



### CASE STUDY

# Up and Down the Structure of Catholic Relief Services Subsidiarity and Empowerment in an NGO Program

Carl Milofsky

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bucknell University, USA

### Abstract

This is a case study of local intervention by a large, international NGO, Catholic Relief Services. It is challenging to situate particular interventions in relationship to a large, complex organization like CRS. One task of the paper will be to describe the history, culture, and scope of CRS as a \$900 million organization operating in more than 100 countries. While this big organization provides a background canvas, our main goal is to describe a particular, local intervention in relationship to the highly structured CRS policy development and implementation system, PROPAC. The second task of the paper is to compare the Catholic principle of subsidiarity, having the lowest organizational level participate in decision-making, with empowerment, the process by which members of local communities feel that they are in control of their communities and social initiatives for change. This paper argues that subsidiarity does not lead to empowerment.

### Up and Down the Structure of Catholic Relief Services

This paper is a teaching case focusing on a local program intervention by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) targeting banana wilt in Rwanda [1-3]. There is a literature about how one or another technical intervention created by a large development organization fares when implemented in a less developed country [4-6]. Much of this discussion focuses on the importance of local empowerment and the difficulties of technology transfer when citizens have little education and the government lacks capacity to provide support. In our case we see a solid effort by a skilled NGO staff attacking a dangerous agricultural problem by involving villagers and creating viable economic ventures that support a complex effort to limit spread of a disease that could wipe out the main economic crop of the country.

Missing in this sort of case is discussion of where the intervention came from, what overall organizational philosophy governs this kind of project, and how we should understand accountability and responsiveness [7]. It is not that we find problems with what CRS has done in Rwanda in its effort to stem the spread of banana wilt [8]. Most NGO observers agree that the organization is one of the most sophisticated, careful, and effective of large development organizations and they have a strong organizational commitment to subsidiarity - to having as many decisions as possible made at the lowest organizational level [9]. The problem is that this sort of intervention just, so to speak, drops out of the sky. An organization like CRS has a complex internal culture. This includes a self-contained career matrix in which employees aim to succeed in an organizational universe that is opaque to outsiders and mostly unknown to those who are not intimately familiar with this sealed organizational

world. Most large development aid organizations follow this pattern and they are separate and discontinuous relative to each other [10]. We have an international aid system where massive, professionalized actors relate to each other at a high level of policy aggregation and where decisions are passed down to the local level with a feeling of inevitability [11-13]. Decisions are made based on sophisticated technical analyses, large-scale financial transactions, and international power politics. Because decisions are made at this high international level the intricacies of local organization do not seem to be relevant. In fact, local organizational issues are rarely discussed and as organizational analysts we struggle to find any discussions of what matters in terms of local efforts to make life better for citizens.

We do not expect to change this situation. It is important to understand huge NGOs so that we can present them coherently to our students and to our colleagues. We also think it is important to frame local program interventions in the organizational context of a massive, sharply hierarchical, internationally powerful organization. We want to tell how local policies, like the banana wilt project, come into existence. We want to tell where funding comes from, how planning is carried out, how evaluation happens, and how the cycle of project proposing, implementation, evaluation, and continuation works (CRS, ProPack I n.d.). We need clear written material to present this organizational universe so that the students can understand how career work in large NGOs is set up.

**Correspondence to:** Carl Milofsky, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, USA; E-mail: Milofsky[AT]Bucknell[DOT]edu

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We also believe that more clearly understanding massive aid organizations will help us to understand how bottom-up organizing efforts might work more effectively. To that end, after presenting the CRS/Rwanda Banana Wilt project and efforts at subsidiarity that were included in the work, we will analyze the CRS approach in terms of concepts of local empowerment. Local empowerment involves a vast literature and many different perspectives that cannot be adequately presented in a short paper like this one. Here are some key themes. First, discussions orient towards the local community, the experiences of its members, ways they can work on a project with significant understanding and feelings of ownership, and the way new work can be integrated into the division of labor and local traditions of work that prevailed in a community before the new project began. Second, empowerment implies a psychological change in which local residents feel that they are owners and authors as well as origins of a project [14, 15] rather than being uncritical recipients of expert ideas from elsewhere [4, 16]. Third, empowerment implies awareness of and efforts to ameliorate inequalities of power, ownership, and opportunities between people of different genders, ethnicities, caste groups, or economic origins. Finally, empowerment implies freedom of speech, property ownership, political participation, and access to services and support from government at all levels of the state [17]. It is not clear that the CRS conception of sustainability actually enables the empowerment of citizens.

In many respects these ideas about empowerment represent a utopian vision. Few projects can meet all of the expectations of this collection of ideas. Furthermore, empowerment puts all of its emphasis on the local context, the involvement of community members, and creative ideas that work well on a small scale. We know that some of the most dynamic and effective development and civil-society-building projects have been set up and can succeed on this level [18, 19]. The question is whether they can be scaled up so that they work in other settings and can serve as an intervention at the societal level [20]. One strength of a CRS project like the banana wilt initiative is that it is designed to scale up. If we speak of empowerment as a utopian idea, it also is true that most top-down development interventions are also utopian, in the sense that they articulate and try to impose certain values that almost never fit or work very effectively in local settings. There are grand plans having to do with international politics, sophisticated technical solutions to agricultural problems, and idealizations of how organizations work. All of them crash on the rocks of local experience. One thing that fascinates us is how local people perceive the principles and practices brought to them by international NGOs and social movements. We hear a lot of confusion when local people try to figure out ideas like individual rights in societies where social structure is strongly group-oriented. We see a lot of frustration dealing with debt when local people encounter Western enthusiasms about micro-credit lending. We hear puzzlement when leaders of communities and organizations discover that they are supposed to respond to and create organizational responses to

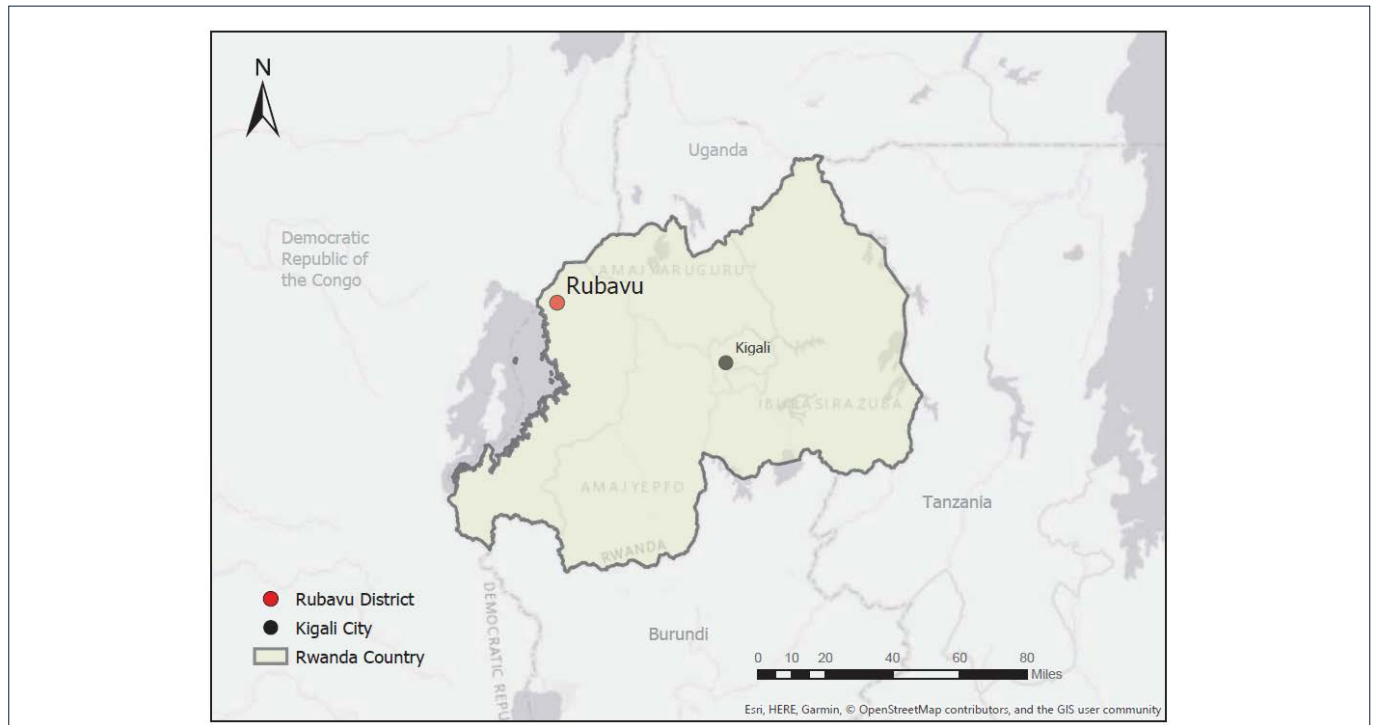
something called “the justice lens” which has been dropped on them by their main international funder and the representative of their international church, Catholic Relief Services.

Our intention in this case is to present a perspective on the programs of large, international NGOs taking as the unit of analysis organizations operating at the level of a sub-region of a country—here Rwanda. If we were writing about the United States it would not be difficult to offer an organizational analysis of an organization serving a population of 500,000 or so in a geographic region two hundred miles across—my local integrated health system would be an example. In the context of a program like the one we focus on in this case, that level of analysis is extremely difficult to establish. Indeed, there is very little research that we might call “organizational theory of the middle range” [21] in the NGO literature. Because of that, it is hard to explain to students what is going on in the kinds of programs that they are most likely to encounter—interventions to address a specific problem, initiated by a large international organization, implemented by their staff working at the national or sub-national level, working in collaboration with local organizations and staff, integrating their work with government, and trying to help local community people develop understandings and commitments that will allow them to continue on with a program after the experts and their funding have left.

### C3P and BXW

This section describes a project undertaken by Catholic Relief Services [1] to combat banana *Xanthomonas* wilt (BXW) in the Rubavu District of Rwanda, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and carried out as part of a regional agricultural initiative called the Crop Crisis Control Project (C3P). We offer this case as a fairly typical example of the kind of intervention a large nongovernmental organization (NGO) might undertake to address a serious local problem in Africa. CRS is well known to development professionals as one of the most sophisticated and competent NGOs. Of special interest for our purposes, CRS follows the important Catholic Church principle of subsidiarity in its programming. Subsidiarity is a commitment to involving people at the lowest level of social aggregation possible in formulating policy, planning, and carrying out projects. In this case, there is important community involvement in the project.

CRS is an organization with annual total operating revenues in 2011 of \$918 million and it works in nearly 100 countries (CRS 2012). About one third of those resources come from donations by parishioners in American Catholic parishes, donations, and other private gifts while about \$600 million comes from grants and public sources. CRS began in 1943 as an effort by Americans to help war refugees in Europe. When the war was over and during the 1950s CRS expanded to provide assistance in other countries. The organization is self-aware about bringing Catholic social teachings into all of the work it does and thus you find statements of theological principles, as they are translated into principles and practices, included in many of their writings about programs. The organization



**Figure:** Describing this mix of philosophy, organizational practice, and professional performance is one goal for this case report.

also has been systematic about developing an internal, highly controlled, system of professional practice. Describing this mix of philosophy, organizational practice, and professional performance is one goal for this case report (Figure 1).

### The Crop Crisis Control Project and Banana *Xanthomonas* Wilt Control

The Crop Crisis Control Project (C3P) represents a short-term, expert-driven agricultural intervention that focused on using partnerships among local and international NGOs to apply sophisticated agricultural knowledge and technology to a growing agricultural problem shared among several countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Walsh [22] describes the project as follows:

The Crop Crisis Control Project (C3P) was a two-year initiative in six countries of the Great Lakes Region of Africa to respond to *Xanthomonas* wilt in banana (*Musa* spp.) and to mosaic disease in cassava (*Manihot esculenta*). Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), managed by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), technically backstopped at regional level by Biodiversity International and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and national research programs at country level, the project brought together more than 40 implementing partners, 33 of which were NGO's. The total C3P project value was \$5.1 million, of which \$4.7 million was from USAID and \$385,000 was a cash cost share from CRS. Approximately \$1.8 million was administered by 40 partners who submitted projects through a country-level coordination committee, which vetted projects and sent to a regional panel for review before funds were

released by CRS Country offices to the partner. An additional \$1 million was earmarked for Biodiversity International and IITA. Given a premium placed on geographic scale, the importance of having a pre-existing network of field offices, and partners throughout the project area, CRS was a natural choice to serve as the lead NGO for C3P.

Walsh [22] goes on to tell us that of 40 C3P sub-grantees, 33 were local NGOs and 19 were multi-sectorial guided by a religious commitment.

CRS provides the following background about BXW disease:

Banana (*Musa acuminata*) occupies 25% of arable land in the highlands of Burundi, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Rwanda. It is a staple food crop and sale of fresh bananas and home-brewed banana “beer” make this crop a key source of income for producers in these countries. Banana is also valuable to the region’s agroecosystem, because the extensive root system of this perennial crop anchors soil and its broad leaf canopy shields the ground from powerful rainstorms; characteristics that protect cultivated hillsides from soil erosion. When left in the field, decomposing banana plants also serve as rich mulch, keeping soil moist and providing additional protection against erosion.

“Banana *Xanthomonas* wilt (BXW)”, caused by the bacterium *Xanthomonas campestris* pv. *musacearum*, was first identified in Ethiopia in 1968 as a disease of *Ensete ventricosum*, a close relative of banana. By 1974 it had moved into banana. This bacterial disease can move up to 70 km a year and in endemic areas, where highly susceptible genotypes are grown, it can cause nearly 100% losses in banana production. Due to the fast moving nature of this disease, it quickly spread through

much of East and Central Africa and continues this spread today. Banana wilt was first documented in DRC (North Kivu province) in 2004 and in Rwanda (Rubavu district) in 2005. Although BXW outbreaks were reported in Burundi in 2006 and 2007, the identity of the reported diseases was not confirmed.

The BXW virus has been spreading slowly and inexorably and it threatens to destroy much of the banana crop in Rwanda and other countries in the Great Lakes region which would be a disaster for the citizens both in terms of economic survival and in terms of their having adequate food supplies. However, the virus is extremely contagious and as the comment above indicates it requires great care on the part of local farmers to avoid spreading contamination and also to produce and secure access to sterile plants.

Farmers must use great care to sterilize tools that cut diseased plants. They must not allow cattle to walk through diseased banana groves and they themselves must be careful not to track infected dirt out of a diseased grove because they will spread the disease. When banana trees are removed, their roots must be dug out and plant remains must be carefully segregated or burned so that the disease does not spread to living plants. It is desirable to carefully cut the male buds off banana trees since these spread the virus. All of these precautions require that farmers completely understand the infectious process and that they are sufficiently meticulous in their practices that they always follow these procedures since if the virus escapes it can quickly spread to new, previously uninfected groves. In addition to these sanitary procedures, once farmers take out diseased plants they must replace them with sterile seedlings and this requires that a local small business industry of growing the plants be developed and maintained by residents. One of the problems is that materials like plastic buckets for the seedlings and plastic sheeting to protect and segregate the plants may not be easily available or it may be beyond the economic means of farmers to purchase supplies. CRS was effective at working with farmers who invented creative workarounds to solve these problems with locally available, inexpensive materials. But the problem is that local nursery entrepreneurs must be available and interested in developing this product for sale. This requires business support that requires different institutional resources than is required to transfer technical agricultural knowledge to the farmers.

CRS program planners were aware of this difficulty and built into the BXW program a significant amount of education for farmers and worked to strengthen local NGOs and foster involvement by farmers in the worked of the project. We get some helpful detail about what work CRS did both from the evaluation report Milofsky et al. [3] and from a scholarly description of community involvement in the project Mwangi et al. [23] provided by one of the authors of the CRS evaluation project. One approach involved simply disseminating information through the media and through government officials including cooperative extension officers (who are thinly spread in the country relative to population

size). A second approach involved traditional, comprehensive community organizing techniques that added banana wilt information in with other community development information and projects. A third approach involved farmer self-education study and experimental groups, although this did not seem to be part of the CRS design and only was developed as an intervention later. An efficacy study showed that if one looked at the proportion of farmer's plots that were disease free, these three interventions are ordered in terms of effectiveness (least effective general media campaigns, second in effectiveness were community organizing projects, most effective were farmer self-organization projects [24]).

It seems clear that the BXW eradication project is an important one that brings advanced agricultural scientific knowledge to bear on a problem that threatens to decimate an important crop in the Great Lakes Region. But as Walsh [22] recognizes there are internal contradictions to the approach. CRS as an organization puts great emphasis on a systematic methodology for planning projects, writing proposals, anticipating measures that will allow assessment, retrospectively analyzing the efficacy of projects, and using that analysis as the basis for writing new proposals and starting the cycle over again. CRS has developed a system called PRO-PAC that is laid out in two, telephone-book sized manuals (CRS n.d.) and those charged with developing and implementing projects are mandated to work through a long series of explicit exercises that spell out the method and the rationale for each step in the PRO-PAC process. A question we may ask (and will ask in the next section of this paper) is whether the mandated, fixed processes for project development, implementation, and assessment enables the kind of citizen involvement in the process that would allow for local creativity in developing and disseminating new projects.

### Constraints on CRS

On the other hand, CRS operates with certain constraints. First, in a local regional program like C3P CRS is operating as an intermediary and it faces significant challenges for it to be successful in that role. Reading descriptions of C3P, it is clear that CRS as an organization has developed the sort of partnership relationship with USAID where high CRS officials are discussing what sorts of interventions might have a significant impact on food security problems in low-income countries. One imagines that USAID officials take seriously the practical experience, the field connections CRS as an organization possesses, and the way that this knowledge is passed up the chain. USAID officials on their part are paying attention to international political concerns and they are charged to address food security issues separately from things like human rights concerns [25]<sup>1</sup>. Thus, one reason the BXW program is possible is that CRS as a \$900 million organization funded by a broad cross-section of American citizens has influence with USAID and is able to convince top level politicians and policy makers that it should be involved in the process of designing and then

<sup>1</sup> Carl Milofsky interview with USAID political officer concerning the relationship between food security and human rights programs in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, April 20, 2010. Comments from field notes.

implementing U.S. government programs<sup>2</sup>.

For CRS to make its case with donors it must have a process of careful internal documentation. After local NGO and local-country staff members work in the field with citizens or community-level organizations that are implementing programs like the education and implementation steps necessary for BXW eradication, each team returns to the office to write descriptive and analytic reports of the work. Catholic Relief faces the problem that realistically the educational training of its local partner staff members is not at the level of top American liberal-arts college graduates in terms of writing that is clear and that gives a critical analysis of the ongoing processes of programs. PRO-PAC is meant to create a framework that both instructs a diverse local staff that may not have sophisticated college training about how to write clear proposals and project reports.

There also is a little known role for American college graduates who are hired to sit in the back offices of local country programs re-writing field staff reports so that they are clear and analytically pointed assessments of what worked and what did not work. These reports then are passed on to USAID that has its own cadre of American liberal arts college graduates who do selective field visits and further buff and polish reports so that distant policy makers will understand what is going on and believe that programs are being carried out in the way that they are described<sup>3</sup>. Second, CRS is committed to bringing the best scientific and scholarly knowledge to bear in applied field programs. Walsh [22] argues that one of the long-standing problems CRS faces is that the workers in scientific research laboratories do not readily adapt their research to the real world problems that arise when attempts are made to apply their techniques and findings in the field. There is not nearly as much research on exactly which intervention techniques produce the best results as there is on pure science issues on things like which genetic alterations can produce cassava plants with the greatest disease resistance.

### Interrogating Subsidiarity from an Empowerment Perspective

Walsh [22] challenges the CRS approach by questioning the attitude of positivistic science that pervades the program design process. To the extent CRS seeks to bring this knowledge into the field it is limited by the fact that technical knowledge carries with it the authority of expertise, so that local farmer knowledge does not have equal standing. Not only does this introduce an inherent power relationship into the application

<sup>2</sup> Although we do not read about the high level consulting and political influence role of the largest nonprofit organizations within many sectors of social action in American society, it is not secret that this happens. For examples from the health charities sector see Milofsky and Elworth [26] and Sun [27].

<sup>3</sup> We do not mean to overgeneralize this point. We have not seen anything in the literature that describes this kind of role for American liberal arts college graduates but traveling in less developed countries and meeting American expatriots we keep encountering people fulfilling this function. Understanding the challenges of adequately reporting information up and down the organizational chain, it makes sense that this is a common role that is well used by NGOs for program evaluation and management. Also see Watkins et al. [28].

of advanced scientific knowledge. It also tends to overlook and ignore disadvantages inherent in new scientific techniques from the standpoint of the local farmers so that indigenous methods tend to be rejected<sup>4</sup>. Since Walsh [22] is a CRS staff member he does not see these problems as a criticism of CRS but rather a challenge inherent in the organization's formalistic methodology for designing and implementing programs that its field workers had to be mindful about overcoming.

A deeper critique is that large NGOs in general are narrow in their program focus and indifferent to local social and political conditions [25, 19]. The C3P program is narrow in the sense that it is focused only on agriculture. None of the program materials have anything to say about health or education much less about rights-women's rights, children's rights, human rights, or socioeconomic inequality. Program materials also have nothing to say about the political regime in Rwanda and how political processes relate to program development and implementation. In this section we ask how and whether this matters. At a minimum, Walsh's [22] concerns tell us that projects are not likely to work as well if there is not effective inclusion of farmers in decision-making about how the project should be carried out and knowledge sharing among farmers in terms of learning, teaching, and disseminating techniques. A broader argument is that NGO development programs only work well if they support a citizen process of democracy and freedom-if they build and draw from civil society. This perspective often is driven by ideologies that, like technical positivism, are not open to or supportive of local viewpoints. At the same time, if citizens are not supported by a full array of necessary social services and if they are politically intimidated and prevented from building wealth by a repressive political regime, then it is unlikely that the farmer participation necessary for the BXW to work will happen. Attentive to the importance of local involvement, CRS has a philosophy and a methodology called subsidiarity that guides its local involvement efforts. Let us examine this approach at work and then consider other ways of conceiving local involvement in programs. The question is whether an expert driven, sharply hierarchical organization can also be open and sensitive to community input in ideas and governance.

### Subsidiarity

In his article on partnerships and local participation within C3P and in the context of Catholic relief, Walsh makes the following comments:

"If they give me money, they are my donor. If I give them money, then I am their partner." The dialectic on partnership is very much determined on who is doing the talking. Is it the

<sup>4</sup> We visited a project in Tigray, Ethiopia, using new drip agriculture techniques funded by USAID and implemented by a local NGO partner. The USAID program evaluator that we were shadowing persistently asked the farmers if they would invest their own money in this technology because they believed it would make more money for them. They were reluctant to do so, partly because the valves would tend to clog with dirt over time. If there was not a parts supplier nearby and if they did not have cash to spend on these fancy plastic parts, their whole investment in building up a new agricultural method would be lost and their families might starve. Milofsky field notes, April 22, 2010.

entity that is primarily advocating and holding the money or is it the entity that is primarily executing activities at the field level? Successful partnership has been defined as mutual trust, complementarity, reciprocal accountability, equity in resource allocation and effort, shared perceptions, mutual advocacy, and long term commitment to working together. Yet there is usually a sharp disconnect between the rhetoric and reality when there is unequal access to knowledge or money.

Although Walsh [22] frames his discussion in a way that explores the challenges for a large NGO in forming local partnerships and points out important ways partnerships do not succeed, his language expresses a basic principle in Catholic social teachings, the notion of and commitment to subsidiarity.

In another CRS document on “the social justice lens”, Deng (n.d.) gives us the following explanation of subsidiarity

“As CRS’ Partnership Quality Statement explains, all of CRS’ programs are based upon operational relationships with local partners which capitalize on our complementary capacities to achieve the optimum benefit for poor and marginalized people. Through its commitment to the principle of subsidiarity, CRS believes that responsibility for decision-making and implementation should be assigned as close as possible to the people whom the decisions will affect. Through its commitment to strengthening local capacities, CRS is committed to a complete and mutually agreed upon process of organizational development with local partners. These beliefs in subsidiarity and in capacity building frame CRS’ operational approach of working with local partners, while the essential principles of Catholic Social Teaching, such as respect for human dignity and peoples’ ownership of the development process, animate and nuance this spirit of accompaniment.”

In operational terms, the spirit of accompaniment is characterized by a close mutual and complementary relationship. This relationship is necessarily flexible in both its institutional and personal forms. Accompaniment, as a process of partnership building and management, is a key ingredient of program quality. The fundamental premise is that healthy partnerships not only produce quality programs, but fuel broader societal transformations, which characterize CRS’ ultimate vision of justice and development. SARO has therefore chosen partnership as the subject for its contribution to agency-wide learning because of its centrality to development, program quality and the broader pursuit of justice.

Two things are clear from this statement. The first is that when CRS talks about partnerships and fostering decision-making at the lowest level of aggregation possible they are talking about partners that are organizations. CRS makes clear that their primary goals in forging these partnerships is to support organizational stability and to ensure that programs are carried out efficiently and in a high quality manner. The second is that we hear nothing about the broader community or institutional areas other than the one that is the focus of a specific program (so in food programs, we do not hear about health, women’s rights, or education). We also do not hear about freedoms and

rights. These might involve economic or ethnic inequalities within a community or the rights of women, children, and stigmatized groups (like those affected by HIV disease). They also might involve basic political freedoms in terms of voting, speaking publicly or holding public office. Also related is whether government provides basic services to citizens and whether local units of government are linked in an effective, accountable way to higher levels of government within the country.

These are roughly the themes one would focus on to encourage empowerment among citizens and partners in local communities. It appears that the focus on subsidiarity does not explore the question of whether having decisions made at the lowest organizational level means that local partners must feel that they have power and control in the process. That does not seem to be the focus of concern for CRS and our question is how and whether that matters. While there clearly are reasons for concern when CRS leaves out crucially important aspects of empowerment, the other question is whether strong local empowerment allows for effective local programs to be scaled up or for the use of the most effective scientific technology or for linkage with and funding support from large international organizations and governments.

The challenge for CRS and the issue we will consider in this section is whether these imperatives for formalization in organizational structure and top-down control create conditions that will make CRS programs like the C3P and BXW control ineffective. Big as this program is, it is manifestly clear that no NGO and no foreign government development aid program can be big enough to solve problems like banana wilt that has to be addressed on a national level. Governments in a country like Rwanda are too underfinanced and too inefficient to effectively implement a program like this one on a national scale. The alternative approach is for farmers and local community members to create and implement the program themselves. One question, then, is whether the local farmers would choose this kind of program if they were spending their own money, rather than grant money, and if this is what they would design if they were on their own. More generally, can the meaning and value of local control be developed through a process like subsidiarity where the whole process is contained within the CRS organizational system and the local partners all are, in a sense, captives of the NGO?

### The Value of Empowerment

The perspective of empowerment would answer that local control cannot happen if it is contained within the CRS system. However, that may be the case because empowerment represents an ideological value [29]. NGOs might respond that as ideologies, some empowerment might be addressed in different NGO programs. If building and enhancing women’s rights is a primary empowerment concern, CRS certainly has women’s rights programs. Is it fair to ask a food security program like C3P to try to solve every problem within its program framework? Would local farmers be able to make sense of a request that they evaluate whether their efforts to

improve farming technology also promote equality? We will argue that NGOs must address certain empowerment issues but we aim for our discussion to be pragmatic. We want to talk about the real value that is added when empowerment is taken seriously and we also want to be mindful that empowerment expectations promoted by NGOs can be in their own way hierarchical and controlling.

Taken in general terms, empowerment refers to a sense of control and efficacy that comes from conceiving and developing projects that seem relevant and effective within the context of one's personal life and one's community. One can only feel empowered if one has the right to participate and if one is treated by others as an equal, full participant in the process of project development and governance. Stated this way, empowerment implies that women will have rights of self-determination, that they will be respected and included in decision processes, and that they will not be targets of coercion or discrimination. Thus empowerment implies personal freedoms and respect for all community members.

In important respects empowerment is a psychological concept as Christens [30] explains:

Psychological benefits accrue not only to those fortunate enough to avoid trauma and other risk factors, but also to those who become actively engaged in community organizations and other democratic processes. This is particularly true for those who become engaged in...settings that have structures that permit many people to play meaningful roles, those that provide social support, those that provide access to social networks in different organizations, and those that implement community action. These empowering community settings can contribute simultaneously to individual psychological development, community development, and positive social change.

The value Christens describes comes when citizens are "origins" of action rather than "pawns", or people whose actions are defined and determined by others [15]. People who are not empowered feel passive. A different aspect of empowerment occurs when people come to view their local context and the qualities of their neighbors and community members as assets rather than as deficits [31, 32, 5]. There has been a lot of discussion of microcredit and the capacity of small loans, given through saving and borrowing groups that often are indigenous to local cultures, to create and encourage business opportunities. This methodology has become a target of Western pro-market ideologies and in recent years we have recognized that this system has caused a lot of damage to local people [20]. But it shares with other "social asset development" strategies that these projects help citizens see their communities in terms of untapped capacities rather than in terms of deficits. Social welfare organizations tend to define communities in terms of deficits and that is why they give them grants (banana wilt is a deficit)-and often those grants are desperately needed.

Viewing one's community in terms of assets not only improves

self-image in the way Christens described, it also helps people recognize that familiar objects and skills residents present might be put together to create new ventures that can help the community and lead to successful individual businesses. Empowerment encourages creativity and creativity leads to the sort of entrepreneurship that can allow small startup projects to endure, to be picked by other local producers, and to spread to other similar and allied activities. This dynamic was essential to the C3P and BXW project we have described. First, for banana plants sterile in terms of the virus to be developed, local people had to be willing to start and maintain nursery businesses that would produce and sell the plants. Individuals had to feel confident that if they invested their own resources in these ventures that their family resources would not be lost and that they could make money, perhaps doing a higher order kind of work than they had been doing as simple farmers.

Second, Bunch [4] has argued that aggressive NGO interventions only survive if local farmers can be taught the technology so they fully understand it, and that usually means finding local farmers who can learn and teach the material. Local farmers also must see sample plots that succeed before they will take up and own the technology. We have data from Mwangi et al. [23] showing that the banana wilt intervention really only works well when Bunch-like farmer self-education groups are formed to assimilate, test, and transfer the technology. It appears from CRS reports that only the less effective community education methodologies described by Mwangi et al. [23] were used during the life of the C3P project, suggesting that the subsidiarity approach does keep local organizations captive. But since Mwangi was part of the CRS self-evaluation teams, perhaps the work she reports represents a continuation and improvement of the CRS methodology.

An important question for NGOs and the reason we must examine empowerment practices carefully is that any local project will succeed only to the extent that it feeds into and fosters a local process of community organization and local entrepreneurship [5]. The more tightly an NGO holds onto and controls the process of organizing local partners, the more those partners are likely to be frozen in a passive relationship to the project. Not only do people then fail to build social and institutional systems that are active and self-generating. They also develop a relationship to the NGOs such that as they build local community processes, they copy the activities and methods of the NGOs. This kind of copying, what new institutionalists call "mimesis" [33], led one NGO critic to describe what he called a "cargo cult mentality" among community organizers in Africa (Homan 2010).

Beyond psychological and community processes, empowerment depends on the creation and effective operation of civil society. Civil society for purposes of this paper refers to two things. The first is the presence and activity of a system of secondary associations in a community that are tied to major primary institutions but that through their informal network structure tie the primary institutional system together socially. This is roughly what [34-36] refers to as social capital.

However, our language of primary and secondary institutions and the function performed by secondary associations in integrating the community and tying together the primary institutions comes from Warner's *Yankee City* studies [37].

The second meaning of civil society refers to government that allows for democratic processes in community action and voting and that also functions effectively in moving requests up and down the three primary levels of government-national, regional, and local. At each level, governmental officials must be open to community requests and responsive to critical comments and demands. The electoral process must be open both so that the government represents the people and so that citizens have the power to be actively involved across the spectrum of local services and institutions. When an NGO like CRS helps local farmers to learn the attitudes and social skills necessary for them to control teaching and learning agricultural techniques, those farmers are likely to recognize that similar issues of representation, power, and political criticism apply in other substantive areas as well. If women farmers are involved in local banana wilt groups, they are likely to apply lessons learned to their experiences with education groups, health groups, and women's rights groups.

When NGOs are narrowly oriented to the functional areas of their programs and blind to what is going on in government or in other service sectors, their own programs can be turned to serve injustice. We found an example in USAID food security programs in Ethiopia where the U.S. Government requires a system that exchanges food for work. Human Rights Watch reported that in these programs, the dictatorial government would lead people to do the work but then only would give them the promised food if they were willing to join the government's political party. When the farmers refused they were denied the promised food. The USAID evaluator noted that in a significant number of cases farmers did not seem to be given food after they had done work. But the evaluator simply voiced puzzlement about this problem, as though there was some kind of bookkeeping mistake.

US Government political officers working for the State Department stationed in Ethiopia told Milofsky in an interview that the food program officials in USAID simply refuse the political officers' pleas to take these kinds of political abuses into account in their programming<sup>5</sup>. This appeared to be consistent with U.S. Government policy that views food relief primarily in terms of U.S. national security concerns. Since Ethiopia is seen as a major bulwark against terrorism (being the only Christian nation in that part of Africa) it is better to support the dictatorial government than to protect the dynamics of civil society at the local level [25, 38-42].

Normal practice for NGOs is to create and implement programs that work in a narrow functional area. A single large NGO like CRS will work in a number of separate functional areas but when it runs programs there is very little attention paid by operatives in one functional program to the problems

or activities going on in an adjacent program. NGOs also rarely question in any public way the policies and practices of governments at any of the three levels. This functional segmentation coupled with inattention to government policies is a major reason NGO programs do not move far beyond the kind of in-house effort represented by the CRS policy of subsidiarity. One may applaud the energy the organization puts into making local organizations real partners. At the same time, when a large international organization pumps resources into the economy of a less developed country it provides tremendous support through indirect means to the government. This often has the effect of undercutting empowerment.

### Hierarchy in NGOs, Local Empowerment, and Middle Range Organization Theory

This paper has had the simple objective of describing a single program of Catholic Relief Services, the Crop Crisis Control program focused on banana *Xanthomonas* wilt as it was implemented in northeastern Rwanda between 2006 and 2008. Taken on its own terms this program was quite large but in the overall context of CRS and USAID programs it was small. Nonetheless, the task of describing the organizational linkages that tied into this effort has been complicated. This complexity is a reason that it is hard to find material that describes the organizational structure of NGO work operating at a middle level of size. This is larger than a local level program but smaller than a national or international program. Because we have few case descriptions of this sort of middle-range organizational work, we also have little organizational theory that tells us about NGOs. The theoretical gain we receive from telling the C3P/BXW story is that we more clearly understand how vertical integration works when the highest level of the system is part of the world of international politics and development and the lowest level involves individual farmers and their communities at work. Cutting horizontally across CRS at every level are complex systems of political negotiation, scientific discovery and resource mobilization [43, 44].

This happens on the top as CRS negotiates with USAID to develop a crop improvement program that applies to all of north central Africa. At the middle level, C3P involved a coordinated effort of 50 organizations working in five countries. At the local level BXW worked with farmers to create sustainable sterilization and nursery programs. Linking the levels together are assertive internal administrative and policy processes, the PRO-PAC grants development system and the theologically driven principle of subsidiarity.

A challenging question is whether political policies generated at a high level of aggregation-at the level of large Western states and international politics-can have its intentions translated down the levels of a large, complex organization and effectively implemented at the grass roots. It is challenging in any political or policy system to carry out this macro to micro linkage. Certainly the process works more efficiently and rationally if the system is tied together within a single, highly bureaucratic, massive organization like CRS. There is much criticism of NGOs that they come into local communities

<sup>5</sup>Milofsky interview with USAID political officers, April 20, 2010, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



in their large, well-maintained SUVs and push programs on communities with little local consultation. Some of that happens where C3P is concerned with its emphasis on the latest scientific findings. But BXW was also implemented with great concern for and sensitivity to the local community and local farmers. It is satisfying to see a highly professionalized organization at work.

At the same time, however, the BXW program like most NGO programs was functionally narrow and implemented in a way where we do not hear a lot about government. This was the case even though the Rwandan system of government has been repressive for many years. But we also do not see much cross-functional area activity and we do not learn much about how civil society development relates to implementation of this program. One could complain that the reports we have used for this paper are all oriented towards reporting program effects of an agriculture program. But we would answer that for complex, technical programs like this one to be sustainable after the NGO leaves and for them to make important contributions to the social and economic development of a society, strong attention must be given to how the program strengthens the horizontal networks of civil society. On that front, it does not appear that C3P and BXW did as much as they might have.

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