

Re-Thinking Our Response to Regional Communal Conflicts and Climate Change ‘Refugees’

An Ideas Paper supporting the new emerging ‘New Aid’ Paradigm

This discussion paper outlines some ideas around a new proactive strategy to preventing regional - communal conflicts from the rising numbers and dislocation of climate change refugees. This approach focuses on enhancing regional and local communities’ resilience, leadership and adaptive capabilities. We are seeking discussions with interested aid-peace-church stakeholders to further explore and pilot new integrated responses to climate change and peace-building. It is our view that we need to integrate the lessons from recent disaster crisis management responses (New Orleans, Aceh and Rwanda and the emerging plethora of initiatives we term the new emergent Aid Paradigm.

Micheal O’Loughlin (Evolveris) and Rebecca Spence (Peaceworks).ⁱ

Summary of Key Ideas

- Climate change presents us with a potential future landscape of prolonged humanitarian – environmental crisis with the likelihood of rapidly rising numbers of displaced Peoples over the coming decades. This Ideas Paper outlines the need for a **re-thinking of our present approach to ‘refugees’** given the looming challenges of climate change.
- We see a **‘new aid’ paradigm emerging** and that donor agencies and governments can **‘bring these new aid initiatives together’** in integrated, collaborative strategies, actioned through ongoing, partnered ‘whole of regional stakeholder coalitions’.
- The challenge of climate change can be an opportunity to re-design aid-peace strategies and for developing more proactive, partnered responses at the local-regional scale. We propose focusing more on a **proactive and generative approach, supporting regional communities resilience, adaptive capacity and ability to enact shifts in tune with the new climate conditions** by fostering local capabilities to build sustainable regional communities. Further that aid-peace stakeholders and regional communities come together as **learning communities** to review and share their learning about what is working where, what isn’t and why, to work more effectively together.
- As part of this re-thinking process with climate change, we are proposing a regionally focused, strategic response we have termed **‘Building Arks of Peace and Renewal’**. The Arks Project seeks to support **regional networks of community skill support centres** and **train the trainer programs** to enhance existing skills and resourcefulness, promote local solutions, renewal and conflict prevention. Our idea is that these community skills centres can be linked through a **storytelling learning and friendship networkⁱⁱ** that allows communities to tell of how they are adapting, their local solutions, the skills and new social enterprises they have developed and, the ways they can trade and support each other for their mutual benefit.

1. The Spectre of Climate Change – as an Opportunity to Re-Think & Re-Design

One projected estimate of displaced people through climate change in an early study by the Institute for the Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in Bonn, predict a rise from 20m in 2005 to 50m by 2010. Commenting on the projected rise in displaced peoples by the UNHRC 2007 Global Trends Report, the High Commissioner, Mr Guterres described how a mixture of competition over natural resources, climate impacts leading to environmental degradation and scarcer water, will lead more people being displaced or searching for a better life. Peter Kessler of the UNHRC sees the “root cause of the (Sudanese) conflict is greatly due to the competition for water and grazing land between tribes” which has seen a displacement of 2.5m people into Darfur. Nick Nuttall of the UNEP cites climate change as enhancing environmental degradation, the decline in river water flows and loss of topsoil from deforestation in the Rwenzori Mountains of Uganda, impacting millions of people across a wide regional corridor. A Medicins Sans Frontieres spokesperson Dr Marinella Catalice says the ‘clandestini’ journeying to Tunisia and Libya to make their way to Italy’s island of Lampedusa, numbered 20,000 in the first 8 months of 2008 with 70% now coming from the sub-Saharan and Horn of Africa regional corridors. The numbers of women with children have doubled, seeking refuge from conflicts and famine.

- We feel we need to be focusing on **more proactive responses** to climate change. The recent glasshouses innovations, and building stabilizing innovations are examples of proactive responses in the Andes region of South America. However, we still face the displacement of large numbers of people into shanty towns such as those ‘hotspots’ adjoining La Paz where water availability declines and traditional food production has been impacted badly due to climate change, contributing to increased displacement of people across the surrounding region.
- Climate change is an opportunity to **re-think our existing reactive responses** including our existing mental model of refugee camps as ‘holding places’ (seeing them instead as regenerative centres we rather than just focusing on ‘providing fish’, we also help people to ‘learn to fish’ in the new environment). We could reframe hotspots of displaced People like La Paz as opportunities to help communities develop new adaptive skills to better suit the new changing climate landscape. Proactive responses like those already being undertaken in the Andes (new local glasshouses and sturdier cheap earth housing redesigns employing chicken wire for earthquakes) are examples of locally developed solutions; collaborative retrofitting and re-designs that can help support people where they are, helping avoid sizeable displacements and potential conflicts. This is not to criticize previous aid-peacemaking initiatives and efforts. However we need to consider that the scale and scope of

problems we could face will be cascading, prolonged and can't be managed using top down approaches where agencies act from within their silos (Homer-Dixon 2007 work is useful here). We feel it is timely to develop 'whole of aid-peace community' learning partnerships that enhance local regional community capabilities to adapt, build resilience (around water availability, food supplies etc) and the capabilities to prevent conflict and enhance peace. Examples of regional community partnered responses here include World Vision's work in Ethiopia and the proactive peace dialogue work championed by the ILC Centre in Rwandaⁱⁱⁱ that also integrates local traditional African peacemaking processes.

- The recent threat to forcefully return 150,000 refugees from Tanzania back to Burundi reinforces the need for proactive strategies to avoid regional conflicts, supporting people where they are, using the army not so much as providing security but as builders of new infrastructure and as training arms to assist displaced people to rebuild their lives, new shelters and damaged local infrastructure. One key lesson from the Aceh disaster was the need for enhanced effectiveness by **supporting collaborative responses** in the face of disaster.
- The one certain thing we know about the impacts of climate change is that there is likely to be increased social, economic and environmental turbulence, increased uncertainty, unanticipated flow-on effects, communal tensions and conflicts over land, water and food and increased numbers of peoples displaced. **An alternative but complimenting strategy which we see unfolding amongst current practices**, is supporting people to support themselves where they are, to develop adaptive local responses to the new climate and environment, to help their transition in livelihoods, adopt new land-food practices while preserving the ecological integrity of their regional ecosystems. Complexity theory tells us that systems like regional communities, their economies and environments when nearing the edge of chaos, can either collapse or undergo transitions to new sustainable, adapted systems states. But these transitions are very difficult to manage in a top down approach by outside interventions. An alternative strategy for co-managing 'system transitions' involves communities, agencies collaborating, making sense together of how changes are unfolding, supporting self-organising adaptive responses (i.e an adaptive learning network).
- Our conclusion is that we need strategic and holistic responses to the likely disruptions of climate change. **Supporting a network of community skills centres that help build adaptive capabilities, acquiring new skills and an empowered devolved leadership across regional communities we see as a way to enable local solutions and to prevent inter-communal conflicts.** The Rwandan conflict prevention and social harmony strategies using peace dialogues and local African traditional peacemaking practices are an example of

they type of skill sets that could be developed across a network of regional community skill support centres or Arks.

2. Lessons from the Emerging 'New Aid Paradigm'

The new aid paradigm is our description of a set of emerging new aid and community partnerships organizations, initiatives, innovative practices and mindsets including;

- The rise in importance of a plethora of NGO's in aid and peace-building, their focus on partnering regional communities and innovative, holistic initiatives. There small community focused aid-support organizations include for example the 'Friends of Rambutso', a friendship partnership helping this island community in the Bismark Archipelago, PNG to help themselves. This small group focuses on education -safe diving practices, health, solar energy and new initiatives for sustainable development. Other small community NGO's like the Solomons Island school support project with Fote community use digital stories and on-line 'crowd-funding' to gain support for the project. Other small but highly flexible and innovative community development initiatives include Surfaid now running preventative health programs in 200 villages in Indonesia and active during the Aceh crisis. These smaller flexible NGO's, employing innovative approaches, focus on developing partnerships with particular regional communities and could possibly signal a future of friendship support networks. This is not to dismiss the holistic regional partnership work by established agencies like World Vision in the Ethiopian region of ... and their pioneering work with more local resilient glasshouse food production systems in the Andes
- A new emphasis on micro-financing small local enterprises especially amongst women and marginalised communities such as the Grameen Bank and now Kiva, which uses direct on-line partnering to support community livelihoods. The recent success of loans to farmers for buying seeds has helped Zambia to create a food surplus reversing the disaster of a food shortages in just under 2 years is another example of innovative thinking. These initiatives demonstrate the self-organising resourcefulness of communities in crisis. Climate change poses the threat of more food shortages while the FAO and emergency food stocks are already stretched.
- The development of initiatives seeking local solutions to community and environmental problems. Examples here include innovative new practices that build

local community capacities to re-shape their social-environmental landscape such as coppicing trees for regenerating firewood and preventing desertification in Sub-Saharan Mali, the Womens' fuel tree planting movement across East Africa and forestry plantations for fuel (in South Africa). Another example is train the trainer programs in using solar cookers employed in the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya, the spread of manufacturing sand filters to improve water quality and health outcomes and peace training for civil war refugees to aid peace-building in Guatemala. Other initiatives include the revival of self-sufficient villages in the once abundant but abandoned land the Ruzizi Valley of the Congo and moves to employ natural farming systems in the Transkei and the Mupo Foundation in South Africa employing traditional African ecological wisdom for sustainable livelihoods. Local community centres such as the Kufunda Learning Village in Zimbabwe focus on enhancing practical skills, leadership and new social organization for sustainable futures. Organisations such as the Berkana Institute aim to support a network of local leadership centres such as Kufunda and crisscrossing train the trainer programs.^{iv}

- The recognition of the need and effectiveness of collaboration amongst aid agencies after Aceh that will help break down the 'old silos' and 'competing mindsets'.

3. Building Capabilities to Enable Sustainable Regional Communities & Enhancing Peace & Social Harmony

- Cyclone Katrina's impact on New Orleans foretold of the possible types of crisis we could expect with extreme weather events arising from climate change. It could be argued that Cyclone Katrina showed up the fragility of centrally coordinated crisis management responses from conducted from afar. Secondly, it demonstrated the importance of nurturing social resilient communities. The New Orleans Cambodian community there, was able to mobilize and self-organise themselves, gather their people and provide food, clean water and preventative health measures at their own community centre. They succeeded by relying on the expertise and capabilities within their own community (Campanella, 2006).^v
- During the last period of climate change in the mini-ice age of ...,there appeared fortifications across the Pacific from Guam to Timor. The recent uncovering of fortifications in Timor are attributed to the time of 'brotherly war' where

communities raided each other to support their own. It could be argued that self-supporting regional communities are less likely to be displaced and engage in regional - communal conflict. Poverty, a lack of food, scarce water, the need for shelter and jobs are harbingers of regional conflict and provide the climate for elites to incite hate ideologies and use communal violence to secure their standing. We have seen this recently with riots over disputed election results in Kenya this year and sadly in the genocide in Rwanda.

- The key capabilities of sustainable regional communities in the face of disturbance events like climate change, as seen by resilient theorists like Walker and Salt (2006) as resilience (the ability to absorb shocks), being able to develop adaptive responses and to undergo transformations or develop new practices and innovative practices and to re-organise themselves.^{vi} One way to enhance this is developing skills and critical literacies (developing an understanding and acceptance of the need to change and what needs to be done eg wells for clean water, pregnant women protecting their unborn children with mosquito nets from malaria) to build more resilient local food systems, to undertake preventative health initiatives and implement peace-making rather than violence to secure their future.
- With climate and global changes like Peak oil we face great uncertainty. To cope with this and to better identify sustainable regional pathways in the times ahead, we feel there is a need for new contemporary ways of sharing social learning. First to make sense of what is happening regionally with climate changes and to share what adaptive solutions are working, where and why.
- We have recently looked at innovative ways of sharing social learning about adaptive local community responses, building cross-cultural understanding and enhancing social harmony and have started to design and work on a storytelling learning friendship network *wikipacifica*. However we see the Arks Project as utilizing short e-training packages and local train the trainers programs as part of a storytelling learning network across a regional network of community support-skill centres - Arks.

4. The Genesis for the A Proactive Regional Partnered Strategy – The Arks Project^{vii}

The Arks project germinated from a request for support to build a community centre in Ador in the Lakes State of Southern Sudan from one of our New England Sudanese community who has since joined Evolveris, Majok Reech. We asked how could this ‘centre’ help catalyze self-supporting sustainable development and help peacemaking. We wondered whether such a centre could be a node for facilitating Kiva e-loans for local enterprises. Could this Ador centre come to negotiate regional partnered projects with stakeholders such as World Vision, the Anglican Church (New England Australia and Rumbek) and work on new community health campaigns with the CCM health clinic already in Ador. In a conversation with Akol Ciol Meriar, another of our local Sudanese resettled community, we asked what were the most pressing issues and problems; she replied ‘everything is a problem there’. So we talked of what she thought were the problems we see as a starting point and she quickly replied “ skills, we need skills’.

We will be travelling to Ador this January 2009 to explore this idea, the usefulness of piloting Ador as the first step in the Arks project, visiting Kakuma refugee camp to learn, investigate the need, feasibility and options for community skill support centres in that cross-regional corridor including linking with the Sudanese diaspora communities in Uganda and Kenya.

We are seeking aid-peace stakeholders to partner this pilot investigation and to take part in a ‘learning community to explore the viability of this initiative and, if agreed, co-design the Arks project and strategies to further field-test this idea.

5. The Design Principles Underpinning the Arks Project for Peace and Renewal

The design principles underpinning the proposed Arks project are based firstly, on refining what we see as emergent ‘possible strategies’ within the new aid paradigm initiatives, as outlined above. Secondly, evidence based analysis of common critical success factors outlined in a study of successful social transformations by NGO initiatives (by Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004 from the Hauser Centre for Non-profit Organisations at Harvard University).^{viii}

The Hauser Centre Study analysis looked at the

- Six S community movement in Burkina Fasso around funding local projects in capacity building and developing networks of village elders
- Plan Puebla supporting improving food practices and production and developing co-operatives amongst subsistence farmers

- Green Belt movement in Kenya mobilizing women in replanting forests for fuel and to prevent de-forestation
- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee organising ‘self-help and local capacity building (projects) amongst women and other oppressed groups’ in healthcare, education, economic initiatives and using social learning across the scaled up networking
- Grameen Bank – micro-enterprise loan networks

And concluded there were a key set of common success factors in enabling social transformations including;

- A focus on building - mobilising local capabilities
- Providing ‘packages’ of innovative new practices whether micro-enterprise lending systems or new locally appropriate farming practices
- Building alliances or a regional movement alongside the existing elites institutions
- Mobilizing the resourcefulness, creativity, existing resources, leadership and new groups within the local communities
- An emphasis on continuous learning and ways to transmit that learning across the network – movement
- Scaling up operations and leveraging initiatives at the local up to the regional corridor scale

6. The Arks Project Strategy

The Arks project strategy is put forward here for discussion amongst interested aid-peace stakeholders looking for a new proactive response to climate and global changes. This holistic response seeks to incorporate the critical success factors outlined above and from new innovative approaches that are emerging from initiatives within the ‘new aid paradigm’.

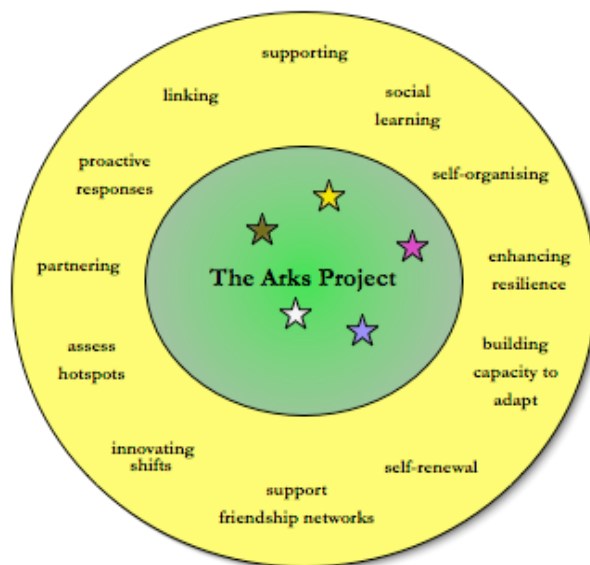
1. Use the threat of climate change as an opportunity to establish a learning community of aid-peace stakeholders to identify climate change hotspots and vulnerable regional corridors with a high likelihood of disturbance. These cross-agency learning collaborations could develop holistic assessment field tools, systems maps and scenario planning as a way of better integrating our learning and developing a shared understanding of the likely dynamics and unanticipated consequences of climate change

disturbance. This assessment learning team could also assess the feasibility of partnering local-regional community Arks of Peace and Renewal

2. Undertake a re-thinking of existing ‘refugee camps’ – involving their re-design into both sanctuaries and generative hubs for supporting renewal of sustainable regional communities; as multifunctional sanctuaries that provide support local resourcefulness using train the trainer programs and community storytelling for skill development and to hance critical literacies.

3. Support pilot regional STLN and community learning centres – to transmit learning about local sustainable solutions, what’s working where and why.

4. Assess providing support for assisting sustainable retrofits of climate change hotspots - the ‘re-designing’ of city regions – local place neighbourhoods to ensure building stability, shade temperature control, innovative cheap local water collection, urban and regional food, energy and transport systems (aimed at increasing efficiency, adaptations & redesigns) to minimize regional displacement and conflicts over scarce resources.



Endnotes

ⁱ Our background is in peace-building and co-designing sustainable regional communities - social enterprises using bottom-up, top-down supported approaches. We feel it is important to go beyond building reflexive 'communities of practice' amongst agency stakeholders to support inclusive regionally networked 'learning communities' between partnering aid-peace-church stakeholders and local communities.

ⁱⁱ **Friendship Networks** describe the diversity of partnerships between regions including local councils, district administrations and regional communities involving individual citizens, enterprises and stakeholders such as Churches or specific community focused social enterprises. Friendship initiatives can involve sponsored local projects, cultural exchanges, supporting each other through trade arrangements, providing volunteer labour or expertise. Examples include the Timor Friendship with Australian Local Councils and Timor-Este Districts. Specific community focused projects like Solomon Islands Adopt a Community - , use innovative internet digital stories and 'crowdfunding' to promote their project. These friendship projects and networks exemplify the diversity of initiatives in the emergent 'new aid paradigm'

ⁱⁱⁱ The work of the Institute of Research and Dialogue (IRD) is outlined by Vanessa Brown in *Conflict Trends* (2008) *Reconciliation in Rwanda: Building Peace Through Dialogue* Issue 1, 48-53

^{iv} The Berkana Institute promotes and supports a number of Learning Centres for developing local leadership across the globe refer <http://berkana.tomoye.com/>. Kufunda is a learning village centre in Zimbabwe and its focus and ways of working are outlined in reflections.solonline.org refere Reflections vol 6, Nos 8-10 55-68.

^v Refer Campanella, T. (2006) Urban Resilience and the Recovery of New Orleans *Journal of the American Planning Association* Vol 72, No 2 141-146

^{vi} Refer Walker, B. & Salt, S. (2006) *Resilience Thinking: sustaining ecosystems and people in a changing world*. Island Press, Washington.

^{vii} This strategy is seen as just the first step in re-thinking integrated approaches to regional sustainability and peace-building. New ideas such as providing aid through issuing 'vouchers', advanced by Eric Werker (Harvard Business School) aim to empower communities to self-organise their own adaptive responses to disasters whether that involves buying seeds for food, materials for re-building shelters etc (this can help stimulate the local economy and avoid downward pressure on local food products thru outside food aid). It is also possible to develop regional social funds that both lend to social enterprises by re-channelling earnings from regional carbon sinks and biodiversity bank initiatives. These regenerative initiatives (currently being discussed in the New England Regional Sustainability Strategy in Australia) can enhance communities' abilities to collaborate, undertake sustainable environmental management and nurture regional resilience. We need to think how we can support vulnerable regional human ecologies to break out of their existing fragile social-economic-environmental, system states; to go beyond our important but limited disaster and recovery, 'crisis management' responses now focused on providing refuge and distributing food after the event.

^{viii} Refer Alvord, S., Brown, D., & Letts, C. (2004) *Social Entrepreneurship and Societal Transformation*. Journal of Behavioural Science, V40 (No. 3) Sept. 260-282