

Relationships, Rights, and “Relief”: Ninety Years of MCC’s Integrated Response to Humanitarian Crises

WILLIAM REIMER AND BRUCE N. GUENTHER

Every night one billion people—one-sixth of the world’s population—go to bed hungry.¹ Due to high food prices and impacts of global recession, the number of undernourished has risen to 850 million. The Millennium Development Goal of halving the level of undernourishment by 2015 to 420 million seems increasingly out of reach. Furthermore, climate change is increasing the number of persons affected by disasters as a result of an increase in the intensity and frequency of natural hazards, including drought, flooding, and storm surges.² An estimated 250 million people are currently affected by climate-related hazards in a typical year; this number could grow by fifty percent to an estimated 375 million a year by 2015.³ The Stern Report on the economic costs of climate change, meanwhile, estimates that up to 500 million could be displaced by climate-related disasters by 2050.⁴

At the same time, however, the number of persons affected by conflict over the course of the last few decades has dropped dramati-

cally. The number of armed conflicts has declined globally by more than forty percent since the early 1990s with sixteen major active armed conflict recorded in 2008. The number of refugees also declined by forty-five percent from 1992 to 2003.⁵ However, the nature of conflict has changed, with an increasing trend toward one-sided violent attacks against civilians (terrorism) and an increased “outsourcing” of conflict by governments to state-aligned militia groups.⁶ The drop in the number of conflict-affected people has been accompanied by a diversification and fragmentation of armed actors.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has a long history of feeding the hungry and of responding to the needs of those affected by disasters and conflict since its inception in 1920. In this essay we explore shifts and trends in MCC’s humanitarian assistance over the course of the organization’s ninety year history. While MCC is well-known for its efforts in humanitarian assistance and crisis response, the organization has from the beginning attempted to integrate short-term emergency response with longer-term community development and peacebuilding. In responding to humanitarian crises, MCC has placed a strong emphasis on “building relationships” and partnership. This relational approach has strengthened ecumenical cooperation and enhanced the local capacity of partner organizations.

However, the organization has also faced a shift from volunteerism to becoming a more professionalized humanitarian organization, demanding more accountability and equity in the distribution of humanitarian assistance. While MCC was originally founded on the premise of assisting Mennonites in the Soviet Union, the organization’s mandate has extended beyond those within the Mennonite community. In situations of armed conflict and in complex emergencies, MCC has emphasized the need for impartiality of humanitarian actors and has increasingly attempted to integrate peacebuilding activities into relief responses.

This study is divided into four sections. The first section discusses how MCC has demonstrated an integrated response to humanitarian crises, rejecting sector specialization and fragmentation. In the second section, we explore MCC’s emphasis on “relationships,” pointing to MCC’s contributions to ecumenical cooperation, to its commitment to building local capacity, and the unique contribution of MCC’s material resources program. The third section highlights the increasing call for greater accountability within the humanitarian sector and the challenge in ensuring that all have the “right to protection.” In the final section, we analyze MCC’s approach in the context of conflict and complex emergencies, highlighting MCC’s at-

tempts to demonstrate a “love of enemies” and to seek opportunities for peacebuilding. The conclusion summarizes these shifts and trends, posing a vision for “MCC at 100.”

NINETY YEARS OF “RELIEF”: SYNERGIES IN RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

MCC is amongst the oldest international relief organizations in the world. In July 1920, in response to Russian Mennonites affected by famine and following the Russian Revolution, twelve representatives of American Mennonite Conferences met in Eklhart, Indiana, to coordinate a joint Mennonite response to the crisis.⁷ Similarly in Canada, in October 1920, fourteen representatives of Canadian Mennonite church conferences met in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, to form the Canadian Central Committee, a body which was to work jointly and in cooperation with the efforts of the American Mennonites.⁸

MCC faced a triage situation in Russia as it worked to keep as many people alive as possible during the famine. Resources provided by the Mennonite Central Committee were not sufficient to meet the growing needs of the about 48,000 Mennonites affected by famine. At the peak of the crisis, an estimated 100 people were dying per week in the German and Catholic settlement adjoining the Molotschna Mennonite colony as a result of severe malnutrition.⁹ Across the Soviet Union between 1921–1922, around nine million people died in the second largest famine of the twentieth century.¹⁰ MCC established soup kitchens while local selection committees identified criteria for identifying beneficiaries. MCC-supported committees gave preference to vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly, single women, the ill, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. From its earliest days, MCC thus confronted difficult decisions about how to prioritize need.

These early activities also reflected the complex character of MCC involvements. While MCC initially focused its resources on the provision of humanitarian assistance, MCC quickly became involved in what we would now call “development” and “advocacy” activities.¹¹ In Canada, the Mennonite Board of Colonization began negotiating with the Canadian government regarding the migration and resettlement of Mennonite refugees to Canada. While the Mennonite Central Committee in the United States had intended to disband following the completion of the relief program in 1925, its members reactivated the organization when the call came to aid several thousand Mennonite refugees who had fled to Germany in 1929. MCC

then assisted with the resettlement of Mennonite refugees in Paraguay in 1930.

In his discussion on the evolution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), David Korten points to four distinct stages or "generations" of NGO development: 1) Relief and Welfare; 2) Community Development; 3) Sustainable Systems Development; and 4) People's Movements.¹² Drawing on Korten's definitions and analysis, one can see that MCC (and its predecessor organizations in Canada) has actually been active in all stages, or "generations," from its inception. In the Soviet Union MCC provided immediate humanitarian relief (e.g. soup kitchens), furnished support for local community development initiatives (e.g. tractors and resettlement), lobbied government for the protection of refugees, and created a movement by catalyzing and coordinating Mennonite churches and service agencies in the U.S. and Canada.

The provision of humanitarian assistance continued to be the dominant driver of MCC's program but always created opportunities for broader interventions. In response to the devastation of World War II, MCC established the "War Sufferers Relief" program which included the distribution of food and clothing, the provision of community services, and peace education.¹³ MCC also undertook a multi-pronged response to the food crisis of 1973–74 catalyzed by the Sahelian drought and the oil crisis. At its annual meeting in Kansas, the MCC board adopted the "Hillsboro Resolution" which called for the broadening and strengthening of MCC's rural development programs, changes in North American consumption habits, greater financial assistance to meet growing food needs, and public policy advocacy.¹⁴ Innovative MCC programs grew out of the Hillsboro Resolution, including the *More-with-Less* cookbook and the MCC Food Bank (now the Canadian Foodgrains Bank).

Despite MCC's attempt to respond to humanitarian needs in an integrated fashion, a recent survey of MCC constituents reveals that MCC is largely recognized for and associated with its work in humanitarian relief activities.¹⁵ MCC's re-visioning process (New Wine/New Wineskins) has also highlighted the importance of MCC's "disaster relief" role in the eyes of MCC's supporters and partners, with stakeholders also pointing toward MCC's peacebuilding niche. However, an integrated approach of "relief, development, and peace" has been the hallmark of MCC's activities from its beginning in 1920.

Like MCC, other international NGOs grew out of the humanitarian imperative to respond to those affected by war and hunger, par-

ticularly in response to World War II.¹⁶ These organizations have "evolved," increasingly looking to "longer-term" issues of sustainable development, conflict prevention, advocacy, and public education. At the same time, relief and development organizations have tended to become more specialized in response to the particular passions and interests of their constituency. "To feed the hungry and clothe the naked" stood as MCC's slogan during its early years of work in the Soviet Union.¹⁷ However, as late as the 1950s, some MCC supporters raised questions regarding how much MCC should be involved in development activities such as health and education.¹⁸

NGO particularism limits the scope of organizations to respond with flexibility and creativity to complex problems and opportunities.¹⁹ The rise of complex emergencies, the growing hunger crisis, and the increasing impact of climate change requires an integrated approach using multiple modalities. For example, in response to increasing drought risk and chronic food insecurity in semi-arid regions of Kenya, MCC has assisted partners with the construction of sand dams. The construction of these dams has reduced water insecurity through water harvesting in seasonal river beds. Combined with terracing activities, sand dams have improved household agriculture output and helped diversify livelihood opportunities.²⁰ During times of acute food insecurity as a result of drought, these sand dams have been constructed through food-for-work activities smoothing consumption for at-risk households while at the same time mitigating against drought in the long-term.

During the Kenya drought of 2009, MCC partner organizations observed that communities which had benefited from mature sand dams were less affected by the drought and that sand dams had not only prevented increased desertification but had transformed the ecology and raised water tables in the region. Sand dams have proven so successful that MCC has helped in the transfer of sand dam technology to Mozambique and Tanzania, with further exploration in southern Sudan and pastoralist areas of Uganda.

Organizations like MCC must focus on reducing vulnerability to natural hazards and preventing conflict which lead to humanitarian crises. To do so effectively, MCC must continue to work at viewing program design holistically. Sustainable livelihood, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk-reduction theories and approaches should all be considered in program design in order to build social resilience in the face of growing vulnerability and accelerating change.²¹ MCC has embodied this multi-sectoral approach in the past and should continue to embrace this.

RELATIONSHIPS AND AID: ECUMENISM, PARTNERSHIP, AND BLANKETS

Within MCC circles, people often claim that "MCC is about building relationships" or that "connecting people" and "relationships" are primary to the organization's approach or philosophy. Despite this strong relationships narrative, scant attention has been paid to why this is important in carrying out MCC's mission—it has become "MCC lore."²² What is the character of these relationships and how do they impact MCC's program? Relationship-building with and for whom?

The twentieth-century Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, claimed that "all actual life is encounter." In *I and Thou*, Buber articulated what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would later call the relational mode of thinking which "identifies the real not with substances but with relations."²³ Rosalind Eyben, meanwhile, argues that aid agencies tend to minimize the importance of social connections and relations, viewing aid through a "substantialist" and technocratic lens. She argues that aid is not a "thing" but is shaped by particular patterns of social relations, relations themselves molded by context-specific and historically conditioned patterns of power. To make sense of aid, we must see aid as "not a thing in itself—money and technical cooperation—but also as patterns of social relations that both shape and are shaped through the giving and receiving of money and people."²⁴

In the realm of MCC's humanitarian assistance program, "relationship building" has been expressed through a number of channels, including: 1) ecumenical cooperation; 2) partnering with local agencies and civil society; and 3) individual "gift giving" through MCC's material resource program. Cooperation and ecumenism have become increasingly important for MCC in its humanitarian activities. John Unruh may have contended that in the beginning "MCC was created as a service organization and not as a kind of ecumenical movement."²⁵ In fact, since its inception, MCC has fostered inter-Mennonite and broader ecumenical cooperation.

One of MCC's greatest contributions to increased ecumenical cooperation has been its role in founding Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). Following MCC's Hillsboro Resolution, MCC created the MCC Food Bank in 1976 to provide timely food assistance for those affected by acute food insecurity, and to promote longer-term solutions to hunger. In July 1982 the MCC Food Bank was dissolved, giving way to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Formed in November 1982 following a meeting with denominations representing the

Roman Catholic, United, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, the Salvation Army, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance churches in Canada, CFGB was incorporated in 1983 and now includes fifteen member organizations with the Catholic and Anglican church agencies joining recently in 2007.²⁶

The call for increased cooperation in the humanitarian sector has become louder in the wake of poor global information sharing and disorganized program implementation in humanitarian crises. Ecumenical collaboration through CFGB provides opportunities for MCC's constituency to respond to needs throughout the world, sometimes extending beyond the reach of MCC's existing program partners. This collaboration provides opportunities for program contributions with trusted and like-minded agencies.

Other church member agencies frequently contribute to MCC's program account, with MCC also contributing to the efforts of other members. Notable collaborative responses to humanitarian crises include Afghanistan, North Korea, Zimbabwe, and Darfur, Sudan. Over the past ten years, MCC has programmed an average of six to seven million Canadian dollars annually through its account at CFGB (including CIDA matching funds) and has recently increased to over 10 million. On the American side, MCC was a founding implementing member of the Foods Resource Bank (FRB), established in 2000 to support smallholder agriculture programs of its member agencies. Similar to CFGB, FRB's fifteen members contribute resources to the projects of other members.

Ecumenical cooperation characterized MCC's response to economic sanctions against Iraq and the 2003 invasion of that country. In the build up to the war, MCC joined with Church World Service, the National Council of Churches USA, Jubilee Partners, and Sojourners in a \$1 million program to respond to the health needs of Iraqi children in a campaign entitled "All Our Children" (AOC). The program focused on providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq but also included an advocacy component, with donors writing letters to U.S. President George W. Bush and engaging in advocacy against the war's impact on children. MCC's participation in AOC gave MCC access to more partners in Iraq and access to more resources.

Relationships built over the years at CFGB have also led to a more coordinated Canadian response to disasters in the area of non-food items, livelihood rehabilitation, and reconstruction. Following the southeast Asian tsunami in December 2004, MCC joined with three other church agencies—Presbyterian World Service and Development (PWS&D), the United Church of Canada (UCC), and the Pri-

mate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF)—to form "PUMA," a coalition which accessed \$6 million worth of CIDA matching resources to respond to an Action by Churches Together (ACT) International appeal for reconstruction and rehabilitation in India. Working together through a joint steering committee, PUMA supported a longtime MCC ecumenical partner in India, Churches Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), in livelihood rehabilitation, housing reconstruction, and disaster preparedness and mitigation.

This multi-level ecumenical partnership—through PUMA, ACT, and CASA—increased coordination and minimize duplication and disparities in the delivery of humanitarian assistance theory. Rempel concludes that the success of the program hinged on effective coordination and constructive north-south dialogue. Rempel argues that the PUMA steering committee engaged CASA in a way that attempted to minimize the donor-recipient power imbalance. The process fostered constructive debate allowing CASA the necessary flexibility to respond to the priorities of the local community.²⁷

Following this successful partnership, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), and Canadian Lutheran World Relief joined the group under the acronym PPUMACC in response to the South Asia Earthquake which affected India and Pakistan. In 2007, these agencies signed a memorandum of understanding under the banner of Canadian Churches in Action (CCA), a coalition which has now successfully carried out joint responses to disasters in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma), and China, with MCC taking the lead with our local partners in Myanmar and China.

In addition to promoting humanitarian coordination and ecumenical cooperation in Canada and the U.S., MCC also has a history of participation in local cooperation and ecumenism in the South. In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Council of Churches sponsored country-specific roundtables where denominational agencies, both local and international, met jointly to discuss and support coordinated humanitarian relief and community development programs of national-level church councils. MCC participated in numerous such roundtables, notably in Sudan, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, and has been frequently asked to chair the roundtable of the Sudan Council of Churches. MCC's leadership was appreciated due to the fact that it had staff on the ground which frequently related to the national church councils.

Ecumenical coordination efforts such as MCC's participation in the Sudan Council of Churches, and the PUMA response to the Indian

Ocean tsunami, have been successful in developing common agenda in cooperation with Southern partners while also responding to the needs of northern donor agencies (and their back donors). Aside from coordination, MCC has placed an emphasis on working through local partner agencies. While in the past MCC workers often engaged in the hands-on delivery of humanitarian assistance, MCC has shifted to almost exclusively working with local partner organizations who manage project implementation. In many cases, MCC's reliance on and relationships with local partners has greatly increased MCC's level of humanitarian access. This approach recognizes that local organizations will be the ones who remain with the affected community and that increasing their capacity is fundamental to long-term development.

In the recent case of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Burma), reaching the affected population was a key challenge for international NGOs in the early weeks of the emergency response. Despite government restrictions on foreign aid agencies, MCC worked with established local partners to respond within days. In the case of the Rwandan genocide in 1994, despite having no program activity in either Rwanda or Burundi, MCC responded to the genocide through L'Eglise du Christ au Congo, with whom MCC had a historical relationship. Similarly, in the Gaza Strip, following Israel's military bombardment in 2009, MCC operated through local partner organizations able to deliver food and material resources to those affected, despite the Israeli economic embargo and restrictions on movement.

Not only has MCC worked alongside local partners, MCC has also heavily invested in building the local capacity of partners. In fact, MCC has played a role in the creation of numerous civil society and relief agencies which are now MCC partners in humanitarian crises. These organizations include the Meserete Kristos Church Relief and Development Association in Ethiopia, the Brethren in Christ Church of Zambia's Compassionate Care Ministries, the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India, the Indonesia Mennonite Diakonial Service, and Mennonite Disaster Service (in Canada and the U.S.).

MCC's emphasis on working with local partners has forced the organization to struggle with questions of power and partnership. Peter Walker highlights the large power imbalance between those who come with money and political power and those who bring the local knowledge so crucial for understanding and acting in the local context. These unequal relationships between international NGOs and local partner organizations often mean that accountability only runs in one direction: back to the donor. Despite these power imbal-

ances, somehow a relationship of mutual trust, responsibility, and accountability must be created.²⁸ Seconding MCC service workers to partner organizations and “sticking with partners” over an extended time frame has pushed MCC to be increasingly partner-driven and strengthened relationships of mutual trust.

In addition to the promotion of ecumenical cooperation and local partnerships, the practice of physical “gift giving” through MCC’s material resources program has created relationships between MCC’s supporters and project participants (beneficiaries) around the world. Through these far-flung “encounters” of meat canning, stuffing relief kits, sewing quilts, or harvesting food grain, individuals, churches, and other groups from Canada and the U.S. have expressed their concern for the plight of the poor and marginalized around the globe. The recent Material Resources Program review highlights the importance of this grassroots participation as an important channel through which people engage MCC’s mission and “connect” with communities affected by conflict, poverty, and disaster.²⁹

The pitfalls of short-term material responses shipped from North America are obvious: The local purchase of material resources is more cost-effective and supports local economic development; shipping increases MCC’s ecological footprint and delays the delivery of relief items; and, finally, it risks leaving donors with the impression that the problem is “solved” through a one-way exchange. However, beyond these pitfalls, the Material Resources Review also noted the appreciation for the high quality of goods that MCC ships.

MCC blankets, hand-sewn by many volunteers in Canada and the U.S., are a case in point. In Darfur, displaced persons asked to exchange their thin United Nations blankets for the colorful MCC, hand-sewn quilts. They noted that these “Mennonite” blankets were lovingly made by persons interested in their plight. These blankets have provided warmth and demonstrated kindness in hostile environments including Rwanda, North Korea, and Iraq. Partners who visit MCC Material Resource centers in Canada and the U.S. are often awestruck at the number of dedicated volunteers committed to the mission of MCC who function as the lifeblood of the organization. Many of these MR volunteers were themselves once assisted by MCC (particularly in the Soviet Union in the 1920s or in Europe during World War I).

The more personal, or perhaps “relational,” connection of the material resource program “makes things more real” and can create opportunities for transformation. In the lead-up to the 2003 Iraq invasion, Canadian and American university students participated in

purchasing relief kits for war victims in Iraq; accompanying information on the impact of the conflict and the promotion of peace provided unique opportunities for increasing awareness on justice and peacebuilding issues as well as mobilizing people for advocacy.

At the same time, as Rosalind Eyben rightfully notes, “the gift is at one and the same time a material expression of potentially mutually transformative solidarity *and* of oppressive adverse incorporation into an unfair world.”³⁰ While MCC should continue to emphasize relationship building through increased cooperation, partnership, and opportunities for constituency engagement, the organization must continue to work toward relationships that foster transformation and build solidarity. The emergence of rights-based approaches further underscores the increasing demand for accountability to those affected by all actors including public, private, and non-governmental organizations.

“CARING IN THE NAME OF CHRIST” AND THE RIGHT TO PROTECTION

One of the greatest shifts in how MCC carries out its humanitarian activities is the growing “professionalization” of humanitarian assistance, particularly over the last few decades.³¹ MCC’s humanitarian activities have been influenced by a greater demand for accountability from donors, local stakeholders, and the broader humanitarian community itself.

In one of the greatest humanitarian crises of the twentieth century, MCC joined 188 other international aid agencies in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (then Zaire) in responding to huge influx of Rwandan refugees fleeing the conflict in 1994. For the most part, poor collaboration existed among these agencies, leading to vastly different levels of assistance being provided to the affected population. The experience in Rwanda led to a call from humanitarian organizations for increased collaboration and also the agreement to the formulation of minimum standards for the humanitarian community.

The Sphere Project was launched and has succeeded in setting out agreeable minimum standards for humanitarian practice in the areas of food assistance, nutrition, water and sanitation, health, shelter, and site selection. At the core of the Sphere Project is the Humanitarian Charter which highlights three core principles for humanitarian actors: the right to life with dignity, the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and the principle of non-refoulement.³²

Adherence to minimum standards over the past decade has led to a reduction in the level of morbidity in refugee camps.³³ In addition to ensuring minimum humanitarian standards, humanitarian organizations are now forced to think through numerous complexities in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including how to promote gender equity; ensure the participation of those affected; reduce vulnerability to disasters; build local capacity; and minimize the use of aid as a weapon (the “Do No Harm” principle).

The emergence of results-based management (RBM) systems in the wake of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness has also changed the way MCC carries out its relief activities. The pressure from back donors (notably CIDA and CFGB) and the MCC constituency along with MCC’s own desire to “manage for results” has also led to greater rigor in MCC’s planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) activities. Many within the organization have resisted the introduction of results-based management, arguing that this “Western rational planning model” has been imposed on MCC and our partners and that it hinders relationship-building and participatory development.³⁴ They contend that accountability for results and building relationships are mutually exclusive objectives.³⁵ Rather, when conducted in the context of partnership, accompaniment, and local accountability, RBM can be a strong learning tool, increasing program impact. The challenge for MCC remains our ability to go beyond “filling in the boxes” toward becoming a learning organization, building our own capacity in current development practice, particularly in PME methodologies.

The management structures particular to MCC’s humanitarian and disaster response operations have also undergone significant change. In response to Hurricane Mitch, numerous humanitarian organizations were forced to reevaluate their operating procedures and policy to ensure the necessary field capacity to carry out large-scale disaster responses. A review of MCC’s operating procedures led to increased information sharing within the MCC system as well as strengthened local capacity for disaster management and coordination. Similarly, the overwhelming response of MCC’s constituency to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has also forced MCC and other NGOs to reevaluate its operating procedures and management structures in the face of large-scale disaster responses.³⁶

MCC’s response to the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 also highlights the great disparity in the allocation of humanitarian assistance. MCC was entrusted with US\$23 million from constituency and government grants to respond to the destruction in Sri Lanka, India, In-

donesia, and Somalia. In addition to immediate emergency relief, trauma healing, and livelihood rehabilitation, these resources allowed MCC to build disaster resistant housing for 106 households in India and Indonesia, as well as a number of schools and libraries.

This overwhelming response to the tsunami stands in stark contrast to other major disasters of this kind, where on average, MCC is only able to respond on a much smaller scale. Levels of humanitarian assistance are often driven by media attention and the corresponding interest from MCC constituents. While MCC often receives a large influx of donations for sudden-onset emergencies (earthquakes, hurricanes, and cyclones), slower-onset emergencies such as drought or protracted conflict receive minimal interest from MCC’s donor constituency. For example, in the case of most major African droughts, MCC is fortunate if it manages to raise \$200,000, even though millions are affected. Oxfam points to the lack of impartiality in the delivery of humanitarian assistance globally, highlighting that the 500,000 people affected by the Asian tsunami in 2004 received on average \$1,241 each in official aid flows, while in the same year the response to the 700,000 people affected by conflict in Chad received an average of \$23 per person.³⁷

Climate change, combined with increasing and volatile commodity prices, threatens to put millions upon millions of people at risk. The prospect of increasing drought due to climate change is notable since slow-onset disasters have accounted for almost 87 percent of all natural hazard-related deaths between 1990 and 1999.³⁸ However, far from being “acts of God,” famine or acute food insecurity is the result of human action and inaction, representing a failure of accountability of humanitarian and government actors.³⁹ One of the key drivers behind acute food insecurity is the predictable nature of seasonal hunger. During the annual “hungry season” and during cycles of drought, households are forced to take on difficult “coping strategies” including reducing consumption, migration, the selling of assets, and the sacrifice of other expenditures (e.g. school fees). Combating these “normal cycles” of seasonal hunger is instrumental not only in tackling chronic rural poverty but also crucial to famine prevention.⁴⁰

In the specific case of Ethiopia, the government and international donors have recognized that despite the cycle of annual “emergency” appeals, the majority of the affected households are chronically hungry and face predictable seasonal hunger gaps. In recognition of this fact, the Ethiopian government along with international donors created the Productive Safety Net Program which targets about eight

million chronically food insecure households. Households are provided with predictable food assistance (in the form of food aid or cash transfers) during the hungry season.

MCC partners with the Miserete Kristos Church Relief and Development Association in the implementation of the safety net program in twelve peasant associations in southern Ethiopia. After four years of implementation, the program has succeeded in improving food consumption, reducing the "distress selling" of assets (along with other harmful "coping strategies"), and has even led to an increase in household asset holdings through group saving circles.⁴¹ Ethiopia's safety net program has proven that predictable access to food during the hungry season positively impacts short-term food security while also contributing to longer-term poverty reduction.

Through MCC's account at the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, MCC partners implement similar seasonal safety net programs in Burundi, Nepal, and India. In the face of growing climate uncertainty, these social protection programs will become increasingly important as a means to promote climate change adaptation and risk reduction more generally.⁴²

How does MCC work with the constituency to ensure the right to humanitarian assistance for all? If MCC believes that "caring in the name of Christ" means that all have the right to protection—that, in fact, there is a universal social minimum which all people should enjoy—the organization will have to increase its ability to respond to "forgotten emergencies" and increase program emphasis on the reduction of vulnerability to disasters and crises.

"LOVING THE ENEMY":

IMPARTIALITY AND PEACEBUILDING

Impartiality remains a key principle for humanitarianism. While MCC began its work targeting its efforts at Mennonite sisters and brothers, over the last ninety years MCC has broadened its efforts to include those beyond the confines of denominational affiliation and ethnicity. In the context of armed conflict, the biblical challenge to "love enemies" has been fundamental to MCC's humanitarian activities. However, the place of humanitarian actors has become increasingly complicated in "complex emergencies" as foreign and domestic governments attempt to coopt humanitarian activities to advance political and military objectives.

The case of MCC's humanitarian activities in Vietnam is still instructive as MCC continues to confront issues of "impartiality" in the

context of complex emergencies. MCC began its efforts in Vietnam in 1954 with the primary objective of helping the Protestant refugees in Southern Vietnam; yet "MCC quickly expanded far beyond this narrow calling to aiding the people of Vietnam with respect to need, not religion."⁴³

Initially MCC cooperated with the U.S. government, distributing U.S. food aid and operating in southern Vietnam; however, this close association with government and military quickly changed. MCC personnel increasingly questioned the alignment of MCC's operations (through the Vietnam Christian Service) with U.S. government objectives. MCC stopped distributing U.S. food aid and increasingly began to reach out and build relationships across "enemy lines" by providing food assistance in Northern Vietnam. The U.S. government also raised questions when MCC service workers developed relationships with the communist leaders, including the National Liberation Front (the southern insurgency group) and northern Vietnamese leaders. By 1976 MCC was the only agency with staff in the country after the fall of South Vietnam. In cooperation with an "enemy state," MCC began operations with the new communist government, including the approval of US\$1 million in humanitarian assistance.⁴⁴

MCC has maintained its commitment to impartiality by working on both sides during conflicts and in complex emergency contexts, including operations in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, and Sudan. While the Ethiopian government was at war with the Oromos, Eritreans, and Tigrayan forces from the mid 1980s to the mid-1990s, MCC provided food and material resources to those affected by the conflict while also maintaining program in non-government areas of Ethiopia. Despite its knowledge that MCC was assisting those in non-government controlled areas, the Ethiopian government allowed MCC to continue its operations. Similarly, during Sudan's protracted war with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), MCC assisted civilians in government and non-government controlled areas. The same goes for MCC's efforts in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. There MCC, through partnership with Medair, assisted people affected by the conflict in both Taliban and non-Taliban controlled areas.

Some international humanitarian organizations have chosen a more activist approach in complex emergencies, publicly speaking out against atrocities. However, MCC has approached these situations differently, using a dual-track approach: supporting "quiet diplomacy" through local advocacy initiatives, while at the same time remaining engaged in humanitarian efforts. Choosing to oper-

ate "under the radar" by taking cues from local partners, MCC has been able maintain humanitarian access in very difficult and complex environments.

The case of MCC's involvement in the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) reflects MCC's emphasis on staying engaged. In 1997, MCC launched an appeal for North Korea in light of growing hunger in this politically isolated country. MCC's constituency enthusiastically supported this effort, doubling MCC's original appeal request of CDN\$ 360,000. In cooperation with the DPRK government, MCC has provided material resources, canned meat, soy milk, and other humanitarian assistance. While some in MCC's constituency question MCC's involvement in the DPRK, MCC has viewed humanitarian and development activities as opportunities for engagement. MCC has sponsored agricultural exchanges in between DPRK officials and Mennonites in Canada and the U.S. to build relationships and understanding. While relatively small, these exchanges have opened "windows of compassion" as we attempt to welcome and embrace "the Other."⁴⁵

MCC's ability to create this space for engagement and to respond impartially has come under threat in a post-9/11 world and the emergence of "humanitarian wars." The line between humanitarian actors and military operations has become blurred with the emergence of "The Responsibility to Protect" doctrine, which justifies the use of military force to protect human rights of those affected by crisis. The "whole-of-government," or "3D," approach attempts to combine defense, diplomatic, and development efforts into a seamless, complementary whole, sacrificing the humanitarian imperative in the name of an integrated approach to achieving long-term peace.

For MCC these new forms of political-military strategy pose difficult questions about its attempts to respond impartially to human need. One month before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S. government contacted MCC's Middle East department to inquire as to whether MCC would be willing to accept funds for development activities in Iraq. The U.S. government saw and continues to see humanitarian agencies as part of their war effort, "force multipliers" for their campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the Canadian and U.S. military have actively sought NGO participation in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) which would involve the delivery of relief and development activities along side military and security operations. The widespread perception that aid agencies merely serve as emissaries of the coalition forces has led to a mistrust of agencies and an increase in violence toward aid workers.

MCC has clearly rejected this 3D approach as inconsistent with MCC's commitment to nonviolence and the need for impartiality to help those on "all sides." By contrast, MCC has sought to integrate community-level peacebuilding activities into relief and rehabilitation efforts. In *Do No Harm*, Mary Anderson argues that relief agencies should not only attempt to prevent further harm and conflict as a result of their activities but that they should "help war to end by lessening intergroup tensions and strengthening intergroup connections."⁴⁶ MCC has accordingly sought to "mainstream" peacebuilding into its relief activities.

For example, in the pastoralist Karamojong region of northeast Uganda, MCC worked with local partners to deliver humanitarian help and increase inter-ethnic cooperation. A serious conflict between the government of Uganda and the Karamajong had led to the destruction of local settlements, or "manyatas." Karamojong leadership requested support from MCC to help displaced Karamojong with food, cooking utensils, and blankets. Concerned about transporting these good through insecure territory, MCC called on the support of local partners in the Iteso region, which borders Karamojong. The Iteso and the Karamjong have historically been in conflict, with Karamjong often moving into Iteso territory during the dry season and forcibly taking over grazing land and water. When MCC approached Iteso partners with the proposition of distributing assistance to displaced Karamojong, the Iteso were willing to help and successfully carried out the distribution despite security risks and the history of conflict. According to former MCC representative David Klassen, this small effort enhanced relationships between the two peoples and created opportunities for future cooperation.

Similarly in Rwanda, MCC supported group income generation activities which brought together both Tutsi and Hutu ethnic women in the wake of the Rwandan genocide. MCC-supported projects formed inter-ethnic youth groups to reconstruct homes. In response to the identity-based violence following the Kenya elections in 2007, MCC assisted local religious leaders from competing ethnic communities in the joint distribution of food and non-food items.

MCC's response to a severe earthquake Iran in 1990 proved to be an opportunity for MCC to increase its engagement with Islam and increase its focus on interfaith bridge-building. Following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Islam was replacing communism as the new "enemy" and MCC was encouraged to explore of interfaith cooperation. MCC developed a strong relationship with the Iranian Red Crescent Society and this initial "relief" engagement in Iran led to a

later partnership with the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute (IKERI) with an emphasis on interfaith dialogue. Most recently this relationship led to numerous talks between church leaders and the current President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in the context of growing hostility toward the Republic of Iran.

MCC's humanitarian assistance program has provided the organization with a window or space to demonstrate compassion and to deconstruct the notion of Otherness, even among those who are supposed to be "enemies." Remaining impartial in delivery assistance is not only fundamental to humanitarian practice but also provides opportunities for peacebuilding and ongoing engagement.

LOOKING AHEAD: MCC AT 100

This chapter has explored the development of MCC humanitarian activity over the past ninety years. Given these shifts and trends explored above, where will MCC be at 100? Certain directions for MCC's humanitarian work seem clear:

- *Integrating "relief, development, and peace":* From the beginning, MCC has integrated peace and development activities as part of its humanitarian and disaster response. To build social resilience and prevent the vulnerability that leads to crisis, MCC should strengthen the interplay between the various aspects of the organization's work, particularly given MCC's strength in peacebuilding.
- *Deepening ecumenical cooperation:* MCC is increasingly focusing its partnerships on Anabaptist-related organizations. Strengthening the capacity of these Anabaptist agencies should serve as an entry point for further ecumenical and interfaith cooperation—cooperation which has proved important in responding to humanitarian crises.
- *Building local capacity and partnerships:* MCC has a strong history of walking alongside partner organizations. If MCC is serious about "capacity building," MCC must invest the necessary resources into strengthening the capacity of local partners in disaster preparedness and response.
- *Reducing vulnerability to disasters:* In light of growing vulnerability to climate change and increasing food insecurity, MCC should increase its focus on measures to reduce vulnerability to disasters. Current efforts in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and social protection represent a strong starting point.

- *Engaging "the enemy":* While at times, MCC's engagement with DPRK, Vietnam, Iran, and Iraq have raised questions among MCC's supporters in Canada and the United States, MCC should continue to be open to opportunities to engage and build relationships with people and countries classified as "the enemy."
- *Realizing "the right to protection":* At present, MCC's ability to respond to disasters is driven by levels of media and constituency engagement in the situation. MCC should find more creative ways to generate resources and awareness about "forgotten crises."

By moving in these directions, MCC will build on and prove faithful to the lessons it has learned over nine decades of humanitarian action.

NOTES

1. See *The State of Food Security in the World: Economic Crises—Impacts and Lessons Learned* (Rome: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2009).
2. See M. L. Parry, O. F. Canziani, J. P. Palutikof, P. J. van der Linden, and C. E. Hanson, *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability—Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Cambridge: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007).
3. *Right to Survive: The Humanitarian Challenge in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2009).
4. *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change* (London: United Kingdom Treasury, 2005).
5. See the *Human Security Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 2009: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2009).
6. SIPRI, 2009.
7. For MCC's early history, see P. C. Hiebert and Orie O. Miller, *Feeding the Hungry: Russian Famine, 1919-1925: American Mennonite Relief Operations under the Auspices of Mennonite Central Committee* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1929); M. C. Lehman, *The History and Principles of Mennonite Relief Work: An Introduction* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1945); and John D. Unruh, *In the Name of Christ; A History of the Mennonite Central Committee and Its Service, 1920-1951* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee, 1952).
8. See Esther Epp-Tiessen, Chapter 4 in this volume.
9. See Hiebert and Miller, 215.
10. S. Devereux, P. Vaitla, and S. Hauenstein Swan, *Seasons of Hunger: Fighting Cycles of Starvation among the World's Poor* (London: Pluto Press,

- 2008).
11. Hiebert and Miller, 293.
 12. David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21st. Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford, Conn.: 1990).
 13. Unruh, 357.
 14. This multi-faceted approach continues today: in response to dramatic food price increases in over the past two years, leading to the contemporary "hunger crisis," MCC has once again called for an increase to food assistance, agricultural development, public policy advocacy, and constituency education.
 15. "Mennonite Central Committee Communications Survey Report," Barefoot Creative (2009).
 16. See David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21st. Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 1990); as well as Marc Lindenbergh and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs* (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2001), for discussions of the growth of humanitarianism and the aftermath of the Second World War.
 17. See Herta Krauss, *International Relief in Action, 1914-1943, Selected Records, with Notes*, sponsored by American Friends Service Committee, Brethren Service Committee, and MCC (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944).
 18. Ibid.
 19. See L. David Brown and Archana Kalegaonkar, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 31 (2002): 231-258 for a discussion of NGO particularism.
 20. See R. Lasage, J. Aerts, G. C. M. Mutiso, A. de Vries, "Potential for Community-Based Adaptation to Droughts: Sand Dams in Kitui, Kenya," *Physics and Chemistry of the Earth* 33 (2008): 67-73; as well as "Sand Dams in Kenya" case study as part of the Canadian Food Security Policy Group's "Pathways to Resilience: Smallholder Farmers and the Future of Agriculture," available online at <http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca/resilience.aspx>.
 21. On integrated approaches to humanitarian work, see Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies in Times of Disaster* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Mark Davies, Bruce Guenther, Jennifer Leavy, Tom Mitchell and Thomas Tanner, "Climate Change Adaptation, Disaster Risk Reduction and Social Protection: Complementary Roles in Agriculture and Rural Growth?" IDS Working Paper No. 320 (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2008); and Lisa Shipper and Mark Pelling, "Disaster Risk, Climate Change and International Development: Scope for, and Challenges to, Integration," *Disasters* 30/1 (2006): 19-38. 2006.
 22. See Terry Jantzi, "A Theoretical Framework for Understanding MCC's Emphasis on Relationships," chapter 17 of this volume, for a discussion of relationships within MCC.
 23. Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7/1 (1989): 15
 24. Rosalind Eyben "Power, Mutual Accountability and Responsibility in the Practice of International Aid: A Relational Approach" IDS Working Paper No. 305 (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2008): 9.
 25. Unruh, 37.
 26. J. M. Klassen, *Jacob's Journey: From Zagadowka towards Zion: The Autobiography of J. M. Klassen* (Canada, 2001).

- For a number of reasons the MCC Food Bank was seen to be in competition with MCC. Some within the organization saw the Bank as resource-driven, viewing funds raised by the Food Bank (which included a match from the Canadian International Development Agency of \$3 to every dollar raised) as in competitions with other MCC priorities. There was also increased pressure on MCC to store and ship commodities and Food Bank board members would often travel to monitor program without consultation with MCC staff.
27. See Henry Rempel, 2009, *World Cannot Express Our Gratitude: The Rebuilding of Lives in Response to the Tsunami in Southern India*, unpublished manuscript.
 28. See Peter Walker, "Complexity and Context," (Boston, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2008). See also Alan Fowler, "Authentic NGDO Partnerships in the New Policy Agenda for International Aid: Dead End or Light Ahead?" *Development and Change* 29 (1998): 137-159.
 29. Shirley B. Yoder, *Material Resources Program Review: An Integrated Report of Findings and Recommendations* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee).
 30. Eyben, 20.
 31. Larry Minear, *The Humanitarian Enterprise: Dilemmas and Discoveries* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 2002).
 32. The protection of refugees from being returned to places where their lives are at risk and freedoms are at risk.
 33. Salama, P. Spiegel, L. Talley, R. Waldman, "Lessons Learned from Complex Emergencies over the Past Decade," *Lancet* 364 (2004): 1801-13.
 34. See Eyben and T. Wallace.
 35. It is notable that this resistance has come primarily from MCC personnel, while partners have frequently expressed an eagerness for further learning and resources.
 36. Allen Harder, *Consolidated Report: Evaluation of MCC's Tsunami Response* (Akron, Pa.: Mennonite Central Committee)
 37. See Oxfam.
 38. Ben Wisner, Piers Blaikie, Terry Cannon, and Ian Davis, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability and Disasters*, 2nd. ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).
 39. Stephen Devereux, "Introduction: From 'Old Famines' to 'New Famines,'" *The New Famines: Why Famines Persist in an Era of Globalization*, ed. Stephen Devereux (London: Routledge, 2007).
 40. Stephen Devereux, Bapu Vaitla, and Samuel Haustein Swan, *Seasons of Hunger: Fighting Cycles of Quiet Starvation Among the World's Rural Poor* (London: Pluto Press, 2008).
 41. Bruce Guenther, "Cash-for-Work, Vulnerability and Social Resilience: A Case Study of Productive Safety Net Programme in Sidama Zone, Ethiopia," M.Phil. dissertation (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2007).
 42. See Davies et al.
 43. Paul Shetler Fast, "The Value of People-Centered Development: MCC's Sustained Relationship with Vietnam, 1954-Today," unpublished paper.
 44. Ibid.

45. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1996).
46. Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1999),