

“Tsunami Disaster: how leadership and project management are helping to save lives”

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with
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Introduction

[slide 1: Title]

Ladies and gentlemen, AUSTCARE’s honoured to participate in this year’s Australian Project Management Congress. Let me start by expressing my appreciation to ESI and the PMI Sydney Chapter Congress Committee for inviting me to address you this morning, and for the opportunity for some of AUSTCARE’s staff to attend the Congress. I will be assisted this morning by Sally Campbell who is currently our Landmine Action Advisor and Kate Glastonbury who has set up our information kiosk outside the conference hall.

It is a particular privilege for us to be here representing Australia’s non-government sector. Such a Congress provides a tremendous opportunity to exchange lessons learned and best practice, and AUSTCARE is delighted to be involved. We particularly look forward to learning from you over the next two days.

[slide 2: AUSTCARE]

This morning I will outline how leadership and project management are helping to save lives. As CEO of AUSTCARE I can tell you that we daily encounter leadership and project management challenges. In this presentation I provide perspectives on what it takes to be a leading Australian NGO during a crisis such as the recent Tsunami disaster. Sally Campbell, who has been managing projects for AUSTCARE for the past two years in the Middle East and South Asia, will then provide insights into how professional project management techniques help AUSTCARE run its broader project portfolio.

AUSTCARE was established in 1967 in response to the growing problem of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). It is one of the few remaining all-Australian non-sectarian NGOs. There are now more than 40 million refugees and IDPs with little prospect of major reductions in the short term. These folk are the unfortunate victims of conflict and natural disaster. They represent the “poorest of the poor,” in a world of six billion people where half are now living below the poverty line of US\$2 per day, with half that number again living on less than US\$1 per day. AUSTCARE is doing something about this terrible situation, from which Australia is no longer removed in an increasingly globalised world.

[slide 3: AC Mission]

AUSTCARE's mission is *to assist refugees overseas, displaced people and those affected by landmines to rebuild their lives through the expert delivery of development programs in partnership with local communities and other agencies*. This simple statement reflects the importance of project management in what we do. Our mandate includes emergency humanitarian assistance as well as long-term development and rehabilitation projects. AUSTCARE's business is to save lives by assisting the most vulnerable people in the world, and we have worked successfully in more than 30 countries since 1967. Right now we are implementing 18 different projects in 10 countries throughout Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and closer to home in the Asia Pacific region.

AUSTCARE is also an organisation that is experiencing considerable change. Over the past two years we have embarked on a significant restructure, which is almost complete. We have given more attention to building our projects overseas – thus focusing more on our core business. This has required us to close State Offices, restructure our Head Office, make greater use of Volunteers on whom we are highly dependent, improve our governance and financial accountability, network more closely with government and with community groups, commence a corporate relations program, and listen more closely to our donors as well as our beneficiaries.

[slide 4: Key Messages]

To my mind there are three essential requirements for success in the international aid and development sector, and these are the three messages that I hope you'll take away from this presentation.

The first is **vision and leadership** which, as with all successful enterprises, is the cornerstone for success. I believe this to be particularly so in the humanitarian world where we are dealing with the lives of people and their future livelihood. Having clear objectives and a mandate to intervene are the foundations of a legitimate and sustainable program. Equally important is the ability to learn lessons at every step, which is to say, the importance of leading a learning organisation. If we don't learn the lessons derived from experience, we threaten not only to become obsolete, but still worse we may end up doing more harm than good.

The second requirement for success is **professional project management**, and, in a very real sense, clear vision and great leadership are meaningless unless they can be translated into effective programs. AUSTCARE's programs are regulated by best practice in the project management field, and in this sense there are more similarities than differences with project management in the corporate sector and in government. AUSTCARE's programs fit within our Constitution and Governance Charter, and flow from our Strategic and Business Plans, all which guide the implementation process. It is only with such high standards of accountability and transparency that a not-for-profit organisation can build and maintain public trust here in Australia and credibility with our partners abroad.

The third requirement for success is **people**. It is our donors and our beneficiaries who stand at the heart of AUSTCARE's strategic vision and project management processes. AUSTCARE is a relatively small NGO compared to large international NGOs such as World Vision, CARE and OXFAM, yet we have been able to make a significant difference. This is because we are always looking for our comparative advantage, which is our focus on people at the grassroots – building trust, maintaining a network of established relationships, and promoting our relative organisational flexibility.

AUSTCARE's focus on people mirrors my previous career in the Australian Army. In East Timor I served as the first Deputy Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force from December 1999 to March 2001. The lessons of peacekeeping that I derived from this, and my other experiences in Kashmir, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia, where I also served, have helped guide my leadership as CEO of AUSTCARE. This is because there is a close relationship between peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconstruction. Poverty is evident in all these situations, and most often refugees, IDPs, and victims of landmines are present. People stand at the centre of all these issues, for they are the civilian non-combatants who become the legacy of conflict.

But people are also the legacy of natural disasters, and this is another area where AUSTCARE has had long experience. It is no accident that 90 percent of victims of natural disasters are from developing countries. Poverty results in a lack of choices that force people to live in hazardous locations. Natural disasters place enormous stress on developing countries, especially when entire economic, social, and political systems are wiped out in a matter of hours or even minutes. These are hard-earned development gains that have taken decades to achieve, which are instantly destroyed without warning. Again we find people at the centre of tragedy and yet also at centre stage in the recovery effort.

The Tsunami Disaster

[slide 5: Tsunami Impact]

On 26 December 2004 an earthquake measuring 9.2 on the Richter scale was recorded in the Indian Ocean. The earthquake created a Tsunami that swept the shores of 11 nations, including Aceh, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, Thailand and even Somalia. More than 270,000 people were killed or remain missing.

Experienced humanitarian disaster personnel report the Tsunami to be one of the worst natural disaster impacts they have ever seen. Houses and offices have not only been flattened but have completely vanished. Entire communities have been eliminated. And, of course, there has been an astounding human toll.

[slide 6: Banda Aceh]

The earthquake and subsequent Tsunami devastated Aceh, a province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra that had already been severely affected by years of violence, armed

conflict, and internal displacement of communities. In Aceh, 126,000 bodies have been buried and a further 90,000 people are still missing. These photos of the capital city, Banda Aceh, provide a good illustration of the damage.

Likewise, over half of the 25 districts of Sri Lanka were severely affected by the Tsunami, a country that has also experienced years of civil war and internal displacement. In Sri Lanka, more than 30,000 people are dead and more than 5,000 are missing. The psychological impact on the survivors will be a major problem for years to come.

AUSTCARE's Response: The Leadership Challenges

The scale of the Tsunami disaster was enormous, but for an NGO like AUSTCARE, which deals with humanitarian emergencies as part of its core business, the Tsunami was not so unusual. Nonetheless, if you consider the logistics of the situation you begin to understand the scope of the challenges faced in a disaster.

[slide 7: AC Tsunami Response]

In the immediate response to the Tsunami, AUSTCARE planned and implemented a number of projects in Sri Lanka and Aceh which assisted some 30,000 people in the first two months. Within 10 days we had committed funds to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Sri Lanka and to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Indonesia for emergency relief in Aceh. Achieving an immediate result and reaching out to the most vulnerable people was no small challenge. There were many strategic decisions that had to be made quickly, accountably, and efficiently, to launch an effective response.

Leadership is just as important in the not-for-profit sector as it is in the government and corporate sectors. NGOs have to motivate a workforce that often works with little or no pay and stretches resources much wider than its private sector counterparts. NGOs implement projects in cross-cultural contexts where local partners may have low capacity and require training to undertake what would otherwise be straightforward tasks. For NGOs there is often no guaranteed source of income and, due to limited resources, NGOs tend to rely on internal organisational skills to raise funds. At the same time our donors want to know, and have a right to know, what is happening with their money. In such a context, planning is the art of the possible and seizing new opportunities can be a high-risk endeavour. For example, in Aceh we have committed for the long-term without any confirmation that the Indonesian Government will allow us to stay. We are there because the population needs us, but our longevity remains uncertain.

[slide 8: Decisions Taken]

In order to perform well during the Tsunami disaster, a number of immediate decisions had to be taken by AUSTCARE. **First** and foremost, we had to establish whether the disaster was relevant to our organisational mission and mandate. It took a few days to realize the enormity of the problem. Public information was not initially comprehensive

and it was hard to gauge the situation. Once we were aware of the scope of the destruction and the resulting displacement of people, it became clear that AUSTCARE should step up to the plate and assist the huge number of IDPs.

A **second** strategic decision was where we would operate. At a time when there was chaos everywhere, we needed to focus our response. A critical decision was made almost immediately that the two countries of primary focus for AUSTCARE would be Sri Lanka and Indonesia. While processes exist to guide such decisions, it was not a clear-cut choice. The fact was that AUSTCARE was not operating in either country and that intervention would require extending the organisation at a time when we were already under strain with the Darfur emergency in Sudan and with most of the staff on a well-deserved Christmas break after having won a major contract for Cambodia. On the other hand, the issues confronting each country were firmly within the organisation's core mandate to assist IDPs. The countries themselves were also in-line with geographical regions of high priority to the organisation. Both were countries that we had been monitoring for several years and where we had a knowledge base and network.

Having established our areas of intervention, we then had a **third** critical decision to make, namely *how* and *with whom* we would operate. As a small NGO, AUSTCARE does not have large warehouses in vulnerable countries waiting to distribute essential goods. Instead, we operate through in-country partners who already have networks established through which to distribute aid. Our emergency response is intrinsically based on our capacity to respond, and engagement is impossible without good partners. As a result, when the Tsunami occurred we had to identify what type of partner was required and whether we had existing relationships with any relevant partners in the area. We also had to assess their capacity to respond, particularly the logistical capacity to implement an emergency program.

A **fourth** critical decision that needed to be addressed at the outset of AUSTCARE's Tsunami response was whether we would be there for just the emergency, or whether we should commit for the long haul. Based on our experience in such situations we believed that it would take years for the people to recover and that we would need to be there for the long-haul and well into the reconstruction phase. Even though we had no idea of how much funding we would ultimately receive from the public, we determined from the outset that 20% would be directed to emergency relief and 80% to longer-term reconstruction efforts. To support this approach, AUSTCARE established separate earmarked funds for Sri Lanka and Aceh so that donors could support long-term assistance to these unique areas even after the Tsunami appeal came to an end.

Initiating a Rapid Response and Establishing Legitimacy for the Longer-Term

Two critical components of any disaster are first, the capacity to initiate a rapid response, and second, the capacity to establish legitimacy for the long haul. Without rapidly responding to the situation, the immediate needs of the affected populations won't be met. And without legitimacy almost every operation is prone to eventual defeat. Legitimacy refers not only to the right to be present in a country or situation, but also to

the full inclusion and endorsement of local communities and governments in the project or program.

[slide 9: Rapid Response]

AUSTCARE's emergency response was two-pronged. In Aceh we were able to re-activate our long relationship with the JRS, which was one of the few international NGOs still operating in Aceh, due to the on-going conflict before the tsunami which had forced the closure of almost all NGOs. Through JRS, AUSTCARE was able to supply emergency assistance to over 15,000 people, including clothing, food, water and sanitation, emergency education and rehabilitation of the education system, as well as trauma counselling.

A similar strategy was followed for Sri Lanka, where AUSTCARE supported the Emergency Shelter project of the UNHCR. This was for us an international partner we could draw on quickly from our long-standing relationship. In fact, throughout the 1970s AUSTCARE had represented UNHCR in Australia prior to them establishing their own office. While the nature of the relationship has changed over time, the partnership remains strong and UNHCR was an obvious choice in the emergency response phase.

These partnerships provided two advantages: first we could begin work quickly with networks already on the ground that provided us with important and ongoing information about in-country needs. And second, these partnerships provided us the opportunity to establish collaboration with local NGOs and then to continue our work for the longer-term redevelopment. These partnerships also enabled us to deploy our own people. By February 2005, we had our own people in Aceh and Sri Lanka to support emergency response work, but also to make an initial assessment of the needs of Tsunami victims and identify some good partners for reconstruction efforts. As a result we are now working in different ways in Aceh and Sri Lanka. In Aceh we have established our own presence. We have an Australian as our Operations Manager and she has recruited local staff and established projects with local NGOs. The team is working closely with district and sub-district officials, the Department of Agriculture and other government representatives, as well as local communities and indigenous development agencies. We are now recruiting an Indonesian to become our country representative, which is our preferred model in countries where we have a permanent presence.

In Sri Lanka AUSTCARE is working with Australian Volunteers International (AVI) to place two long-term volunteers with our local partners in-country. Following an assessment mission, these volunteers will deploy within the next month and will be an essential contribution in building the capacity of the Sri Lankan NGOs.

[slide 10: Legitimacy]

Establishing legitimacy is critical in all the projects AUSTCARE undertakes. It is widely acknowledged that the best way to establish legitimacy is to directly engage and consult the communities in which you are working at every step in the project process. This is

why involving the relevant people is a key concept in the NGO world. It is equally important to feedback results of planning, monitoring, and evaluation to all those who have been involved in the exercise. Encouraging a range of people to participate strengthens AUSTCARE's access to the work and knowledge of the problem. It brings added relevance and effectiveness to the work by drawing on local experience, and perhaps most importantly it creates a sense of ownership of the work such that people are interested and committed to sustaining the results.

[Slide 11: Aceh Activities]

For this reason, AUSTCARE favours partnerships that build local capacity and encourages local decision-making, rather than relying on international NGOs. AUSTCARE has now identified local partners in Aceh and Sri Lanka for four high impact projects that are being initiated at community level to enhance human security and reduce poverty.

[slide 12: Aceh Achievements]

In Aceh, one such reconstruction project works with local community cooperatives to support the livelihoods of survivors from Lam Bada Village, a small village located near the capital city of Banda Aceh. The project is providing fishing boats (as you saw on the previous slide), the construction and supply of kiosks, cooperatives, and livestock breeding farms, as well as training in small business management. This is a village where only 570 women and 50 children have survived from a pre-Tsunami population of 2,300. It is essential in this context to get livelihoods up and running again, but also to support community cooperation, both of which are being achieved by this project. Another local partnership project in Aceh works collaboratively with the Department of Agriculture. It provides resources and technical support in soy bean, peanut and red onion farming to farmer groups, again with a focus on livelihoods and community building. In the coming weeks we will be negotiating with an international agricultural company that has pledged almost half a million dollars to our work in Aceh.

[slide 13: Sri Lanka Activities]

In Sri Lanka we have initiated a project in partnership with a network of 60 local women's groups to protect women and girls at risk of sexual and gender based violence. It is well documented that disasters involving internal displacement, such as occurred with the Tsunami, leads to an increase in sexual and gender-based violence, causing additional trauma for survivors, and because of the network of women's groups involved in the project it is a very good way to generate community ownership and sustainability over the long-term.

Another project is a joint initiative with the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), the representative body for Australia's travel industry. It sometimes happens that the Australian community itself has an interest in specific issues abroad and they partner with AUSTCARE to support the cause. Your organisation can partner with

AUSTCARE in a similar way. In this case, the AFTA partnership is leading to the creation of a sustainable livelihoods project to support people in the coastal communities of Sri Lanka who lost their source of income as a result of the Tsunami. The project will focus on micro-credit and micro-tourism and will include necessary training.

Giving Donors and Corporate/Community Partners the Confidence to Invest

[slide 14: Donors]

Of course, our tsunami response would not have been possible without donors and corporate and community partners. AUSTCARE undertakes fundraising as a core part of its business, through which it relies not only on in-house capacity but also, critically, on its partners and networks in Australia. NGOs are competitors for media attention, members, money, and other resources. In this sense, fundraising takes on a range of dimensions, from competitive positioning, to media management, to the essential business of procuring donations.

AUSTCARE's response to the Tsunami began on 29 December 2004, just three days after initial reports of the disaster, by launching a public appeal for funding. Since then we have raised \$1.4 million in cash, with another \$0.5 million in pledges. Particular challenges were encountered as a result of this overwhelming public response, not all of them unique to AUSTCARE, but challenges to the sector as a whole.

For example, the Tsunami disaster highlighted some of the most pressing issues in terms of competitive positioning among NGOs within Australia. Because the vast majority of giving in Australia is individual, the competitive positioning of NGOs is closely tied to public perceptions of NGO accountability. The Tsunami drew attention to what seems to be a long-standing public perception that, as members of the public sector, NGO accountability standards are not as high as those for the corporate sector. This is not at all the case. Australian NGOs are regulated by a Code of Conduct (ACFID) that defines standards of governance, management, financial control and reporting. It identifies mechanisms to ensure accountability in NGO use of public monies. The Code aims to maintain and enhance standards throughout the NGO community, ensuring public confidence in the integrity of individuals and organisations of the NGO community and the quality and effectiveness of NGO programs.

During the Tsunami, this Code became a centrepiece of discussions for the need for consistency among Australian NGOs in terms of their financial disclosures. Harnessing the good will of Australians is an exercise in building trust. One of the key lessons learned is the need for NGOs to improve their communication with the public on the role of administrative costs in supporting their work. The public, for its part, needs to understand that delivering assistance requires expenditures in support of relief. Compliance with the Code of Conduct has related reporting requirements, which generate an administrative cost for NGOs in themselves. Reporting back to the public on project outcomes, providing qualitative and contextual feedback on progress made, also carries

administrative responsibilities. Not to mention the costs of deployment to countries of intervention and all the program staff involved in such undertakings.

My point is, there is no such thing as “no administrative costs” in the NGO sector. All projects have administrative costs related to accountability requirements under the Code of Conduct. On the one hand NGOs are accountable for transparent financial disclosures that cost money, while on the other hand the public and legislation demands that NGOs are professional and accountable. While the public might prefer all of its money to be directed to the field it is not possible for this to happen – and you should be wary of any NGO that claims this. The truth is that administrative work is essential to delivering the high standard of project work expected, and that figure will normally be between 10-20%.

Another key lesson of the Tsunami disaster was the important role of the media in building public confidence to invest. I am happy to address any questions related to the media in questions following this presentation.

One of the biggest challenges faced in humanitarian emergencies is to bridge the gap between the emergency response, what we call the CNN factor, and protracted development assistance. After an emergency there is typically a loss of donor interest when public attention drifts to new issues. Strategies put in place early on in AUSTCARE’s response to the disaster helped to structure a longer-term response because of the initial decision to emphasise longer term reconstruction needs. This does not suggest that there are no further needs. The reconstruction phase has only just begun in Aceh and Sri Lanka, and in the tradition of natural disasters, literally years and years of development progress have been wiped out overnight. The needs of the Tsunami affected regions will be of continuing importance for years to come.

We are now faced with some interesting questions related to the astounding support of the public for the Tsunami disaster. What does the overwhelming response of the public to the Tsunami mean for the long term? Is it a watershed that will inspire the younger generation to give? Will we see a sustained increase in corporate giving? We have yet to understand possible future trends in giving resulting from the Tsunami, but we are encouraged by Australia’s generosity and hope it will continue well into the future.

[slide 15: Sally hand-over]

I will now hand-over to Sally, who will provide an overview of AUSTCARE’s project management processes and the specific techniques we use to conduct our work.

[Sally]

Good morning. Mike asked me to speak briefly about how professional project management supports AUSTCARE in its work. Our work *is* our international program, and, as you can imagine, how we manage our projects is absolutely critical to our success and accountability.

When it comes to project management there are more similarities than differences between NGOs and the other sectors. While the scope and nature of NGO projects might be quite different from other sectors, our processes and accountabilities are quite similar. Over the course of the next two days, it will be interesting for me to hear from you some of the project management best practices in the private sector to see the extent to which our experience is shared.

Here are what I think are some of the core similarities. AUSTCARE's international program is guided by a program manual that spells out the processes and systems to be followed in our projects. The similarity to project management in other sectors is that our manual is based on the Australian National Competency Standards for Project Management developed by the Australian Institute of Project Management.

AUSTCARE's projects are managed according to what we call the "project management cycle" and conform to established protocol on how projects are conceived, planned, and approved. Projects are approved based on the expected achievement of measurable success. Projects are prioritised and resources are allocated according to those priorities. And people on projects are held accountable for measurable results and for completing activities. Again, these project management standards are common across the sectors.

[slide 16]

If you have a look at our project management cycle, it starts with project identification, which assumes that the critical step of assessing the problem and making an initial decision as to whether we should intervene at all, has already been taken. In fact, there should be another step shown in this cycle that might be called the "Problem Identification" step in the process. No project moves forward without an initial assessment of the problem and our capacity to respond taking place.

During project identification, information is collected and the situation is analysed to see how we might most effectively intervene. This is then followed by project planning and testing the feasibility of the planned project. Then of course comes implementation, project completion, and finally project assessment and integration of lessons learned into any future or follow-up projects. As you can see, from a project management perspective, this is a relatively standard model of the process.

[slide 17]

But the similarities in project management do not appropriately capture the unique complexities encountered by project managers working in humanitarian and development projects. There are differences. Our clients and the contexts where we work are unique and, consequently, so are our projects and project management techniques. This brings us back to the focus on people that Mike explained earlier in the presentation. The centrality of people to our work is really critical because when we talk about our project clients we are actually talking about some of the most vulnerable and afflicted people in the world.

We are talking about farmers in Cambodia, landmine survivors, and orphaned children as some examples.

The contexts where we work are generally rural and remote villages of under-developed countries or camps for refugees or displaced people. And this within either an emergency or a development situation. This explains how, as project officers, we often find ourselves in a remote community overseas, wearing gum boots, and stomping from one mud hut to the next, with a translator in hand, to discuss core elements of the project with our clients. In this example, I was identifying the scope of the landmine problem in tribal villages in Mozambique. Each village we surveyed spoke a different dialect and we had to work with the local police in every district to find a translator who could translate from local dialect to the national language of Portuguese. Then my Portuguese translator would work it into English for me. This came after the traditional welcoming ritual of offering the visitor – me – a live chicken as a gift from the local coup. So, context really does introduce some interesting complexities!

Mike also emphasized the importance of integrating lessons learned into our work, and a critical lesson is that these people who we are seeking to help are agents of change, not passive recipients of assistance. What is absolutely striking after several years experience in the field is to know the incredible ingenuity of the people with whom we work and to draw on their strengths. And as agents of change, the people who might to us here in Australia seem vulnerable and incapable, become key players in the project implementation process – with a bit of training and assistance – but largely based on their own amazing knowledge, survival and thrift.

There are at least a few ways that our clients and the contexts where we work directly affects our project management approach. It explains our focus on capacity building of local partners, the importance of sustainability to achieving positive results, and the prominence of cross-cutting issues like gender and the environment in our work.

Capacity Building

[slide 18]

When we speak of capacity-building, we refer to building the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to manage their own development. It's the famed philosophy of "give a man a fish he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish he'll eat for a lifetime." Because AUSTCARE works predominantly with local partners, the work of AUSTCARE project managers is based on facilitating local capacity to manage projects. We achieve this by building their capacity, whether administrative, financial or accounting skills, project implementation techniques, and a range of other things.

A great deal of time is spent providing training and reinforcing the project team of other organisations so they can manage their own development. And I emphasize the cross-cultural context in which we work because often we find that Western models are completely incomprehensible to some of the cultures where we work. We have to be willing to adapt our processes to the local context so that they feel ownership of the tools

and techniques in as much as they feel ownership of the project activities. For example, working with illiterate communities requires us to learn how to draw some of our plans with them. To get an idea of the landmine problem in a village, one very useful technique is community mapping, where we ask the community to draw a map of their village from their own perspective showing us where they believe the landmine problem to be. It's a non-verbal and non-directed way for the community to express the scope of the problem in their own terms.

Over the years we have found capacity building to be one of the best ways to build legitimacy and credibility in the places where we work. Without it, we create a situation of dependency where project results are not being achieved because the partner is unable to properly reach key goals.

Local partnerships also increase our effectiveness. Their local knowledge provides AUSTCARE with scope of access to otherwise difficult-to-reach people and places, as well as depth of knowledge of the situation from a national and local perspective. AUSTCARE becomes a more integrated part of the communities where it works and builds the capacity of local organisations to continue the work even after the project ends. This optimizes the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of our projects.

Of course, the risk to AUSTCARE is the importance of knowledge among our own staff. We have an ongoing commitment to staff training and skills development so that we can transfer our services through a capacity building model. We also have good systems in place to assess local capacity from the outset to ensure that we are ourselves capable to meet local partner needs and that we can properly capitalise on their existing strengths and weaknesses.

Sustainability

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One of the reasons capacity-building is so important is that it creates a firm platform for achieving project sustainability. In seeking to have sustainable projects, NGOs plan projects where the flow of benefits of the project will be sustained into the future long after the NGO intervention has come to an end. It is not referring so much to environmental sustainability – which is how sustainability is commonly viewed, particularly in the corporate lingo – but rather to sustaining the benefits of our work even after we are no longer involved.

Most of our donors view sustainability as one of the signs of the cost-effectiveness of the project, and in this sense sustainability is a measure not just of good development – it's a measure of good business.

Achieving sustainability requires a great deal of legitimacy and ownership by the community, which means community participation is an essential ingredient to truly sustainable projects. Without thorough community participation, long-term solutions to poverty are highly unlikely. Communities should be trusted to drive their own

development and to manage resources, and they should be provided with the information, support and guidance to do so.

While adopting a community participation model, NGO projects often mix local custom with a range of best practices known to be successful. But the extent to which you can challenge existing norms is a real art – how far can you push for social transformation and still achieve good project results? This is one of the key challenges in the project planning phase when trying to adhere to humanitarian or human rights principles. For example, we found in implementing a micro-credit project to empower the women in villages in East Timor that the men wouldn't allow the project to go forward unless they were entitled to 50% of the loans earmarked for women. We had to adopt a more integrated approach to include both women and men in order for the community to be willing and wanting to go forward with the project. It was important for us to make these changes so that we could have the full participation of our target group – the women – and total endorsement of the communities in which we were operating. The change in approach was critical to achieving a successful project.

Finally, it is very difficult to create a sustainable project in a context where politics doesn't allow us to find a long-term solution. This is typical of the refugee contexts where AUSTCARE works and it has an impact on project management because it means we might engage in a project where the political process shows no clear end to the situation. In both Kenya and Nepal, AUSTCARE has projects in refugee camps that have been highly successful and have a solid outreach in the camps. But, in each case, no political resolution has been reached to allow the refugees to return to their rightful countries of origin. These refugees could be in the camps for many years to come – they are becoming what is known as a “warehoused” population, which means that several generations are born and die within the refugee camp context without reaching a durable solution to their plight.

In such situations, it is very difficult for the projects to reach financial sustainability and survive without AUSTCARE, and yet, if we withdraw our support we will find very good projects that are directly and tangibly helping the people to survive come to a rapid halt because they cannot continue without our investment. The impact on project management is to constantly move the goal post for project finalisation. The focus instead turns to building the capacity of the local partner organisations such that they might be able to help AUSTCARE attract a broader donor base through awareness raising and fundraising strategies.

Cross-cutting Issues

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For NGOs, cross-cutting issues are issues such as gender, environment, disability and human rights and they are required to be a central consideration at all stages in the project cycle. The difference for NGOs is that cross-cutting issues inform not just our implementation strategies, but also our approach to the work from the outset. It ties into our commitment to rights-based programming, which shifts the focus of our work from

looking at the needs of people, to the duties and responsibilities of those around them to respect, protect, and fulfil their human rights. Easily enough said, but our commitment to cross-cutting issues raises some interesting ethical issues in the decision-making process.

Gender mainstreaming, for example, recognizes that all development planning has an impact on women, men, girls and boys. The aim in projects is to ensure that a gender perspective informs all stages of the program cycle and that program processes benefit communities equitably. While the full participation of women is a fundamental principle of any development program, there are barriers to women's participation that sometimes make their inclusion difficult. This includes a lack of time among women due to heavy workloads and family responsibilities, deference to men, and specific cultural constraints. Our duty in the project management process is to ensure that those hurdles are overcome and that the role of women is considered even if they are not part of our core target group.

Environment refers to natural resources but also peoples' livelihoods and their surroundings. In projects, it means optimising possible benefits to the environment and minimizing negative impacts on the environment. Certain dilemmas are encountered for NGO projects in taking such an integrated approach. For example, a project aiming to clear landmines from an area that is in demand by a local population might, subsequent to the landmines being cleared, encourage deforestation in an environmentally sensitive area. This brings an ethical dimension to the decision making process. It means that our projects have to be forward looking to know before starting whether the negative consequences of the project outweigh the benefits to the population in question.

These are a few ways – the issue of capacity building, sustainability, and cross-cutting issues -- that professional project management guides our work and the specific areas that are unique to the NGO sector. They are the systematic processes followed to ensure that vulnerable groups are reached and that the impact of our intervention is the best that it can be. We are accountable to reaching the most vulnerable people in the world, and this means the lens through which we implement projects is one that brings the right of the individual and their communities a special prominence in our approach.

Conclusion

[slide 21: Key messages]

In conclusion I want to stress AUSTCARE's three requirements for success: vision and leadership, professional project management, and people. These three are at the core of our work and make our business of saving lives easier and more effective. This includes the corporate community, because we are realising that in this increasingly globalised world, what happens in Australia is affected by what happens overseas. The first words of the United Nations Charter are "*We the Peoples*" and this is truly representative of where we find ourselves today, at a crossroads that clearly signals the importance of people helping each other and our collective responsibility to address urgent global issues – of which the reduction of poverty under the Millennium Development Goals is at the forefront.

More Australians are making a difference by reducing poverty overseas. This was demonstrated by the public's response to the Tsunami with donations exceeding \$284 million. But this response is not a one-off: Australian's are contributing more to overseas aid every year, with an average of 12% annual growth to NGOs every year for the past five years.

[slide 22: Partnerships]

AUSTCARE is committed to building collaborative partnerships with our corporate, community and government supporters in Australia, in the same way as we work in partnership with project participants, local communities, host governments and other agencies in delivering our international programs.

AUSTCARE can work with you, your employees and stakeholders, to establish and grow a partnership that could be the start of a broader Corporate Social Responsibility program as part of a commitment to sustainable development.

We invite you to engage with AUSTCARE in tackling some of the really difficult and pressing social issues of our time. Become a corporate member, engage in cause-related marketing, support our work through secondments and volunteers, provide gifts in kind, make a regular donation through payroll giving, and support our appeals and our programs. Get involved – you have an important role to play in making our work possible, and you and your company can make a difference to people's lives (including your own). We have information available at our stand, which I encourage you to visit during the Congress, and please feel free to approach our volunteers to discuss specific issues of interest.

[slide 23: Questions]