

The World Bank Post-Conflict Fund

Workshop on  
***Closing the Gap on Community Reintegration Activities:  
Learning from Inter-agency Collaboration***\*

Geneva, 23 & 24 June, 2003

**Final Report**

**I. Introduction**

1. The World Bank's Post-Conflict Fund held a workshop on June 23 and 24, 2003 in Geneva, entitled, *Closing the Gap on Community Reintegration Activities: Learning from Inter-agency Collaboration*. The objective of the workshop was to draw lessons from World Bank, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) experience in partnering on Post-Conflict Fund (PCF) community reintegration<sup>1</sup> grants in four countries: Burundi, Cambodia, Congo-Brazzaville, and Serbia. The intention behind it was three fold: 1) to articulate lessons learned and best practices from these experiences so they can be used in future PCF grants, 2) to improve collaboration between the three agencies with respect to community reintegration efforts, and 3) to inform the larger 4Rs process<sup>2</sup>.
2. Participants included UNHCR and UNDP PCF grantees in the four countries<sup>3</sup>, World Bank staff, staff from all three organizations' headquarters, as well as headquarters and field staff from the four 4Rs pilot countries of Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Eritrea participating in the UNDP/UNHCR-sponsored 4Rs workshop held the following day.<sup>4</sup>
3. The workshop sought to extract common issues among the different activities, contexts, and target populations in the four community reintegration grants that might also apply to other contexts and initiatives. Thus, while the workshop objective was not to achieve consensus on best practices, it was to provide guidance for future similar projects.
4. The two days were organized around breakout groups on four salient aspects of community reintegration that emanated from a review of the PCF grants and a participant selection process: 1) local/community development councils; 2) process of identification, selection, and initiation of projects; 3) adaptability and flexibility in program implementation; and 4) linking projects with other initiatives and structures.<sup>5</sup>

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\* This report was prepared by Kimberley A. Maynard.

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of the workshop, the working definition of community reintegration used was: Activities (at the community level) that promote the successful social and economic reintegration of refugees, IDPs and other vulnerable groups, thereby laying the foundation for longer term social and economic development.

<sup>2</sup> The 4Rs process is a broad-based, multi-agency approach to facilitating return, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction in countries affected by conflict.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP implemented the grants in Cambodia, Congo-Brazzaville, and Serbia; UNHCR implemented the Burundi grant.

<sup>4</sup> The plan to hold the two workshops in succession—the PCF-run community reintegration workshop followed by the UNDP/UNHCR-led 4Rs workshop—was aimed at maximizing the sharing of experiences on two closely related subjects, taking advantage of the availability of field staff from the combined eight countries.

<sup>5</sup> Participants received a concept note presenting the four core issues in an effort to guide and frame the workshop towards extracting lessons learned from implementation of the PCF grants.

5. The following are the highlights of the workshop including specific lessons from each topic, good practices that cut across the four breakout themes, suggestions for improving inter-agency collaboration, and next steps aimed at improving community reintegration initiatives.

## **II. Lessons from Four Community Reintegration Issues**

6. Each of the four breakout groups raised issues unique to its topic. The following section summarizes these noteworthy observations, lessons, and practices.

### ***1. Community Development Councils***

7. Each of the four PCF community reintegration grants created or expanded existing community and municipal councils as a means to ensure community participation in reintegration activities. This breakout group examined the roles of these community-based development councils, how they function within the community, how council members are identified, and how they relate outside the community to the local power structure.

8. While the use of community development councils was common to all four grants, their utility as a means and/or an end varied. On the one hand, councils are a means when they serve the function of providing a locus for local decision making to meet short-term project aims. Tangible projects emerging out of such a community council process builds credibility in the council and can lay the groundwork for future activities. On the other hand, community development councils are an end when they form the foundation for a longer-term strategy to help the local communities hold government accountable, linking them to the larger political structure. In either case, even a series of projects using the community council decision making process should not be a one time effort but part of a larger reintegration strategy. Councils provide an opportunity for the community to speak out and such participation may ultimately serve as an avenue to political leadership.

9. A question that emerged in the discussion was when to work with a pre-existing institution—possibly adapting it to fit current post conflict objectives—and when to develop an entirely new committee. In the former, understanding the nature of the pre-existing institution, its function, and its membership is essential, especially given the potential for bias in a post-conflict setting. Even in a brand new council, however, establishing representative membership can be difficult. Gender and minority inclusion, for example, pose challenges for the agency working in communities with conflict and cultural partiality. It is, thus, important to be pro-active yet realistic about equal representation. At the same time, it is difficult to determine appropriate representation when the demographics of the community continue to change as displaced members return—especially when the returnees are minorities. One way around this may be to establish a parallel participatory decision making system in the displaced communities themselves that can be integrated into the community upon return.

### ***2. Process of Identification, Selection, and Initiation of Projects***

10. In each of the grants, community participation in all aspects of the reintegration project was important to developing community empowerment, creating local ownership, and building sustainability. This breakout group, thus, discussed what forms the basis for decision-making and where the locus for decision making lies in how community reintegration projects are identified, selected, and implemented.

11. Notwithstanding the fundamental principle in all the agencies of community-driven project development, organizations begin the project design with a specific vision and intended goal in mind, engaging the communities along the way. Establishing and maintaining that vision through a strategic plan supports the ultimate objectives of enhancing local governance, increasing community empowerment, and supporting reconciliation. Even with a plan, however, projects often simply emerge as a result of the accumulation of

experience, going from an initial informal approach to a more formal project structure. One way to prevent a lack of continuity between these projects and to harmonize standards and criteria between programs is to establish a transitional or phased approach.

### **3. *Adaptability and Flexibility in Program Implementation***

12. Both this founding principle of maximizing local decision-making inherent in each of the grants and the chaotic conditions in a post-conflict environment require that implementing organizations be responsive to local decisions and conditions. At the same time, agencies are usually under time, staffing, and financial constraints that can limit their agility. This breakout group, therefore, looked at how to ensure that the community reintegration project is reactive to changing—or recently discovered—needs and conditions.

13. Organizational management is tied directly to the agency's ability to adapt to changing scenarios: the more flexible the country management structure, the more likely the organization can adjust. A decentralized structure, as an example, in which staff have a clear understanding of what decision is made at what level with what concurrent responsibility is among the most responsive arrangements. Financial management that supports increased agility is especially beneficial; early disbursement of funds, in particular, increases project versatility. This kind of organizational flexibility, however, may be hampered by antiquated internal administrative structures that are based on traditional relief and development and are not conducive to post-conflict transition conditions.

14. In addition to flexible organizational management, establishing an open, analytical approach can help the agency recognize and respond to changing needs. One aspect of this is to examine and track underlying assumptions while keeping the community reintegration objectives in the forefront. It may, therefore, be advantageous to conduct a pilot phase to test assumptions and procedures before institutionalizing the project. A second aspect of an investigative approach to establish, maintain, and refer to a feedback system. This can help the organization identify project adjustment needs early and specify the appropriate responses. Once a community reintegration project is under way, for instance, it is worth the investment to create a monitoring unit to conduct real time evaluations—especially during the first third of the program—that can illuminate necessary adjustments. Another feedback loop is keeping close contact with beneficiaries and continuing to conduct participatory assessments at the community level. To maintain an analytical approach when problems arise that require program modification, it is important that the organization supports its staff in making the necessary changes.

### **4. *Linking Project with Other Initiatives and Structures***

15. While the overall goals of community reintegration initiatives are to enhance local governance, increase community empowerment, and support reconciliation, each PCF grant is limited in its singular ability to impact the larger post-conflict environment. Thus, linking community reintegration initiatives to other programs that promote co-existence and conditionality for the greater peace process can leverage the individual efforts. Hence, this breakout group explored how to connect the reintegration project with other people and mechanisms to create greater synergy.

16. In the early phase of operations, one valuable method of improving effectiveness through project sharing is to cooperate in the same planning processes. Conducting joint program assessments and using incentives to support collaborative project design, for example, naturally link participating organizations. More fundamentally, tying community reintegration projects to the larger Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers process and other country strategies can create continuity. Once the initial planning is underway but before projects begin, organizations can conduct institutional or policy impact pilots to see how the community reintegration project might connect to other initiatives such as government-led peace processes. During the implementation phase, agencies might also use pilots to develop follow-on projects linking to current programs or planned activities among other entities. Organizations often tend to collaborate more readily in

the field so delegating inter-agency interaction at all stages of the project cycle to field staff can be useful in connecting to other initiatives and structures.

17. While creating greater synergy is desirable and useful, several factors affect the viability of linking projects to other efforts, such as funding and project cycles, the economic benefits and incentives of various initiatives, and changes in the local situation. More fundamentally, in a post-conflict environment, agencies may face political risks by connecting to peace initiatives that have strong political connotations—which can be a disincentive to associating with them.

### III. Other Good Practices and Challenges of Community Reintegration

18. Discussions during the workshop breakout groups pointed to thirteen cross-cutting good practices and challenges arising from community reintegration activities as experienced in the four PCF grants.

1. **Balancing short and long-term interests is a necessary challenge.** An underlying tension exists between the short-term needs in the immediate aftermath of violence and the long-term development needs of a post-conflict country<sup>6</sup>. In addition to addressing emergency requirements in the initial stages, organizations feel the need to provide an immediate peace dividend to reward tolerance and to encourage other communities to follow suit as a means to a larger end. However, initiatives that target near-term needs can simply become one-off projects with no link to a larger strategy. Establishing a long-term perspective from the beginning, even as the organization addresses immediate needs, can help create continuity and smooth this transition. Specifically, these accelerated projects should fit into well thought-out objectives that establish short *and* long-term priorities and complement other community reintegration programs that address specific needs over a longer timeframe. A danger here is in raising expectations among communities for continuous or follow-on activities. Even if the needs exist, the funding may not. PCF funds can play a catalytic role in this regard as seed money to create the conditions for development. They can be used to attract other donors to fund medium and long-term objectives.
2. **Each situation is different; heed local context.** In sharing experiences and looking for commonalities, it is perhaps human nature to search for a common template that applies to all. It is thus important to avoid being lured into following a standard formula by remaining diligent in recognizing the uniqueness of each community and each conflict situation. Project identification and selection, for example, should be based on locally derived demands and take into consideration existing local capacities and limitations—community, government, and infrastructure. Developing a thorough understanding of the local context can contribute to recognizing potential cultural and conflict pressure points, which are often particularly sensitive in a post-conflict environment.
3. **Working with local communities takes time.** Establishing and using a participatory approach, building trust among stakeholders, and developing local capacities require a dedication of time and resources. This can conflict with the implementing organization's need to address immediate requirements and to provide rapid and concrete results. Organizations felt it took six months to one year to implement first activities through a participatory approach as a return to the community for resisting conflict.
4. **Establishing a local presence can be valuable.** In many instances, co-locating agency staff with the community in which they are working can help develop trust, provide the agency with the ability to monitor the project and community relations, and increase the organization's understanding of local

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<sup>6</sup> The discussion refers generically to a “post-conflict environment” while clearly several areas within the grant countries still experience violence. For the purpose of drawing lessons, the working assumption is that most grant implementation of community reintegration programs takes place in areas of relative calm, if not complete cessation of violence.

context . However, security concerns, staffing availability, and resources may inhibit the agency's ability to place staff throughout its operating zones.

5. **Creating a legal operating framework may be beneficial.** Having an official structure from the beginning within which the community and the organization agree to operate can help create a modicum of continuity in such a mutable environment as one emerging from conflict. Such a framework can help ensure that the project development and implementation process is legitimate, it offers a legal foundation to which to refer, and it regulates such operations as local development committee decision-making. However, legal frameworks regulating community development councils, their functions, and responsibilities are rare.
6. **Conducting an institutional analysis is a useful prerequisite to implementation.** An institutional diagnostic designed to determine local capacities can be invaluable over the long run. It is useful in ascertaining the ability of the community and local government to carry out a project, designing programs to fit actual conditions, and pinpointing capacity building needs.
7. **Building local capacity with all actors is essential.** Development of local staff, community, local organization, and government capacity is a benefit to the project itself as well as an investment in the future of the local people, structures, and institutions. Within community development councils, for instance, training and mentoring not only bolster project success but also contribute to the long-term development of the councils as decision-making bodies. A challenge for the implementing organization is to strike a balance between immediately initiating a community reintegration project and first taking the time to develop the councils' skills and abilities. A consideration is whether the project necessitates a certain capacity level to function: building the council members' ability to handle finances, for example, is necessary before allocating it funds. The government will mostly likely require capacity development not only to work successfully with the councils and with the implementing organization, but also to have the skills necessary for effective long-term governance. Capacity development with any actor helps build confidence but also requires time and resources as well as follow-up over the longer-term.
8. **Government involvement is crucial.** Engaging the government wherever possible in the community reintegration process offers numerous long-term benefits. A government-led coordination between agencies based on common agreed principles, for instance, supports government leadership. Engaging the government and linking the project to government programs and community reintegration initiatives as a basic principle of operation creates ownership. These can have long-term repercussions on sustainability, civil society development, and good governance. For this type of interaction, however, the government must not only possess adequate capacity, but must also have in place an official structure with which to relate to the communities and organizations.
9. **Local ownership supports sustainability.** The process of project selection and design must be grounded in local community decision-making for reintegration to endure over time—particularly after international agencies disengage. Similarly, the government's involvement in reintegration initiatives lays the foundation for long-term leadership and stewardship within its jurisdiction.
10. **Participation is best engaged from the initial stages of a project.** Early use of participatory practices (such Participatory Rural Appraisals) is important to identifying true needs, empowering the community, and supporting the renewal of intra-community relationships. This builds the foundation for sustained participation in on-going decision making and ultimately provides the basis for democratic involvement and demand for better governance. Beginning with a participatory approach, thus, sets the stage for the life span of the project as well as lays the foundation for future initiatives and decisions.
11. **Transparency must be rooted in the beginning.** Developing transparency as a foundation of operations is imperative at the introduction of a project. Starting with the implementing agency itself,

establishing transparent rules, being consistent and equitable in the allocation of funds, reporting honestly, and in general building a culture of responsibility and integrity can help build trust among beneficiaries over time, especially in multi-ethnic communities. This is particularly significant with respect to managing funds in order to establish zero tolerance for misuse of money. Agencies can support this through maintaining frank communication about the funds available, through helping the communities administer the funds, and through building the community's capacity to manage finances early on.

12. **Inter-agency collaboration in the field supports post-conflict efforts.** Good working relationships between organizations benefit overall community reintegration goals including building long-term local capacity. Reviewing organizational comparative advantages (such as adaptability, skills, and operational timeframe) and mapping which organization does what can help determine where agencies can support each other. This can be useful, for example, in ascertaining the potential long-term impact of short-term projects or in transferring local staff and inputs when an organization phases out. Area-based approaches also tend to promote greater linkages between agencies, especially when they are supported by locally based coordination structures facilitated by a lead organization. Setting up staff exchanges between relief and development staff, for example, recognizing partners' work publicly, and establishing advisory groups to help guide the agencies can also be useful. Finally, linking PCF to other grants and funding sources from the beginning can enhance inter-agency interaction as well as support adaptability to changing needs in a post-conflict environment. These are the ideals. The recognized advantage of greater inter-agency collaboration, unfortunately, is often over shadowed by the reality of competition for resources and operational rivalry.
13. **Good communication between all entities is key to building trust.** Information sharing between donors, government, implementing agencies, local organizations, and communities individually and altogether is indispensable to successful community reintegration. This entails keeping dialogue transparent between all actors and ensuring clarity, agreement, and respect in communication. Involving all stakeholders in the assessment process or sharing information on organizational phase out, for instance, engenders trust and understanding between entities. Such communication practices benefit from the early establishment of an information sharing and decision making structure based on a common agreed framework and principles. Just as this type of a structure can help manage inter-entity information, developing a communication strategy and using the media can help relate community reintegration efforts to the general public.

## V. Next Steps

19. Several recommendations for future actions emerged from the workshop for advancing practices in community reintegration. In light of the agreed benefit of inter-agency collaboration, the most significant recommendation was to conduct more collective work on community reintegration between UNHCR, UNDP, and PCF, such as joint field assessments and evaluations. This kind of collaboration could be enhanced through the tendering of small grants for the evaluations, the use of resource people from previous successful programs, and through the (joint) development of impact assessment indicators usable by all agencies. Such efforts would help streamline the issues, broaden the partnerships, and build awareness of community reintegration issues particularly among field staff. At the same time, the workshop concluded that organizations needed to undertake an internal review of their own institutional mechanisms, such as staffing and funding, to enhance their ability to function effectively in transition environments.

20. PCF, specifically, might examine the impact and relevance of its funding and why organizations want to access it, as well as whether security (humanitarian access) was a pre-requisite to PCF grants (or, indeed, whether PCF can contribute to security). To facilitate and disseminate this learning, PCF might write a brochure on lessons learned in community reintegration to offer to countries and organizations considering applying for PCF funding.

#### **IV. Inter-organizational Collaboration**

21. Inter-agency collaboration was an important part of the overall workshop discussion on learning from organizational experiences in community reintegration. The following are several suggestions that emerged on how to support greater cooperation between UNDP, UNHCR, and the World Bank, both in the field and at headquarters.

22. Despite a theoretical agreement that good inter-agency collaboration is invaluable to effective community reintegration, the fundamental cultural, policy, and methodological differences and the continual contention over the lead agency issue can make cooperation difficult. It is therefore highly advantageous when organizations come to terms with these by reconciling their different experiences and expectations and agreeing on common parameters before beginning to work together. Communication in this history laden endeavor is key. Also of great benefit is involving government in the discussion as early as possible and working under government leadership. This can help facilitate inter-agency coordination while engaging other actors in the discussion such as local organizations and donors.

23. Collaboration is easier at the field level. It can be enhanced, however, by developing linkages within an area-based approach, establishing a field-based inter-agency project approval mechanism, integrating the projects at the community level, sharing information on programs of possible mutual interest, and co-locating offices space. Finally, in the interest of developing better overall inter-organizational understanding, agencies might also exchange staff and establish an inter-agency discussion on working in a transitional environment.