

# April Newsletter

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**Status Quo; Social Architecture; Direction, Trust & Hope:** "...depends much more on 'facilitative being' than on the 'doing.'"

**GFSC at the IAF conference:** Tampa, FL, June 9-11, 2005. For more conference information, go to [iaf-world.org](http://iaf-world.org).

## GFSC: The Distinctive Contribution We Make

by Tim Karpoff

At GFSC, we continue to ask ourselves, "How are we different from all the other NGOs working in disaster relief or community development?" As we grow, and as we work in partnership with others, we are finding it more and more important to refine our own understanding of the contribution we are making.

A good starting point is to describe current models, for instance, the distinction between humanitarian assistance and development assistance. Humanitarian assistance is usually associated with emergency relief operations—getting resources, supplies and technical assistance to communities that have been devastated by crisis or disaster, such as the recent tsunami. Development assistance is usually associated with programs and efforts to build the capacity of communities to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant.

These models may be found within the same organization. For example, several years ago I worked briefly with Mercy Corps in Bosnia.

Historically, they have focused on humanitarian assistance. I was impressed with their ability to quickly get supplies, from cooking oil to building materials to used transport vehicles, to refugee camps and local communities. Their sources included UN organizations, private foundations, and individuals, and their efforts were sometimes heroic. In the past several years, Mercy Corps has expanded their focus to include developmental assistance as well, offering training and other capacity-building programs to build or rebuild 'civil society' in communities and entire countries.



This example can be repeated over and over. Thousands of organizations, private and public/private, religious and secular, large and small, have built an infrastructure for providing resources and skills

to help communities rebuild after disaster, or accelerate their ability to sustain themselves. They work alongside, and sometimes along with, governmental, bilateral and multilateral efforts. Many people doing this work have devoted their lives not only to helping people, but to changing the world, making it more livable and sustainable for all.

Where do we fit in? Like development assistance organizations GFSC is concerned with increasing or rebuilding the capacity of communities. However, we are looking to move beyond present efforts, which still focus on transferring resources from some other, external place to the community in need. In fact, we are exploring the idea of a new way

of thinking and acting, moving from *transfer* to *exchange* as a fundamental paradigm.

Think about it: all forms of development assistance involve, somehow, the transfer of resources and/or knowledge from one place that has resources to another place that does not. In disaster relief, moving supplies rapidly to where they're needed is critical. In community development, helping communities to learn new skills through technical assistance is extremely valuable. These are important and necessary types of assistance, and we admire organizations that do terrific work in these areas. But we think that a fundamental need is going unmet, and that without meeting it, the whole development aid infrastructure is aimed at maintaining the world it seeks to change.

In humanitarian assistance, after the emergency, how do communities rebuild—socially as well as physically? In Bosnia, the international community was so effective in getting building materials after the war to inter-entity border communities, that when we first rumbled into Gradacac, my wife and I remarked that “It looks better than some towns in New Mexico.” Much progress was quickly made to address physical needs. But the issues of how to help people to return to their homes, across the inter-entity border, and how to help communities rebuild their social networks and to interact with outside organizations on an equal footing, was far more difficult.

In development assistance, the term, “transfer of technology,” is commonly used. Does this imply that communities need something that can only be obtained from somewhere else? Even when there is a mutual understanding between a community and an outside agency, are our assumptions based in the idea that the really important knowledge lies outside the community? Many times, assistance is

provided in a way that places the community in a subordinate, almost colonial relationship.

The point is that, by themselves, both models overly rely on one-way movement of whatever is needed.

GFSC believes that we must start with more reciprocity. Further than many other development assistance efforts, GFSC believes that the tools and skills for rebuilding are, essentially, already in place, and that local technical assistance should be looked to first, and relied on primarily. The questions we ask include,

- What is already present that can be built on?
- What local skills and resources are available for rebuilding?
- What can local people teach others?
- What can be exchanged between local communities—what can be learned *from them*, and what can we learn from each other? and
- How do we link these resources so that communities can and do learn from each other?”

Disaster intervention has been a key motivator for us. Our insight has been that facilitators have crucially needed skills for helping communities rebuild their social and physical networks after major crises. Facilitators have invaluable skills in helping communities remember their strengths, develop a path forward, and develop skills and capacity. But we shouldn't let ourselves get trapped into thinking that those facilitation skills are only available from somewhere else. In fact, at first, we thought that GFSC would focus on organizing skilled facilitators to travel to communities in need so we could “teach them how to do it.” We quickly realized that this thinking only preserves a paternalistic way of providing development assistance. It is interesting to note how deeply

this mindset may be in us as facilitators and community developers.

It is crucial to start with and stay with the idea that *every* community has ways of facilitating participation in planning and decision making, and *every* community has people who are skilled in these ways.

To support this, GFSC helps develop networks of local volunteer facilitators who can deploy *local* knowledge and, through contact with other local networks, have access to knowledge from other communities and cultures around the world. This can create a genuine, ongoing exchange of knowledge and skills of local culturally-acceptable models of facilitating community and NGO development. This is an exchange that we want to develop and encourage.

GFSC also provides tools for facilitators and other professionals through our Mentored Pathways, Virtual Mentoring, Disaster Intervention Facilitation, Facilitating Social Resilience and other programs and workshops. We are continually expanding our library of resource and training materials to include insights and perspectives from many countries and cultures, so that the foundation of our programs is not only Western or Northern. The profession of facilitation, while growing in many areas, is largely based in economically developed countries. Much of the knowledge is being “transferred” from these areas. As local volunteer networks increase in size and number around the world, we look forward to seeing more transfer of knowledge and people from the global South to other parts of the world. Eventually, we hope to see policy and institutional changes that support development efforts that do more than “honor” local input, but are based on local experience and skills.

We know we are not unique, and we look forward to finding organizational partners in

expanding these efforts, to discovering additional facilitation methods and skills, and to facilitating the exchange of this knowledge to communities everywhere.

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### GFSC Tidbits

#### We're growing:

- Newsletter Subscribers  
English – 618, Spanish – 306
- Volunteers – 147 English, 45 – Spanish
- Mentors in Training – 12
- To become a GFSC volunteer, visit our web site, [globalfacilitators.org](http://globalfacilitators.org) and sign up.

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#### President's Column

Gilbert Brenson-Lazan



### MONTHLY MUSINGS

#### Status Quo; Social Architecture; Direction, Trust and Hope

Warren Bennis (1994) says that three things are at the top of the list for leading during periods of unprecedented and transformative change:

- 1) Recognizing that staying with the status quo is unacceptable.
- 2) Creating the social architecture capable of generating intellectual capital.
- 3) Providing direction, trust and hope to the followers.

As volunteer facilitators in GFSC, our task is one of helping local network and community leaders recognize the importance of these three elements and effectively develop them:

- 1) The status quo is not just a set of policies and procedures to which we adhere, but also our mindsets, our perceptions and our models. As Tim Karpoff so eloquently expresses in his article in this month's newsletter, traditional aid and assistance models have their place and time in community development work, but if they do not rapidly give way to models and strategies of empowerment and endogenous self-development, a new culture based on a cruel and devastating dependency is almost always created, many time worse than the initial challenge. Our task as GFSC facilitators is not to lead the processes but to prepare and accompany local leaders to do so.
- 2) Preparing and accompanying the local leaders requires an appropriate and culturally relevant social architecture. Facilitators are truly blessed with a rich heritage for creating spaces and processes of group self-development. The decades of experiences of ICA and the on-going efforts of the IAF to become and remain the professional collegial organization for facilitators are just two examples of the many organizations dedicated to these efforts. We have many enormously effective models and tools for effective planning, creating and maintaining meaningful participation, alternative conflict resolution and decision by consensus.

- 3) In my opinion, helping local leaders provide direction, trust and hope depends much more on "facilitative being" than on the "doing." Our heritage also includes ground-breaking work and on-going reflections on our values as professional facilitators. No technique, structure, "toolbox" or model will ever replace the congruent commitment, altruistic concern and value-driven actions that a volunteer can and must radiate in order to be successful. Simply put, we cannot give what we don't have and we cannot facilitate effective community development if we are not practicing continuous personal development.

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- **GFSC** will be at the IAF Conference in Tampa, FL, June 9-11, 2005. Hope to see you there! For more information about the conference, go to [iaf-world.org](http://iaf-world.org).
- **To contribute toward IAF conference scholarships** for facilitators working with communities in need so that they can enhance their skills, go to [globalfacilitators.org](http://globalfacilitators.org) and click on  **Support Scholarships for facilitators committed to building community sustainability**
- **To contribute toward GFSC programs** go to [globalfacilitators.org](http://globalfacilitators.org) and click on How Your Donation Helps

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**Letters to the Editor:**

We welcome your comments and ideas. Please write to us at [gfsc@amauta.org](mailto:gfsc@amauta.org) and write "Attention Editor" on the subject line.