, mostly because we are weak because we are so poor and because of the war.

The first influence would be the UN troops who came to Cambodia to help with the election and of course they brought HIV AIDS. That was a big influence. Then also the number of prostitutes really increased because of the troops that arrived in 1993.

After that the International NGOs came in and they started a lot of programs with human rights. They wanted to strengthen the idea of democracy and human rights. They wanted us to have a very perfect constitution for Cambodia. But they found that it was quite difficult to deal with the old ways of communism. You see things had changed very fast.

Also when they came they brought a lot of money. They threw the money at us. Everyone was happy to catch it and unfortunately a lot of money went into people’s personal pockets. They also gave a lot of money to our government for development.

The international community wanted to try to rebuild Cambodia as fast as possible. So that we could live in peace and forget all that had happened. And so we thought, “OK these people have come to help us so we should welcome them.”

We knew that if we wanted their money then we had to follow the international community. Also they recognized that HIV/AIDS came from them and also some inappropriate culture such as pornography and video. These things are not in keeping with Cambodian culture and did damage to Cambodian culture.

Some Cambodians look at the international community and see that they have affected us and that there have been bad parts with that. But for most it is more balanced – good influences and bad.

The good part is that the international community can help to control the corruption. When they throw some money they can put pressure on the government. They can say, “OK if you want money then you have to achieve these goals.” So it puts pressure on our government to implement certain things that are important. It is good that our Government has to hold meetings in front of the international donors to report what they do.

The part that isn't good about the international community is that everything comes from them. The perspective on our country is theirs. This means that when you are looking for funding you cannot create your program with your ideas and sense of what your country needs and how to do something about those needs. Instead, you have to create a program that follows their ideas, their priorities and their ways of understanding the problem and how to deal with it.

That is not a good point. Sometimes you can feel that they look at us as if we are low educated people and so everything has to be organized by international people.”

*CAMP Youth*