Introduction to Chapter 5

Keith Brown

CLAIRE SNEED PRESENTS A NEW twist on the Latin tag: instead of *caveat emptor*, *caveat donor*. Since her direct experience with one of CRDA's implementing agencies in southwestern Serbia in 2001 through 2002, she returned to higher education, studying at the Fletcher School of International Diplomacy at Tufts, before resuming her international career. In October 2005, after a stint in Macedonia with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, she was rehired by Mercy Corps to oversee a program in the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia. As the chapter indicates, she remains committed to the community-based approach to development and democratization, but her field experience has highlighted the need for careful management and the utility of local knowledge.

In this context, her reference to the *mesna zajednica* system in the former Yugoslavia is illuminating. Socialist Yugoslavia had a strong ethos of decentralization and self-management, the rhetoric of which is often a surprisingly close fit with the ideals of today's community-level democratizers. Women have had constitutional voting rights since the establishment of the Tito regime after World War II, and the principles of self-management were taught in schools (which was both free and compulsory). By the 1990s, many people were well-versed in the principles of community consultation and committee work. CRDA's implementers thus encountered at least some people who believed in the virtues of the old system, had taken part in it, and had practiced some of the habits of association and participation and were therefore well-equipped to make CRDA a success. Conversely, they dealt with others for whom the phenomenon of one-party rule until the late 1980s, the economic collapse of Yugoslavia in the same decade, and the concentration of economic decision-making in the different Republics' capital cities, had combined to discredit the *mesna zajednica* system and turn it into a historical oddity.

Past experience, then, even when not acknowledged by USAID's implementers (a majority of whom, as Gagnon notes elsewhere, had little or no experience in the former Yugoslavia), played a role in some citizen responses to the new program. Sneed makes this clear in other regards by noting, for example, the specific dynamics of intercommunal rivalries. She also stresses that, for all the idealized images of progressive Socialist Yugoslavia, it was possible to locate a strong traditionalist, patriarchal ethos, especially outside major urban areas. This judgment is borne out by at least one senior scholar from the region, who, in an article in 2004, found that a majority of her rural respondents held what she termed a "constellation of traditional opinions" (Golubovic 2004: 91) and argued that "the potential for modernization and democratic transformation" (Golubovic 2004: 91) lay in the cities.

By setting out to remake society from the ground up, in villages and towns as well as the major urban centers of Serbia, CRDA challenged that last claim. It also invited comparison with other precedents beyond Socialist Yugoslavia. In this regard, James Scott's work on the twentieth-century phenomenon of "high modernism" appears relevant (1998). Scott traces the efforts of various elites to improve conditions by applying the principles of rational social science, often at immense cost to the communities involved. As Sneed suggests in her conclusion, "elegant" theory does not always adequately convey the messiness of implementation. Also of note, from the archive of well-meaning efforts to foster community participation, is Daniel Moynihan's memoir of his involvement with the Kennedy Administration's war on poverty in US cities. Writing with hindsight, Moynihan expressed his unease over "the increasing introduction into politics and government of ideas originating in the social sciences which promise to bring about social change through the manipulation of what might be termed the hidden processes of society" (Moynihan 1969: xiii).

While USAID and its implementers steer well clear of transferring the "engineering" metaphor from the goal of infrastructure repair to that of reshaping attitudes, Sneed acknowledges the underlying function of the program in which she was involved. She also demonstrates a salutary sense of history in making reference to a more overtly ideological intervention, detailed in *The Surrogate Proletariat* (Massell 1974).[1] The book describes interwar campaigns by the Soviet authorities to transform the structures of power and loyalty in "traditional" Muslim societies in Central Asia. In Massell's phrase, his book represents a case study in micropolitics, concerned with the confrontation of "tradition and revolution, of vision and reality, of central plans and local mores, of impersonal social blueprints and intimate human relations" (1974: xxi). He distinguishes three

different approaches taken by Soviet elites to bring about the desired goal of societal transition; revolutionary legalism, administrative assault, and systematic social engineering (1974: 188), respectively, seeking to legislate change, to compel it by destroying alternatives by force, or to incrementally promote it through incentives. In all three approaches, a key struggle took place to remake the relationships between men and women.

Obviously, the underlying goals of gender programming by USAID and Mercy Corps today are not those of the interwar Soviet authorities, either in southwestern Serbia or in Central Asia. The tactics described by Sneed, too, do not neatly fit any of Massell's three categories. They reflect instead an intriguing mix of attempts to import ostensibly universal templates—such as the detailed sequence of exercises to facilitate group decision-making—and improvisations on-the-fly which respond to the particular social and political dynamics of different communities. Practically grounded, her observations highlight limitations of easy assumptions that the kind of "direct" democracy envisaged by CRDA, and similar programs, works smoothly.

In particular, the chapter confirms the insights of Nancy Fraser in *Justice Interruptus*, who notes the resilience of gendered styles of interaction, even in such ostensibly enlightened settings as university faculty meetings, where "men tend to interrupt women more than women interrupt men; men also tend to speak more than women, taking more and longer turns; and women's interventions are more often ignored or not responded to than men's" (1997: 78). Fraser concludes this section of her work, based on a wider discussion of how protocols of style and decorum serve to silence subordinate groups, by stating that "for participatory parity, systemic social inequalities must be eliminated" (1997: 80). Significantly, Sneed describes cases of her work in Sandžak villages where, by convening women separately from men, she implements exactly the response to this dilemma articulated by Fraser, which is to first empower a subordinate group as a group, and only then bring their (joint) position to the larger group. Feminist theory, it transpires, may have more utility, and salience, than courses in meeting management. And it is Sneed's first-hand experience, and her ethnographic eye—capturing, for example, how gender relations were inscribed in space, both inside and outside meeting spaces—that makes that insight possible, and provides the basis of her recognition of the local specificities that, ultimately, give shape to outcome.

NOTE

1. Claire Sneed and I both owe our awareness of this work to Susan Woodward.

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Neutrality, Empowerment, Gender: Fostering Democratic Culture in Southwestern Serbia

Claire Sneed

IN THE LATTER HALF OF the 1990s, the former Yugoslavia was a testing ground for community-based development assistance as a component of bottom-up democratization. The guiding principle of this approach, adopted by a number of international agencies, is that bricks-and-mortar projects can be used as vehicles to foster the habits of democratic activism in a local population. Once motivated by the prospect of concrete assistance at the local level, the theory goes, people are readily mobilized to participate in planning and implementing projects that they see making a positive difference in the quality of their lives. Assistance dollars targeted in this way thus have a double yield; beyond the tangible, physical benefits of repaired schools, health facilities, improved transportation infrastructures, or other vital service deliveries, these participatory programs are designed to be "confidence building" in three senses: First, for populations wary of international involvement in their countries, these programs can offer tangible evidence of real commitment by the international community to the rebuilding process. Second, by fostering collaboration between different ethnic or religious groups, these programs can begin to address problems of inter-communal miscommunication and intolerance, which played such a prominent role in Yugoslavia's tragic recent history. Third, by encouraging the full participation of under-represented groups—especially, in rural areas with strong patriarchal legacies, women—these programs can build the self-confidence of members of these groups. Overall, then, the promise of such programs is that they can make a decisive contribution to the formation of habits of democracy.

Among the North American nongovernmental organizations that took this approach from the start were Catholic Relief Services and the Institute for Sustainable Communities, whose activities are described in this volume by Chip Gagnon and Paul Nuti, respectively. In this chapter, my focus is on Community Revitalization through Democratic Action, or CRDA, a large-scale program orchestrated by the United States Agency for International Development in Serbia, which is also described by Jeff Merritt. Whereas Merritt's experience was that of an independent evaluator, coming from a background of graduate study in international relations, mine was as an insider. I worked for Mercy Corps, one of the five US NGOs implementing community-based development projects across Serbia. After joining the organization in 1998, working first on northeastern Asia programs and subsequently in the former Yugoslavia, I was part of the team that wrote Mercy Corps's initial bid to implement CRDA; I then served for one year as a gender mobilization officer and the head of a regional field office in the Sandžak, a minority region in southwestern Serbia. I subsequently returned to graduate study at the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy, where I first drafted this chapter.

My focus here is on the way that CRDA yoked together development and democracy assistance through the community-based approach. I then turn to Mercy Corps's vision of appropriate methodology and analyze how it influenced specific decisions that confronted me in the field. For example, Mercy Corps's vision affected how I and my team selected our interlocutors/partners at the village level, how projects were selected and implemented, and how we attempted to measure the democratization "impacts" of our results. Community-based development can ensure local ownership of the development process and engage people in public life and decision making. However, juxtaposing my own reflections with other documentary traces of our work, and putting the work in Serbia in the context of community-based approaches elsewhere, I argue that, while community-based development is an ethically sound way of encouraging development, it demands careful management. Without thoughtful, reflective, and consultative leadership, attuned to the specific local context, community-based development (CBD) cannot prevent the consolidation of undemocratic local power structures, which may further disempower or marginalize minority voices in the community and even contribute to exacerbating tenuous intercommunity relations, thus inciting rather than mitigating conflict.

THE CRDA MODEL

In 2001, the State Department's US Agency for International Development (USAID) established the Community Revitalization through Democratic Action (CRDA) program for Serbia; the program is scheduled to run through July 2006. The $200 million, five-year community-based development project, one of the largest of these kinds of projects, was set up, as described by Jeff Merritt in this volume, as part of a strategy of US investment to consolidate democracy in Serbia following the ouster of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. It was based on USAID's prior Lebanon project, the Rural Community Development Cluster, of which Mercy Corps was also an implementer, launched in 1996 (Rothman 2004). CRDA responded to a number of the objectives laid out by USAID, including, in language taken from the USAID website, "assistance that strengthens civic participation in community decision making and economic decision making and increases transparent two-way relationships between citizens and government" (USAID 2002). CRDA's overarching rationale was to engage citizens in villages and towns across Serbia in decision making about their infrastructural, social, and economic development needs and to implement rapid-response projects to address these needs. Among the principal justifications for significant investments in these activities was the promise of "consolidating" popular support for the Western-backed democratic revolution that had enabled the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic. By implementing immediate, highly visible infrastructure rehabilitation, economic development, and new opportunities to participate in a decentralized, transparent governance system, it was hoped that a tolerant, outward-looking new generation would be established to lead Serbia out of its decade of isolation and toward a brighter future as part of the globalized, multicultural family of European states.

In 2001, USAID referred to the project as a "community development program" with a projected budget of $27.1 million in fiscal year (FY) 2001 and $65.0 million in FY 2002. The initial goal was to "rehabilitate the foundations of civic life" by working with communities to identify and implement necessary rehabilitation of or construction of local infrastructure, including schools, health clinics, paved roads, agricultural feeder roads, water and wastewater systems, and solid-waste management systems (USAID 2001). In 2003, the description available from USAID's website had evolved: CRDA was still focused on community-development activities, involving "broad-based representative citizens' committees." The projects envisaged for this program had expanded in scope, however, to include "civic participation activities, local small-scale infrastructural rehabilitation

or construction (such as schools or clinics), income-generating activities and environmental improvement actions" (USAID 2003a). CRDA was described on USAID's website as part of the program titled "Civil Society and Local Governance" within the strategic objective "Increasing Better-informed Citizens' Participation in Political and Economic Decision-Making."

COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT: BACKGROUND

Although, in their budget justification to Congress and in their publicity information, USAID presented CRDA as showcasing a new approach, the roots of community-based development are quite old. A key, pioneering role has been played by a group of scholars, of whom the best known is Robert Chambers, working on issues of development at the University of Sussex. Chambers's work calls for a recognition of, and movement beyond, traditional hierarchies of knowledge and expertise that are implicated in the "top-down" model of development (Chambers 1997). This critique is now broadly accepted in scholarly circles: international development initiatives often import value systems and principles into local systems, disrupting social, familial, political, economic, and other power structures with the end goal of transforming local culture and social behavior. The Soviet effort to dismantle existing power structures in Central Asia between the two world wars, by seeking to empower Muslim women, is a classic example of transparently ideological development, documented in *The Surrogate Proletariat* (Massell 1974). More recently, anthropologist Janine Wedel has drawn on this critical tradition in analyzing Western aid to Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, which had the effect of creating a new plutocracy (Wedel 1998).

Development scholars and professionals have developed a range of methodologies to convert these ideals of incorporating locally informed perspectives into practice in the planning and implementation of projects. These include, for example, the now-established techniques of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). At the World Bank, Lawrence Salmen has also advocated the incorporation of "local knowledge" at every step of a project, on the pragmatic grounds of cost-effectiveness and efficiency (Salmen 1987). The growing acceptance of such approaches, especially in the field of program evaluation, has been documented by Basil Cracknell (2000). More recently, Gordon Crawford has advocated the greater inclusion of participatory approaches in democratization projects, pointing out that this represents a field where a focus

on the means would serve the stated end of promoting a more democratic culture (Crawford 2003a, 2003b).

Crawford argues that, to date, this seemingly commonsense conclusion has eluded many organizations involved in democracy promotion. His work is a reminder that CBD remains, in some cases, a hard sell, especially in situations where international agencies see a paramount need for speed. CBD is nonetheless gaining ground; some donors use this method because their experience shows that the more ownership members of a community have over the development of their community (including the process in which decisions are made and projects are implemented), the more sustainable the changes in social behaviors and roles will be. Others use CBD as the basis for the "rights-based approach" to development, which emphasizes the importance of establishing conditions in which people who were once perceived as recipients of foreign largesse are instead recognized as agents, defining and achieving their basic rights to livelihood and opportunity (Uvin 2004).

USAID's CRDA program appears to represent a case where a governmental organization is enacting an agenda that has substantial scholarly support. It draws on CBD approaches, bringing together local informal community leaders, members of civil society, local elected officials, businesses, and other interest groups to discuss priorities, select projects, and, in some cases, contribute financially, in kind, or in labor to the implementation of the project. From the outset, it has not envisaged the completion of projects, with the involvement of the community in the implementation, as the end goal. Instead, the central thrust of CRDA, at least as interpreted by Mercy Corps, one of its implementers, is that each project acts as a vehicle through which citizens are mobilized to act in a "democratic" way.

This emphasis creates, in turn, new demands for evaluation and monitoring. Despite widespread support for CBD approaches, a fundamental question hung over the CRDA initiative from its outset: how would we know whether we were achieving the ambitious goal of fostering a culture of democracy? While counting the number of committees set up, tracking the projects to completion, and providing head-counts of beneficiaries of infrastructure projects and of those who consistently participate in planning meetings were relatively straightforward, measuring the program's societal impact was a less tractable issue. Indicators of physical and economic development provide a template, but tools to assess the status of a democratic transition below the level of the indices developed by Freedom House, for example, remain a work in progress.

THE MERCY CORPS BACKGROUND

When Mercy Corps was awarded the role of CRDA implementer in August 2001, it was announced as the biggest grant in Mercy Corps history to that date (Dworkin 2001). At that point, the grant was for $40 million over five years. This was part of a rapid expansion of the operating budget of Mercy Corps, from $56 million in 1998 to $128 million in 2001.[1] In the initial press announcement, in August 2001, Mercy Corps flagged its previous experience, as part of USAID's project in Lebanon, building the "cluster model" to get local villages to cooperate. The explicit focus for CRDA, at this point, was to rebuild links—physical and social—between neighboring Serbian towns.

Mercy Corps had also garnered experience in Bosnia, Kosovo, and southern Serbia (Randolph 2004) as well as in Central Asia, in Tajikistan (since 1995), and Azerbaijan (where it was USAID's primary partner). In particular, work in Central Asia has focused on programs in the Ferghana Valley, where the borders of three countries converge. Indeed, after the award for CRDA in August 2001, Mercy Corps began two further USAID-funded community-mobilization programs: the Peaceful Communities Initiative (PCI) and the Community Action Investment Program (CAIP). Although smaller in scale than CRDA, these programs are also administered by a set of US NGOs (including CHF and ACDI/VOCA, among Mercy Corps's fellow CRDA grantees) and similarly seek, in accordance with Mercy Corps's mission statement, to implement "the process of engaging communities . . . to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change" (Mercy Corps 2003). In Mercy Corps's internal assessment of these programs, though, it is argued that they differ in emphasis; the distinction made is as follows:

> Both CAIP and PCI divide activities in the communities into two categories, **social** projects (e.g. sports and cultural events, festivals, seminars and openings) and **infrastructure** projects (e.g. water and natural gas projects, school and cultural center repair, road construction, etc.) However, the emphasis is different for each program. CAIP uses these social events primarily as a mechanism to facilitate and strengthen the process of implementing infrastructure projects while PCI views them as stand alone events in themselves. (Mercy Corps 2003: 21)

This distinction surfaces, I believe, in all such forms of complex assistance, which operate across different sectors at the community level. The distinction can be seen as combining two threads of literature on development that emphasize social *process* and physical *product*. In the latter

case, engineering is literally at work. In the former, "social engineering" is a metaphor once common, but now scrupulously avoided. The language of human construction nonetheless still surfaces in the terminology now in use; a key operative concept, for example, is "trust building" rather than "trust growth." But, more generally, the terms draw from a lexicon of persuasion and argument, of human-to-human interaction rather than from the language of action against an inert or resistant object. Alongside trust building, the terms used by Mercy Corps to describe its activities include "encouraging," "promoting," and "fostering."

THE SERBIAN CONTEXT

In 2001, after Mercy Corps's successful bid to implement CRDA, I took up the role of program manager for the region known as the Sandžak, in southwestern Serbia. The Sandžak, known in the early twentieth century as the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, was notable for its checkered history and for its multiconfessional character. It has the largest Muslim Slav-speaking, or Bosniak, community in the Balkans outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. As of the 2002 census, 58% of the population was comprised of Bosniaks, while ethnic Serbs comprised approximately 32%. In Novi Pazar, the municipality that houses the largest city of the region and that was the local headquarters for Mercy Corps operations, a full 78% of the population was Bosniak. This group thus constitutes a local majority, though in Serbia as a whole Bosniaks are a small minority. The region suffered from chronic underinvestment throughout the twentieth century, and, in the period since World War II, it has experienced extensive emigration by Bosniaks to Bosnia, Western Europe, and Turkey.

When I arrived in Novi Pazar, which is the economic, cultural, political, and spiritual capital of the Bosniaks of the Sandžak, in August 2001, tensions between Bosniaks and Serbs were tangible in the town. Since the breakup of Yugoslavia, and with the continuing rise of the Milosevic regime, identities had been increasingly politicized and redefined in religious terms. This had exacerbated the sense of difference and played on the insecurities of communities created by the collapse of the state and the outbreak of communal conflicts in its neighboring countries. Among the rural population, the treatment was one of neglect, as Milosevic's cronies from the ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS) were placed into mayoral seats across the predominately Bosniak region. Investments in the region had dried up, and both Serbian and Bosniak communities in the region felt the resulting pinch.

In Novi Pazar, though, neglect and marginalization were countered by a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The people of the city, or "Pazarci," are notoriously industrious and opportunistic. Twentieth-century patterns of migration to Turkey consolidated close familial, business, and cultural ties to Turkey with longer historical roots, established under Ottoman rule, when the Sandžak was part of the Ottoman Empire. During periods of isolation or marginalization, "Sandžaklija" (the pejorative term used by their Balkan neighbors, including Muslims in Bosnia) have long treated Asia Minor as a refuge from oppressive governments. They also have a tradition of transnational commercial activity, purchasing cheap raw materials that are then brought back to establish businesses, such as cafés, restaurants, and textile factories. The most notorious businesses during the time I was there were jeans and shoe manufacturers, where men often employed women to work, without legal protections, in sweatshops and sometimes in hazardous conditions. However, this gray market–based prosperity generated new problems, as Belgrade routinely extorted profits from the region. For many Muslim Pazarci, it seemed that their work was bankrolling a state that cared more for its Serb citizens than for its minorities, and intercommunal tensions were heightened by this sense of injustice and discrimination. Politicians also radicalized and manipulated ethnic identities. As part of the same process, political and cultural leaders within communities reimposed culturally defined social roles, particularly as they related to gender. Overall, then, the last few years had seen Bosniak society in Novi Pazar take an increasingly insular, anti-Serb, conservative, and Islamist turn.[2]

Mercy Corps's counterparts in other regions of Serbia faced ethnic issues. Cooperative Housing Foundation, operating in southern Serbia, contended with tensions between Serbs and Albanians, especially due to differences over the status of the border between UN-controlled Kosovo and Serbia proper; tensions were also exacerbated by the fighting in Macedonia in the summer of 2001 between rebel Albanians and the Macedonian government. America's Development Foundation, operating in Vojvodina, had to be sensitive to the Hungarian and Croatian populations there, as well as to the presence of substantial numbers of Serbs who had been displaced from other parts of the former Yugoslavia. The Sandžak, though, seemed to me to pose its own particular problems. My task, in this challenging context, was to set up and manage a team of local staff members to meet USAID's prescribed objectives in democratization and development. This included identifying and creatively engaging at least twenty different communities within the area of responsibility to prioritize and implement infrastructure and economic development projects—all within

ninety days. All these projects had to be 100% "community-driven," meaning that the Mercy Corps staff would need to facilitate a community-mobilization process to identify the projects and develop plans for their implementation. These 20 communities were to continue to be project partners throughout the five-year life of the program; project interventions, then, not only had to be implemented quickly, but in a manner that would do no harm to longer-term local development and would not disturb the fragile and complex relations between Serbian and Bosniak communities. Last, and perhaps most dauntingly, I was expected to engage women, who often appeared to be wholly occupied with the duties of family and home, in public processes that seemed, by and large, to be reserved largely for men.

THE ART OF MOBILIZATION

Once the Sandžak CRDA team was selected, the mobilization process and the formation of representative community development groups (CDGs) began. In order to train the new staff members in participatory development approaches, Mercy Corps engaged an American expert in participatory development to run an intensive week-long training program on the principles and practice of community mobilization. Effectively, we were taught to break down the process into sequenced steps, constituting an idealized timeline for each project, as follows:

First, arrange a meeting with the mayor and other relevant local government representatives (including, for example, the director of urban planning) to explain how the program should work. Ask them for suggestions, project priorities, and ideas about how the project might be designed.

Second, through an internal community-prioritization and community-mapping process, identify a broadly representative group of diverse individuals from the community to attend a planning meeting. The group should not be monolithic in terms of profession, gender, age, or political affiliation.

Once the group of 20 to 40 residents is identified, usually including the mayor or representatives of the local municipal council, convene a planning meeting, with the goal of producing a ranked list of project proposals.[3]

Have the Mercy Corps team of experts (engineers and community mobilizers), the community, and the local government assess the projects in order of preference.

The project that demonstrates feasibility, sustainability, and sufficient local-match contribution (at least 25% of the total value of the project) is then implemented.

The first challenge, though, was selecting the staff. Given the politics of ethnicity and gender that defined communities in the region, hiring a staff that was representative was both imperative and difficult. The staff of the project responsible for leading the community-mobilization process would have to work in different contexts, including municipal centers and rural villages with very different social, cultural, and economic dynamics, in which national, religious, and political affiliation had historically determined the level of support people received from the local government—a trend that CRDA, ultimately, set out to rectify. Ultimately, the team of 10 consisted of six Bosniaks, three Serbs, and myself; three of us were women. The community mobilizers, the staff members who are responsible for facilitating community meetings, mediating differences within the community, and liaising between the diverse community interests and the local self-government, included two Bosniaks, one woman and one man. On reflection, from my position as an "engineer" of more equitable local decision-making processes, this staffing configuration worked, in particular, because it enabled men and women in more conservative and rural communities to see an assertive, intelligent Muslim woman leading and, in fact, teaching the community how to organize themselves. Likewise, the arrival of two Bosniaks in isolated and downtrodden Serbian villages perhaps sent a much-needed message that Muslim "Sandžaklija" were not oblivious to the needs of the marginalized Serbs in the region.

With this preparation accomplished, and the clock ticking, we set to work. I quickly ran up against a slew of questions, each of which seemed to merit thesis-length study but all of which demanded rapid answers. How, for example, should you select the partner communities from among the scores of underdeveloped and neglected towns and villages in the region? Surely a concentration of tens of thousands of dollars in rehabilitation resources that was allocated to only a small portion of the population would neither use resources efficiently nor have a positive effect on relations between communities. How should the community-based approach be structured in an urban context? (Novi Pazar had an alleged population of 100,000, whereas many villages had no more than 1,000 residents.) Should you invite the entire community to a town hall meeting, or preselect the participants somehow? How would the preselection process work? Would you solicit interested citizens, or ask the mayor to select people? Should you try to use the existing "mesna zajednica" structure of the local organization, or deliberately sideline it?[4] How do you ensure the meaningful participation of women and minorities—demanded both by the donor and by development "best practice"—in the prioritization process? How, practically, do you involve women as equals in a society in which women

do not enjoy an equal status or role in public life? How do you ensure their inclusion in a way that does not offend the culture and the people, your primary interlocutors? Finally, recognizing the inherent conditions of mutual dependence—the communities' development on the program's resources and the program's success on the inspired and enlightened activism of the people—how do you tailor activities to avoid power games and instead foster a genuine culture of democracy?

NEUTRALITY AND EMPOWERMENT: NAVIGATING COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND AVOIDING CONFLICT

I raise these questions because, with the benefit of hindsight, I can identify cases where the CRDA hands-on mobilization approach, in which the Mercy Corps staff engaged directly with the community, provided the potential for fomenting rather than mitigating local conflicts. In part because the approach was facilitative rather than directive—that is, community-driven rather than donor-driven—aspects of the process left room for manipulation by those with influence, money, and political power. This tendency was very difficult to foresee, predict, or immobilize, as often the manipulating party had other power structures protecting him or her.

In the town of Nova Varoš, for example, a small, ethnically mixed town on the lower slopes of the Pester Highlands, the community committee members had been selected by the Serbian mayor. The only mayor in the Sandžak who was a member of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) coalition,[5] he was a favorite of the US government and had received substantial financial support, which he had invested heavily in areas of the town populated by his supporters. He welcomed the CRDA team, and offered both the cooperation of the municipal government in the community planning process and his own services as community leader in identifying qualified candidates to participate on the committee. Acutely aware of the need for local government support, and having secured community approval through a town hall meeting, Mercy Corps endorsed candidates selected by the mayor and the head of urban planning to represent community interests as committee members. This was the composition endorsed by the preceding "quick impact" USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) program (described by Merritt), and, while the selection process may not have been as democratic or community-driven as was called for in Mercy Corps's approach, the members seemed well mobilized and fairly representative of the broader community. As a result of the mayor's great level of involvement in the CRDA process, CDG meetings

were usually held on the municipality premises, with the mayor attending the meetings as a passive observer. It later became evident, however, that the projects being prioritized and endorsed with substantial cash contributions from the mayor were disproportionately benefiting committee members, including the asphalting of roads and the paving of sidewalks. This created some tension in the community, particularly among Muslims who were underrepresented on the committee. These tensions led to the mayor losing support among his former constituency of moderates in the community, in turn creating a space for the victory of the more extremist party in the subsequent election.

In the villages of Kalafati and Mazici, near the border of Republika Srpska, Mercy Corps's initiative provided an opportunity for neighboring multiethnic villages to engage and discuss shared interests and problems, but at the same time created a situation that demonstrated the deep and latent distrust and tension between the communities, respectively Serbian and Bosniak. The villages are situated in the high hills outside of the municipal center, Priboj, and are accessed by a steep, gravel road that becomes impassable during the winter months. Through the mobilization process, the ethnically mixed community committee, representing both villages, agreed that asphalting the road to the city center was an urgent priority shared by the two communities. However, when the technical assessment of the project concluded that the project funds and community contribution were insufficient to extend the road beyond Kalafati, the Serb village, to Mazici, the Bosniak village, the residents of Mazici went to the mayor to ask for municipal funds. When the predominantly Serbian municipal council refused, on the grounds of budget constraints, one of the community leaders launched a smear campaign against the municipality, claiming ethnic discrimination. The project was forestalled, and a high-level delegation had to intervene to assuage the situation. Although this specific problem was resolved through a compromise with the municipal administration, the damage to intra-communal relations deterred continued CRDA work there, at least temporarily.

GENDER EQUALITY: MOBILIZATION OR VIOLATION?

In the patriarchal cultures of conservative Orthodox and Islamic communities in the Balkans region, gender roles are often strictly maintained, and women generally do not have the same access to public life and official decision-making processes as do men. In the Sandžak, particularly in the rural areas, special efforts were made to ensure that women were included

in CRDA activities. In the first round of mobilization, village leaders (unofficial village leaders, or village "elders," who were men, with only one exception)[6] were advised that, in order to qualify for funding, they should invite representatives from minority groups to participate and that at least 25% of the participants should be women. More often than not, several men would drag their wives from their housework to attend the meeting, often held in a school. The women, often wearing headscarves, would hover or sit silently in the back of the classroom while the men shouted and fought about community problems. From an outsider's perspective, this ultimatum approach was more demoralizing for the women than it was empowering, as it highlighted clear social inequalities and injustices. Silencing the men with the goal of encouraging the women to voice their opinions would clearly put the women in a compromising position, and, even when a woman was bold enough to offer a suggestion, it often merely triggered a strong adversarial, or simply dismissive, reaction from the men.

In the Bosniak village of Crkvine, for example, which is located in a rural area several kilometers from Novi Pazar, village women were more amenable to engaging in community-mobilization activities. Yet at the initial meeting, when men were asked to give a woman the floor, they agreed but would inevitably interrupt or undermine the speaker. Finally, we suggested that we have separate meetings with the men and the women to ensure that women could freely discuss their needs and priorities, and thus identify a shared position that they could later present in an open meeting. The men, realizing that this approach might result in their priority projects being overridden by the (more practical and urgent) interests of the women, then offered the "concession" of increasing women's participation in common meetings to 50%. The women continued to favor a separate meeting, which we held the next day in the local school. Once together, and in a mutually supportive environment with friends and neighbors, the women were outspoken about their needs and interests, identifying milking equipment (for the livestock, which they tended) and heating for the school as the key needs. The men, meanwhile, insisted on telephone lines. Budget limitations prevented both proposals being fully funded. Through facilitation, the men and the women agreed to a compromise in which the school heating and a portion of the telephone lines could be achieved with a sufficient local match contribution. The women seemed emboldened by the opportunity to voice their ideas and participate in project implementation. We selected a woman as the community focal point, and over the year saw several of the women develop as outspoken leaders in the community.

In other contexts, though, the "separate but equal" approach created fractures in the community. In the neighboring ethnic Serb village of Sebecevo, after several initial community meetings with no women participants, the men insisted that the asphalting of the main road into the village was the main priority. We insisted on including women's voices, and asked for a separate meeting with the women, which we held the following day at the schoolhouse. Dozens of women attended and expressed a different shared priority, to provide a central water pump in the village center. The men, threatened by the implications of the closed-door meeting, loomed outside of the school, pacing and smoking nervously. We later learned that men had chastised the women for undermining their project and exhibited clear animosity toward us, particularly the female project implementers. We were unable to repair the broken relationship for some time and temporarily suspended our cooperation with the village.

In retrospect, it appears that it was the perceived high stakes involved that drove anxieties and animosities. In our attention to clarity and transparency, indicating that only one pilot project could be undertaken at first, we created a sense of urgency among local communities that carried with it a fear of being left out of the process. This occurred even though we indicated that further projects could be undertaken in the future. Even at the time, there was debate among the team members over whether smaller-scale projects that would partially address issues identified by a wider section of the community might have been a more constructive approach, particularly for the first phases of the five-year project.

MOBILIZING AND COMPETITION: THE CASE OF RAŠKA'S SWIMMING POOL

Economic disparities also exacerbated the tensions between neighboring towns. The town of Raška, for example, located 20 kilometers northeast of Novi Pazar, was largely Serbian and had been a party stronghold of Milošević's SDS party during the 1990s. During the Milošević period, tensions between Raška and Novi Pazar had deepened and were manifested most clearly at periodic Raška–Novi Pazar football matches. Young men from both sides typically took these opportunities to express their feelings for the other with bottles, rocks, fists, and inflammatory comments. Such flashpoints deepened tensions in a tangible way that made inter-community communication difficult and cooperation between the two simply impossible, despite their shared economic interests and, in the case of Raška, dependency. Raška, a town of a mere 10,000 citizens, had experienced rapid economic demise in the post-Socialist period.

Unemployment rates had peaked at nearly 80%, among the country's worst. The population in Novi Pazar, 75,000 to 100,000, depending on whom you asked, exceeded Raška both in size and in entrepreneurial spirit. Raška residents had absorbed the stereotype of the "Pazarci" as criminals and "peasants," enriched by their businesses, black market activity, and smuggling savvy. The "NP" license plates on the vehicles of Novi Pazar residents were the first to be stopped by Raška's police officers, who typically patrolled the main road toward Belgrade from Novi Pazar. Conversely, Serbs from Raška were paid less to work in Novi Pazar's textile and shoe factories, and they were allegedly the first to be sacked by Bosniak-owned businesses and regional public companies.

Through the CRDA program, Raška participants saw an opportunity for these anxieties and resentments to be addressed. During the initial community-mobilization processes, the CDG selected an Olympic swimming pool as their priority project. The community's representatives argued that the project matched our stated criteria perfectly. They could point to significant cost-sharing since the community had used household donations to finance the initial works in the mid-1990s; the entire community would benefit, including the significant Roma population; and revenues would be generated.

Although USAID had not explicitly excluded recreational facilities from the list of potential community projects, the guidelines—noted previously—had made no mention of them. We raised this issue with the community, suggesting that USAID might look at the relatively serious deterioration of the schools and hospital in the town and look more favorably on a project that addressed basic needs. The community group argued in response that the swimming pool *did* meet basic needs—needs for recreation, needs for a sense of progress and development, and the need for community pride. When a business development expert assessed that the community would not be able to afford the upkeep of the swimming pool, given the extremely high rate of unemployment and the deterioration of the town, the mayor committed to ensuring the sustainability of the pool. We suggested that this would divert municipal funds away from other vital urban needs, but the mayor—and, it appeared, the whole community—remained resolute. USAID, in keeping with the principle of granting implementers considerable decision-making power, deferred the final decision to Mercy Corps.

This case distilled all that was most difficult in the program. While the sentimental arguments of the community representatives were valid and demanded respect, it was clear to the Mercy Corps team, from conversations with the community members, that the currently unfinished pool had as

much symbolic as practical significance. For many citizens of Raška, it was a visible reminder of what they had lost over the previous decade, serving as a marker of their lagging behind the larger and significantly more prosperous Muslim-dominated Novi Pazar, which had an Olympic-sized pool. Raška's residents used that pool during the summer months, and so, arguably, they did not need a second pool. Having their own swimming pool, though, would symbolize their progress, independence, and autonomy and give them a sense of renewal of national strength and identity.

Even as we reached this conclusion, we also embraced the philosophy that the community-based approach should be facilitative, not obstructive. Raška's citizen body came together around the swimming pool project: different political parties, the sizeable Roma community, the municipality, and the CDG were united in their resolve and stated their willingness to invest their own resources toward realizing a long-held dream. What message would it send to reject the project? Yet, at the same time, we asked what consequences might it have to support a project that our analysis suggested was in the long run economically unfeasible, and, in the short run, would allow Serbs, Roma, and Bosniaks, who once swam together, to swim separately?

SUCCESS STORIES AND EVALUATION

The examples provided previously give some sense of the questions we grappled with. For the most part, the time constraints kicked in in such a way that we did not dwell too long on such reflections. The CRDA website shows the range of completed projects. Mercy Corps, like its fellow CRDA-implementing partners, focused on school rehabilitation, roads, market places, bridges, and the like. In March 2002, the USAID director, the US ambassador to Serbia, and the coordinator of US government assistance to Eastern Europe, Ambassador William Taylor, visited Novi Pazar and the nearby township of Mur to review the outcomes and impact of the CRDA program. During their well-publicized visit, they saw a traffic signalization project in Novi Pazar and, in Mur, a playground-asphalting project. As in the Ferghana Valley project, Mercy Corps, as well as USAID more generally, saw added value in photo-friendly projects such as these, which lent themselves to greater donor visibility. However, over the long run, the issue was whether the projects succeeded, not just in infrastructural improvement, but in promoting the kind of democratic culture that we had set out as our goal. Evaluation methods, in this regard, were critically important and yet remain, I feel, underdeveloped. While

accounting practices of the type represented by the dedicated CRDA website serve a vital function, statistically based analyses of projects, expenses, and even numbers or types of participants tell us very little about impact. And, while new methods for evaluating the impacts of these kinds of projects are improving, donor projects, seemingly by their nature, tend to prioritize the "need for speed" and delivery of physical products over the quality of the *process* that is required in order to "engineer" the social and democratic changes that these types of programs were originally designed to facilitate.

Figure 5.1 CRDA Website Report on Raška Swimming Pool

PROJECT DETAILS

Grantee:	**MC**
Project Title:	**Reconstruction of Swimming Pool**
District:	**Raška**
Municipality:	**Raška**
Community:	**Raška Town**
Project Type:	**Sports Facilities**

PROBLEM

The citizens of Raska identified finishing the construction of their Municipal pool as their priority concern. The project was originally launched in 1978 when the Municipality purchased the land. Since then, citizens have been contributing 2% of their declared salaries toward completion of the pool The designs were done in 1990 and work started in 1997. The water and electrical installations were completed and much of the needed equipment such as filters and pumps were purchased. Since the work started, the local economy declined sharply and the Municipality does not have the funding needed to complete the pool. Community members were eager to see their investment realized, and recognize the need for a healthy youth and family recreation facility within their community.

SOLUTION

This project will facilitate the completion of the Municipal pool. It includes finishing the small children's pools, coating the large central pool with special paint, installing lighting and fencing around the pool grounds, and finishing the areas and yard surrounding it. The project will be completed through a large Municipal contribution and works provided by their communal enterprises.

IMPACT

Finishing the construction of the Municipal pool will have a very high impact, not only for the inhabitants of Raška, but also for members of the whole municipality. It will serve as a valuable public recreation facility, particularly for those affected by economic downturn and who can no longer afford family vacations. It will provide healthy recreation and a good meeting place for youth, children, and families alike. The community will also be in a position to organize water sport competitions and events. Children will also be able to learn how to swim, which is important considering that a river runs along the edge of town and is a favorite place for playing.

BENEFICIARIES

5,000

PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

COST OF THE PROJECT

USAID:	$61,603
Municipality:	$127,309
Total:	**$188,911**

Source: CRDA Website http://www.sada.usaid.org.yu/en/projects_details.cfm?ngo=MC&id= NPC033/RA-04

The gaps in the accounting process can be illustrated by comparing the brief account given previously of the issues surrounding the Raška swimming pool with the description of the project that can be found on the CRDA website (Figure 5.1). Technically not a "success story," this account nonetheless demonstrates the "best-case" planning and accentuates the positive; the issues of status rivalry, noted above, are (of course) wholly absent. Knowing the underside of this case, though, makes me curious as to the background story in all the other projects described on the site, where, dollar by dollar, large amounts have been disbursed for projects that may similarly, unknown to the outside donors, convey a story of community stubbornness and self-isolation to local populations who can "read" them.

REFLECTIONS

The implementation process of CRDA resulted in a continuous tension between the donor's desire for rapidly visible outputs on the one hand and the thoughtful process required to foster democratic action at the community level on the other. As one of my staff members, a Novi Pazar native, jested in frustration at a local community group's apparent apathy and unwillingness to invest time in a school rehabilitation project, "What this program should really be investing in is brain transplants for all of these people in my town." This abruptly cynical (and obviously flippant) comment nonetheless has a ring of truth. Social and cultural change, if understood as the transformation of people's mindsets or worldviews, requires a committed regime with access to power, information, resources, and—perhaps most importantly—local credibility. It cannot be accomplished through a series of community meetings. Yet this was, in effect, a major assumption of the civil society–building component of this program—that the aggregate effect of mobilizing a subset of the residents of communities in Serbia, over five years, would be to build a base of knowledge and skills that would create a demand for democracy from the ground up. Coupled with the effect of complementary interventions coming from the international community to promote decentralization, structural adjustment, a market economy, and the rule of law, the pressure for change would be impossible to resist.

The theory is elegant, and the image of mutually supportive programmatic interventions—from policy and structural reforms to community mobilization—flowing synergistically to promote the greater effect of an enlightened, free, and progressive democracy is a compelling one. But this

image overlooks not only the existence of competition or lack of coordination between international actors that may have different institutional interests, but also the frictions, inconsistencies, and miscommunications that can arise even when individuals and organizations with the same basic orientation work together in one small segment of the arc of democracy promotion.

Ultimately, I conclude by recognizing a core paradox. Participatory projects that truly prioritize representative, sustainable empowerment and the building of a culture of democracy cannot afford to compromise the process for the sake of the product, but sometimes they have to. In general, skipping steps leads to poor constructs and often the engagement of individuals who are self-promoters, or involved for self-serving purposes. In this chapter, I discussed a number of cases where compromises in the process—made for what were, at the time, compelling reasons—resulted in projects that, while going through a *pro forma* community-mobilization process, failed to engage representative participants in the decision-making process. But, in the particular case of women's participation, where in some cases we convened women separately after they were marginalized in community-group discussions or excluded from meetings generally, that decisive action achieved more meaningful participation, but also sometimes created tensions within the community as well.

When it comes to promoting democracy, "size" and substance matter. The larger the value of the project, the more easily and likely it is to become politicized and the resources to be abused. On the other hand, evaluations of community-based programs elsewhere have suggested that too little funding for community-identified priorities undermine the mobilization process because communities become disillusioned. Infighting within the community can ensue when resources for projects to address community issues are limited. This can also happen with larger-scale projects if the program structure does not, or cannot be adapted to, accommodate competing interests. In the case of CRDA, time was the biggest enemy of flexibility and thoughtful programming. In addition, the more technically complex the projects in question (communal infrastructures such as bridges and roads) were, the less likely it was that there would be any meaningful participatory role for the local citizens.

LESSONS LEARNED

As I review this text, first drafted when I was pursuing graduate study in development, I am in the throes of starting up a new, even more ambitious USAID conflict-prevention and community-mobilization program

in Kyrgyzstan. USAID has funded a three-year follow-on program to the CAIP program that, like CAIP itself, is intended to address the root causes of tension and conflict in Kyrgyzstan's Ferghana Valley. The follow-on program focuses particularly on the lack of economic and market-development opportunities; the societal problems created by a proportionately high percentage of youth, most of which are unemployed; poor governance practices; and a lack of access to credible information. The program seeks to foster the creation of community-representative groups, selected by local communities, that will develop responses to these issues.

That, at least, is the vision. Poised again at the start-up of an ambitious community-mobilization program, I am armed with lessons learned and best practices in my toolbox, ready to tackle the challenge of doing it right. However, I am faced with an entirely new set of challenges. First, Kyrgyzstan is not Serbia. The political culture (in particular, the effect of religion in decision making), systems of local governance, social structures and relationships, and individual and community identities have all been deeply shaped by the country's Soviet—as well as pre-Soviet—experiences, and the respective heritages of the different ethnic groups. What in the West would be labeled "corruption" appears to be a way of life; difficult to identify or to anticipate, it is not seen as a "good" quality, yet it is broadly accepted at all levels of society as the way that people get by.

Second, the program itself is more complex than CAIP or CRDA was in Serbia. These programs used substantial funding for infrastructure projects as the "carrot" to encourage community action; the mechanics of mobilization, selection, and implementation were relatively straightforward. However, this new program calls for select representatives of "clusters" of communities, called a local economic council, to create and implement economic development plans for a broad contiguous cluster of settlements, ranging in size from 1,000 to 40,000 residents. This will be a daunting task, as poverty is deep and economic opportunities are nonexistent in most areas in the region. In addition, the area is multiethnic and tensions along ethnic lines have been inflamed by recent political events in neighboring Uzbekistan. In the program's vision, the local economic councils will become major actors, with certain powers vis à vis the local community and perhaps even the local government. This dynamic could have positive effects if managed well, prompting otherwise lethargic and ambivalent local officials to pay attention and respond to community needs. It could also be terribly divisive, fomenting tensions rather than helping communities to manage conflicts internally and with neighboring villages.

Although I feel only marginally more prepared to address these complexities through creative and thoughtful programming than I did when I

landed in Sandžak four years ago, I can say that I am at least more conscious of the possible pitfalls and harms that a program like this can promote. Whether these lessons learned can translate into programmatic approaches that successfully dodge these potential pitfalls is another question entirely. And, again, my "reflective practice" is challenged by the ticking clock. According to USAID, this program is meant to build off the foundations established by CAIP and thus "bring quick results to the table." However, what became immediately evident to me when I began visiting communities and interviewing potential staff members is that the expectations of the new program require an entirely different set of skills and a different kind of local partnership. Whereas CAIP and CRDA emphasized community mobilization as their raison d'être, the new program is built around economic revival through income generation by creating employment opportunities and developing new businesses in the target communities. The aggregate effect of economic improvements, according to the program goal, is that communities will be more willing to collaborate, to problem-solve, and to resolve conflicts and tensions constructively. The focus issues are therefore different, demanding cooperation with a wider range of constituencies—including power brokers in the local economy; local imams; police and government officials; and marginalized groups such as minorities, women, and youths.

One thing I have also realized, from my short time on the ground in this extremely complex operating environment, is the truth of Gagnon's argument in this volume—that democratization implementers can be more effective if they bring a deep contextual knowledge and an intimate knowledge of the history and culture of the people and societies they engage with. With that background, they are often the most realistic and engaged, as well as the most skeptical, critics of what can be achieved through these programs; they also have a nuanced insight into the real local incentive-structures at play. Yet, at the same time, such intimate knowledge can also block big ideas that, while driven by idealism, sometimes materialize. Sometimes people and communities will catch you off guard with spontaneous, voluntary expressions of self-help and change in attitude and perspective during the life of a project. These rare instances are the most rewarding when they are personal, such as with local staff members in Serbia, some of whom, through four years of work on the CRDA program, have dramatically changed their attitudes and expectations about the kinds of change that can be possible. Such cases prompt the question that drives my continuing commitment to the field of international development: if democracy programs can promote the transformation of individual mindsets, then why not of an entire society?

NOTES

1. This figure is given in Dworkin (2001). An April 2002 General Accounting Office report on foreign assistance reported that, for fiscal year 2000, Mercy Corps International received $43 million in procurement funding obligations from USAID alone, ranking it tenth among all NGOs in receipts and fifth among private voluntary organizations (PVOs) (GAO 2002). Charity Navigator and USAID's own site on PVOs both estimate Mercy Corps's total operating budget for 2003 at just over $116 million, of which $47.6 million came from USAID grants or cooperative agreements. Like other US-based NGOs, Mercy Corps's leadership has reflected on how this heavy dependence on US governmental funding, with its own conditions and reflecting an institutional culture of its own, will impact operations.

2. A more current and comprehensive assessment of the Sandžak region, by the International Crisis Group (ICG), suggests that much remains unchanged five years after Milosevic's departure (ICG 2005).

3. The training also gave explicit guidelines as to the methodology to be followed at the meeting. The model called for us to break the group into smaller groups of 5–6 members and then have the groups identify 3–5 priority projects, write the projects down in large letters, and post the pieces of paper randomly on the wall for the whole group to see. Projects were then grouped according to larger categories (i.e., water supply, road repair, education, health centers) and the citizens divided themselves into teams matching the categories that best fit their interests. Each group then developed a project proposal that included the number of beneficiaries, the total cost, and the total community contribution. Finally, teams presented their projects for discussion and ranking by the whole group.

4. *Mesna zajednica* is a literal translation of "local community." The concept was institutionalized as an instrument of direct democracy and self-management during Socialist Yugoslavia, when citizens had considerable experience in open meetings, referenda, and collective decision making. For some, the term "mesna zajednica" evokes the Socialist past, and, as such, its legacy should be forgotten; this was the position taken by Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) staff in Macedonia in the case described by Paul Nuti in this volume. Others argue that it symbolizes historically deep habits of civic participation in towns, suburbs, and villages across the former Yugoslavia.

5. DOS was held together by common opposition to the Milosevic regime. The coalition contested and won two elections, the presidential election in 2000 and the parliamentary elections in 2001, before it splintered.

6. In the remote ethnically mixed village of Delimedje, a woman had become the de facto village leader and was our main interlocutor. "Vesna" was an ethnic Serb in a predominately Bosniak corner of the Pester highland village. She had been married to a prominent army general of the Yugoslavian Army and had spent much of her life in somewhat privileged circumstances as a teacher in Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian Coast. After the fall of Tito and the death of her husband, she returned to her home village to work as a school teacher. Because of her unique and worldly background, and her ability to read and write, she held a unique status in the community, even among conservative Muslim men who did not allow their daughters to continue their education outside of the village.