

# VOLUNTEERING AND LINKING ROLES IN (ENABLING AND SUSTAINING THE GRASSROOTS BASE OF) RESILIENT GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: A SYSTEMIC MODEL?

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## ABSTRACT

Defining resilience?

Regarding individual commitment in social enterprises and innovation. Linking in different sectors arising from volunteering experiences and other social contacts across international boundaries.

Agencies and initiatives that promote linkages and their governance. The role of academics and other social thinkers in designing and sustaining international linkages and initiatives: hands-off leadership? Horizontal and vertical Governance of initiatives, reporting and separate responsibilities. Barriers to sustaining resilient governance in grass-roots based organisations: professionalism; vested interests in governments and international agencies; self-maintaining NGO's and institutionalisation.

Sources on the web and elsewhere: Boy Scouts and related groups; VSO; ASE; UKOWLA; DEA; WEA; Fair Trade Foundation; Trade Unions and Business-based Groups i.e. Rotary.

Finlayson "looem"

*Bottom-up*

*Bottom-up, there's the real clever stuff*

*Top-down, there's cause to frown*

*Get the little people talking, share their views*

*Much better than preaching to them in the pews!*

*For far too long it's been the case*

*In many, many groups of the human race*

*That those with the power over us tower*

*With ideas that kept them in wealth*

*While most others lacked enough for health*

*Now's the time, perhaps, to alter course*

*Put the past behind us, without remorse*

*Open up the channels, allow interchange*

*Listen to everyone, broaden the range*

*Of ideas and thoughts from far and wide*

*Surely by now, it pays not to hide*

## Volunteering and Linking Roles

*Great differences for sure remain to resolve  
But the best way forward is to involve*

*More and more of the people both young and old  
Male and female and others into the fold  
So let's get to it, not a moment to waste  
Yet proceed with consideration, rather than haste!*

### **Defining resilience?**

Resilience has become a commonly used term in recent years and was, for example, much used at the ISSS Conference in Brisbane in 2009. At that meeting in the session presented by myself, I asked those present to give their own definitions and then added by my own comment which was that I wanted the response to challenging situations to be not just adequate, as most participants suggested, but rather to actually produce a response that improved on the pre-disaster situation i.e. I favoured definitions that had a constructive, positive overtone! So that is what I am hoping to carry forward in the present context too.

More especially, I want to follow on from that session's discussion to focus on how individual and group can, voluntarily, contribute to promoting and sustaining a base for resilient global governance. At that time, I focussed on social enterprises in general, whereas here I aim to look at agencies and initiatives that promote international linkages and their governance initially at least as a result of volunteering by people from more developed regions in less developed countries or less favoured communities in richer areas.

Among the roles considered will be that of academics and other social thinkers who, preferably while being, themselves, involved first hand, can enable the designing and sustaining international linkages and initiatives by the whole of the requisite stakeholder communities. This activity I refer to as: "hands-off leadership". For such initiatives to be sustained a process of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' governance has step by step to be put in place. This involves setting up ways of allowing some of those engaged in any given initiative or set of initiatives to develop ways of reporting progress and set-backs to the wider groupings and requires, I propose, certain such groupings having various separate responsibilities. These might, for example, be: day to day management or administration; development and recruitment of human and other resources; new project design and development and, finally, evaluation. Separating these will often be resisted by some who like to control everything, but this will quickly lead to a decline of the resilience desired!

Various barriers to sustaining resilient governance in grass-roots based organisations include: a desire to promote, so called, professionalism; vested interests from colleagues in governments and international agencies who prefer boundaries and responsibilities to be narrowly defined; group employed on a long term basis in the voluntary sector that get frozen into self-maintaining NGO's and, finally, those from all these areas that would

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promote institutionalisation by requiring pre-specified qualifications, experience, membership of certain associations and so on.

### **The Scouting Movement**

I was involved in scouting from the age of eleven into adulthood and then observed first my partner and then my children's involvement over a number of years. In addition, a colleague from school and student days has been involved throughout her life until recent required retirement! The movement is almost entirely voluntary and is now active almost throughout the globe. Regular international gatherings are held that involve all age groups from around six years old up to retirement. Inevitably the bonds formed during these events usually last only a short time in most cases, but some endure for a lifetime! Common codes of behaviour are encouraged from the earliest involvement, but the movement also accommodates a wide range of variations reflecting different religious affiliations, for example. There have also been a number of spin-off groups that share much the same values but may be more family orientated, for example, as with the Woodcraft Folk.

These common values, most especially, include a spirit of international citizenship!

- (1) At the other extreme of formality is the Hash House Harriers which are active in many countries especially those employing large numbers of British Commonwealth expatriates. More details can be found on the web!

### **VSO**

Moving closer to the present there is Voluntary Service Overseas, VSO, which in some respects is a British version of the Peace Corp. In its early years students around the age of 18 went out to Commonwealth countries in Africa, for example, to gain experience and insight that would stay with them into adulthood. Very soon, however, the recipient countries were requesting graduates who were still for the most part in their early twenties and went out to work as teachers and in similar, often rural based roles. Over the years the average age has greatly increased and now many of the volunteers, such as those I encountered during my own period of volunteering in Cambodia during the summer of 2006, are teachers who have taken early retirement as well as others of a similar age who want a break and work in all sorts of fields such as agriculture, forestry and so on. In addition, VSO now recruits volunteers from other parts of Europe, North America, South East Asia and even some African Countries. Many of these stay for longer than the normal two years (in the early days one year was the norm) and some go on to set up formal linking arrangements with their home localities, schools, colleges, hospitals and so on. Consequently VSO and similar Government sponsored groups lead to many long lasting relationships across international boundaries, and this is even more common, perhaps, where the volunteer sponsors are faith or international NGO based groups.

### **UKOWLA, WEA and the Fair Trade Foundation**

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The United Kingdom One World Linking Association is a much more recent creation and was essentially established by a small group of volunteers based in the UK to share knowledge and experiences of forming and maintaining international linking arrangements. All kinds of links are encouraged including one between market traders in a small town in Derbyshire and a similar group in Southern Africa which recently celebrated its twentieth anniversary! Initially it was funded entirely by donations, but more recently it has received support from the UK government. Working alongside is a largely school orientated grouping, the Development Education Association or DEA, which also has received Department for International Development, or DfID, funding for the last ten years or so. It encourages UK schools to make links with schools in other, often less developed, countries and also develops and promotes materials on international issues and initiatives such as “Fair Trade”. The Fair Trade Foundation, unlike all of the above, originated in Europe, though similar ideas also originated initially in North America and other developed countries around the globe. Formally it allows products to be branded as ‘fair trade’ if certain ethical requirements are met by the producers. In the UK companies in the retail sector in particular are encouraged to sell such products and some, especially the Cooperative Supermarket chain, promote them vigorously! My own personal involvement, in addition to being a Coop Member, is to be part of a committee that promotes Fair Trade in a small town near to where I live. In addition to schools and faith groups this involves engaging with Chambers of Commerce, Trade Unions and some similar work or business based groupings.

### **Chambers of Commerce, Trade Unions and some similar work or business based groupings.**

Many business based groups have, like the Scout Movement above, now spread throughout the world. They support workers and employers, raise funds for charities, organise delegations to visit trade fairs and other gatherings and so on. Some have strong political affiliations but generally span a wide range of views when looked at overall. My involvement with these groups has largely been as an adviser working for local government in different parts of the UK, though I have also had some contact with groups in South East Asia, for example, while operating under Bilateral or Multilateral Aid arrangements. Clearly these groupings are there to encourage and sustain primarily trading links but personal commitment does lead to many individuals taking roles well beyond that narrow scope.

### **Conclusions**

Above I have outlined some of the very wide range of organisations that underlie resilient global governance. They face obstacles, especially from those in government and international agencies that would prefer them to be more uniformly organised and thus more readily controlled. Generally, whatever their base, they resist! As long as they do this successfully, so long as they remain largely open to all who wish to contribute the effort voluntarily, they will continue to provide a base for ‘resilient global governance’!

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