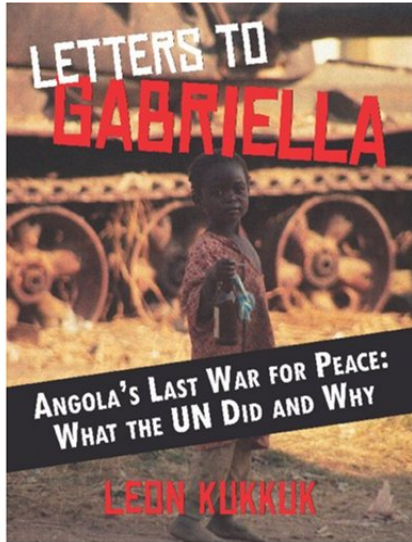


UN Lives on the Dark Side, UNDP, corruption, Angola, 1998-2002



Leon Kukuk, Letters to Gabriella – Angola's Last War for Peace; What the UN Did and Why, Florida Literary Foundation, ISBN-10 - 1891855670, 2005, 648 pages. Available at amazon.com

From the Author

War in Angola lasted intermittently for more than forty years. After several failed attempts at peace throughout the nineties, a full-scale conventional war broke out again at the end of 1998. This marked the end of a United Nations attempt, lasting more than twelve years, to make peace in this country. It was one of the first major UN missions after the Cold War and turned into a spectacular and expensive failure.

In 1995 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Angola had one hundred million dollars of donor money available for community reconstruction. This was managed through a Trust Fund in conjunction with the Angolan government.

UNDP planned a "Community Production Centre" in the city of Huambo, the second largest city in the country and one of the cities most affected by the war. The objective of the project was to create employment through the encouragement of local production. UNDP subcontracted a private company to implement the project in spite of government protests that this would be unsuitable.

In the beginning of 1998 the author was contracted to start implementing the project. It very soon became apparent that the private company was not capable of

working in Angola. In spite of this UNDP paid more than one and a half million Dollars to the company, which was never seen in Huambo. Almost none of the project funds reached the project. Nevertheless it was adapted locally and became one of the more successful projects in the country.

Soon it became the subject of an investigation by the Angolan government and the local press that exposed a host of irregularities within UNDP. To date UNDP has not provided an adequate explanation of what went wrong and how money from the Trust Fund was managed. Instead, their responses reveal a web of lies, corruption and excuses.

For more than four years the author sought explanations from the United Nations, going all the way to their headquarters in New York seeking answers. Investigations and audits were promised but never happened. Parallel to this, the "Last War for Peace" was fought amongst Angolans. Much of the heaviest fighting focused on the central highlands surrounding Huambo.

This is not simply a dry account of war. It is a narrative, conversational, at times intimate, story, something told to his daughter, Gabriella, born during this time. At the same time it is also a detailed, authoritative and comprehensive account of a fascinating time by someone who experienced much of it firsthand. The pride of Angolans, their friendly and outgoing natures in the face of incredible hardship, their capacity for hard work and sacrifice and sense of community comes through strongly. Path breaking insight is given on the shambles, the arrogance, corruption and sheer incompetence of many of the United Nations development agencies.

This book would not only appeal to specialists and those with a special interest in Angola, although they will find much in it that is new and never before published. The general reader will find an interesting story, much of it an expose, backed by original documents, of corruption and incompetence that makes for a bizarre, disturbing yet entertaining chronicle of the culture of control freaks and inept officials.

In the narrative, United Nations officials, in their own words, provide a devastating account of the scale of their own internal incompetence, the extent to which they are neither accountable morally or legally, a rare insight into a world normally closed to outsiders. The war is a constant backdrop to this; the causes of this war, the nature of modern warfare, its destructive effect on civilians, and the strengths and weaknesses of development aid. The actors are global and local, public and private.

It shows the brutality and meaninglessness of war, exposes the strengths and weaknesses of those who come to assist. It is academic, yet intimate and personal. It investigates the profound without losing touch with the trivial. It is a substantial work.

About the Author

Leon Kukuk was born in South Africa in 1963. Congenitally at odds with normality, he has led a colourful, even rickety existence, roaming the globe, points north, east south and west and posing, amongst other things, as a student, a traveler, a tramp, a barman, window cleaner and for the last decade as a professional do-gooder. This

last pose is perhaps the truest part of his persona. Although sometimes labeled as a Communist and rabble-rouser, he sees himself not as a political ideologue but as a social reformer. He is presently settled in Angola with his daughter, Gabriella.

Mr. Kukuk also has a blog at www.letterstogabriella.blogspot.com

Press Release

Talk about corruption is the order of the day. Of all the bad things that are happening in Africa, corruption is slowly reaching the top of the list. Corruption is perhaps not as bad as genocide, but it is also a crime against humanity. Corruption is a killer of initiative and trust. It drives away foreign investment and undermines the development of the rule of law. But most importantly, corruption robs Africans of a better life and African children especially of a future. The UN has initiated a “Convention Against Corruption” that has been signed by more than 100 countries.

Some of the most infamous incidences of corruption include Mobutu Sese Seko, the former president of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) who allegedly stole somewhere between \$5 and 14 billion, and Sani Abacha, former president of Nigeria, who reportedly looted more than \$2 billion. Both these former leaders are now dead, but their legacy of corruption continues to afflict their nations.

African governments are warned time and again that increased aid flows continue to be compromised by the issue of accountability in the face of serious and well-documented corruption. The South African government most notably wants to be seen as clean and free of corruption.

Chances are, however that you still don't know about one of the biggest scams of our time: The misuse of foreign aid to Africa by Non-Governmental Organisations, United Nations agencies, and businesses operating in Africa.

Perhaps it is because it has been such an embarrassment to democratic governments in the developed world and private organizations who keep on believing that foreign aid will help Africa that this issue never gains the attention that it deserves.

Now a new book, “**Letters to Gabriella: Angola's Last War for Peace, What the UN Did and Why**” (ISBN: 1891855670) published by **Florida Literary Foundation**, takes the reader into the bizarre and murky world of development assistance. It provides an insider view on how UN agencies function and how businesses have latched onto this world of undeserved affluence and excess to earn profits for themselves with very little effort. It names the names and points fingers at the guilty, unlike similar books on the same subject.

The author himself steps into this world when he arrives in the beginning of 1998 in Huambo, Angola, charged with setting up a small business development project in this, the second largest city in the country situated in the central highlands.

The country is on the brink of civil war but a project planned three years previously by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is finally being implemented through an agreement with a South African company, RUTEC. This company, under the directorship of John Dommert has sold themselves as experts in small business development and UNDP has promised them a payment of \$1.65 million to transfer this expertise to Huambo. The contract however, turns out to be very vague. Amongst other things it fails to state exactly which services RUTEC are to provide. Furthermore the Angolan government claims that they had not authorised this project and do not want it there.

It soon turns out that RUTEC is a company that sells equipment to small businesses and not much else and their demand to sell this equipment is immediately transmitted to the project staff in Huambo. It also turns out that the equipment is not only largely irrelevant to the Angolan context but also prohibitively expensive and of very poor quality. John Dommert informs the UN system in Angola that RUTEC has no staff capable of travelling to Angola. Nevertheless month after month large amounts of money is paid from UNDP into the RUTEC account.

A full scale civil war had also broken out at the end of 1998 with its epicentre in the area surrounding Huambo. Under these circumstances project staff, with no support, technical assistance or even salaries struggle to make a difference, with some success, against overwhelming odds. Blissfully indifferent to the circumstances of the Angolan people that he had promised to assist, John Dommert provides no support either financially or technically. Instead, he uses his UN contract to sell RUTEC to the South African Land Development Bank and the Mineworkers Development Agency at a grossly inflated price and promptly disappears with his share of the loot.

By the beginning of 2001 the author, faced with a project that had achieved some success but had received less than 15% of the funds allocated to it, with staff salaries six months in arrears and \$100 000 of unpaid obligations in Huambo, went to UNDP's offices in the Angolan capital Luanda to find out what went wrong and why, and how this can be corrected.

Correspondence to RUTEC quickly establishes that this company has no idea where and how they had spent \$1.5 million received from UNDP over a two year period. The new director was for three months unaware that RUTEC had a project in Angola and was receiving money from this project. An audit is promised.

Instead of this promised audit the author is then drawn into a topsy-turvy world of lies, deceits and threats. It is a world where nothing is as it seems, where higher and higher level UN officials tell bigger and bigger lies, an organisation with a complete and utter disregard for a humanity that they are supposed to serve, a world of glossy reports, excessive salaries and fraud, corruption and incompetence on a fantastic scale. All of this is being perpetuated by development practitioners who are morally and practically accountable to absolutely nobody. No audit ever took place.

This happened at a time before corruption was allowed to be discussed within the UN, before the oil-for-food scandal and before more members of the UN started pressuring the body to start accounting for what it is doing.

This is no isolated incident.

As the Angolan civil war drags on through 2001, and the mortality rate skyrockets along with a dramatic plunge in living standards for almost all Angolans, another South African businessman, Paul Erskine, noted for shady dealings in China and Russia, arrived with a lot of fanfare and a television crew from CNN and Mnet's Carte Blanche in tow.

Mr. Erskine claims to represent the "Angolan Refugee Charity" an organisation dedicated to assist the people of Kuito, another city on the highlands as badly affected by the war as Huambo. This charity is registered in South Africa and on his website Paul Erskine requests donations to supply 1500 humanitarian products to the "refugees" in Kuito. These include wine, beer and cigarettes.

Almost nothing is known about Paul Erskine except for a series of complex business arrangements that he has with the local governor, a person reputed to be one of the most corrupt men in the country. Under his humanitarian assistance guise, he asks for logistical support from the World Food Programme (he calls them the World Food Organisation on his website) to bring his 1 500 humanitarian products into the city. This provokes a lot of suspicion and questions being asked.

Seamus Reynolds, a Carte Blanche journalist, responded to the author's concerns as follows:

"We have been in contact with the World Food Program in Kuito and they have also expressed their concern. The Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance has also promised to send through some information about Mr Erskine, but as yet I have not received any correspondence.

We are very concerned that money and supplies donated by the South African public might not be reaching the intended destination, but we need solid proof if this is the case.

We are aware of Mr Erskine's previous dealings in China and Russia, and although we cannot judge the man by those businesses we do include them in our assessment. When we spoke to him originally he explained how he operated in countries where free trade was a problem, and this is obviously the case in Angola. However, the work he says he is doing now is not for gain but purely humanitarian. Now this is the question we are asking. Is Mr Erskine using the aid from South Africa to benefit his business?"

It probably did, but unfortunately for Mr. Erskine, his methods proved to be a bit too crude and after few months of trying to raise funds and profit from the spectacle of compassion, he leaves swiftly, along with the TV cameras and disappears from the scene.

But as long as corruption exists at its current levels in Africa, and as long as both donors and ordinary people continue to look the other way, foreign aid will simply serve to keep Africans poor. Sub-Saharan Africa has received an estimated \$140 billion in bilateral and multilateral aid from 1995-2004. Yet African countries consistently end up as the poorest countries in the world. So one may ask the (literally) billion-dollar question: Where does the money go?

Admittedly kleptocrats do take a large percentage of this money, but the worst transgressors in this regard had been removed from office by the end of the last century and still large amounts of money are unaccounted for. Clearly, the answer to this question must be searched for elsewhere.

Non-Governmental agencies, the UN, the large number of donors and to a lesser extent private business are generally perceived in a positive light. There is an assumption that, at the UN, in particular, staff are always bound to the high standards of their institution and always act in good faith and are consistently reliable and trustworthy. Because of this assumption, rather than actual institutional accountability, moral authority is not questioned but assumed.

It is time to remove the veil of purity that has supported humanitarian institutions. The UN should not only set standards for its own conduct, it should also establish mechanisms to enforce adherence to these standards that goes beyond their tendency to simply say, "Trust us." Aspiring as they are to the highest values of mankind, the UN cannot, without oversight, expect its employees to be above corruption, abuse, stupidity, incompetence and ignorance.

The danger that exists is that current positive views, which are not fully supported by reality, can quickly turn negative. There are some corruption researchers who are concerned that countries are typically seen as either as mostly clean or mostly dirty, with few countries falling within these extremes. For example a 2004 Gallup poll of 41 000 people in 47 countries found moderate concern over corruption in South Africa's courts, customs, business licensing, etc., yet people's concerns regarding corruption were growing. The poll found that 51% of South African respondents expected corruption to grow worse. They were among the most pessimistic of all the people asked. It is perhaps not surprising considering that they live in what must be one of the most corrupt business environments around.

On 01 Apr 2004 Business Day published an article "South Africa Plans Law Against Corruption By Local Companies In Foreign States" which stated that "Government plans to enact legislation that will make it possible to prosecute South African companies accused of corruption in foreign countries."

According to the article Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe, "called for South African companies operating elsewhere in Africa to make sure they were ethically beyond reproach and to act in such a way that they would not be deemed the 'new imperialists.'"

He furthermore said that government was considering a special code of conduct for state-owned companies operating in other parts of Africa, and trusted "that most in the private sector would agree with our approach." Does he in all honesty believe that the private sector would, by themselves and left to themselves, agree to this approach?

Organized business responded to him by saying that "it would welcome the cabinet's proposed initiative, (but) it called for avenues other than legislation to be explored." If not legislation, then what are the alternatives? One can then only turn ones hopes to the international community.

For the past decade at least we have heard how corruption and mismanagement at the UN has bruised its image. Time and again the world and especially the Third World are promised that "steps are being taken to correct the situation and refurbish the image of the UN."

“Letters to Gabriella” clearly demonstrates how the United Nations in general, and its so-called principal agency, UNDP, in particular, perform in countries where they claim to be assisting local economies and people.

Time and again we find out that it is all whitewash; the UN remains as corrupt and mismanaged as ever; in fact, as this book amply demonstrates, “its standing in many countries has “never been lower”.”

In 2003 Mark Malloch Brown, then the UNDP Administrator, claimed in a report that

“Today, UNDP has come to the close of the most dramatic four-year internal transformation in our history. We are more capable than ever before of responding to the world’s development challenges because our organization is stronger, more focused and better connected.”

“Letters to Gabriella” is set against the background of this promise and shows clearly that on the ground that at best this “transformation” had not done much more than entrench old habits in an already corrupt and incapable UNDP. Survey after survey (except for UNDP surveys), demonstrate that confidence in UNDP in particular and the UN in general remain as low as ever. Recently Mr. Brown was later appointed the Secretary-General’s chief aide, specifically charged with overseeing UN reform. Could we now look forward to more empty words and more whitewashing?

Mr. Shashi Tharoor, Under-secretary General of the United Nations for “public information”, stated that no charge against the organisation goes unanswered. **“Letters to Gabriella”** clearly demonstrates how a contractor to UNDP spent six years trying to get answers from an organisation regarding their ineptness and corruption, without any success. These questions are unanswered in the book and remain so today; leaving in its wake only an account of a series of lies, threats and deceit that does nothing to instill any confidence in the UN system.

Mr. Tharoor also likes to state that a “blizzard of public information initiatives” is unleashed by the UN to counter attacks in the media.” Would it not be more productive to unleash a blizzard of dismissals of the freeloaders, the charlatans, the corrupt and incompetent officials that form the bulk of UN staff and tarnish its image? Would not then UN reform be more productive and more believable?

Corruption thrives in secrecy. When corruption prevails, the resultant misallocation of resources hits not only the poor but also the pockets of taxpayers and shareholders worldwide. Even so, by far the most damaging effects of corruption are felt by its victims in the developing world, ordinary people who lack the political skill or economic leverage to bring about change.

Response to Stephen Kinloch

Assunto: Defamatory use of online service:
<http://www.publishedauthors.net/leonkukkuk/events.html>

Remetente: stephen.kinloch-pichat@undp.org
Data: Fri, 24 Novembro 2006 00:03
Para: leonkukkuk@publishedauthors.net

Dear Mr. Kukuk,

It has just come to my attention that my name, together with that of several colleagues who either work or have worked for the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Angola or elsewhere, is mentioned in hidden (but searchable and readable) text, together with defamatory terms such as 'fraud' or 'corruption' in your webpage: <http://www.publishedauthors.net/leonkukkuk/events.html>

As you are probably aware, the use of a computer or online service to defame a person carries with it severe potential liability, including for any related claims, proceedings, damages, injuries, liabilities, losses, costs, and expenses.

Therefore, I would like to kindly request you to immediately and completely delete all personal reference, whether hidden or visible, to my name and that of other colleagues from the above mentioned website, and any other website that you may have published.

I have already alerted PublishedAuthors.Net. In order to avoid further measures, I would appreciate your acknowledging receipt of this email and confirming that you have made taken appropriate corrective action.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Kinloch
Advisor, Strategic Planning
Office of the Resident Coordinator
United Nations - Port-au-Prince

Dear Mr. Kinloch,

In the preamble to my book "Letters to Gabriella Angola's Last War for Peace: What the UN did and Why" I say:

"I strive at all times to give a fair and honest account of what might have occurred or of what was said. There are those who gave me information in the strictest confidence, who may now be surprised to find it repeated here. I do not apologise for this. Those guarantees of confidentiality were given in exchange for certain promises, these not having been fulfilled, the confidentiality then no longer holds. There may be still be others who might be aggrieved to find they have been quoted and identified; yet again I am reluctant for apologising for doing so, for those most likely to be the loudest in their protestations draw their salaries from public money and donations and they should not expect, much less demand, to be working surrounded by a cloak of secrecy and anonymity."

You, Mr. Kinloch, as well as your colleagues, are all public servants, drawing your salaries from public money and are thus subject to public scrutiny, being named and identified publicly at the discretion of any member of the public, if they believe that to be in the public interest.

It is not as if I had not been anticipating a tantrum. What I had not anticipated was how long it would take for the first tantrum to arrive. I am also surprised as to how people who have

demonstrated a total inability to arrange something as basic as an audit, show such alarming enthusiasm to threaten me with “further measures,” surely a substantially more expensive and complex thing to arrange. You are not the first UNDP staff member to threaten me with such, and it may well be that you may not be the last, and my response now remains the same as it has always been: There is nothing that would please me more.

There may possibly be a case to be made for defamation. There is definitely a case for severe potential liability, including for any related claims, proceedings, damages, injuries, liabilities, losses, costs, and expenses. In neither instance are these cases to be made by any UNDP staff member.

Please bear with me through this argument. That way we can establish exactly where we stand.

My book is about fraud. It is principally, but not exclusively, concerned with a scam planned, financed and executed by UNDP, under the guise of a project in Huambo, Angola, of which I was in charge. The book goes into huge detail regarding the anatomy of this scam. It was read by several legal specialists before publication and has since publication attracted a fair amount of meaningful and constructive feedback.

There is no doubt whatsoever that a scam was perpetuated and that UNDP was responsible. The only measurable outcome of this project, ostensibly designed to assist poor and vulnerable people in Huambo, Angola was that at the end of it, a white man, called John Dommett, from Johannesburg, South Africa, was a millionaire.

This outcome did not happen by accident. It was designed to have this outcome. UNDP staff did not design it like this because they were unable to distinguish between a white man and poor and vulnerable Africans, or because they considered John Dommett to be especially needy and somehow entitled to receive UN funds. They did not even do it for altruistic reasons.

If there is anybody that disagrees with this analysis, I urge them to read the book, and to then present me with a counter argument based on the relevant documents.

During the course of my investigations into this scam, conducted over a period of more than six years, and based on a sometimes overwhelming volume of documents, interviews and in-depth research I managed to identify, and name in the book, a number of UN officials, all of whom have left. It still leaves unanswered questions and concerns in relation to this scam in particular, and the prevalence of corruption and fraud within UNDP in general. These individuals are: Mark Malloch Brown, James Lee, Dimitri Samaras, Bisrat Aklilu, Michele Falavigna, Erick de Mul, Michel Balima, Stanislaus Nkwain, Stephen Kinloch, Francisco de Almeida.

All of these individuals are involved in one or more aspects of this scam: Oversight (complete lack thereof), planning, executing, covering up, assisting to cover up, ignoring. Some were involved over a period of many years, others for only a few hours. Some acted on their own initiative, others simply followed instructions. Some play a central role, others acted only on the periphery. Some made deliberate decisions, others did so inadvertently. Some embraced the scam with enthusiasm, others were indifferent, yet others were involved only very reluctantly.

What each and every one of the people named have in common is that the contribution of each and every one, no matter how small, is significant and instrumental in ensuring the perpetuation of this scam over many years and the eventual attempt to cover it up.

The consensus of UNDP as a corrupt, fraudulent, wasteful and inept institution is pretty near universal and I am not now going to enter into that debate. This state of affairs at UNDP is

not the result of angels who came fluttering out of the sky and do funny things, neither is it the result of a mysterious force acting upon UNDP. It is also not the mysterious “them” that UNDP staff refers to when reflecting on their organisation. It is the direct, causal result of the staff at UNDP and the decisions that they make.

Those who turn a blind eye or ignore wrongdoing around them help foster the atmosphere of corruption and impunity at UNDP. Staff indulge not only in fraud but also in wasteful, fantasy projects (also a form of fraud) knowing that they can rely on managers to cover up for them and to promote them out of harm’s way when required. Managers cover up fraud and waste, knowing that there is no oversight whatsoever within the organisation, no sense of holding responsible staff accountable, and that senior management will protect them and the organisation with a barrage of misinformation and spin to the media, drowning out all dissenting voices.

Every single staff member at UNDP is complicit in this; even the honest ones who try and survive within the organisation as best they can by remaining largely invisible. Knowing about wrongdoing and doing nothing about it is a crime. Planning and financing a scam and leaving it to others to execute, sometimes inadvertently, is a crime. Wasting public money is a crime. Using public money for private gain is a crime. That is the law. Staff at UNDP can argue otherwise as much as they like. It still remains the law.

Naming and shaming is a recognized tool for ensuring compliance with the law and to foster a sense of accountability and transparency. It is a tool that the UN itself uses. It is a particularly useful and appropriate tool within the context of the United Nations, which is functionally immune to prosecution, where many staff members hide behind immunities that they have not earned and do not deserve, where corruption and fraud is so endemic that one frequently encounters UN public servants that firmly believe that it is their right to steal.

For four years I raised my concerns with UNDP in a measured and reasonable manner. I was met at first with indifference and resistance, then for a short time with a half-hearted and pretty hopeless attempt to address my concerns, followed rapidly by threats, intimidation, accusation and an outright refusal to communicate with me. (That is the reason why this response to Stephen Kinloch is done publicly and not directly to him.)

The fact that a name may appear on a page that also contains the words “fraud” and “corruption” by itself is meaningless. Simultaneity does not prove a relationship; much less the nature of the relationship. It may be of concern to somebody with something to hide. I am always quite proud to find my name on pages that also contain the words “fraud” and “corruption.” Yet any relationship can only be established through language, grammar and deductive logic.

However, extracting my case, spread over several chapters, from a complex narrative and presenting it coherently as well as concisely appears to me a daunting task. What I will do instead is provide a short summary of the main theme in my book to provide some context, followed then simply by all the correspondence between Stephen Kinloch and myself. It should provide at least some explanation. This may be unsatisfactory to many, including perhaps Stephen Kinloch himself. All I can do in my defence is to urge you to read the book.

By way of summary I will quote from “Angola: Empire of the Humanitarians” (<http://www.jha.ac/articles/a192.pdf>) an excellent paper by Sreeram Chaulia:

“Kukkuk’s remarkable testimony of corruption, deceit and lies in the UNDP bears elaboration. RUTEC, a South African company with dubious links to diamond dealers,

started a 'micro enterprise development project' in Huambo in 1998 with \$1.5 million of funding from UNDP and UNOPS (UN Office for Project Services).

The author, who was selected as the Project Director, found to his shock that only a pitifully small amount of money actually reached him on the ground in Huambo. "This contract seemed to neatly sidestep the usually strict procurement rules in place within the UN system." RUTEC was chosen as sub-contractor by UNDP although this company was spurious, lacking local roots and planning for what kinds of training would benefit the war-affected economy. The author's higher-ups in RUTEC instructed him, "We do not have to tell anybody what we are doing in Huambo and what we are spending on this project." (p.217). Progress reports submitted to UNOPS contained no financial statements. There was no competitive bidding or justification shown by UNDP for choosing RUTEC as the sub-contractor.

Under the CRP, projects had to be reviewed and authorised by a local appraisal committee. RUTEC never received one. UNDP "got involved, planned and gave money to a project that none of its staff understood or made an effort to learn to understand." RUTEC was "yet another typical UNDP mess, a fiasco that usually accompanies UNDP projects." For RUTEC to get vehicle documents, imported equipment or even work visas, well-paid UNDP staff requested "missing documents" (euphemism for \$100 bills). RUTEC in Johannesburg was, on its part, harnessing this "sweetheart deal with UNOPS", further increasing its profits by over-invoicing and manipulating equipment transfers to Angola.

Kukkuk recalls the irony of UNDP coining catchy slogans like 'Project Management, Good Governance and Anti-Corruption' before putting its own house in order. It employed bureaucratic blockades to cover up scandals like RUTEC and provided excuses for inaction."

For the Huambo project's local employees who were cheated of their salaries by UNDP, "those who lose are always us, due to the fact that it is foreigners that drive the train of deceit." They repeatedly requested UNDP to "be more human". When it was to no avail, they accused UNDP of being 'the main violator of human rights whilst presenting yourself as the protector of these same rights.'"

Here is our correspondence, over a period of five months:

Leon Kukkuk on 01 September 2001, soon after the arrival of Stephen Kinloch in Angola as a Deputy Resident Representative UNDP, to arrange a meeting:

*Please let me know when it would be possible for us to meet.
We used to have a project in Huambo that was unfortunately severely mismanaged and now the subject of lots of to-ing and fro-ing tracing and hopefully recovering funds that had been paid but was not spent on the project. In spite of this the project achieved some very positive results.
All the problems are putting the possibility of raising additional funds under severe strain and need to be solved. I am under lots of pressure from the local authorities to provide some answers and things have now dragged on for several years since I had initially raised the issues with UNDP.*

On the same day from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

As early as possible. As you know, the beginning of the week is going to be quite busy. What about Wednesday at 15:00 in my office?

Leon Kukuk to Stephen Kinloch 05 September 2001:

Thank you very much for taking time to talk to me. As always I am hoping for a positive outcome. Attached, please find two documents that provide a summary of the project that should be in the file. A brief perusal indicated that they were perhaps not there any longer.

Also find a copy of my CV.

A talk with Allan Cain from Development Workshop would perhaps be more useful as follow up - free from the intricacies of UNDP and distortion through personal involvement.

On the same day from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

Thanks, Leon, I really appreciate your taking the time to come and see me. Sorry, really, for the difficulties you have been going through. I will seize any opportunity to meet with Allan Cain, and keep you posted. Have a very good evening. Stephen

On 21 September 2001 from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

Leon,

To keep you posted of developments.

This office is now following-up with UNOPS in New York.

The idea is to obtain a thorough evaluation/audit of the whole project.

There will be no, repeat: no, new activities, at least until such an audit has taken place.

Meanwhile, we are also looking seriously into ways to compensate former staff for unpaid salaries.

This is not meant to raise any expectations, or make promises, but to assess what can be done.

We all have to act responsibly on all sides, as partners who can respect each other.

I therefore look forward to your cooperation, and to staying in touch with you.

I also trust your judgement on relaying that message to those concerned.

Should you wish to contact me, please do not hesitate.

Have a very good week-end, and take care.

On the same day Leon Kukuk to Stephen Kinloch:

Respect is something earned, not given. .There will be no, repeat no orders given to me regarding new activities.

On 23 September 2001 Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk wrote back:

Leon,

Perhaps my message was not clear enough:I meant: no activities from UNDP side, of course.

As for respect. . . may we, then, all have to earn it?

I look forward to it, from both sides.

Thanks and regards.

[Note: The promised audit never took place.]

On 09 October 2001 Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

As you know, we are actively working on finding a solution for the settlement of pending salaries for staff of the Huambo Training Centre (ANG/96/B01 BL2101) for the months the staff worked without salary after the termination of the project.

Attached is the list of pending salaries we have received from you.

As the documents I have at my disposal are not always consistent, I should be grateful if you could confirm that the period covered is end of July 2000 to end of January 2000 or, if not, if you could provide me with the specific dates for which salary is claimed for each person.

I also note that you are not included in the list of staff whose salary is pending, although I understand you have also been working during the period concerned. Could you clarify this as well?

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

On 18 October 2001 from Leon Kukuk to Stephen Kinloch:

Attached is a summary of all amounts outstanding to a total of \$95 207.78 (before end October 2001).

Our account details are as follows:

...

We are looking forward to a prompt solution to this issue.

Although we won't find any compensation for the mental anguish, stress and waste of our lives caused by this mess, a final resolution would also depend on the following three issues:

1. Some very clear answers need to be given regarding who planned this project, why they planned it, who protected it for more than three years and what steps are being taken to prevent them planning similar things in the future.

2. It has come to my attention that there is a perception amongst certain people that I am the one being investigated for misappropriating funds. I strongly suspect that Jurgen Spangenberg, from the UNDP Insecurity Unit, is responsible for this perception. Whatever the case may be, this is as serious as it is unacceptable. Do you have any suggestions how this misunderstanding can be cleared up? I will highly appreciate it.

I am looking forward to better relations in the future (naturally with a UNDP that is diametrically different from what is now)

Thank you very much and hoping to hear from you soon.

On 21 October 2001 from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

Thank you very much for the information.

However, in the table, there are elements that we have not discussed, while the precise information earlier requested is not present.

As per my previous email (below), I should be most grateful if you could confirm for each person concerned the precise amounts of unpaid salaries and corresponding dates for the period end of July 2000 to end of January 2000, that is after the termination of the project.

Please note that I will be away until 28 of October as of today.

My colleague, Francisco de Almeida, will be following-up in my absence.

On 25 October 2001 from Leon Kukuk to Francisco de Almeida:

Francisco, The list contains the salaries of the national staff for the months of July 2000 to February 2001 inclusive, minus amounts paid to them from two sources - either from my own funds or from the sale of equipment. Although the centre closed at the end of January 2001 this was a decision only taken on 22 January 2001 after we had not received any responses to the e-mails (14 January 2001) sent to Teresa Felix and Stan Nkwain and a letter (14 January 2001) to the Co-ordinator of the UN system. We were therefore obliged to offer the staff a months notice and severance pay. Carlos Alberto Gomes is offered an amount of -- per month for looking after the equipment and vehicles from March 2001 to August 2001 (--), under very difficult and at times threatening circumstances.

On the same day from Francisco de Almeida to Leon Kukuk:

The message below was certainly sent to me by mistake. I am not handling this issue that, I must confess, is getting more and more confused. Stephen will be back early next week. Please liase with him to find out the status of the payment of salaries amounting to \$33,340 to the local staff that our Office exceptionally accepted to advance while working out the final solution with RUTEC and UNOPS.

Regards, Francisco

On 01 November 2001 from Leon Kukuk to Stephen Kinloch:

I appreciate your efforts.

Please provide me with some sort of timescale:

- 1. for payment of amount of local salaries.*
- 2. Of audit.*

Remember, as more time passes more darkness will be shed on this subject, and more expenses accumulate. The time that I am spending without an income or freedom to secure a reliable means of income is also becoming unacceptably long and need to be taken into consideration.

On the same day from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

Thank you very much for the data on unpaid amounts related to the project, as requested. I truly appreciate your effort to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation, which does give an idea of the problem.

Unfortunately, it also appears more and more that given its complexity, the lack of consistency sometimes between various figures, and the number of actors involved, only a thorough audit could at this stage help determining accurately responsibilities, duties and amounts involved,

to settle the issue. We are following up with UNOPS, from whom a response has not yet been received.

Meanwhile, pending such clarification, UNDP has expressed its willingness, and is determined, to settle from its own resources the most immediate, urgent, and clear-cut aspect of the problem, which is the payment of local staff for the period they have been working while not under contract.

Given the above, steps are now being made by this office to settle payment of salaries to local staff for the period of July 2000 and February 2001, on the basis of the attached table received from the staff, as initially envisaged.

This obviously does not meet all expectations and does not sort out or solve all problems, but at least allows us to move forward.

I truly hope it will nevertheless be viewed as a concrete step in the right direction, and will keep you posted of developments in due course.

On 20 November 2001 from Leon Kukuk to Stephen Kinloch:

Dear Stephen,

I am not getting any response regarding the sort of timetable for payment of local salaries or audit, but have decided to spend the rest of the year in Huambo.

Please keep me up to date with what is happening. The tel. system in Huambo appears to continue to be less than reliable but I can be contacted through WFP radioroom or OCHA as alternatives should it be necessary.

I would very much appreciate your assistance in this regard.

Have a good holiday season + Christmas, etc.

On 26 November 2001 from Stephen Kinloch to Leon Kukuk:

Thanks for your message. And apologies for my delay in responding to you.

Salaries for local staff (based on table initially submitted by them) have been approved and are being processed for payment. The issue of a formal audit is still being followed up with UNOPS New York.

Unfortunately, for reasons beyond my control, I am no longer authorized to be in touch with you formally on behalf of UNDP, so please do not consider this message as official communication, but as a personal and informal message.

Best wishes to you too.

On 24 January 2002 the last meaningful correspondence with UNDP from Leon Kukuk to Francisco de Almeida:

We are in receipt of your letter of 22 January 2002 and it has been distributed to some of the staff. We are looking forward to have the considerable ill feeling and confusion related to this project cleared once and for all.

. . . In addition I would like to request that you stay directly in contact with me. Working through intermediaries and Carlos Gomes, who is working in Kaála, creates a lot of extra work and

confusion. If it is the case that UNDP no longer wants to talk to me or that I am persona non grata or responsible for the current problems, the correct procedure would be to motivate this decision by way of the available documentation. Until such a time, I have been responsible for the project and am now responsible to find a solution to its problems. This is a decision taken amongst ourselves and will remain the case until we decide otherwise.

As you may be well aware, I have tried my utmost to find a solution in an agreeable and open manner through maintaining good relations with UNDP in the face of threats, insults, disrespect and gross incompetence on their part. In over three years we have made no progress or received any meaningful responses. If UNDP cannot respond in a like manner, one becomes inclined to believe that perhaps they have something to hide. This is unsuitable behaviour for a public agency that depends for its survival on contributions of our money. I sincerely hope the present circumstances will not continue indefinitely.

They have continued indefinitely.

Over the intervening years my understanding of corruption also increased dramatically. Corrupt practices are invariably very complex, deliberately so, confusion is a key element in how they function and even if they can be unravelled, a wealth of technical jargon makes it difficult to recount the process in a manner that can be readily understood. I am now more aware of how scams are hidden behind a veneer of legitimacy, with legally enforceable contracts, carefully designed to fit into the cracks between different agencies, institutions and governments, even the cracks between national and international law.

I now know how accountability is spread so thinly as to be virtually meaningless, which incidentally, combined with complex and overlapping bureaucratic systems, also provides the required opacity for these scams to function. Deniability, or potential deniability, remains the primary motivation informing key decisions at all levels. I now know how the strange audit procedures within the UN system encourage rather than prevent corruption.

In looking forward to an audit at UNDP, which never happened, I did not then realise that I was looking forward to process that is used to cover up crimes, not to expose them. For a long time I naively believed that all I needed to do was to make UNDP aware of how much harm their behaviour was causing and then they would stop. It was too late for me by the time I understood the need for scapegoats in scams and that in this project I was to be that scapegoat. There was no concern about what would happen to the local staff, they were not even considered as human beings.

As I embarked in 2002 on a series of interviews explaining the circumstances of this UNDP scam, I immediately found myself under attack by UNDP as Francisco de Almeida reacted thus (and I quote from one of his own documents):

“In a live interview I informed Mr. Mario Vaz from Radio Ecclésia and the listeners of the 12 o’clock news journal that the allegations made by Mr Leon Kukuk did not correspond to the truth. I clarified the following:

If there was misappropriation of funds, Mr Leon Kukuk in his capacity of former RUTEC Programme Manager would be the best person to provide any clarification on this manner;”

I am indeed the best person to provide this clarification and have since complied with this request in writing my book, a book that incidentally is the only thing that stands today between myself and me being on the receiving end of accusations and suspicion of corruption. To date nobody from the United Nations System or from UNDP has responded to the conclusions drawn in that book. There may be a case to be made for defamation. It is not a case that can be made easily, by one individual pitted against a corrupt and powerful organisation.

The last official reaction from UNDP comes in the form of a statement issued on 13 January 2002, by Erick de Mul, at the time the UNDP Resident Representative in Angola. Acknowledging the difficulties that we had suffered over so many years and guaranteeing that “our office has pledged to do everything since the end of 2000 to find a solution to this difficult situation,” he then proceeds to deny any wrongdoing, stating instead:

“However, as you know UNDP did not have any direct responsibility in the execution and implementation of the (project) in the province of Huambo. The responsibility of UNDP is limited to the formulation and financing of the project.”

With this statement, whatever little respect I may ever have had for Erick de Mul (and it was never very much) disappeared along with the last vestiges of whatever confidence I may have had in UNDP or any of its staff. There is no reason why UNDP should get away with it.

Stephen Kinloch, you may be dismayed to find that you are being identified and named. It is nothing personal. Neither you nor any of your colleagues mean anything to me as individuals. It is simply a matter of your names having surfaced in an issue with which I am concerned. I am fully entitled to use those names in this context and to use them again if they crop up again in any other context. I make no apologies for that. Everybody that I have named still works for the United Nations. Some have even been promoted, most are no longer in Angola. I was the one left behind, trying to cope, alone, with the shambles created by UNDP.

I am concerned with the role of the entire International Community, whose members enter into my home, Africa, only long enough to make a mess, destroying not only my life but the lives of everybody around me, and then disappear.

This makes us go hungry, it makes us fight wars with one another, and it makes us indulge in our own corruption. We suffer from AIDS, TB and Malaria and our children die in vast numbers. There is definitely a case for severe potential liability, including for any related claims, proceedings, damages, injuries, liabilities, losses, costs, and expenses. Are you prepared to make that case?

This response is also posted as a Blog.

White Lies; Black Truths

Many champions of the United Nations viewed the end of the Cold War as the dawn of a new era in international affairs in which the UN would play a leading role. A standing army at the

call of the UN Security Council would impose peace on warring nations and a plethora of dedicated agencies would engage in “nation building” in so-called failed states. A host of UN-brokered international agreements on issues ranging from the environment to health to urban planning, funded by multilateral development banks, would serve as the basis for a “Great Global Society.”

The United Nations has achieved some positive results, but has always fallen short of achieving the objectives for which it was created. Overall, the United Nations should be considered as a fantastic idea, an organisation that is an essential and valuable part of the modern world, gone sadly wrong.

Resistance to reform and to any sort of internal and external control mechanisms is one of the most remarkable, indeed the signature, feature of the United Nations System today. The many attempts at UN reform across the years have suffered from failures: failure to implement measures; negotiated compromises that are inadequate and subsequently difficult to undo; moving boxes on organizational charts without attention to ensuring vital lines of communication and coordination; poor choices of senior UN personnel; lack of clear job descriptions; inadequate or non-existent staff training; assigning tasks and funding to institutions on grounds of favouritism rather than appropriateness; and confusion over the meaning of the term “coordination.”

The United Nations had gone sadly wrong because its people failed it. In reality it is becoming increasingly obvious that many UN agencies act as a magnet for every type of charlatan and crook, where incompetence seems to be not only tolerated but also actively encouraged and rewarded. In spite of their unspeakable incompetence, or perhaps because of it, the single, defining characteristic attribute of most UN staff is their arrogance. Much of this arrogance is born from the notion that they belong to something special, something that is inherently special and which specialness applies to them although in reality they may be nothing more than a bunch of freeloading charlatans exploiting the system.

Graham Hancock, in his book “The Lords of Poverty” (1989) puts it most succinctly;

“To continue with the charade seems to me to be absurd. Garnered and justified in the name of the destitute and the vulnerable, aid’s main function in the past half-century has been to create and then entrench a powerful new class of rich and privileged people. In that notorious club of parasites and hangers-on made up of the United Nations, the World Bank, and the bilateral agencies, it is aid - and nothing else - that has provided hundreds of thousands of ‘jobs for the boys’ and that has permitted record-breaking standards to be set in self-serving behaviour, arrogance, paternalism, moral cowardice, and mendacity.”

There is no other agency where this is more obvious than at the principal agency of the system; UNDP. And since this agency has taken it upon itself to tell others how to behave, the dichotomy between what it says it is and what it really is in reality had become increasingly conspicuous and disturbing.

Many of these things are entrenched in the substantial number of manuals and guidelines that exist within UNDP, where they are diligently ignored. Clearly, all measures could only be successfully implemented within an organization fully committed to pruning away all existing unethical behaviour. This is a prime prerequisite. If an organization fails to do so, it will only send a strong message throughout the organizational structure that it is acceptable to be less than honest.

Given the various mandates performed, often in difficult environments, the UN has undoubtedly a massive task. It is a recognized fact that the immensity, loose definitions of

responsibilities and fuzzy organizational structures has historically plagued large UN agencies and led to organizational deviance. What may not be so widely recognised is that the degree of unaccountability is staggering and has allowed most UN civil servants to remain largely immune, both legally and morally.

The senior UN managers in charge of the day-to-day UN operations are specifically responsible for minimizing fraud opportunities by instituting cost-effective reliable internal controls and promoting ethical organizational behaviour. Management is ultimately responsible for perpetrated frauds, with external and internal auditors playing a major role in advising management to strengthen control of their organizational entities. Developing ethical leadership within a given organisation is also critical, but UN operations fall short on several key aspects.

As a general rule, there is no evidence that UNDP exercises due diligence in seeking to prevent and detect criminal conduct by its employees. It has produced no clear statement of its managerial philosophy regarding internal fraud, and there appear to be no specific high-level personnel with substantial control over the organization appointed to oversee compliance with standards. The UN's Internal Audit Division is severely understaffed. The UN's ability to pursue those charged with misuse of UN funds through national jurisdictions also needs strengthening. But these things are all pointless if there is no will on the part of management to implement these, and no sense of accountability within the organisation.

"The glib and oily art to speak and purpose not," as Shakespeare wrote in King Lear. This only gained meaning for me when I started reading a bit more closely and critically through the UNDP documentation. It has to be said that this is arguably the most verbose organisation in existence and reading through their literature is both an exercise in endurance and resistance to boredom.

One of the most readable, by their own account, is their Annual Report 2003, which they insist upon calling "A World of Development Experience" and it is not a world that I would wish upon my worst enemy. Perhaps acknowledging that UNDP had not performed to expectations in the past, the report tells us that;

"Today, UNDP has come to the close of the most dramatic four-year internal transformation in our history. We are more capable than ever before of responding to the world's development challenges because our organization is stronger, more focused and better connected. We seek and achieve results, and underscore accountability in all that we do. We look for new and creative opportunities to help people build better lives, through partnerships and the exchange of knowledge, while ensuring that our resources flow steadily behind our mission to reduce poverty."

On the ground, naturally there is very little to support this sort of optimism. There may have been some restructuring but very little real reform -- a lot of ad-hocism, but no long-term vision.

UNDP also started using "staff surveys", along with yearly country office polls of headquarters products and services, that are comprehensive measurement tools that provide insight on our strengths and weaknesses, opening avenues for better performance and greater accountability" and they came to the earth shattering conclusion that; "They have underscored, for example, the critical importance of improving people's basic skills and matching staff more closely with their jobs."

This is the same organisation that has taken it upon themselves to tell others how to manage their affairs. This is the same organisation that claims to represent a unique pool of knowledge and skills; yet had just learned for themselves "the critical importance of improving people's basic skills and matching staff more closely with their jobs."

Reading further into the UNDP report, we soon conclude that they are not offering anything concrete. The nicest definition that UNDP ever came up with; “Human beings are not only the purpose, but also the means of development” sounds nice but is largely meaningless. And all the nice explanations in their report are likewise largely generic, feel-good, touchy-feely sorts of stuff, clothed in flowery and profound language.

The words transparency, good governance, democracy, accountability and many others are bandied about without being defined. UNDP, an organisation noted for the absence of these concepts within their own structures, promises that once these issues are addressed, and that they will address them, the world will be just a dandy place. Nowhere are we told exactly how they will do this. They admit that the problems are serious but are optimistic that they can be solved.

We are told that UNDP has \$2.83 billion available in core funding. They mention a success here and there but these are but a few selected and specific examples, the veracity of which is a bit dubious. No numbers are given to accurately gauge if these are really successes. Remember that UNDP had very proudly presented our (Angloa) project as a success as well, even though the success had absolutely nothing to do with them, and at the time they were actively working towards its eventual failure.

What they are doing in the report is public relations. There is no consistent, realistic analysis, containing both successes and failures, that provides a coherent overview on how they are spending their funds and what effect this is having. By the way, this amount of money is not small change, but on the other hand it is not a particularly large percentage of the hundred or so billion that circulates in some form another annually under the banner of humanitarian aid. If UNDP considers itself as a major player in the development world it is certainly not as a result of their financial clout.

These things are all a bit beside the point anyway. The arguments in this document, their abstract nature aside, lack any sort of logical and analytical rigour. They make no attempt to explain how all the issues that they want to address interact with one another or their relative importance in this so-called development.

One of the biggest successes, and the biggest contradiction, of UNDP is that their publications can frequently be of excellent quality. These are mostly done by consultants, contracted for a specific purpose through a much abused system. Yet one of their biggest failures is that none of the excellent ideas and concepts in these publications ever become part of UNDP as an organisation. Today we have an agency incapable of keeping its own house in order, yet trying to convince others, through meaningless platitudes, that it is dealing with some of the most serious and intractable issues in modern society.

This is an organisation that is very seriously adrift. Unless their restructuring involves disinterested and outside advice and guidance, and most important of all, input from their constituents, any so-called improvement in the organisation will be and come across as patch-up jobs.

Reading through their Country Reports and Country Co-operation Frameworks, another exercise in tedium, further confirms this. Nowhere is the reader told how many people have benefited from their efforts and how much it had cost. Meaningful financial statements from UNDP are a rarity. One is confronted with qualified and vague statement after qualified and vague statement: “project results will benefit from the introduction of better management systems,” and “achievements will be improved through monitoring and evaluation.” Behind the carefully constructed myth created by UNDP lies but a mass of contradictions, unfulfilled objectives and broken promises.

It may be noble for the United Nations to intervene when corrupt government results in hardship, poverty and suffering, but who will make the decision to intervene? The United Nations? Who will keep the over-powered and over-privileged UN bureaucrats in check, if there is no electorate to do so? It is often easy for somebody in New York or London to suggest that the UN should be sent to sort out some embarrassment in some remote cesspit somewhere. It is not always so easy for the people living in those cesspits to deal with the problems that the UN bring with them, in addition to the problems that they already suffer. Bring with you nothing but ignorance, combine that with arrogance, throw in a healthy dollop of corruption and all you have is a recipe for causing offence.

It is time for the extent of the United Nations' value to be put into perspective. The United Nations is not our "moral guardians" or "mankind's best hope for peace" or the "conscience of humanity" as they like to tell us, but merely an association of the world's governments created for a limited purpose. As an equal partner amongst independent but inter-dependant organisations the United Nations would become a minor player in the international system, and kept within such confines it can do a modest amount of good; as would each of the other organisations within their own geographical spheres and areas of responsibility.

Within such bounds there may be some incentive for the UN to become more focused, and reform itself, to adapt in order to remain relevant and to become more accountable and really make a difference. The UN system is operating in a world of much greater complexity and danger than when it was founded. In order to tackle the range of urgent problems demanding coherent attention, the UN's machinery and capacity must be streamlined and strengthened.

Where would UNDP, the agency who, mindless of the need to explain the reasons for their near consistent failures, blithely continue to make ever-more ambitious promises, fit into such a scheme? They would fit into the same place as where most of their projects end up. In the rubbish bin, another failed idea.

The skills and creativity that UNDP claims to have is in fact to be found in abundance amongst the people that they so diligently ignore, even despise: the poor, the marginalized, the displaced, the refugees, the same people who endure, and even thrive against tremendous odds. These are people who do not have to remain within sight of a five-star hotel in order to survive. These are the people that represent what being human is really all about; survival against the odds, a being with more endurance than any other living thing, that can adapt to almost every condition, that can find its own solutions without spinning a web of deceit and lies around themselves.

In the same way now, at the sight of the hunger, cold and degradation of thousands of people, I understood not with my mind or my heart but with my whole being, that the existence of tens of thousands of such people. . . while I and thousands of others over-eat ourselves with beefsteaks and sturgeon. -- no matter what all the learned men may say about its necessity -- is a crime, not committed once but constantly; and that I with my luxury not merely tolerate it but share in it.

DRC Evaluation

In possible support of the argument above and disturbingly similar to my own experience with UNDP and UNOPS in Angola is an evaluation of the UNDP/UNOPS Peacebuilding and Community Development Project in Ituri, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by Ingrid Samset and Yvon Madore from the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), an independent, non-profit research institution.

This is an evaluation of the project “Support To Peacebuilding And Community Development In Ituri,” implemented in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo from mid-2003 onwards, by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in conjunction with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS). The project, which ended in 2006, was co-financed by the Government of Norway (USD 3.1 million) and UNDP (USD 400,000).

At the end of the report they provide the following summary:

“Building peace through community development: this was the key idea of the evaluated project, which was run in the war-torn Ituri district of the DRC from 2003 onwards. The planning of the project did not take sufficiently into account the difficult conditions under which it would be run. Centralisation of project management tasks to UNDP and UNOPS in Kinshasa, and **the shortage of resources that were made available for the project** at this central level, complicated implementation efforts on the ground. **Strategic management was also weak.** Still, many positive results materialised as the local partner organisations welcomed the idea of building peace through community development and acted on it in their micro projects. **Thanks to many skilful local partners** and **a dedicated UN project team in Ituri**, and **despite considerable delays**, the micro projects came a long way towards reaching the aims of reconciliation, reconstruction, local capacity building, and HIV/AIDS awareness raising. As a whole the project contributed to launching the processes of peacebuilding and community development in the district. But given the uniqueness of the project and its weak coordination with other agencies, little ground was prepared for a scale-up and a transfer of results in a subsequent phase.

The peacebuilding and community development **project was hence a success – but a success that materialised in spite of an unsuitable organisational framework, weak strategic management, insufficient coordination, and continued violence in Ituri.** It was in other words a “**success by default**”; one that came about **despite choices made within the project that were not the most amenable to goal attainment.** Yet given the project’s positive results, its still unrealised potential, the need for such a project in Ituri, and the learning of lessons within UNDP; the report recommends that the project continue and **proposes a number of reforms that should be made within it in a new phase.**”

It may be interesting to note that this project was implemented in the immediate aftermath of this confident promise made by the then UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown in 2003:

“Today, UNDP has come to the close of the most dramatic four-year internal transformation in our history. We are more capable than ever before of responding to the world’s development challenges because our organization is stronger, more focused and better connected. We seek and achieve results, and underscore accountability in all that

we do. We look for new and creative opportunities to help people build better lives, through partnerships and the exchange of knowledge, while ensuring that our resources flow steadily behind our mission to reduce poverty.”

In order to truly understand what this project evaluation summary above really says, it may be important to reflect on the euphemistic way in which many of these reports are written. A statement such as “can be improved” usually means “was a complete failure” and -- the personal favourite of many consultants doing evaluations -- “at best had no results” almost invariably means that said activity harmed the very people it was supposed to benefit.

This particular report is not all that guilty of these sorts of euphemisms, written as it is by a respected and independent organisation. Nevertheless, as is the nature of these reports, its criticism remains in many ways very general, much understated and with an emphasis on avoiding possible conflict and offence.

In this context one should then perhaps be concerned about statements such as “the shortage of resources that were made available for the project at this central level.” That usually means that nobody knows where much of the funds were spent.

If the resources were not made available to the project, where and/or to whom were they then made available?

The usual criticisms that surface so regularly with regard to UNDP --“unsuitable organisational framework, weak strategic management, insufficient coordination, and continued violence,” “considerable delays,” “choices . . . that were not the most amenable to goal attainment” -- sits uneasily with Mark Malloch Brown’s confident promise of an organization “that is stronger, more focused and better connected,” that “seeks and achieves results, and that underscores accountability in all that we do.” An organization that “looks for new and creative opportunities to help people build better lives, through partnerships and the exchange of knowledge,” and (by the way) “ensuring that our resources flow steadily behind our mission to reduce poverty.”

It shows an institution that, notwithstanding the report’s assertion of “the learning of lessons within UNDP,” remains an organisation that is unable to learn lessons, in fact, an organisation almost exactly the same as the one which I experienced in Angola (in the midst of UNDP’s so-called “most dramatic four-year internal transformation in our history.”) An independent assessment made at a conference in November 1999 in Canada, by an expert who had more than 30 years of experience in Angola, sheds more light on UNDP’s performance there:

The donor community in 1995 mounted a program as a contribution to peace building, the Brussels Round Table process. It underwrote the Lusaka peace accords with a billion dollar, to assist in community revitalization. It wanted to engage communities in national rehabilitation, as part of a peace-building process. The UN set up independent evaluation teams to look at a well conceived, inclusive program but it was left to the UNDP to implement. UNDP is one of the weakest structures in terms of administering programs. After almost 4 years, none of the rehabilitation had taken place. Proposals received in late 1995 from communities had still not been processed 4 years later. Due to poor implementation, the international community was further discredited. If implemented early and effectively, this program could have assisted in the consolidation of peace.

UNDP’s own bureaucratic systems of financial planning, reporting and monitoring -- Imprecise and overlapping sets of definitions of programme and project boundaries -- made budgeting a difficult process for non UN personnel to understand. Government, Donors and Communities each became frustrated and impatient with programme procedures and tended to look for means to circumvent them. The use of the UN Trust

Fund as a pool to finance both the programme administration, necessary office infrastructure rehabilitation, capacity building aspects of project as well as community based projects, without sufficient separation of these functions, prevented programme managers from monitoring the overall financial situation of the CRP. The problem became a serious constraint for local Government and Donors who need clear and accurate financial reporting in order to plan and carry out their functions within the CRP. The lack of transparency of reporting systems hid the fact that only a small proportion of the UN Trust Funds money was invested in community based projects.

This reveals an organisation refusing to answer the questions of their failure in one country as they already embark on exactly the same failures in another.

Refreshingly for a UNDP project, it appears that, in spite of the difficulties in Congo, “projects came a long way towards reaching” their goals, “thanks to many skilful local partners and a dedicated UN project team in Ituri.”

One is assuming here that the UN project team in Ituri must have consisted largely or exclusively of Congolese, thus leaving the burden for the project failures with UNDP in Kinshasa.

As is usual with these sorts of reports it is very difficult to assess whom exactly had not done their jobs, and what exactly it is that they should have done but did not, and, equally importantly, what exactly they did do with their time at UNDP in the DRC.

From previous experience I would be somewhat concerned with the relationship between what UNDP staff did with their spare time and “the shortage of resources that were made available for the project at this central level.” In Angola it appears as though key staff dedicated their time to making funds available to their cronies. They then dedicated their time trying to cover up this fact.

One can however, with a bit of effort, come up with some names, names that are useful in some ways, but useless in the absence of accountability systems that would actually hold them accountable, that can explain exactly what they did not do and what they did do.

I also came across the Co-ordinator, Central Management and Coordination Unit, UNOPS. What made this discovery so interesting is not the name of the person as much as his title. In 2001, I wandered around at UNDP in Luanda, trying - unsuccessfully to date - to solicit an explanation as to what had happened to the funds that UNDP was supposed to disburse to a project in Huambo, Angola but did not.

I came across this correspondence from Dimitri Samaras, Deputy Director UNOPS, and instrumental in the misplacement of said funds, to Herbert Behrstock, Officer-in-Charge UNDP, Angola on 12 March 2001:

“ . . . Lots of money has been spent in Angola and wasted for no reason. . . or reasons beyond my imagination. We have invested but never capitalised on it. Cost benefit analysis is indeed needed.. I do believe that this office needs a Central Management and Coordination Unit which will implement/ execute and supervise all operational activities.”

It is astounding how the same solution he offers for their failure in Angola then becomes complicit in their failure in the DRC. Surely the solution to their problems must be found somewhere other than in the ability to move blocks around on an organisational chart?

Another sorry example of the creation in Angola UNDP in the mid-nineties of an “Economics Unit.” Announced with a lot of fanfare, it was intended to contribute towards the consolidation of peace and reconstruction in Angola.

When this failed to materialise, they created the “Project Management Support Unit.” This consisted of two lost looking individuals, a man and a woman, who with increasing and ultimately futile despair tried to figure out what UNDP had done and was doing with its funds. It did not go to its projects. As criticism of UNDP mounted, it responded with the “Advocacy, Partnership and Resource Mobilization Unit,” this time consisting of one pathological liar with an uncanny ability to exclaim, “this is getting more and more complicated” when asked routine questions. This finally morphed into a more conveniently named “External Relations Unit” consisting of the same man being equally confused.

The shocking reality that lies behind the measured tones of this report, and is not even alluded to or acknowledged, is the sacrifices and effort that no doubt had to be made by somebody to make the project a success. It is not “success by default” as the report asserts, it is success because without a doubt, somebody, most likely the local staff members, made an exceptional effort to do what UNDP was supposed to do.

Projects of this type, that do have some results, invariably achieve them not so much in spite of the failures of UNDP and UNOPS, but because an effort is made to mitigate the harm that these organisations cause.

In his excellent book “The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good” Prof. William Easterly claims that existing aid strategies provide neither accountability nor feedback. Without accountability for failures, he says, broken systems are never fixed. And without feedback from the poor who need the assistance, no one in charge really understands exactly what trouble spots need fixing. Prof. Easterly adamantly argues that the sort of planning administered by organizations such as the UN will never reach the people that need it most.

True victories against poverty, he demonstrates, do not come from those who seek to impose solutions from the top down, but are achieved through indigenous, ground-level effort that adapts to the real life and culture of countries from the bottom up.

It may be a bit utopian to think that all these small efforts will add up to the big changes required in the absence of fundamental reforms and the efforts of local actors can be a bit of a racket as well. But to suggest that the project can be continued with UNDP, since it has “learned lessons,” is equally naïve, since UNDP has demonstrated and demonstrates with each additional failure that it is not able to learn anything.