

Capacity development from the inside out

by Anisya Thomas and Desiree Bliss

In 2004, the leaders of 15 African Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC) Societies and staff from Fritz Institute met in Johannesburg, South Africa, to further the growing belief that Africa's humanitarian problems cannot be solved from the outside in.

The African leaders spoke frankly about the failure of current humanitarian assistance in Africa. In their view, the most significant challenge facing them was their inability to generate funds to support their core personnel

and infrastructure costs while still being expected to implement large front-line programmes effectively. With inadequate infrastructure, they could not attract or retain top talent or provide the quality of reporting required by donors. This in turn led to lack of trust from donors who often insisted on costly oversight, often patronisingly provided by junior or inexperienced expatriates. They also felt that as

African humanitarian leaders they did not collaborate enough with each other or share lessons learned.

In Johannesburg they established a network called the New Partnership for African Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (NEPARC).¹ NEPARC's vision is to be a network of excellence – its mission that members take charge of their own destiny, mutually support each other and develop a common voice in serving the continent's most vulnerable people. The founding members of NEPARC invited Fritz Institute as a neutral non-profit organisation to be its enabling partner.

Auditing capacity

Capacity development should be driven by southern organisations, with donors and partners acting as enablers. This approach should

objectively assess NEPARC members in the areas of a) transparency, accountability and governance, b) financial sustainability and c) programme effectiveness. Not only would this 'audit' identify soundness of governance, capacity deficits and patterns in capacity or lack thereof across organisations and countries but it would also create a common reference point and vocabulary for NEPARC members and their donors, enabling peer mentoring and the sharing of good practice.



The first to be implemented was an audit in transparency, accountability and governance, undertaken by the SGS Group – the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company – using their NGO Benchmarking Standard tool.² Fourteen NEPARC members have participated to date, three of whom have since participated a second time. Members learned that although they have common commitment,

be paired with the creation and deployment of mutually agreed upon, objective standards that enable gaps to be identified, solutions developed and evidence of capacity demonstrated to all stakeholders. Finally, there should be an effort to share knowledge and lessons across various organisations facing similar issues in order to facilitate peer learning and mentoring as well as to indicate which approaches to capacity development work and which do not.

Fritz Institute developed a model of humanitarian excellence – focusing on the core challenges expressed by NEPARC members – in order to

vision and project and field-level operational experience they also share weaknesses – uncertainties about the role of boards of trustees, inadequate or absent codes of conduct and inability to ensure field experience feeds into improved practice.

The overwhelming feedback from members who have participated in the first audit suggests that valuable learning has emerged. At the 2006 NEPARC General Assembly the Uganda Red Cross Society said they had hosted a governance and management retreat following its initial transparency, accountability and governance audit. At the retreat,

Dr Awori, Vice President of Kenya, presents the Fritz award of humanitarian excellence to Paul Birech, President of the Kenya Red Cross.

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General openly discussed how his organisation discovered that they shared many of the same challenges faced by African organisations.

In 2007 Fritz Institute and KPMG Kenya developed the second audit tool to assess organisations' financial sustainability. The sustainability assessment tool includes assessment of an organisation's diversity of funding sources, relationships with stakeholders and whether the organisation has the necessary skills, experience and training to develop an effective fundraising strategy. The audit tool was developed in close

cooperation with the Ethiopian Red Cross to ensure applicability across the NEPARC network and is being refined through the participation of the Mozambique and Uganda Red Cross organisations in pilot audits and feedback sessions. Fritz Institute has also begun working on a tool for assessing programme effectiveness, the third audit.

Four new members have joined NEPARC – Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana and Mozambique – and it is expected that the network will grow to 25 members by the end of 2007. Two meetings have been held, an executive director hired and a newsletter established. Members have convened meetings in advance of wider Red Cross Movement policy discussions to share views and arrive at a common position. Participation in the audits has facilitated NEPARC members' local fundraising efforts and enhanced the credibility of members. Organisations unable to meet the audit threshold the first time can now present coherent arguments for soliciting funds for local capacity development.

they developed a code of conduct for the board and management, created conflict of interest policies and procedures and conducted a comprehensive policy review engaging all of its branches. Uganda's efforts to address its weaknesses were awarded with an increase in its audit score of almost 15% between its first and second audits.

Similarly, the South African Red Cross Society hosted a workshop on resource mobilisation, a weakness identified by the audit which stressed the need for a formalised fundraising policy and a long-term strategy for resource allocation. They failed the initial audit but felt that their participation in it had helped them identify weaknesses and prioritise areas for improvement – enabling them subsequently to pass the second audit.

NEPARC members challenged their donors in the Red Cross Movement to undertake the audits themselves in order to appreciate the rigour of the process and to develop a common vocabulary around capacity. The Spanish Red Cross took up this challenge in 2006 and its Secretary

"NEPARC is providing African National Societies with the opportunity to demonstrate our credibility to our partners, governments and societies. The network has prompted us to seek out resources within our own countries, as sustainability is a core value that NEPARC is fostering."
Tom Buruku, Chairman,
Uganda Red Cross Society

"Every time I have the opportunity to recommend NEPARC to other African National Societies, I tell them that the audits are not sanctions; rather, the audits provide an opportunity for Societies to demonstrate where they have been, where they are and where they should be."
Monique Coulibaly, President, Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire

"The Sustainability Assessment tool provided our organisation with the opportunity to analyse the diversity of our funding sources and reflect on our core costs; as a result of our participation in the pilot, we are developing a master resource mobilisation plan that will enable us to reach our long-term objectives."
Fernanda Teixeira, Secretary General,
Mozambique Red Cross Society

Monique Coulibaly, President, Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire, at 2006 General Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Conclusion

NEPARC is by no means a proven model and only time will tell if it can permanently enhance capacity. The benefit of this model is its ability to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of its members, providing each organisation with practical data on which to develop its own strategy to build capacity. Changes within organisations can then be made according to their own priorities and timetable and with partners of their own choosing.

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1. www.fritzinstitute.org/neparc/neparcIndex.htm
2. See www.sgs.com.