

The Role of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Disaster Management: An Interview with Jo Luck, Past President and CEO of Heifer International

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Abstract

There are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the world with a wide variety of missions and core values. Ranging from local, state, national and international NGOs some are considered disaster relief organizations while others are long-term development organizations. It may seem that the discussion regarding a role in disaster management only involves disaster relief NGOs. However, that is not the case. While NGOs with a long-term development focus may have a very limited role in disaster response, they can have a significant role in disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery efforts. As disaster managers, responders and organizations continue to understand the value of disaster relief NGOs it will also behoove them to consider the role and value that a development NGO can bring to overall disaster management efforts.

This article is an interview with Jo Luck about her last two decades in a leadership role at Heifer International.

Non-Governmental Organizations

There are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the world. NGOs often have similar broad characteristics such as independence from the government and private sector, subject matter expertise, and commitment to the unique mission of the particular NGO. However, there are also many differences such as size, location, funding, mission, core values and focus. Some NGOs are focused on long-term development while others are focused on disaster relief. Heifer International is an example of an established NGO guided by a mission based on long-term, sustainable development. This interview sought to present some of the issues related to such an organization's involvement in disaster management. The insightful

answers provide an interesting look at a development NGO's often implicit and sometimes explicit role in disaster management.

QUESTION: How would you define a non-governmental organization (NGO)?

LUCK: The definition can be quite complex, but my simple definition would be that an NGO is a not-for-profit, non-government organization that is humanitarian in nature. An NGO may deliver disaster assistance, provide development (hopefully sustainable) assistance, or advocate for a cause. The organization can be local, national, or international. NGO revenues can be from donations – direct gifts of cash or in-kind, via planned giving, foundations, trusts, grants, and government funding. Some NGOs are faith-based while others are not. NGOs establish their missions around a focus area, or areas, such as: health, education, agriculture, human rights, animal welfare, conservation, micro-finance, hunger, poverty, disaster relief, habitats, empowerment, elections monitoring, literacy, and children.

QUESTION: Until you recently retired, you served as the President and CEO of Heifer International for 18 years. Can you please provide some basic information about the organization?

LUCK: Heifer International (Heifer) was founded by Dan West in 1944. He was serving as a Church of the Brethren relief worker after the Spanish Civil War. As he handed out limited rations of milk to orphans and refugees, he decided that what relief needed was “a cow, not a cup” – a cow could produce milk so families would not have to rely on temporary aid such as powdered milk. Since 1944, Heifer has helped more than 15 million families – close to 80 million people – overcome poverty and become self-reliant.

Today, Heifer is a humanitarian NGO working with communities in over 50 countries to end hunger and poverty and care for the Earth by providing resources – appropriate livestock such as heifers, goats, camels, yaks, chickens, and rabbits. And with those resources Heifer

provides education and training which enables small holder farmers to improve their quality of life and that of their families and communities. Heifer's development approach is sustainable, long-term and values-based, guided by its twelve "Cornerstones": Passing on the Gift; Accountability; Genuine Need & Justice; Improving the Environment; Sharing & Caring; Full Participation; Training & Education; Sustainability & Self-Reliance; Improved Animal Management; Spirituality; Nutrition & Income; and Gender & Family Focus. Heifer's approach leads to much deserved transformation from hunger and poverty to personal dignity and entrepreneurship.

QUESTION: As you mentioned, NGOs have focus areas. For example, some NGOs are focused mainly on disaster relief while others are focused more on long-term development while still others have a combination focus consisting of disaster relief and development. How would you describe Heifer International's involvement with disaster management?

LUCK: I want to say that Heifer appreciates and supports the work of disaster relief NGOs. In some cases Heifer works in partnership with those NGOs as well as with first responders and the local government. However, long-term, sustainable development, rather than short-term relief, is at the core of Heifer's mission and all of its work. That being said, without changing its mission, there are a number of ways that Heifer is involved in disaster management. For organizations such as Heifer there is an ongoing balancing act between disaster and development work.

QUESTION: If possible, can you give examples of what Heifer's involvement might be in the context of the "four phases" of the disaster management "cycle" – "preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery?"

LUCK: Yes, I can provide examples of Heifer's involvement in that context, keeping in mind that the areas or phases overlap and there are rarely clear lines of separation. Also, please note that Heifer International has a *Disaster Position Statement* that is available on its website

[<http://heifer.org/ourwork/our-approach/disaster-position-statement>]. First, Heifer sometimes provides short-term support to its project beneficiaries immediately after a disaster (i.e., replacing livestock loss), which would be part of response efforts. Second, Heifer's disaster rehabilitation work is clearly part of short and long-term recovery. Third, Heifer's twelve "cornerstones," which I listed earlier include "training and education" and "sustainability and self-reliance." Those cornerstones are "threads" throughout Heifer's work and contribute to mitigation, which "threads" through the disaster management phases. Fourth, Heifer works with communities that are vulnerable communities in disaster-prone areas. As part of our development methodology, they help communities at risk to prepare for the impact of disasters. Disaster preparedness is part of Heifer's training and education based on lessons learned from increased pressure on the environment, (e.g., population growth and natural disasters). Fifth, in much of Heifer's work, including each phase of disaster management, Heifer works through alliances and partnerships. Also parts of the disaster management equation are standards of conduct and funding.

QUESTION: Now that you have provided a broad description of Heifer's potential involvement in each disaster management phase, can you provide a little more detail in terms of Heifer's work in each phase?

LUCK: Yes, I will try to do that, and since response is the disaster management "phase" in which Heifer has the least direct involvement, I will start there. As I've mentioned previously, and want to be sure to reiterate that Heifer's focus is on long-term development rather than relief. However, if a major disaster strikes a Heifer project community and the impact exceeds the community's capacity to respond, Heifer will partner with relief and first response organizations to support the community and its surrounding region. Mostly they replace livestock lost. I also want to mention that, if clearly needed and if it is possible, Heifer sometimes can provide its

project communities support regarding basic needs such as water, food and transportation. Those disaster response efforts are coordinated through Heifer's area offices, and Heifer is careful to support and complement, rather than duplicate, the work of governments and other NGOs. And as soon as possible, Heifer will direct its efforts toward long-term rehabilitation which is part of Heifer's sustainable development path.

QUESTION: How is Heifer International involved in mitigation efforts, which in disaster management serve to avoid or lessen the loss of lives and property that disasters cause, and as you said earlier seems to thread through the disaster management phases?

LUCK: Mitigation is an inherent aspect of Heifer International's work. Training, education and implementation of sustainable practices are all part of Heifer's development methodology, and, as you mentioned, those practices can also serve to minimize the impact disasters have on individuals and communities. Reducing a disaster's impact is especially important for Heifer's vulnerable communities that are located in regions rife with disasters. Let me give you an example. Consider a family living in a community that has poor, unyielding soil and the area is prone to flooding and mudslides. If Heifer provides a water buffalo to that family, the family is required to properly prepare for the animal. Heifer then educates the family about how to care for the animal. Heifer also trains the family members on using the water buffalo to implement terraced farming and using its manure for fertilizer. The enriched soil is good for farming, and the terrace method of farming on a steep slope helps collect and distribute water more appropriately and prevent or lessen erosion. Or Heifer might provide the family nitrogen-fixing trees for the family to plant on hillsides to improve the soil. And the roots and foliage provide help by stabilizing the hillside.

QUESTION: While mitigation aims to avoid or decrease disaster impact, preparedness presupposes a disaster, and aims to get individuals and communities ready to respond to and recover from a disaster.

LUCK: First, Heifer recognizes that while mitigation can lessen, and sometimes even avoid, the impact of disasters on communities, there is also a critical need for communities to prepare for handling itself when a disaster does strike. It is important to get ownership by the local leadership of a community about importance of disaster preparedness – it is then easier to educate the rest of the community about how they can prepare themselves, their families, their livestock and their other property for a disaster. Since it is often for a significant period of time that victims of a disaster must fend for themselves, having a plan prior to the event can make self-help more manageable as well as assisting others in the community. Such preparation can save lives, and allow the community to begin “putting the pieces back together” and embarking on recovery efforts.

I also mention fundraising here since Heifer has many project communities in disaster-prone areas all over the world. An important part of Heifer’s being prepared to handle disaster situations as an organization is to have funding that is designated and readily accessible for assisting communities with post-disaster rehabilitation. Therefore, Heifer raises money for a Disaster Rehabilitation Fund so that it may support communities, regions or countries following a natural disaster. In raising this type of funding, Heifer is careful to make it clear to donors that these funds will be used should a disaster occur that impacts a Heifer recipient community at some point in the future.

QUESTION: That definitely gives a good description of Heifer’s role in disaster response, mitigation and preparation. So, how would you describe Heifer’s role in recovery?

LUCK: “When the cameras leave, Heifer moves in to do the work on the ground for the long term.” That comment is a pretty good one-sentence statement regarding Heifer’s involvement with a disaster. As I’ve discussed, Heifer may have a limited role in response, but

recovery and the long-term rehabilitation/reconstruction aspect of this phase are right in line with Heifer's mission. Meaning, as I mentioned in my discussion about response efforts, once Heifer communities' basic needs have been met and the disaster situation is stabilized or being handled by relief and responder organizations, Heifer turns its efforts toward working with disaster affected project communities and their surrounding region. Heifer's goal, which is also the goal of long-term recovery in disaster management, is not just to get a community back to the way things were prior to the disaster, but rather to rebuild in a way that makes that community more resilient and its growth more sustainable. Again, rebuilding in that way fits well with Heifer's mission.

I will mention funding again here for two reasons. One, fundraising for development is different than fundraising for disaster relief. Two, fundraising as part of disaster preparedness is different than fundraising as a result of a specific disaster. When I discussed disaster preparedness, I mentioned Heifer's Rehabilitation Fund and the fact that it is clearly marked as something to be used "only in case of a disaster in the existing Heifer project communities." If there is a major disaster that has a significant impact on numerous Heifer projects and communities, there may be a fundraising effort specific to that disaster. Examples of such a disaster would be the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake. After the tsunami, people called Heifer saying that they wanted to donate money. However, since Heifer focuses on long-term development we capped the donations at \$1 million to be used for the reconstruction phase after the cameras left and citizens around the world moved their philanthropic attention to other needs. I recommended that donations for disaster relief should be given instead to relief organizations and first responders, of which there are so many who do great work. Heifer then focused on reconstructive efforts for tsunami-impacted communities in

the countries where they already had ongoing development work and staff in place. It is critical for me to note that during the time I was with Heifer, and I am certain the policy is still in place - Heifer will not use any disaster as a fundraising opportunity in which the funds would go to programs or work not directly related to the disaster for which funds have been raised.

As part of disaster rehabilitation and long-term recovery, one can witness three more of Heifer's cornerstones – “accountability,” “sustainability & self-reliance” and “passing on the gift.” As with any Heifer beneficiary, post-disaster recipients are required to take proper care of any resources that Heifer has provided to them. In other words, beneficiaries are fully accountable for what they receive whether it is an animals, trees or bees for example. I have mentioned sustainability throughout our discussion, and noted its importance in both Heifer's work and disaster management. The Heifer cornerstone, “sustainability & self-reliance” ensures that families and communities continue to be successful and grow even after Heifer is no longer involved. Also, before beneficiaries ever receive anything from Heifer, they agree to one day pay their “living loan” by providing a “living loan” to another family in need. So, once beneficiaries are successful and self-reliant, they will then “pass on the gift” of an animal or plant offspring for example, thereby becoming donors themselves. And that process leads to well-deserved dignity.

QUESTION: Previously you mentioned partnerships specific to disaster response. Does Heifer have partnerships in other areas of its work?

LUCK: Absolutely – Heifer has many partners such as other NGOs, civic groups, foundations, faith communities, multilateral organizations, governments and corporations to name just some of them. Partnerships between organizations that complement each other, whether their missions are similar or completely different, can greatly expand the positive impact

and effectiveness of humanitarian work whether it is disaster relief, development or a combination. In fact, goals can be reached through partnerships that might not be achievable independently. A specific example of an organization that brings together NGOs for beneficial partnerships is InterAction. Heifer is a member organization of InterAction which is the largest coalition of US based international NGOs that work in both development and disaster relief. For detailed information, you can see InterAction's website [<http://www.interaction.org/>]. Heifer became a member organization of InterAction in 1989 and I was elected Board Chair in 2009. There are many positive things to say about InterAction, but I can tell you two of the aspects that are critical to its positive international reputation with not only NGOs, but with governments and multilateral organizations as well - its ethical standards and guidelines with which every member must comply and the alliance's belief in transparency. Another good example is the Conrad Hilton foundation which facilitates the Hilton laureates in combining their synergies/missions to enhance their collective impact.

QUESTION: With people and organizations involved in disaster management, in recent times there has been a pretty significant shift in opinion about NGOs from skepticism to appreciation, especially internationally. To what would you attribute that shift?

LUCK: I have seen government, military, multilateral and private sector organizations increasingly see value in partnering with NGOs in a number of situations, including disaster relief and recovery efforts as well as long-term development. An NGO often has what it takes to gain access and effectively work in certain communities, regions and countries, including but not limited to: knowledge of language, culture and politics; long-term presence in a community, respect from local government and community leaders; and a well-established local staff. For example, in the countries where Heifer works, there is trust and respect "on the ground" in the country because of such practices as hiring only indigenous people and providing resources and

training particular to that community. Heifer workers understand cultural needs and nuances without having to check for information in a guide book, because they are already a part of the community. Heifer hires citizens of the country in which the project is located with very few exceptions. In other words, Heifer does not hire expats locally, but uses their skills for evaluation or training purposes to support the indigenous staff.

INTERVIEWER GRAY: Thank you Jo Luck for expanding our knowledge of the role of a development-based NGO in regard to disaster management.

LUCK: You are welcome and thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss this important topic, and of course I always enjoy discussing Heifer. I hope those who read this article will visit Heifer's website and learn more about the organization.

Conclusion

In closing, the following post from the Heifer International Blog is a Heifer success story that captures many of the key aspects of the information given in this interview. Furthermore information about development work married with disaster recovery is put into the context of human dignity and a better quality of life because of assistance. And the resulting empowerment of local people is transformative. This story demonstrates the synergy of Heifer's overall development mission with the goals of long-term disaster recovery. Casey Neese wrote (2011):

Late last night – while most of us in this hemisphere were sleeping – a delegation from Heifer's US headquarters attended a Passing on the Gift ceremony in Baan Klang village in Phuket, Thailand. It was already Wednesday there, and the event was well attended with five groups of 25 villagers sharing the offspring of their plants and animals – in this case mangrove trees and oysters – with another five groups of 25.

The Passing on the Gift ceremony is the embodiment of the ever-expanding network of hope, dignity and self-reliance that's created when our project participants are given the tools to lift themselves and their communities out of poverty. This project is focused on rehabilitating areas hit by the 2004 tsunami that devastated thousands of families in Thailand's southern provinces and in neighboring Asian countries. Heifer Thailand made grants to local government offices and NGO partners to provide families with livestock, mangrove trees, fishing equipment and training to help them rebuild their incomes and move closer to self-sufficiency.

Noel Mace, our Asia and South Pacific program officer, was there to witness the ceremony. He says it was remarkable to see not only recipients being transformed into donors, but disparate groups coming together as they passed on their "love and values." "It really stood out that these inclusive groups of Buddhists, Muslims and Christians showed that community development and environmental protection takes everyone working together."

About Jo Luck and Heifer International

In August 2011 Jo Luck retired from her position as president of Heifer International after 22 years with the organization. She served as the organization's president and chief executive officer from 1992 to 2010, and as director of International Programs from 1989 to 1992. Under Luck's leadership, Heifer International (Heifer) grew from a \$7 million organization to over \$130 million, thereby dramatically increasing the organization's programmatic impact.

During Luck's time at the helm, Heifer International received a number of awards such as: the Martin Luther King, Jr. Salute to Greatness Award; *Fast Company's* Copernican Award;

the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize; the Phoenix Award; *Bon Appétit's* Humanitarian Award; Platinum Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council; and InterAction's Mildred Robbins Leet Award for the Advancement of Women.

Jo Luck herself received the 2010 World Food Prize, which is often described as the "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture." The award recognized her for her work through Heifer International for improving the availability and sustainability of food to people in need throughout the world. She also received other awards including: the Lions World Services for the Blind Vision Award; the *Forbes* Executive Women's Forum Trailblazer Award; the International Women's Forum Women Who Make a Difference Award; Rotary's Service Above Self Award; the LC & Daisy Bates Humanitarian Award for Global Awareness; and in 2011 President Obama appointed Luck to the U.S. Agency for International Development's Board for International Food and Agricultural Development.

Luck continues her work to end hunger through speaking presentations and service on boards and advisory committees addressing the global food security challenge of feeding nine billion people in 2050, through sustainable agricultural development. She serves as a member of the Chicago Council's Global Agricultural Development Initiative Advisory Group, the Farm Foundation's Dialogue on Food and Agriculture Steering Committee, and the DuPont Advisory Committee on Agriculture Innovation and Productivity. She is the chairperson of the Program Oversight Panel on Aquatic Agricultural Systems – a Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) multi-year research initiative conducted in partnership with the WorldFish Center located in Penang, Malaysia.

Luck attended Hendrix College and earned a B.A. in education at David Lipscomb College. She attended the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and

Harvard Business School's Executive Education Session on Governing for Nonprofit Excellence.
She holds honorary doctorates from Clark College, Lyon College, the University of Arkansas,
and Stephens College.

Reference

Neese, C. (2011, May 11). Mangroves and oysters mean hope for Thailand. Retrieved from:
<http://www.heifer.org/blog/2011/05/mangroves-oysters-mean-hope-for-thailand.html?msource=magento>