



Actions speak louder . . .

Fact Sheet no.7: Reviving a war-torn economy and providing employment for ex-combatants

Description and analysis

After civil conflicts economies may take years to recover not only because of physical damage but because businesses built up over the years are often ruined by suffering long periods without revenue. The construction sector is especially hit because in periods of insecurity, development stops. When reconstruction takes place external suppliers benefit more than former local producers of materials and services because, given sufficient money, they just fly in materials and construction staff for quick turn-around contracts that contribute little to the local economy.

Design response

Instead of 'quick fix' construction programmes largely based on imported materials and foreign contractors, the reconstruction plan should incorporate elements to 'kick start' locally based construction activity and building materials production. There is a significant design element needed back in the form that new buildings take so as to be made suitable to be fabricated out of locally made products, and in the capacity of the manufacturers to make any special items needed by the architects.

Parry Associates technical input possibilities

Parry Associates have historic links with the UK building materials merchant company, W T Burden Ltd, a large company owned by a family trust which is interested in aiding, through the charitable foundation, worthwhile practical activities in overseas territories, particularly Africa. Parry and Burden have identified how technical merchant skills can ease the market entry of inexperienced building materials ventures. In suitable circumstances an entity using the business methods of a commercial building materials merchant can assist new ventures gain access to the market. It will set a realistic specification for quality which the small producer can meet and which will also be acceptable to the building contractor engaged in a formal project. It can provide 'liquidity' by ordering a run of materials ahead of the contractor's own orders thereby reassuring them that sufficient quantities are available to complete their projects. The technical merchant function can also provide technical support and training - to the contractors in adapting their designs, to their workers in acquiring skills in using unfamiliar materials and to the producer in operating his equipment to achieve good results.

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Local resources required

Principally labour (to be trained), clays, sands, gravels and laterites also limited possibility of using straight growing poles in substitution for sawn timber for roof structures.

Potential local business response

Enterprises need entrepreneurs and many ex militia will be individuals who in former life have engaged in business, albeit at a 'micro' level, shining shoes, selling newspapers, delivering materials using a handcart around a market. The ability to transact with customers and suppliers and handle money is equally important as organising the physical activity of the business. In the absence of individual entrepreneurial skills a variety of abilities can be brought together in a cooperative which, while less decisive than individual business people, can better represent the interests of a small community.

Real case studies

The issue of reviving a war-torn economy and providing livelihoods for ex-combatants has been initiated using Parry technology and has proved successful in the Sierra Leone Affordable Housing Programme (1998-2001). For a full list of case studies where Parry technology has been used to combat problems in the developing world see our Success Stories page.

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