

HOW TO BUILD A GOOD SMALL NGO

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SECTION B: GOOD PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

This Section Consists of parts of Chapters 8, 12 & 13.
The original numbering is left in place so that extracts can be traced back.

BUILDING GOOD STRUCTURES

8.1 Becoming a formal NGO

So your group has passed the initial stage of enthusiasm and informality. You have decided that you can do more if you formalise your structure and register as an NGO. You will create a steering committee or board, be recognised officially by the government and donors, and comply with the expectations and prescriptions that will result.

8.2 Specialisation among the staff

Well, do you really need administrators, fund-raisers and book-keepers, an office and a filing system, secretaries, vehicles and drivers, sweepers, a canteen and cooks? To answer that you need to start thinking about the other end – What do you want to achieve with your organisation? The original group could help a hundred people in a nearby slum. Now you want to run a health service meeting the basic needs of 20,000 people. To provide a bigger, more

focused and professional service, people have to specialise. If you want to do immunisations, you need a nurse. The nurse should not be spending a lot of time sweeping floors because then she can do fewer immunisations. And so on.

8.3 Building and sustaining the principles

But NGOs are not just about size and professionalism. They are about principles. One of these principles is that everybody, director and sweeper, should feel that they are part of the NGO team and that the NGO belongs to them. There are different ways of doing this but one is through people eating together. If you serve a good midday meal to everyone, at big, mixed tables, this is one way of making them a team.

Other principles for an NGO are reliability, accountability and transparency. For this you need an adequate administrative system. Someone must deal with each gift of a pile of pennies, give a receipt and say thank you. The book-keeper must enter the money and be able, as part of the annual audit, to show that it went to buy medicines, not beer for the staff. The book-keeping must be simple enough that the donor understands. The receipts for the medicines must be filed in a system so they can be found again. If we come back to finances over and over again, it is because so many NGOs handle money so poorly.

8.4 The Western model of organisations

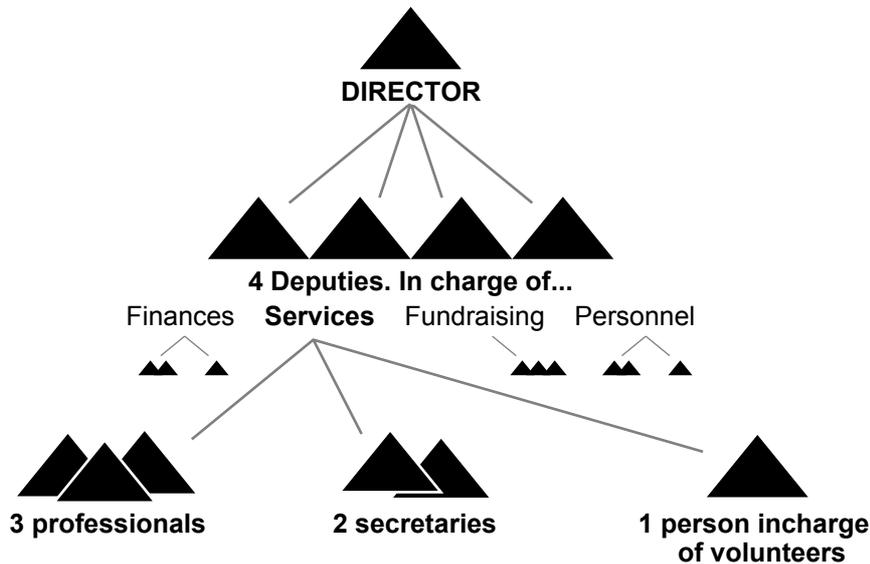
The western model of organisations, the Pyramid, is the most common in industry and also among NGOs, both in the North and the South. It was the same type of organisation that built the real pyramids.

Other ways of organising groups of workers are found all over the world and can also work well but they are usually smaller organisations. For example, in the health field, nursing or maternity homes are sometimes run by a group of sisters or midwives, who are fairly egalitarian while offering quality care. The nurses know and respect each other and would rather do minor jobs themselves than pay out extra salaries. It is a way of working which is more “female”, which draws on a spirit of co-operation.

Another successful model is that of the Family organisation, where everybody will turn to any job and the boss is also grandpa. A possible weakness with family organisations is that they may be resistant to new ideas. Then, in addition to the stated function, the organisation has another – important but unwritten – goal: to benefit the family itself. This does not matter if they make and sell flip-flops, but matters a lot if they say they are helping AIDS orphans.

So the western Pyramid model is like a pyramid in shape, with usually one boss at the top and more people as you go down the pyramid:

AN OUTLINE ORGANOGRAMME OF A WESTERN NGO:



Each layer supervises the layer below, each layer answers to the layer above. In the end, everyone answers to the boss who should take responsibility for what everyone does.

Some organisational pyramids are tall and thin; some are wider and flatter. A good NGO has a pyramid that is not too tall. The most junior person should not have too many layers between her or him and the boss. The reason for this: it should be easy for the two to communicate, when necessary.

EXERCISE:

Put your NGO structure on paper, like the example above.

How many layers between the most junior person and the boss?

The same model is found in almost all industries and profit-making organisations. Some say it is a more “masculine” way of organising. The model can stay fairly worker-friendly and democratic but, particularly as the organisation gets bigger, it can become distorted in the following ways:

- The prestige of the boss may get greater and the gap between him and the lowest worker gets bigger (the boss is usually but not always a man);
- The top of the pyramid becomes mainly male;
- To get promotion or even keep your job you must compete;
- Employees are set targets, with pressure to produce volume rather than quality. For example: An increasing number of old people must be visited each year. But it becomes less important that the quality of their lives is actually improved.

8.5 Improving staff functioning

You can help the NGO to function well by making sure that each post has a job description – what that person should be doing, who they answer to and who they supervise.

Job descriptions for senior posts should include tasks at field level, so that the bosses do not get out of touch. And serious tasks should be shared rather than all being done by the Director. Good bosses deputise – for example, the NGO can be represented on a local platform on Food Security by the person who knows about agriculture, etc.

Your NGO has stated goals and a chosen specialism. So you know what you want the NGO to do. And you need staff who can do it. The job of the NGO should be reflected in the capacity of the staff and then in the qualities of the board.

Supervision/support of the workers:

Most workers need the same things to work well. They need the basic material things – a salary which will pay for a roof, food, school for the children; sufficient job security so that if they work well they will not get sacked; enough holidays to keep mentally healthy.

In an NGO, all being well, they will get something more – a sense of purpose in doing a job that helps others. But this feeling does not last forever if the workers themselves do not receive enough support.

In most organisations, most workers answer to someone, who in turn has the job of checking what they do. Good supervision reminds each worker from time to time of their purpose. Perhaps each cleric needs to spend a day with a field worker from time to time, or the NGO could hold an 'Accounting Day': "This is what we achieved over the last year..."

In some cultures and with some people, supervision is almost wholly negative, with fear and humiliation used to keep workers as underlings. Not only is this morally dubious, people treated this way tend to work far below their full capacity.

A better way is to focus on good work – effort, achievement, support of colleagues, cooperation using praise and encouragement. Honest praise is a goldmine that most organisations barely try to dig out. It inspires individuals and knits team spirit. A good supervisor can also help a worker to understand their own motivation, their strengths, their weaknesses and how they can improve.

If you, the reader, are also a supervisor, you could do the following exercises with your supervisees (and be sure to do them for yourself as well!): 13.1, 13.1.1; 13.1.2., 13.2.2.

EXAMPLE: BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE FENJI WATER PROJECT

Fenji is part of a wider project run by an NGO in Vietnam. Until recently it was a temporary project reviving an old water system with a number of technicians on temporary contracts. Now the equipment works well, meters are installed at each house and business; the money that is being collected from users can pay for Operation and Maintenance. The project is sustainable. So the NGO is setting up a permanent Water Section.

As part of the changeover it has:

- 1 decided on the posts required in the Water Section;
- 2 formulated the job description for each of the posts;
- 3 conducted a performance appraisal of the staff currently working in the project;
- 4 decided whether the capacities of the current staff, technical and personal, match the requirements of the job;
- 5 decided, with regret, to dismiss one staff member with few skills and little wish to learn; and to move two others who could not behave properly towards the new young boss;
- 6 arranged for three staff to go on training courses so that they can do their jobs adequately (if they pass);
- 7 is drawing up job contracts with a probation time of 6 months.

This kind of approach to a job overview is known as a SWOT (a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis) and can be used to analyse capacity in the whole NGO and for other issues.

For more on SWOTs read the first part of Chapter 12, 'Building Sustainability'.

In Fenji and elsewhere, it is important to realise that staff capacity-building is more than just training – some organisations see training as the answer for every problem when what is needed is staff working more accurately, getting better supervision, having their motivation improved etc.

Funding for training is more difficult to find these days.

EXAMPLE: CAPACITY-BUILDING IN A WOMAN'S PROJECT

A farming NGO in north-east Africa started a Women's Section to offer training to village women. It recruited five professional women from the capital, all middle-class and with heavy family responsibilities. These were women who had to find food for their big families with prices high and inflation rising; care for the aged parents of their husbands; leave their babies with 10-year-olds while they worked. They had good hearts but their job was not their highest priority.

The Women's Section had no clear objectives. Staff held meetings at crossroads around the country. They would give a lecture on child care. Two women from each village would be "volunteered" to attend. Neither staff nor listeners found it useful or interesting. The morale of the staff became very low.

Then, with the help of donors, the organisation started to analyse what was needed. The staff spent a week in a village, for several the first time they had done so. They returned later to interview women on what the village women wanted to learn. Their priorities turned out to be Earning Money and Family Planning. But to teach these things the staff had to do two things – find professionals to work with and go back to school themselves. The process of re-forming was long and tough but it made sense to the staff and their morale went up.

8.6 Building and sustaining an effective Board

Having a Board or Steering Committee is a Western way of organising an NGO. It is not the only way. However, in the experience of the authors, good NGOs almost always have good Boards and the contribution of that board is visible. In Chapter 1 we said that a Board becomes important when the workers start to be paid, and may become more concerned with earning a living than with good service.

A good Board can do the following:

- If the membership is right, it will truly represent the interests of the beneficiaries
- It can make policy decisions away from the people doing the daily tasks, out of no personal interest except the good of the beneficiaries. This is what is meant by the separation of policy-making and executive functions.
- It gives the director authority and support; and provides an alternative authority to which staff can appeal if the director gets out of line.
- If it is made up of experienced women and men from the local community it will bring all kinds of experience into the NGO.

By asking respect-worthy local leaders and representatives to be members, a bridge is built between the NGO and the wider community. It is a fact that local leaders cannot be bypassed. If they feel ill-will towards an NGO then that organisation has a poor chance of doing well. Other ways of ensuring the passive support of local leaders, when you don't want them messing in policy-making, are getting their blessing or asking them to be Honorary Patrons. However, if they are suitable to be on the Board they can also form an active bridge between the NGO and donors, the NGO and Government.

The skills they bring should supplement those of the NGO staff rather than compete with them. Examples of the people to recruit as Members are: nurses who have reduced their workload in the hospital; headmasters; officers who used to work in the community courts; representatives of the private sector (since some business people have a refreshing way of seeing organisations); people who work in finance, because most NGOs are dreadful managers of finance.

The Board members should have their functions clearly written, with a job description – for many of them, it is indeed a new job. The description should include the years of tenure. Job descriptions also help to link the board to the office and the people in the office. The two types of functions – Board and Staff – should complement each other, and both should be stated in writing. It should be clear that the Board shall never interfere in decision-making about daily work; and the staff should not re-interpret the policy of the board to make it fit with their own vision. Inevitably, though, these things will happen and there will be clashes.

8.7 The relationship between the Staff and the Board in an NGO

Both Board and Staff will only function at their best if their relationship is well built. The staff need to have ways of providing information to the board and having an input into the process of policy development. They must then be ready to understand, accept and work within that policy framework. And they need to have the room to make decisions themselves within the framework.

8.8 Building the capacity of Board and Staff

Members of the Board need to build their skills as Board Members. The NGO can arrange courses, the members can visit other NGOs; they can learn more from Staff about the issues of the work. They can also share training with Staff, building a sense of working together. See *the CLRAC example in Chapter 10.2.1. 'Planning the funding needs of the NGO'*.

8.9 The boss, the character and the job

The capability of bosses is affected by how they are motivated and what got them the boss position. Some are bosses because they are someone's son or the oldest successor to the resigning boss. A more typical head is someone with extra drive, energy and vision. Sometimes the vision is for the beneficiaries, sometimes it is for personal glory.

Are you, the reader, a boss? Can you look at what motivates you and use that knowledge to work better? *If so, look at Exercises 13.1.2 and 13.2.2 in Chapter 13.*

If you acknowledge to yourself that your work is less about serving others than feeding the image you have of yourself, don't get discouraged. You can still do a fine job, but you need to build in safe-guards – ways of ensuring that you treat workers and beneficiaries well and do not edge into small tyranny. Find people to spend time with who will tell you if you are getting a swollen head.

Then consider this: whatever your motivation as the boss, the more you are a strong, inspiring leader, the more you need to ask yourself "If I have a heart attack tomorrow, who would keep the NGO going? Who would maintain standards?". Then, we suggest, you can start delegating more, giving possible successors more responsibility and guiding them so they learn how. Start building sustainable leadership.

Think about this: energetic, driven bosses are sometimes better at getting results than at building good relationships with colleagues. If there is a persistent and serious conflict between you and a colleague, or between two colleagues, it may affect the functioning of the NGO. See *Chapter 8.10.5.*

8.10 Good group functioning

8.10.1 Democratic decision-making:

Your organisation needs to be like a democratic country. Everyone should have a say and a vote. Sometimes, the boss, like a Prime Minister, has to take the final decision, and also take responsibility if it goes wrong. However, bosses in many countries find it difficult to share any of the decision-making. Dialogue between board and staff, dialogue between boss and staff – unless bosses ensure this, they are on the road to a dysfunctional, undemocratic NGO with unhappy employees.

8.10.2 Respectful listening:

Good, respectful listening is one of the most important skills that everyone should develop. It means helping the other person to say what they think and feel, by giving them the time they need, making encouraging noises, asking questions, saying that they are doing well – whatever works within your culture.

GROUP EXERCISE:

The best way of learning is to listen to the other person's point of view and then state it yourself, effectively, even if you do not agree with it. So find a topic that people find exiting and will argue about. For example:

Your country has a wild animal that attract rich hunters, who bring money into the country but kill. Protecting the animal might attract camera tourists if anyone organised it. And for some people the animal is lovely; it has a right to survive and be protected, whatever the economic arguments. But the country is so poor. Can you think of such an animal in your own country – tiger – lion – elephant – red deer – arctic fox – polar bear?

Now each person picks an extreme position, that they identify with. "No animal should be hunted for fun", or "If it brings money in, we need it". Then they find someone with a position they disagree with and makes a pair.

Now, each, in turn, states their point of view as well as they can, with feeling, and the listener helps them as much as possible.

Then, in front of the whole group, each person states the argument that they heard from their partner, doing it as well as they can.

The idea is not for people to change their point of view, but to see that a different point of view is understandable and worthy of respect.

The discussion should stay on the problem, and people should not talk about the personalities involved;

- d) If people lose their temper, they go outside until they are cool. It is better if other people do not pay them much attention. (Paying attention rewards bad behaviour). After four meetings, a more normal meeting may be possible

IF YOU FIND THIS SECTION USEFUL, GIVE THE EXCERCISES IN CHAPTER 13 A TRY.

8.10.5 When there is serious conflict between two of the workers:

If there is persistent conflict between two colleagues it may affect the functioning of the NGO. Here is one way to approach this problem. (It may seem elaborate but you can adapt it to your own needs. Above all, do make the effort to resolve conflict: if major disagreements go unresolved, an NGO can get torn apart.)

STEP ONE: Find an independent Chair, and have both parties agree to abide by the Chair's decisions.

STEP TWO: The Chair starts investigating the background, bearing in mind the following basic principles:

- The problem is defined by the interests and the personalities of the people involved.
- Both sides are probably interested in keeping their job
- Both sides are interested in being valued.
- Probably, both want to be seen as in the right in this disagreement. So focus on interests, not positions or personalities

The Chair may want to find out more about the conflict before any formal meeting, talking with bosses and colleagues within the NGO. Then, talking separately with the families of those involved in the conflict might stop the conflict being stirred at home – instead family members can be encouraged to bring gentle pressure for resolution.

STEP THREE: The Chair talks to each party separately.

- 1) Each party gets the time they need to recount their view of what has happened. The Chair tries silently to sort out real events from interpretations of events.
- 2) Parties are listened to quietly until emotions have been clearly expressed. Then the Chair responds to the feelings: "I hear from you how sad and angry you are about everything that has happened". Both sides need to have their say, let out their feelings, and have those feelings acknowledged. Having each party do it separately means that bad feelings are kept away from the other party.
- 3) The Chair can list, perhaps on a big sheet of paper for each party, the main events and problems of the last years, with the parties ensuring that the lists are accurate.
- 4) The Chair ensures that all remarks are free of labelling one party the 'goodie' and the other the 'baddie'. Saying something like "Nobody deserves to have their report stolen and presented as someone else's work" would be fine. It does not say that the Chair believes the report was stolen (since it is not yet clear that it was).

STEP FOUR: The Chair arranges the first meeting with both parties.

Some conditions may need to be imposed – for example, that both promise to listen and not make personal attacks on the other.

Issues of honour and face-saving may be important to both parties. When the word 'Honour' comes up, the Chair can acknowledge its importance and the feelings it raises; and say that any

agreement reached will have to be honourable to both sides, otherwise it will not be agreed to. At a certain point, the Chair can say it is better not to use the word for the moment because it is a given and distracts from working out how to repair the underlying problem. Some people get stuck on the concept of honour and chew on it like a dog with an old bone. To move them on, talk about the honourable nature of working for a future for the NGO and how worthy of respect it would be to achieve that.

STEP FIVE: Dealing with the past.

The Chair has to identify which past events were unacceptable and cannot be forgotten by the injured party. Stealing a report and presenting it as your own might be an example. But is there proof or an admission of guilt? If not, the injured party may have to live with no final resolution.

STEP SIX: Finding the long-term goals that can be agreed to.

Ask both parties to think five years ahead. They will probably still both be working in the same NGO, perhaps the same building. What do they both want? It is hoped that they both want the NGO to be doing well. They probably both want to be in a job, perhaps with promotion. They may both want to be boss or to have more responsibility. They probably want recognition, to be valued, to feel some satisfaction in what they do.

The Chair may have to point out that in these situations, people are not going to get all they want. However like every worker, they deserve a certain package. It may be possible to ensure that a party with little responsibility is given more (only if he or she is a personality who can handle it – the interests of the NGO are a higher priority).

The Chair can meet separately again with the two parties, give each a prescription of how they should behave in the future, and promise to re-visit over the next year. One party, for example, might hear: “If you cannot control your temper over the next year I will recommend your dismissal”; OR “you need to tell yourself every day that the other party is not the enemy and should be treated as carefully as a sibling”; OR “you need to start listening seriously to the other party; you can learn useful stuff”; OR “Let go of all these complaints and grudges; they will give you stomach ulcers”.

This may be a good time for the NGO to introduce a Code of Behaviour for all workers. This might cover inappropriate behaviour such as angry outbursts, bullying, and sexual harassment. Following such a Code can be part of every job description, a pre-condition for promotion and even for keeping a job.

STEP SEVEN: Saying sorry.

This part may need separate meetings with the two parties. When people have been hurt and angry for a long time, it helps to have this acknowledged by the people they see as the cause. It helps to hear the other party say “Sorry”. In English you can say “Sorry” without admitting fault – “I was not here when you broke your leg but I’m sorry it happened”. So, in conflicts between two people, find a way for both to say “I’m sorry that we are in disagreement”; “I acknowledge that sometimes I forget how another may be feeling; I did not mean to hurt you but I am sorry that I did” or “I miss working closely with you”.

STEP EIGHT: Sharing hospitality and pleasant times.

If the parties eat or drink together, with the Chair and the others involved, the process is rounded off and lightened; there is a start towards better feelings and correct behaviour to each other has the chance to begin straight away.

8.11 If things are going wrong in the NGO

Many factors may push an NGO in the wrong direction. Here we deal with some typical examples. If you have experienced other types of problems, and found a way of solving them, please let us know.

1 PROBLEM:

Workers are not listening to each other, not allowing others to have their say, not accepting criticism or even having a major conflict.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

To help with listening: Read Chapter 8.10.2 and have everyone do the exercise at least once. (You can repeat the exercise by finding different topics to discuss).

To help with accepting criticism: Try Exercise 13.2.2.

To help people work better in groups: Look at Chapter 8.10.4.

To help two people who are in serious conflict: Check Chapter 8.10.5.

2 PROBLEM:

Workers are unclear about their job or their own motivation.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

Make the job clear: Every post, including the Board positions, needs a clear job description. If people act inappropriately with juniors or beneficiaries, or if they start doing the minimum, then it helps if their performance can be monitored against the Job Description. Job descriptions should include the length of time the post holder can remain in place – the job lasts, say, for three years and is then reviewed, or the holder has to retire at a certain age.

Improve behaviour to juniors and beneficiaries: Try exercises 13.2.1, 13.2.2 and 13.3. After using these, other approaches can be found – perhaps an outsider organising a small workshop, or discussions on relevant sections of the Koran or Bible. Perhaps other NGOs have approaches they find useful.

Use the powerful tool of role-play: Suppose there is a workshop and you can find a couple of brave beneficiaries or outsiders. They can act a scene in which they play Senior v. Junior, or Worker v. Beneficiary. If, say, the NGO employees are often rude, asking very personal questions or if seniors are exploiting and patronising then the actor exaggerates such behaviour to the point where people are shocked and laugh. Seeing bad behaviour acted out can change attitudes. Some organisations allow this approach in a yearly play or pantomime. It can make points more gently but still be unforgettable.

Create a Code of Behaviour: A further step, suggested in Chapter 8.10.5, is a Code of Behaviour for everyone, being a part of their Job Description.

Improve supervision: Look at Chapter 8.5. If supervision is poor throughout the NGO, then a workshop – perhaps with an outside trainer – could be the most useful approach.

3 PROBLEM:

The management style is not serving the goals of the NGO.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

A *SWOT exercise* as in Chapter 12.1 may be the way to start the process of change.

It may also need an *outside trainer*.

The management at each level would have to accept the need for change, perhaps giving much higher priority to the welfare and involvement of the workers, perhaps retraining every worker in the ethics of service. Managers and supervisors at every level would need retraining. People who cannot demonstrate that they can do the job the new way can be, if not dismissed then blocked from promotion.

4 PROBLEM:

The boss is no longer listening.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

Read Chapter 8.9. If you are junior to the boss, identify the people who can talk to him about the way he is acting. Look at the people round him. Who does he respect? People he knew as a student? His father? Anyone on the board? Who could talk to him in a way he would listen? At the same time there may be a group of people round him in the office who boost his ego and these people must be discouraged. Think of small ways of influencing him, that can be done frequently.

5 PROBLEM:

The Board is not motivated.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

This problem was tackled in the Lesotho SWOT exercise outlined in Chapter 12.1.

6 PROBLEM:

Elderly individuals at the top are blocking progress.

In some countries the work culture lets the person with the longest service get promotion, regardless of their ability to do the job. Organisations exist where one or two elderly people can block all progress, keeping the training school empty or running major feuds against the organisation next door.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

An organisation that has this problem has to do two things:

Ensure that the situation is not repeated in the future... by having more stringent selection criteria and job descriptions; and by building better checks and balances into the guidelines for what Board and director can do.

Then, deal with the individual... A Board, for example, may not be able to get rid of a 'deadwood' director until he retires in two years. Perhaps his terms of employment protect him. However they can start planning for that moment. They can make it clear to him that his powers are limited: he cannot extend his post, choose his successor or hold up

business for longer than two years. They can refuse to listen any more to his repeated complaints and obsessions. They can repeat “We are concerned about the NGO here, not about individuals. Let us discuss the future of the NGO”. Repeated, this may gradually erode his 'playing the tyrant'. Should it be necessary to get a decision from him, ensure this is done by sending a delegate of fairly equal status to meet with him – alone. The delegate must be careful to keep the whole transaction cool and adult.

7 PROBLEM:

The purpose of the NGO has been corrupted but this is not discussed.

This can happen from the outside: the government, by bringing pressure and/or replacing staff, can turn the NGO into another mouthpiece – into a GONGO (Government-organised NGO). Political parties can turn an NGO into an organisation that gets money for its own members. Sometimes the hijacking comes from the inside – an NGO created by a family may gradually divert more resources and positions to family members and dependants. A further way of hijacking the purpose is for the whole NGO to get comfortable with doing the minimum. Consider, for example, an organisation to help elderly women. Two years on, it is contacting fewer and fewer of the beneficiaries, and providing services which take little time and are irrelevant. Once a year, it passes out a doll and some cloth to dress it. This agency could close the next day and only the staff would suffer.

POSSIBLE APPROACHES:

This is a very difficult problem to tackle from the inside. If a junior challenges what is happening, dismissal is possible, and in many countries jobs are scarce and families need to be fed. But an individual can, in a quiet way, start look for allies and developing legitimate strategies. These might include:

Encouraging beneficiaries to organise themselves and protest;

Ensuring that the press gets interested;

Ensuring that any partner organisations or funders start realising what is happening.

Funders in particular may be able to organise an independent financial audit and/or systematic review.

12.1 Institutional sustainability – SWOTs

Remember: Sustainability is People

An NGO which is concerned about long life might choose to do an exercise called a SWOT – Strengths, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Threats. This exercise helps the NGO to identify the key issues which could make its future either more secure or instead, threatened in some way. The issues may be internal (organisational issues) or external (environmental issues). The purpose of doing a Swot is twofold; firstly it enables the NGO to find the issues which everyone agrees are strengths, weaknesses etc. The next step is to work with these issues, establish the relationship between them, select the ones which are priority and then transform them into policy issues or Things-to-be-Done.

In this chapter we describe a SWOT that focuses on sustainability, but the same broad approach can be used to analyse other problems, such as the capacity issues in Chapter 8.5.

Steps to take:

- The NGO finds a workshop leader, from its own staff or from outside, who has a good analytical mind and can run the workshop well.
- It allocates a block of three days for the whole examination of sustainability. Of these days, the first half-day is given over to the SWOT exercise. During the rest of the time there are discussions and brain-storming to find the policy issues and Things-to-be-Done
- Then, the meaning of Strengths Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats are explained and agreed on. Participants are asked to identify issues that fit into these categories. An issue might fit into two categories. For example, if an NGO only has one very generous donor this could be both a strength and a weakness; however for the purpose of the SWOT exercise it can only be discussed in one category – and in the context of sustainability it is a weakness.
- Both issues internal to the NGO and those that are external, need to be identified. For example, if a major donor is cutting back on contributions this is a serious external threat. If the NGO is spending too much on administration this is an internal threat.
- A fundamental concept in organisations is explained to the participants. It is this: An organisation is like a plant; there is a part of it which is above ground – stem, leaves, fruit. These are the organisational aspects which an outsider can see – the projects, the administration, the capacity building. But there is also the part below the ground, the roots, or institutional aspects of the organisation. This part is strong if the NGO is serious about its purpose, has strong objectives and convictions. If the boss and staff have lost their vision, the roots are weak but may still be rescue-able and a guarantee that the NGO can survive.. If the roots have been eaten by pests, no matter how well the office is run, the NGO will die.

EXAMPLE:

An Asian NGO had the stated aim of improving the skills of farmers throughout the country. However there was also an unwritten aim, held by the boss and most of the Board; that was to spread the culture of the majority ethnic group into minority areas. This aim had changed the nature of services for the worse. There was no serious decentralisation and all training was in the majority language even where the farmers could not understand it. The staff were becoming increasingly demoralised.

Workshop Technique:

- As the groups work, findings need to be written up. If the only resource is a blackboard, that can be used. But it is one step better to use big sheets of cheap paper and felt pens. Even better are file cards and bullock, which is like chewing gum and sticks cards to walls or paper. Its advantage is that cards can be moved around, grouped in one way and then another. Each group will need a blackboard or paper, cards and felt pens.
- Staff are put into groups. If the NGO is democratic, the groups can have a mix of gender, job status, HQ- based and district-based, technical and non-technical etc. If the SWOT is happening in a culture where juniors cannot speak freely in front of bosses, then a different mix in the groups has to be done. Or, if needed, different kinds of groups can be made up for different steps of the SWOT exercise.

- Each of the groups discuss each of the four themes for a certain length of time, perhaps fifteen minutes. Then a short break, a cup of tea or coffee helps the digestion of ideas.
- Everyone comes back together and each group presents its findings. As each group talks, the Workshop Leader writes up what they say under “external” and “internal”.
- Under Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, the Leader notes all the issues brought forward by the groups. These are then reviewed and the not-so-relevant ones left out. Through discussion, the remaining issues are put into an order of priority. Ways of addressing each problem in turn are discussed. As agreement is reached, and tasks assigned.

EXAMPLE:

An NGO in Lesotho did a SWOT analysis to look at sustainability. A major finding of the workshop was that Board members had a lack of commitment to the basic goals of the NGO, and that this was an institutional weakness that needed to be addressed. A sign of poor commitment was that too many Board members missed meetings.

A number of Actions were identified to change this:

- Firstly, there was a very careful, tactful discussion on whether the right Board Members had been chosen, whether they actually had the time and means to do a good job. From this discussion, the NGO came to a consensus on the future profile for Board Members and the procedure for selecting them.
- Secondly, it was agreed that the Board members should have training. This was done.
- Thirdly it was agreed that the District Office Co-ordinator should raise the interest of Board Members; this was done by visiting individuals at home, introducing individuals and their skills to the meetings and raising her own profile as an example. Board members were also encouraged to read NGO literature and documents.

This example shows how a workshop can identify a weakness, find organisational and institutional answers and agree on the steps to take to address it so that the weakness no longer exists. These actions together also raised the motivation and standing of the Members.

It is important that the SWOT exercise does not focus only on weaknesses and threats, but devotes a lot of time to achievements and strengths. They should be highlighted and used to give more perspective to the weaknesses and threats.

Another “must” in successful SWOT-ing is that everything should be done to separate issues from personalities. The SWOT has to deal with functions, processes and procedures and not with the performance of individuals. It is not a performance appraisal of staff. Where an NGO has a serious issue linked to an individual, this should not be dealt with in a workshop but through other means.

The final steps of a SWOT workshop would be to plan a reunion after a couple of months to see how well the planned actions are implemented. Then participants are thanked and the workshop is closed.

CLEARING YOUR MIND

People who do a good job in development work have found some balance in three areas:

- 1 They have some understanding and control of their own motives.
- 2 They treat their colleagues with respect and some understanding.
- 3 They treat the beneficiaries of their work with respect and some understanding.

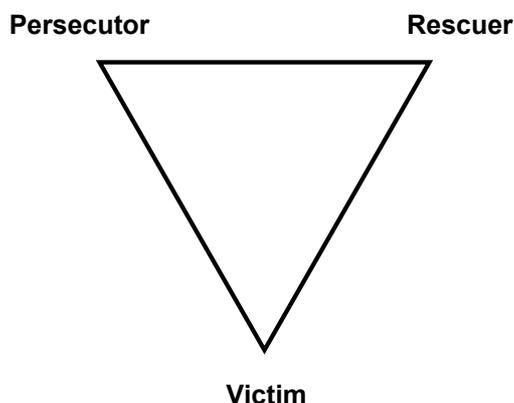
What follows are discussions and exercises to help you in these three areas. The idea is to help you to get things clear in your mind - help you to understand why you do what you do. Of course, you can skip this chapter. But what you understand, you can control. If you do not understand your own behaviour you will not be in control of what you do. So work through it all, discuss what you learn from the answers to the exercises; then keep the debate going inside your head over the next few years.

You might want to do the exercises in a group. You may have a group of people with whom you hope to build your NGO. Or you may work with them in an NGO. If you bring together a group of fellow-workers, make sure it is a group of equals. Make sure, for example, that if one person says something honestly, and offends the boss, they will not be sacked, or have their life made difficult. So have a group of three junior staff, or three senior, instead of one big group. Make sure that each person promises to keep to themselves what they hear in the group.

We are talking now about everyone who works in development, including ourselves. Nothing said here is meant as an insult. But as we become older, we hope that we understand more clearly what feelings drove us when we begun our careers. None of us are saints. None of us have total control over our meaner instincts. At some level in our minds, we all think ourselves to be the next Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King. At another level, we are sure we are rubbish, and that we can only save ourselves if we do Good Deeds for the rest of our lives.

13.1 How well do you understand and control your own motivation?

It is important that people in the business of helping others, understand The Rescue Triangle:



The idea is that we all play roles, just as we do in role-plays, but we do this most of the time unconsciously. We have roles that we find comfortable, and, since we are involved in NGOs, we probably like the role of Rescuer.

Other people like being the victim too well. If we help them with one problem they will find another. To be a victim, most people need a bad guy who makes them that way – the persecutor. A classic example is the weak-seeming woman who always marries a man who treats her badly . . . and who then finds another man who will rescue her. After a while, he, too, starts to treat her badly, so she looks for another man who . . . etc.

So we do not stay in one role, we move around the Rescue Triangle. We help a friend with her problems, encourage her to talk to us, giving advice, being a good rescuer, until suddenly she tells us that we are nagging, making her life miserable – so now we are persecutors. Then she goes away, leaving us feeling bad, feeling like the victim, so we go to a friend, who helps us and encourages us to do this and that, until . . .

It is not only individuals who play Rescue Triangle, it is ethnic groups and countries. Persecutor, Victim, Rescuer – can you think of examples from Africa and Asia in the last ten years? Sometimes two countries fight each other and both feel the victim, and say that the other is the persecutor, calling on the UN to come to the rescue.

There is one further position that individuals or countries can take, and that is the position of Onlooker, who sees what is going on but does nothing.

If you think in these terms you will realise a few things:

- You work in development not just to be a good person, but also to serve your own needs.
- Sometimes, the natural-born rescuers expect too much and get disappointed when the world does not follow their advice. One way to avoid this is to stop wanting to control everything. Instead, build partnerships with beneficiaries so they are more responsible than you for sorting out their own problems. You make it clear that the problems are theirs, not yours, and you cannot lift them off the sufferers' backs.
- If groups still come back, time after time, with more and more problems, and you think they are happy in the victim role, talk about this with your colleagues. You may have to tell the group that it seems that they are not mentally ready to find a true solution; perhaps you could set a time limit on your involvement.

EXERCISE 13.1.1

Can you think of a time in the past when the NGO or you as individuals have got entangled in the Rescue Triangle?

EXERCISE 13.1.2

Imagine that it is ten years from now. Imagine that the NGO you started has done very well, and you have been told you will be getting a medal at a big ceremony.

People will clap you; people will say how great you are. Each of you, write down the answers to the following questions:

Who is the person you will first want to tell? Would it be your father, your mother? Your grandfather or grandmother? Your husband or best friend? Your bank manager? A journalist at the local paper?

Who are the people who will be most annoyed or jealous? Brother or sister? old school friends or enemies?

How important is telling these people? One a scale where 0 is “not at all” and 10 is “The most important thing in the World”?

Now look at Chapter 13.4 and have somebody read out what it says about this exercise. Then discuss what you think in the group. You can share as much or as little as you wish with the others – but be honest with yourself.

13.2 How far do you treat your colleagues with respect and understanding?

EXERCISE 13.2.1

This is an exercise to do in a group, if you can:

When it comes to making decisions, we could say that some people are better suited than others. Suppose that it is lunchtime in your office; people are eating round the table, and the discussion turns into an informal but serious meeting on the future of the NGO. There is a mix of people round the table. They are listed below. Copy the descriptions out, each onto one bit of paper, then put the bits of paper in a column, with the person whose opinion is most important at the top and the person whose opinion should matter least at the bottom:

- A youngish male medical doctor;
- A middle-aged woman social worker, whose English is poor;
- An older non-literate woman, visiting from a village, whose English is poor;
- One of the group you are trying to help;
- A middle-aged male book-keeper;
- A visiting European expert;
- A young female worker.

Now look at the next page and have somebody read out what it says on 13.2.1. Then discuss what you think in the group. You can share as much or as little as you wish with the others – but be honest with yourself.

EXERCISE 13.2.2

Think of the last three times that you were at work and a colleague disagreed with you. Ask the person who works closest to you to remind you of other occasions. How did you feel? What did you feel about the other person? Write down a word for each occasion – but keep these words to yourself. The words might be might be “angry”, “stupid”, “surprised” “disrespected” – whatever.

Now look at the next page and have somebody read out what it says about 13.2.2. Then follow the instructions. You will need someone in the group to write on a big sheet of paper.

13.3 How far do you treat beneficiaries with respect and understanding?

EXERCISE 13.3

Each of you write down the answer to the following questions:

Suppose you are looking after a child, and the child now seems to be getting a slight fever. You think about taking the child to a western-style doctor. Your mother is around and suggests how the child should be treated. She is not very educated and grew up in a village. Do you accept her advice or go to the doctor? Why do you make that choice?

Now look for 13.3 on the next page and have somebody read out what it says. Then discuss what you think in the group. You can share as much or as little as you wish with the others – but be honest with yourself.

13.4 Discussion about understanding and controlling your own motivation

Looking at 13.1.2: the award ceremony

What you are concerned with here is the extent to which you are driven by the opinions of other people. Of course you want to please your mother and make your father proud; of course you may want to annoy your older brother who said you were a loser. But if it becomes “The most important thing in the world”, – 8 or more on the scale of 1-10 – then you may have a problem. If you wanted to tell a bank manager, then do you have big money problems or a big need to be rich? If you wanted to tell a journalist, do you have a crying need for fame? If these needs are very strong then you may start making decisions that are not in the interest of the goals of your organisation. If you found that you scored 8 or more, then look around for somebody you can talk to, somebody older, more experienced, who can help you work out what is going on and help you feel less strongly.

13.5 Discussion about how you treat your colleagues:

Looking at 13.2.1: the discussion round the lunch table

Did your group make a hierarchy of the different people? Why? Did you really think that a hierarchy is a good idea, or did you think that – if it is in a book, it must be right? Some books are not so reliable. So the first lesson is: if your instincts are good, follow them. Believe them before you believe a book, even if it is written in Europe. Perhaps we should not put people into any hierarchy.

Next, if you made the hierarchy, what value did you put on the different people? The text said “We could say that some people are better suited to make decisions than others”. But we could also say the opposite. Did you put the European near the top? Why? Europeans who go to the South get called “expert”, but how much more do they know than you people? Were your

decisions affected by the ability of people to speak English? Why? You are not trying to help penniless English hippies, we hope.

So value people for the qualities and experience they have.

Looking at 13.2.2: when colleagues disagree with you

Ask one person in the group to be the writer on a big sheet of paper. Clearly, in any group there will be disagreements. Sometimes these can be handled well and sometimes there is a clash.

At the top of the paper, write on the left “Helpful” and on the top right “Unhelpful”. Now, in general the group discusses what feelings can be helpful when people disagree, and why – what feelings do not help and why.

Nobody has to confess anything and nobody should be accused of anything. But each individual should think seriously about their own behaviour. Some people use anger to bully colleagues.

Some people tell themselves; if people disagree with me, then I must be wrong and stupid. This de-values them and their contribution to the organisation.

For some of you, now might be a good moment to make a resolution – to behave or talk to myself in a more helpful way.

FOLLOW-UP EXERCISE:

Look round the group of colleagues with whom you are working. In turn, each of you tell each other person one quality that they have that makes them valuable – perhaps honesty, perhaps their ability to work hard. Say out loud that you all value what is in your group.

13.6 Discussion about how you treat beneficiaries

First, go back to 13.2.1: the meeting round the lunch table

If you made a hierarchy of everybody in order of importance, how important was the member of the beneficiary group? If that person was not near the top, perhaps you should look seriously at how your organisation sees this group. What are the people who make up the group to you? – objects of charity or proper partners in finding out how to improve their lives? If they are objects of charity, even just a little bit, ask yourself this:

How would you feel if someone came along and said “we are going to organise your future education and training, but we will not ask you what you want or what you think, because we know better than you”.

Now look at your response to 13.3: about your mother and the sick child.

This question was intended to help you think about your mother’s culture, which for most people is their first culture, the tradition to which they belong before they go to school and study science. And it is also, usually, the culture of the people you want to help. If you have no respect for that culture, you may have no respect for them.

EXAMPLE:

I (MM) grew up in England just after World War Two, part of an Irish Catholic family. My mother did a number of things to keep us healthy. We were all breast-fed for three months. We wore Saint Christopher medals round our neck. For Catholics he was the patron saint of travellers and by extension would keep us safe from cars on the road. She had her own policy on vaccinations. If any neighbourhood child had measles or mumps, we were sent to play with them. My mother was determined that we would have had all the childhood infections before we started school. And in spring we had vitamin sandwiches, to strengthen our blood after the winter, made of parsley and anything else that grew green in the garden. Every morning we had to shit. Every evening, before sleep, we had to make up quarrels and say our prayers . . . and more . . . and more.

What did your mother do to keep you healthy?. Some of it, probably, was not rational or scientific but made you feel protected, part of a community, or in balance with the world. List all she did for you and honour it. Tell your friends. Tell her. Honour the culture where you started your life.