

THE ROLE OF NGO'S WITHIN THE DISASTER MANAGEMENT PROCESS

*A perspective as presented by Deline van Boom, Disaster Relief Manager,
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INTRODUCTION

DURING AUGUST 1994, I ATTENDED A MEETING OF VARIOUS GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS AND COMMUNITY AGENCIES.

THE MOOD WAS THAT OF "POST-ELECTION EUPHORIA" - COUPLED WITH THE SUCCESS OF THE RECENTLY COMPLETED RELIEF EXERCISE TO VICTIMS OF THE CAPE FLATS FLOODS.

EVERYONE WAS UNANIMOUS IN THEIR DECISION THAT THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR COPING WITH DISASTER MUST REST WITH GOVERNMENT, WHOSE MANDATE SHOULD INCLUDE MEETING THE NEEDS CREATED AT THE TIME OF A DISASTER.

IT WAS NOTED THAT NGO'S; THE PRIVATE SECTOR; GENERAL PUBLIC SUPPORT AND INTERNATIONAL DONOR SUPPORT WAS VITAL.

IT WAS ALSO NOTED THAT AT TIMES OF DISASTER IT IS INVARIABLY THE NGO / CBO SECTOR WHICH MEETS BASIC NEEDS FALLING OUTSIDE FUNCTIONS NOT COVERED BY GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES, I.E. ASSESSMENT OF BASIC NEEDS, MASSIVE BULK FEEDING, COUNSELLING, REFERRAL, FAMILY REUNIFICATION.

AT THAT POINT (DURING 1994) DISASTERS WERE ALSO SEEN AS A FORM OF EMERGENCY RESPONSE - AS OPPOSED TO POSSIBLE LONG TERM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES.

AS WE HAVE SO OFTEN SEEN IN THE TURBULENT HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY, DISASTERS SERVE AS A CATALYST - FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF MITIGATION.

DISASTERS CREATE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT - AS THEY CREATE A POLITICAL AND / OR ECONOMIC ATMOSPHERE WHEREIN EXTENSIVE CHANGES CAN BE MADE AT A SWIFTER PACE THAN UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

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STRUCTURES

GIVEN THE SPECIALISED NATURE OF NGO'S AND CBO'S UNFORESEEN UPHEAVAL WITHIN COMMUNITIES PRESENT A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR DEVELOPMENT.

WE NEED TO BEAR IN MIND THAT A NUMBER OF FACTORS PROMOTE THE EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS OF NGO'S.

BY THEIR VERY NATURE NGO'S & CBO'S HAVE ARISEN AND FLOURISHED BASED ON COMMUNITY NEEDS.

THE NGO HAS A CLEAR, FOCUSED MANDATE - RESPONDING TO DIRECT NEEDS OF BENEFICIARIES - ACROSS A BROAD RANGE OF SECTORS RANGING FROM :

MEDICAL / SOCIAL / EDUCATIONAL / DEVELOPMENTAL
AND WE CAN CONTINUE ON AND ON.

FURTHER FOCAL POINTS CAN THEN BE IDENTIFIED, IE. GENDER, AGE, PHYSICAL NEEDS : GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS : HISTORICAL SERVICES

OUR ONE COMMON BOND IS THAT EVERYONE HAS THE NEED TO SERVE AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE AND HEALTH AS A PRIORITY. WE ALL TALK THE SAME LANGUAGE, WE ALL HAVE A COMMON MANDATE.

OTHER AREAS OF COMMONALITY INCLUDE:

- FUNDING LIMITATIONS
- ONGOING NETWORKING
- COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

ROLE OF THE NGO

HISTORICALLY, NGO'S HAVE BEEN THE LIFEBLOOD OF COMMUNITY SERVICE. PRIOR TO 1994 THE NGO SECTOR STROVE TO SERVE WHILST WORKING UNDER THE MOST APPALLING CONDITIONS.

FOR MANY VICTIMS WE WERE THE ONLY FORM OF RELIEF - DURING THE 1986 CROSSROADS CRISIS - AT THE TIME OF THE 1992 BOIBATONG MASSACAR - AT THE TIME OF BISHO AND LANGA - NGO'S FORMED THE FOCAL POINT FOR SERVICE.

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IT THEREFORE GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT IN THE NEW DISPENSATION THE NGO ROLE , SERVICE AND MOST OF ALL EXPERIENCE SHOULD FORM A VITAL PART OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT.

THIS , I AM SURE HAS BEEN RECOGNISED BY GOVERNMENT, AS IS EVIDENT IN THE WHITE PAPER WHICH FEATURES THE WORD “NGO” ON PRACTICALLY EVERY PAGE!!

THE DOCUMENT IS ALSO PEPPERED WITH WORDS SUCH AS “INTERRELATIONSHIPS / “INTERDEPENDANCIES” - WHICH ALL ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED FOR CO-OPERATION - NOT ONLY WITHIN VARIOUS GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS, BUT ALSO WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND THE COMMUNITY.

NGO EXPERIENCE ALSO INCLUDES AREAS SUCH AS:

- **FOOD SECURITY AND DROUGHT**
- **WATER AND SANITATION**
- **TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS**
- **VULNERABILITY AND CAPACITY ASSESSMENT**
- **COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE & CO-OPERATION**
- **CONFLICT MEDIATION**
- **COMFORTABLE IN THE ROLE OF “IMPLEMENTING PARTNER”.**

THE NATIONAL DEPT OF WELFARE’S NGO DIRECTORATE ALSO SERVES TO LESSEN THE GAP. PERHAPS OTHER DEPARTMENTS SHOULD ALSO ESTABLISH A “NGO DESK” ??

MY CONTACT WITH THE COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION OF THE TYGERBERG MUNICIPALITY INDICATES THAT THEY ARE STRIVING TOWARDS GREATER GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION. PERHAPS THIS IS ALREADY TAKING PLACE WITHIN OTHER MUNICIPALITIES, AS WELL AS A “CROSS-POLLINATION” WITH DISASTER MANAGEMENT.

AS WE ALL KNOW, RESOURCES ARE FAR TOO LIMITED AND THE ENTIRE SCOPE OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT IS FAR TOO BROAD TO CREATE NEW STRUCTURES TO ACHIEVE EVERYTHING THAT NEEDS TO BE DONE - ACROSS THE SPECTRUM. THE DAYS OF ALL OF US BEING ALL THINGS FOR ALL PEOPLE ARE IS OVER. WE CANNOT AFFORD THE LUXURY OF DUPLICATION.

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OBVIOUS AREAS STILL NEEDING ATTENTION INCLUDE:

- **CAPACITY BUILDING OF NGO'S / CBO'S**
- **COMMUNITY AWARENESS & PREVENTION PROGRAMMES**
- **ONGOING NEEDS ANALYSIS IN COMMUNITIES**

RESOURCES

VOLUNTEERS

IT WILL BE NOTED THAT THE DEPT OF WELFARE'S EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DOCUMENT WHICH INCLUDES THE "AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE" MENTIONS THAT THE STATE OF VICTORIA'S FIRE DEPARTMENT HAS A VOLUNTEER BASE OF 70 000 MEMBERS WHO CAN BE CALLED UPON WHEN REQUIRED FOR BUSHFIRES, ETC. WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO!!

THE VITAL IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS CAN NEVER BE UNDERESTIMATED. WITHOUT THEM NGO'S WOULD NOT SURVIVE. THEY NEED TO BE NURTURED, TRAINED AND FOCUSED. VOLUNTEERS ARE THE GREATEST ASSET OF ANY UNIT.

FINANCE

IN THE NGO WORLD WE WORK AGAINST THE CLOCK, WE WORK WITH NON-EXISTENT BUDGETS, WE NEED TO PRODUCE AGAINST THE ODDS AND WE NEED TO BE TOTALLY ACCOUNTABLE.

WE RECOGNISE OUR LIMITATIONS BUT WE ARE NOT HAMPERED BY THEM, BUT USE THEM RATHER AS CHALLENGES. INTERNATIONAL FUNDING IS NO LONGER EASILY ACCESSIBLE.

IT IS THEREFORE VITAL THAT WE UTILISE WHATEVER OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE TO FORM SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND THEREBY PROVIDE COMMUNITIES WITH A MORE COMPREHENSIVE, EFFECTIVE SERVICE.

FLEXIBILITY & AVAILABILITY OF FUNDING IS THE PRIMARY BENCHMARK FOR SUCCESS !!!

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- **EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES (STAFF & VOLUNTEERS) .**
- **CONSTRUCTIVE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS & DONATIONS.**
- **EFFECTIVE UTILISATION OF INFRASTRUCTURAL RESOURCES LEADS TO A RESPONSIBLE AND TOTALLY ACCOUNTABLE PUBLIC SERVICE.**

SO HOW DO WE CREATE AREAS FOR CO-OPERATION

- **WE NEED TO COMPROMISE ON OUR DIFFERENCES OF APPROACH AND WE NEED TO FOCUS ON AREAS OF SIMILARITY.**
- **WE NEED TO DISSEMINATE OUR WORK - ALL ROUND. OFTEN THE PUBLIC HAS MISCONCEPTIONS - THESE EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS INFLUENCE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, MEDIA RESPONSE, ETC. ETC.**
- **WE NEED TO BE COMFORTABLE FORMING PARTNERSHIPS WITH NGO'S AND CBO'S AND INTERACTING WITH THEM AT ALL LEVELS.**
- **WE NEED TO BE COME PEOPLE FRIENDLY. NOT EASY - ESPECIALLY AT GRASSROOTS.**
- **WE NEED TO BE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR ABOUT WHAT IT IS WE ARE DOING AND WHY WE ARE DOING IT.**
- **EXPECTATIONS OF COMMUNITIES TO BE KEPT IN MIND.**
E.G. SARCS: BASIC RELIEF (MATERIAL, MEDICAL)
SUPPORT SERVICES (ELECTIONS)
REFERRAL (REFUGEES)
- **WE NEED TO WORK WITH COMMUNITIES (AND EACH OTHER) IN PARTNERSHIP - THE DAYS OF TOP DOWN STRUCTURE ARE GONE.**
- **EVERYONE NEEDS THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERACT, TO DISCUSS & DEBATE - TO FORM COMMITTEES (OFTEN TIME CONSUMING) BUT ALL PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.**
- **MOST OF ALL WE NEED TO RESPECT EVERYONE WHOM WE SERVE.**

WHAT CAN NGO'S CONTRIBUTE WITHIN PARTNERSHIPS

- **EXPERIENCE AND PASSION**
- **COMMITTED STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**
- **COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE**
- **INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION**
- **OPEN ENDED COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS AND THEREFORE THE ABILITY TO DELIVER IN BRIEFER TIMES.**
- **THE REALISATION OF THE SIMPLE MOTTO:**
"IF IS TO BE - IT IS UP TO ME !!!

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS

- **TRANSPARENT AND UNCOMPLICATED SYSTEMS AND COMMUNICATION.**
- **CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF ROLES AND LIMITATIONS.**
- **UNDERSTANDING OF GRASSROOTS OPERATIONS AND METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION.**
- **CREATION OF PARTNERSHIPS AT GRASSROOTS.**
- **STREAMLINING OF SERVICES.**
- **ONGOING DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER STRUCTURES.**
- **MAINTAINING RELEVANT PROACTIVE PROGRAMMES.**
- **RESPECT FOR COMMUNITY DYNAMICS.**
- **KEEPING AND OPEN DOOR - BE FLEXIBLE - EVALUATE ON AN ONGOING BASIS.**