

# HUMANITARIAN HPN exchange

The magazine of the Humanitarian Practice Network

November 2002

22

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The food crisis in Southern Africa has been catastrophic for millions of people: thousands of individuals have lost their lives, families have lost the people they depended on and cared for, and their communities have had their capacity to survive devastated. The human cost of the crisis has been immense; the social and economic costs have been far-reaching.

The crisis and the way it has been dealt with have raised serious questions about how aid works, about the responsibility and accountability of the governments of the affected countries, and of elected governments and donors in the West, and about the relationship between humanitarianism and development. In this issue's special feature, John Seaman, Hisham Khogali and Donald Mavunduse, experienced NGO experts in food security and emergency response, look at the impact of the crisis and ask why it took nine months for the international community to respond. Suresh Babu and Ashwin Bhouraskar of the Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Christopher Eldridge of HelpAge present lessons drawn from research and previous experience. Moira Reddick looks at an initiative in real-time lesson learning in humanitarian response, and we have information about two research initiatives in ODI, one examining the origins of the crisis and how development policy might prevent a recurrence, the other looking at the way humanitarian need is measured and assessed and how that might be done more effectively.

This issue also carries articles by HPN members and readers on a range of other practice and policy issues. Sadiki Byombuka discusses the role of local organisations such as his, providing humanitarian assistance in eastern Congo. We would like more local, national organisations involved in humanitarian response to write about their experiences in these pages – and we'd encourage international organisations working with local partners to ask them to participate in the international humanitarian debate.

We also hear about a workshop in the US that looked at how agencies can enhance the protection dimension of their humanitarian action, about the dilemmas of providing long-term refugee support in Nepal, and how income-generation initiatives can help people and communities recover from conflict. Other articles look at how far the Sphere standards have been institutionalised by aid agencies, and at the problems of staffing humanitarian aid programmes. As part of our series looking at governments' humanitarian policies, HPG's Adele Harmer looks at Australian government policy. To end, Nicolas de Torrenté of MSF challenges humanitarian organisations to recognise the profound and far-reaching implications for humanitarian action of the war on terrorism.

## Natural disaster, political failure

*An estimated 14 million people in Southern Africa will need food assistance between now and March 2003. Governments within the region have struggled to respond, while international help has been slow to arrive. **Hisham Khogali** looks at what caused the crisis, and how the international community has responded*

The roots of Southern Africa's food crisis lie in a combination of environmental shocks, chronic poverty, a health crisis and damaging government policies. Over the past two to three years, the region has suffered widespread drought, erratic rainfall and flooding, hitting agricultural production. Prices of the staple crop, maize, have increased, in some cases by as much as 400%, drastically restricting access to food among impoverished populations. Across the region, in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, millions of people are vulnerable.

### Political failings

Poor accountability and a lack of democratisation have only exacerbated the crisis. In Malawi, for instance, the European Community accuses the government of financial mismanagement and corruption. In Zimbabwe, usually a surplus producer and a crucial supplier in times of food deficit, the controversial land-redistribution policy has hit commercial agricultural production and destabilised the country. Elections there and in Zambia, seen as rigged by many external observers, have generated further political instability, and attracted the hostility of donor states.

Meanwhile, the mismanagement of strategic grain reserves across the region has meant that shortfalls cannot be met internally, and South Africa, previously a source of additional supplies, has been unable to fill the gap. All the affected countries possessed these reserves, but none was adequately stocked. In Malawi, grain stocks were sold immediately before food shortages peaked. According to the Malawian government, the sale was to meet International Monetary Fund (IMF) demands for loan repayments, a claim denied by the IMF.

### The international response

The response of donors to the food crisis has been slow and conditional, despite its severity and despite the presence of well-established early-warning systems in the region. The signs of an impending crisis were certainly there; as early as March 2001, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) reported that harvest prospects had deteriorated as a result of flooding and unusually dry spells in a number of countries. The World Food Programme (WFP) responded with targeted food distributions, and in early 2002 launched an appeal for \$69 million. The Red Cross also launched an appeal in May 2002. NGOs, notably Save the Children-UK, lobbied hard for donor attention,

### The impact of HIV

Environmental shocks and policy failures have been exacerbated by the region's HIV crisis. Southern Africa has some of the world's highest rates of infection; a quarter of the region's people are thought to be infected with HIV. In Zimbabwe, HIV prevalence amongst the productive age group stands at 30%. The short-term consequences of the HIV pandemic include reduced food availability through loss of labour, land, livestock assets and even tools through sale, culminating in reduced or no food production. Access to food is also reduced as a result of a decline in disposable income with which to buy it. More money goes on medical care, reducing the amount spent on food. A shift by households to less labour-intensive production may also reduce the quality of food supplies. The reduction in both the quantity and quality of food has a negative impact on the prognosis of people living with HIV, whose dietary requirements increase in terms of calorific value, and protein and mineral content. The longer-term implications of the HIV pandemic include decreased workforce capacity, reduced agricultural output and the loss of skills.

but these warnings went largely unheeded. The gravity of the situation became unmistakable in the wake of the 2002 harvest, when WFP launched an appeal to feed nearly 13m people at risk of starvation. The Red Cross also launched an appeal for \$70m, and the international response began in earnest in July 2002. Food donations started to flow through the WFP, mostly from the US. An earlier response by NGOs, the Red Cross, UN and donors may have reduced the required food inputs and protected livelihoods.

Why was the international donor response so slow? Part of the reason was international opposition to policies in the key regional state of Zimbabwe; could aid have been conditioned by a desire to pressure the government of Zimbabwe into policy change, for example over controversial land distribution, apparent attempts to hijack elections and efforts to intimidate opponents? There were also fears for the transparency of assistance, as reports emerged that aid reaching Zimbabwe was being redirected to government supporters. In addition, regional governments them-

selves were concerned about the distribution of genetically-modified (GM) food. The maize grain provided by the US government is genetically modified and, if planted, could contaminate local species, and possibly cross between plant species. There were also fears over the long-term health implications of GM food. Although there is no evidence of side-effects, research in this area is relatively young and it is impossible to predict the long-term impact. Although only Zambia refuses GM food, other affected countries stipulated that it be milled at source or on entry into the country.

**NGO and Red Cross action**

Despite the slow donor response, a diverse group of international and local NGOs, as well as the UN and the Red Cross, is operating throughout the affected countries. Activities have included targeted food distributions, selective feeding programmes, agricultural programmes and water and sanitation projects, as well as monitoring activities. Through its HIV Home Based Care programme, the Red Cross targeted food distributions to people living with HIV and AIDS, as well as to their household members and orphans. The Red Cross is also undertaking water and sanitation programming and an agricultural inputs programme. The Red Cross’ biggest contribution is logistical support to WFP food operations through a regional transport package, which includes the trucking of food to various NGOs for targeted distribution. Cooperation and coordination between NGOs, as well as with regional governments and the UN, have developed well, particularly in monitoring and assessment of the situation across the region.

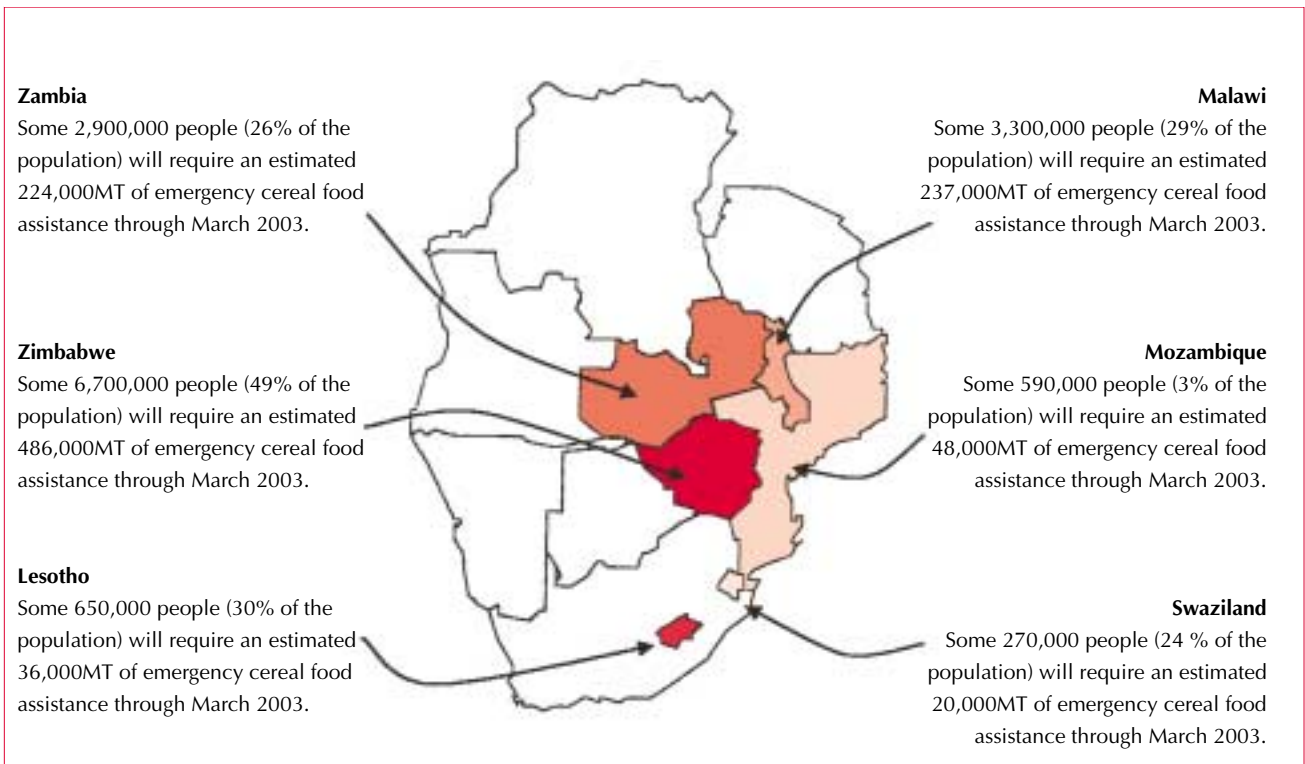
**Future prospects**

Malnutrition rates are now under control in most of the region, with the exception of some areas of Malawi. However, the crisis is far from over. Overall, the prevalence of acute malnutrition is low, but in all affected countries households report low or depleted food stocks, and coping strategies are damaging long-term livelihood security. According to assessments by the Vulnerability and Assessment Committee (VAC) of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), which brings together NGOs, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, regional governments and the UN, the number of people needing assistance has actually increased, to 14m:

The VAC emergency food security assessments confirm the severity of the regional food crisis and provide compelling evidence that urgent action, beyond that of current levels, is required from national Governments, regional bodies, and the international community to avert a humanitarian disaster in the next seven months before the main harvest in April/May 2003.

Southern Africa’s food crisis is not the result simply of widespread drought and unfavourable environmental conditions. Increasing political instability in the region, particularly in Zimbabwe, has contributed to the crisis, as has the HIV pandemic. Donor governments, keen to criticise the lack of accountability and democratic process in a number of affected countries, were slow in helping, and early-warning systems were ineffective in mobilising international concern. Even now, the response may meet the immediate need to save lives, but many liveli-

**Southern Africa food security assessment: September 2002**



Source: SADC FANR Vulnerability Assessment Committee

hoods have been damaged; unless assistance continues beyond the food-deficit period, many people may lose their livelihoods altogether.

The Southern Africa crisis has brought to the fore a number of issues that demand urgent attention from the humanitarian community. Were the region's governments adequately aware of the impending crisis? Why did long-established early-warning mechanisms fail to solicit a response? Was information provided by the WFP and others trusted by donors, and if not why? Why did local authorities not have the capacity and institutional efficiency to respond in a timely manner? Were delays in the donor response the result of a desire to force the region's governments into improved accountability and democracy? And if so, did this contradict the humanitarian imperative, and with what effect?

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Vulnerability Assessment Committee, *Regional Emergency Food Security Assessment Report, September 2002*. Available at: [www.sadc-fanr.org.zw/vac/vachome.htm](http://www.sadc-fanr.org.zw/vac/vachome.htm). The VAC website also holds country-specific emergency food-security assessments for Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia and Swaziland.

IFRC, 'Mission Report to Zimbabwe and Zambia, July/August 2002', available on request from [khogali@ifrc.org](mailto:khogali@ifrc.org).

FAO reports on the food-supply situation and crop prospects in Sub-Saharan Africa are posted on the FAO website at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org).

## Towards a Southern African solution

*The crisis in Southern Africa calls for urgency and forward thinking. Donald Mavunduse argues that no durable solution is in prospect until the limitations of the current relief response are acknowledged and overcome*

The crisis in Southern Africa is both massive and complex, far outstripping current capacities to assist. The emergency is much greater than a simple food deficit: it includes a health crisis, with millions affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as a crisis of poverty, with over 70% of people in the affected countries classed as poor. As other articles in this issue also stress, underlying everything are issues of governance and policy – even, in some countries, a crisis of politics itself. These problems are simply too many and too large for current approaches to handle.

### The failings of the emergency response

Efforts to deal with the crisis comprehensively are being seriously undermined by limited funds. Over \$600 million was required for immediate assistance and relief.<sup>1</sup> However, less than 40% has been received from the international community, and some money may not come at all. Far more is needed to rebuild and improve the living standards of those affected after the emergency phase. In addition, the collective efforts of governments, local and international NGOs and donors in assisting people affected by the crisis have been fragmented, localised and lacking coherence. The bulk of assistance goes on providing immediate relief to those without adequate food. While relieving immediate suffering is of course a humanitarian imperative, it is also generally agreed that this is not enough to prevent another food crisis in the future. Simply providing food to relieve short-term hunger will not do much to address the underlying causes of this crisis.

<sup>1</sup> This figure represents the combined appeals of the WFP, IFRC and British agencies under the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC).

### Political will and policy application

Many long-term solutions to the current crisis have been put forward. Most of them, however, are technical, and many call for complex, comprehensive answers. These proposals include:

- *Causes, Consequences and Policy Lessons from Malawi*, a study commissioned by Action Aid and carried out by Stephen Devereux, a Fellow of the UK's Institute for Development Studies. Devereux recommends the reintroduction of subsidies to boost agricultural production; better management of national grain reserves; and the adoption of pro-poor policies by institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- *Fighting Famine in Southern Africa: Steps out of the Crisis*, a policy paper by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and featured in this issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*, suggests policy options based on long-term development. IFPRI argues that lasting solutions will be achieved by closely linking immediate relief with recovery and development phases.
- Many papers have suggested the need for disaster mitigation and risk reduction. The 2002 International Red Cross *World Disaster Report*, for instance, argues the value of mitigation as a cost-effective and efficient way of dealing with emergencies.

These proposals are credible technical options. However, the real driving force in making them work lies with the people wielding the greatest decision-making power in Southern Africa: the governments of



Southern Africa themselves. Famine is always a product of decision-making failures. Southern Africa is where it is now because of the decisions and actions of the powerful. Thus, the key solution to preventing hunger lies in increasing people's participation in, and the effectiveness of, governance. Southern Africa's governments and their citizens are the key to reaching a solution to the current crisis, and in preventing another in the future.

If greater public participation in governance is to mean anything for the region's future food viability, it must aim to ensure:

- the efficient and accountable use of resources;
- the allocation of resources by governments in a non-discriminatory way; and
- the participatory planning and control of resources at decentralised local levels.

In addition, there needs to be a policy commitment to tackling some of the underlying causes of the current crisis. Governments should establish clear goals for reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and improving the health of those already affected. Given the stigma around the disease and its vulnerability to manipulation for political purposes, it is vital that governments are at the forefront of fighting it, influencing social attitudes to both the disease and the risk factors associated with it, and promoting positive living among those affected and those at risk. HIV/AIDS should be seen as an emergency in its own right, and the current response to the food crisis as an opportunity to scale up the fight against it.

Second, poverty has to be tackled head on. Again, governments are primarily responsible, and should hold themselves accountable. Other players, such as NGOs, civil-society groups and donors, should hold themselves to quality development programmes that have a meaningful and sustainable impact on poor people. The Southern African crisis also reflects the long-known reality that, over the past decade, small farmers have become increasingly incapable of producing enough food. All the players trying to assist should realise that famine will occur again if issues of agricultural production are not addressed adequately within broader poverty-reduction drives.

Hazards and disaster events will occur again regardless of current initiatives. However, if governments act to address issues like health and poverty in addition to efforts to stem immediate food needs, they will be better prepared for the next episode, and their citizens better equipped to resist.

### **What does this mean for humanitarian practitioners?**

The crisis in Southern Africa is severe, and providing food aid a necessary short-term measure. In itself, however, this will not prevent disaster from recurring. There is thus a need within the current emergency



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*A woman cradles her hungry child*

response to address the issue of policy and practice, as well as governance and participation. The performance of emergency interventions as well as development should be measured by what changes and benefits ultimately accrue to the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. Any other performance measurement will be secondary.

Humanitarian actors and agencies need to recognise that having credible pro-poor policies is a positive step only if these policies translate into actual benefits to vulnerable and marginalised people. There is a need to strengthen and empower those affected by the emergency. They need to have a voice and be effective in claiming their rights to adequate and appropriate assistance from government and other sources. Working with civil society and involving it in areas such as the formulation of national budgets and budget tracking will counter a well-entrenched myth that governments in Southern Africa cannot allocate more resources towards assisting their people. Finally, there is a need to address the critical issues of poverty and HIV/AIDS, with clear, unambiguous targets and objectives. It is

also important to realise and support governments' leading role in this fight.

The crisis in Southern Africa is so grave, and its attendant problems of poverty, health and governance so deep, that it is difficult to believe that there is a sustainable way out. Admittedly, the prognosis for the region is not good, especially given the current level and type of aid being provided. Yet there are ways, even within current resource constraints, that these burdens may be eased. The levers are the governments and the people of Southern Africa themselves. International efforts during and after this crisis need to recognise this, and develop true partnerships that can harness local and international efforts to address the food situation in the long term. Through the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African governments have promised more effective governance. This is a positive step, but much more needs to happen if genuine efforts to assist the poor and marginalised are to bear fruit that lasts.

**Donald Mavunduse** is Emergencies Programme Advisor at Action Aid UK. Previously, he worked for ten years in Southern Africa for a variety of international organisations in development and emergency programmes.

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### Famine and the failure of development? Work on the Southern Africa food crisis at the ODI

After decades of investment in food security and development in Southern Africa by aid agencies and donors, the current crisis seemed to many humanitarian actors to represent a failure of development that would leave them, once again, to pick up the human pieces with emergency response.

To explore some of the failures in the region's development that led to the crisis, ODI held a workshop in London in July. Presentations were made by a range of specialists, including Stephen Devereux from the Institute of Development Studies, Jonathan Kydd from Imperial College at Wye, the ODI's Ed Clay, John Seaman from Save the Children Fund-(UK) and Megan Vaughan of Oxford University. The discussion highlighted the problems caused by failures in the region's early-warning systems; the conflict between donor, government and NGO objectives; the deteriorating governance and accountability of key institutions; the failures of agricultural input and output markets post-liberalisation; and the underlying vulnerability of many households caused by HIV/AIDS.

Important questions were asked about the failure to learn from past food security crises in the region and elsewhere, in terms of establishing effective early-warning systems and management of food reserves. The need to improve the governance and accountability of all agencies (governments, financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, donors, the UN and the private sector) was raised, as was the role that effective civil society organisations can play. The absence of a sound model of agricultural growth for the region was noted, and attributed to failures in agricultural service delivery, the unreliability of output markets and lack of economic integration. Many participants emphasised the urgent need to address the mounting vulnerability of the region's people, who are rapidly losing the ability to cope in the face of HIV/AIDS and market failures. Possible ways to address that vulnerability include a combination of market interventions and safety nets (for asset-building as well as immediate consumption). Many participants asked why the mass of relevant research-based policy analysis on these issues is not being used to bring about practical change.

A report on the workshop, with links to the presentations and other documentation, is available on the ODI website at [http://www.odi.org.uk/southern\\_africa/index.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/southern_africa/index.html).

ODI is also establishing an e-forum to explore current problems and underlying issues in rural development in Southern Africa. This will bring together experts from the international and regional research community, donors, NGOs and other development practitioners. The discussions will form the basis of a series of Policy Briefs that will summarise current understanding of key issues affecting rural development in the region, and highlight the available policy choices.

For further information about the e-forum, contact Elizabeth Cromwell at the ODI: [e.cromwell@odi.org.uk](mailto:e.cromwell@odi.org.uk).

# Fighting famine in Southern Africa: steps out of the crisis

*Environmental shocks like drought bring collapse only to systems already weakened by poor policies and governance. To overcome the famine in Southern Africa, argue **Suresh Babu and Ashwin Bhouraskar**, the region needs appropriate and effective policies for immediate relief, recovery and sustained development*

To mitigate the present famine in Southern Africa and to prevent others in the future, governments in the region will have to adopt the wellbeing of their people as their central goal. If governments allow wars, corruption and poor policies to continue, actions to mitigate and prevent famines will fail. Policies for mitigating famine lie on a spectrum ranging from immediate relief to recovery to initiating development. When deciding which mitigation policies to adopt, policymakers must consider two questions: what interventions should be implemented?; and when will their implementation be most effective? This article describes the policy approaches that the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)'s research in Africa has shown to be effective over the past several decades.

## **Relief: food and health**

In the first instance, governments and aid agencies must minimise the mortality, dislocation and destitution caused by the famine. Not all areas are equally affected; the priority must be to reach the most affected first, and to do so as quickly as possible. In Lesotho, for instance, mountainous and difficult-to-reach areas have been hardest hit, in Mozambique shortages are most acute in the south and centre, and in Zimbabwe the south, west and extreme north have suffered most. A national famine-mitigation strategy can be more effective and cost-effective if it targets food aid to areas where shortages are most severe, using other programmes to address the threat of hunger elsewhere. Criteria for ranking the severity of the situation by district might include crop-production records, emigration numbers, anthropometric measures of nutritional status and reported mortality rates.

Food should be distributed to people where they live; extreme hunger may prevent households from reaching central aid outlets, food camps uproot people and undermine household stability and poor sanitation and overcrowding heighten the risk of disease. Camps may also expose the most vulnerable to exploitation by more powerful inhabitants, and inadequate management and ineffective operations can leave the neediest without assistance.

Households differ in size, wealth, composition and coping capacity. If all households in an area require assistance, aid administrators may respond by distributing food aid evenly. However, this will penalise large families and those that have no other means of coping. It is crucial that aid administrators ensure that

the poorest households receive what they need to survive. Distribution should be controlled by standardised, formal guidelines to minimise discrimination, for instance against households headed by women or the elderly, or households of low status or minority ethnicity. Aid organisations cannot rely on criteria such as the judgement of village leaders or project administrators, but should establish transparent distribution rules – and be seen to enforce them.

There is also a need to invest in health services in addition to food relief. Many of the deaths that occur during famine are due not to starvation but to disease. Under-nutrition makes people more susceptible, and existing health services are often unable to take on the added burden. It is therefore imperative that governments maintain or increase public investment in health services during famine, including childcare, nutrition, sanitation and clean water, and HIV/AIDS.

To guarantee that the needs of the most severely-affected households are being met, countries must monitor and evaluate famine-mitigation schemes. Measures should be evaluated for their private and social cost-effectiveness and for their efficiency in making food available. Assessing the performance of interventions during famine can be difficult, especially during the initial crisis stages, but even estimates can be helpful.

## **Recovery: vulnerability, employment and partnership**

As a first step in recovery, famine vulnerability in all areas needs to be assessed. Vulnerability mapping can help determine what kinds of relief and recovery interventions are needed to move out of famine. Useful indicators include levels of food intake, average income level and income range, food sources, coping capacities, links to markets, assets and access to water. It is also important to know which households are headed by females or the elderly, and which have members with AIDS.

Implementing public-works programmes would offer short-term income, provide risk insurance and create assets by developing or improving public goods. The focus of any intervention in this area would depend on the health of the households participating, their coping capacity and the level of food shortage. During the initial crisis stage of a famine, a public-works programme may disregard asset-generation, but once

some security has been achieved, thought should be given to how the scheme can create outputs that promote food security and prevent famine. Where public-works programmes exist, they should be expanded. In Zimbabwe, where such a programme helped prevent a famine in 1991, this should be scaled up. Labour-intensive employment schemes require extensive administrative capacity if they are to contribute effectively to a nation's recovery efforts. If such capacity is not present, other schemes may be more suitable.

During the early recovery stages, when food shortages still exist, food may be too expensive for the poor, and the cash wages offered by public works programmes may be insufficient. In certain regions of Southern Africa, where prices are high, food-for-work schemes would be an appropriate intervention. Such schemes would also be suitable in areas with poor infrastructure, or far from markets. Cash wages, on the other hand, are most appropriate in urban areas where food is available but incomes have declined, and in rural areas where food markets are functioning well.

Any public works scheme should target poor households. This means that, as with food aid, public works should employ standardised and formal criteria to target those suffering most. Programmes can also reach more poor people if wages are set relatively low, or the food supplied is limited. To distribute the benefits across poor households, administrators could set minimum quotas for women or limit the number of participants per household. For destitute households or households without, for instance, an adult who can go out to work, programmes such as free food aid are required.

Although initial recovery from famine in the first instance requires government involvement, the private sector may have a useful role to play. Agents in the commercial agriculture sector, such as estates in Malawi or commercial farms in Zambia or Zimbabwe, could be encouraged to employ poor rural people. If food prices are high, these private agents could purchase staple grains from the public sector and provide them as wages for work. Greater private-sector participation in supplying and distributing food could help alleviate local food shortages and lower prices. Although poor infrastructure may prevent food being transported between regions, availability within regions could be improved. Increasing private-sector involvement will require developing better information systems on prices and markets. Government food marketing systems, such as Malawi's ADMARC, could arrange for private sellers to supply government-purchased grain in areas not served by the public system.

### **Development: technologies, policies and institutions**

Southern Africa's vulnerability to famine and food shortage is in part a result of low agricultural productivity. Providing small farmers with basic agricultural inputs, such as fertilisers, seeds or equipment, can help

increase production. The region's governments could distribute free 'starter packs' of seeds, legumes and fertilisers to all farmers, as Malawi did in 1998–99. Such a programme should be expanded in Malawi and introduced in the other countries in the region, especially Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Any agricultural technologies that are introduced must be appropriate, taking account of the season, the prevailing conditions, existing farming practices and household knowledge, skills and labour. New technologies or assets should be easy to use or require little training, and need little maintenance, especially if they are provided during the more difficult periods of a famine. Transfer schemes should also be flexible in the face of temporary obstacles, such as unfavourable weather.

If small farmers believe that growing staple food crops for the coming year will be risky and that commercial crops will bring higher incomes, they may not plant staples. If this happens, food shortages will continue in the following year. Governments should implement policies that provide an incentive for small farmers to grow staple crops, but which do not place an undue financial burden on the public sector.

Institutions should also be developed to improve farmers' access to, and use of, new technologies and assets. Strengthening private markets for agricultural inputs and technologies would help to meet demand, reduce the administrative responsibility of the public sector and create the basis for long-term agricultural development. Where informal and inexpensive borrowing does not exist, governments should establish formal, affordable credit programmes for the rural poor. Such credit allows poor households to purchase agricultural inputs, to buy food during periods of shortage, or to replenish assets such as livestock, which farmers are often forced to sell during famine (livestock sales have been frequent in Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia). Finally, governments must improve agricultural-extension systems oriented to small farmers so that technological and credit inputs are used as productively as possible.

The table opposite presents the policy options suggested here for each of the mitigation phases: relief, recovery and initiating development.

### **Policy issues and long-term food security**

Although the primary goal in a famine situation must be to get food to people as soon as possible, attention should also be given to how relief and short-term measures can reduce future vulnerability. Relief, recovery and development projects must be combined and sequenced in mutually-reinforcing ways. No single type of intervention will itself achieve relief, recovery or the initiation of development. At the same time, no single agency can hope to achieve an effective outcome alone. Governments, NGOs, the private sector and donors must strengthen their cooperation. Each of these actors has different capacities, and it is important to draw upon and integrate all of them in plans for



## Policy choices for famine mitigation

Policy area	Phase		
	Relief	Recovery	Initiating development
Production and supply	Food aid Food imports	Public and private food-for-work employment programmes	Agricultural inputs Macroeconomic policies favouring staple crops Private sector help with marketing Agricultural extension
Markets and accessibility	Macroeconomic policies (price stabilisation)	Public and private cash-for-work employment programmes Credit for purchases Investment in health services	Credit systems for inputs and assets Public-private marketing partnerships
Human capital	Investment in health services	Investment in health services	Agricultural extension

mitigation and long-term development. Countries should also improve coordination among their own public agencies.

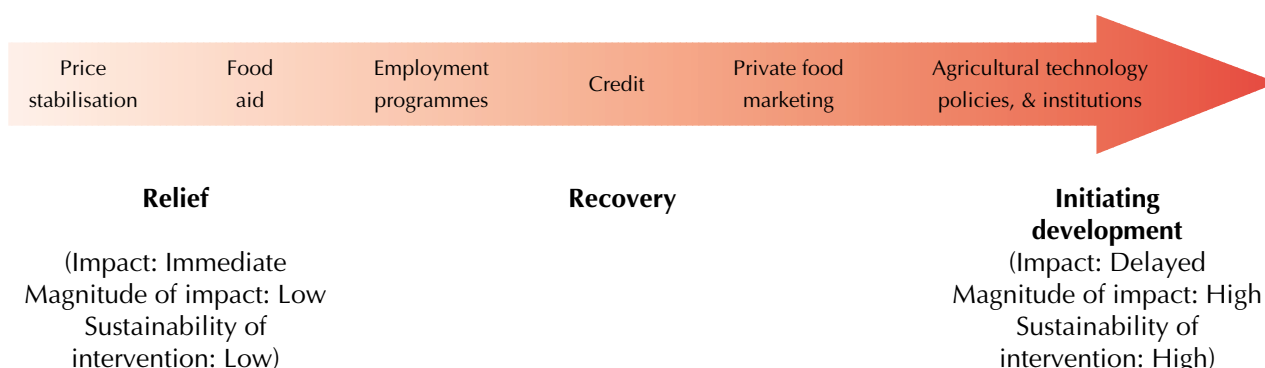
The combination and sequence of interventions required for a country will depend on its circumstances. The figure below shows where various interventions fall on the spectrum of relief to development initiation. It shows that the more *immediate* the effect of an intervention, the smaller its *magnitude*, and the less sustainable the intervention over time.

Famines signal the failure of institutions, organisations and policies. While various programmes can minimise the impact of famines and lay the groundwork for future development, policies for famine prevention and long-term food security are imperative. Such policies must encourage agricultural growth, particularly among small farmers; infrastructure development; environmental rehabilitation; and more effective markets. Well-developed famine early-warning systems and the proper management of buffer grain stocks are needed. Countries must develop the capacity to design and

implement appropriate food policies and programmes at all levels.

Long-term food security depends on sound governance. Without responsible governance, transparency and accountability, investment in growth, development and food security is likely to have little impact. Governments in Southern Africa must ensure food security and protection from famine regardless of the political and social changes that a country undergoes. Governments must ensure that the poor and vulnerable can take an active part in determining their own lives and their countries' political future. If governments allow wars, civil unrest, corruption and poor policies to continue, their people will remain vulnerable to famines.

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# The failure of early warning in Malawi in 2001: time to rethink international famine early warning systems

*Malawi offers a clear example of the difficulties plaguing international early-warning systems. John Seaman outlines some of the changes that are required if these problems are to be addressed*

In October 2001, Save the Children-(UK) (SC-UK) predicted that, unless the price of maize in Malawi was lowered by early 2002, there would be famine. This turned out to be correct. Increasing rates of child malnutrition were observed from late 2001 into early 2002. In February 2001, in Salima in central Malawi, the mortality rate was 2.8/10,000 children under five per day. Yet SC UK's prediction was dismissed. In November 2001, a multi-agency assessment by the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) reached essentially the *opposite* conclusion. Only in February/March 2002, by which time crisis was undeniable, was there any articulated international recognition that a serious problem existed.

In the famine literature, much has been made of the failure of donors to respond to famine predictions. Much less has been said about the institutional and technical problems of providing reliable and convincing warnings. While the Malawi case is far from unique, it should have been straightforward. A considerable amount of information was available about the state of the economy, and there was no impediment to obtaining more data. All agencies with a declared role in global early warning or food-related information were represented, along with the major donors, and the prediction was technically undemanding. How then was it possible that the major food security agencies could not agree on what was likely to occur?

### Different systems, different results

The literal answer to this question is that there is no agreed 'best practice' in early warning. Each agency obtains different information, analyses it differently and so arrives at different results. The regional FEWSNET in Harare, in conjunction with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), provides routine reports on Malawi's weather, food production and prices; in Malawi itself, FEWSNET operates an information system with the Ministry of Agriculture. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is primarily concerned with crop production and aggregate food supplies, and technical advisers from the UN and donors do their own rapid assess-

ments. SC-UK uses what is known as the household economy approach (HEA).

Current technical approaches to early warning have been largely shaped by two events. The first was the 1974 World Food Conference, which marked the first articulated attempt to set up an international early warning system. The conference proceedings were overshadowed by the drought and famines in the Sahel in 1968–73, and in Ethiopia in 1973. These had largely escaped international attention. The conference proposed a global system of nutritional surveillance. The idea was to monitor events using indicators already available or cheaply collected by governments. In practice, these indicators were reduced to meteorological and crop data, and the prices of staples, livestock and major commodities. Anthropometric data and a variety of other indicators were proposed, but proved impossibly expensive to collect. The assumption was that changes in indicators, for instance a fall in production followed by an increase in the price of staples, would give early warning of an approaching problem.

The second influential event was the publication in 1981 of Amartya Sen's theory of exchange entitlements, which for the first time put the phenomenon of famine on a firm theoretical basis. The theory of exchange entitlements provided an explanation for the observed features of all famines. According to Sen, famine is the result, not of levels of aggregate or local food supply, but the inability of people to acquire enough of this food to meet their needs. Food may be abundant and cheap, but some people may starve because they do not have the cash to purchase it. Food may be in marginal supply, but where access is reasonably equal, there may be no starvation.

Sen's theory does not diminish the importance of food supply, but it does show that it is a poor guide to outcome. While most food crises in Africa have been preceded by crop failure, few crop failures have led to starvation. The basic mechanics of survival are now well understood. In much of rural Africa, even the poor may be able to maintain their food entitlement,

sometimes in the face of severe and persistent shocks, by storing food, selling their labour, livestock and other assets, gathering wild foods and by gifts and non-market transfers.

A direct corollary of Sen's theory is that predicting famine requires an understanding of people's entitlement – unless we know how people get their food, we cannot understand the effect of a shock. The theory showed that indicator-based surveillance alone was insufficient for famine early warning. For example, an observed fall in food-crop production will have little direct impact on the food access of people who depend on the market; an observed rise in prices will not affect people who meet their entire food needs through their own production. Indicators can be interpreted only with knowledge of the underlying economy.

### The requirements of early warning

In practical terms, early-warning systems must achieve two things.

1. They must be able to identify a shock, such as crop failure, price rises, the closure of markets or some event or combination of events which might possibly cause a famine.
2. They must be able to assess the likely effect of this shock on people's ability to obtain sufficient food.

In Malawi, the first of these requirements was met. In 2001, the maize harvest fell by up to a third because of flooding, and from July 2001 prices steadily increased, reaching approximately five times normal levels in early 2002. These changes were monitored and regularly reported by the regional FEWSNET. The problem came with the second step: assessing the effect of the maize failure and price rise on people's food access. Two predictions were made: the one by SC-UK in October 2001, and the multi-agency assessment the following month.

### The SC-UK prediction

The SC-UK prediction arose by chance. SC-UK gathered information on the rural economy as part of a training exercise in vulnerability analysis using the HEA. This allows an estimate to be made of the effect of a shock on household food access. In this case, the prediction was straightforward. The poor in Malawi are very poor. In much of the south, poor people depend for most of their income on a small amount of cultivation, and on *ganyu* – chiefly day paid agricultural employment. Before the crisis, poor households in Mchinji district obtained approximately half of their food from agriculture, and half from labour paid in



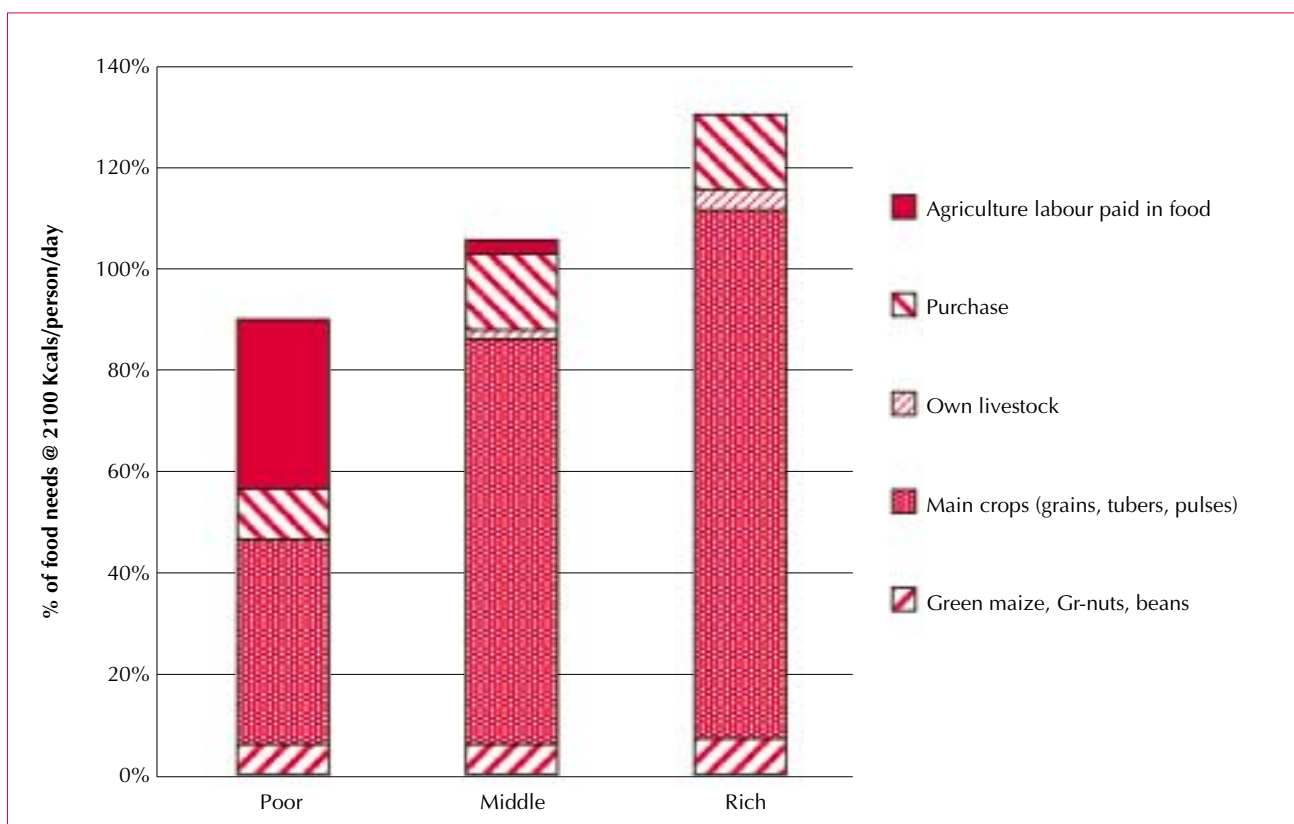
*A man wheels a sack of food across the Malawi border*

cash or food. Around 40% of total annual cash income was spent on food, and the remainder on fuel, soap and other essentials. During the period between November and February, when there are no household stocks, virtually all household income is devoted to food. People live on a day-to-day basis, are usually paid in maize flour or grain and have no cash for other essentials.

The fall in domestic maize production forced more people onto the labour market at an earlier than usual date: as *ganyu* is in limited supply, labour income fell. The increase in the price of maize relative to household income from labour led to a reduction in the ability of households to purchase maize. As household assets are minimal – at best a goat and often only some household goods – wild foods are hardly available and there is little help between households.

SC-UK estimated the food deficit for the poor group at 30%. As this was actually concentrated in the shorter pre-

## Sources of food by wealth group, Mchinji district



harvest period, it was proportionally more severe. A confident prediction could be made that poorer households would suffer a catastrophic failure of food access starting at the end of 2001, and accelerating into 2002 until the first maize from the new harvest in February/March.

### The multi-agency assessment

The multi-donor rapid assessment in November 2001 conceded that there was a problem, but appears to have had difficulty in defining the aggregate food supply and assessing people's ability to acquire this.

In assessing aggregate supply, the report acknowledged that maize production did not do well, but concluded: 'Other food crops are playing a big role in supplementing and substituting for maize'. These other crops were chiefly roots and tubers. A subsequent report commissioned by SC-UK showed that the estimated national supply of these crops was exaggerated. They were chiefly produced in the north and the lakeshore areas, mostly for domestic consumption, and any surpluses were not available elsewhere.

In assessing people's food access, a main finding of the report was that 'groups of people depend on other sources, especially the market, for food. Fortunately, general observations indicate that people in the southern region are more enterprising and engage in various activities to generate income'.

### Lessons for early warning from Malawi

The difficulty with early warning in the poorest countries is no longer technical. Remote sensing has steadily

improved, and government systems for the routine collection of data on weather, crops and prices now cover most famine-prone countries. Outstanding technical problems are of a relatively detailed kind, for example relating to rapid data collection. Using existing techniques, we can now confidently detect any significant food crisis. The challenge is to find an effective institutional framework to ensure that these techniques are routinely applied.

The central difficulty lies in developing systems that can acquire information on livelihoods at a sufficient level of accuracy and geographical disaggregation to permit surveillance data to be interpreted in terms of food needs. This requires a step change in the skills and resources required to run early-warning systems. Livelihood systems, if developed independently by external agencies, are costly, chiefly in the consultant support needed for fieldwork to establish and maintain baseline descriptions. Even if these resources could be found, this does not seem to be an efficient use of them except under very special circumstances, such as in south Sudan where there is a huge annual expenditure on food aid and relief, and where the relative costs of information are small. In most countries, famine is rare and maintaining complex and expensive systems exclusively for this purpose is difficult to justify. It could be argued that the money might be better invested in relieving the desperate poverty in which many rural Africans live.

A solution to this might be found in two parts. First, livelihoods information and the techniques used to predict starvation have value well beyond early



warning, and the costs can more easily be justified in those terms. This information can be used to improve the selection and management of emergency interventions; in some situations, for instance, it can obviate the need for food aid entirely by reducing household non-food costs. This information is also likely to have value for the wider understanding and management of poverty. Most economic decisions are currently taken in complete ignorance of actual livelihood patterns.

Second, the costs can be much reduced and the development benefits increased if external agencies concentrate their efforts on supporting national systems. Considerable progress has already been made in some countries, such as Mozambique, and there are encouraging signs that, through the SADC, this may now happen more widely in Southern Africa.

It is clear that the current involvement of multiple organisations, each with its own interests, cannot meet the basic challenges of early warning. Agency coordination is a national function: only govern-

ments can adequately coordinate external agencies. Paradoxically, those countries that depend most heavily on external assistance have the least capacity to control its use. In some countries, agencies coordinate where there is a common interest in doing so. If there is to be progress in famine early warning more generally, a common interest needs to be found.

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#### ODI/HPG research project on needs assessment

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI is undertaking a research project on the assessment of humanitarian needs, as part of an international initiative on humanitarian financing. The project is exploring the way in which needs assessment is linked to decision-making in agencies and donors. Donors seem increasingly to be questioning the assessments of agencies; agencies doubt whether needs assessments are the main factor in donors' decisions about whether and how to allocate funds. In practice, needs assessment is highly variable, and the results are hard to compare and aggregate. Underlying these issues are some fundamental differences in the way 'humanitarian needs' and 'humanitarian crises' are defined and interpreted.

The *process* of needs assessment – as opposed to specific methodologies – has been little studied. This research is concerned with the processes by which assessments are designed and coordinated, as well as with the type of information provided by sectoral methodologies (specifically, food and health). A guiding question is whether current needs assessments provide the information required to make timely and appropriate decisions about humanitarian response and funding.

A number of case studies are being conducted, of which the food-security crisis in Southern Africa is one. In this context, pre-existing poverty levels and governance issues, as much as the extent of drought or the scale of international assistance, have a critical bearing on the risks people face. Central to this study will be needs prediction, based on forecasting (including the FEWSNET and SADC early-warning systems) and scenario planning. The question of whether interventions are essentially *preventive* in their rationale – and preventive of what – will be explored, as will attitudes to predictive analysis and the links to decision-making about interventions. Are the criteria for response in situations of *potential* and *actual* human catastrophe the same? What are the appropriate indicators at what stages of such slow-onset disasters? Another question will be the assessment and monitoring of *vulnerability* and the work of the Vulnerability Assessment Committee (SADC/FANR). How do agencies assess coping capacity, the effect of shocks on livelihoods, and the significance of underlying risk factors like HIV/AIDS? All of this will be related to decisions about the targeting of assistance (food aid and other).

The Southern Africa field study focuses on Zimbabwe and Malawi. Other case studies include Sudan/Somalia and Afghanistan. The project is due to report in April 2003.

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# Protecting livelihoods during drought: some market-related approaches

*The history of food crises includes a history of famines that did not occur. Drawing on the experiences of the 1992 drought in Southern Africa, Christopher Eldridge argues that an understanding of the methods people used to avert famine then – notably food purchase – could usefully inform today's response*

Ten years ago, in 1992, the worst drought in around half a century struck Southern Africa. But there was no famine, largely because of the activities of those people who were most affected, namely the rural poor. Villagers obtained most of their staple food from non-aid sources, particularly through increased purchases. To finance these, most poor villagers intensified non-water dependent income-generating activities, sold animals and/or cut expenditure on education and agricultural inputs. During the planting season, they worked off their own land for longer than usual.



©Christopher Eldridge

*Women scoop water out of a shallow well dug in a dry river-bed*

Many of these attempts to finance increased food purchases had adverse effects on livelihoods. Relief programmes during drought should aim to complement and support those responses that do not damage livelihoods. In particular, relief interventions should aim to limit the decreases in poor people's purchasing power and incomes which normally occur in food crises, especially in rural areas.

## Four approaches

This article outlines four possible approaches that address market-related issues during drought. The first two address expenditure; they aim to maximise the amount of staple food which poor households buy by temporarily reducing the price and by suspending user fees for essential services. The second two address income; the aim is to minimise the reductions in earnings which most poor households experience during drought.

### 1. Subsidising staple food prices

During drought, the purchasing power of most villagers decreases because the price of cereals, the item they spend most on, generally rises. This is compounded by reductions in net earnings, especially for the poorest households.

Subsidising cereal prices for the period of the drought would enable people to buy more for the same outlay. As a result, people should have less need to resort to measures that damage their livelihoods, such as working off their own land for excessive periods during the planting season, or selling draught cattle.

Subsidising staple food prices is, in theory, a relatively easy way, both logistically and administratively, of maintaining the purchasing power of the poorest households during drought. However, this has rarely been tried during food crises, and difficulties have arisen where it has been attempted. While subsidies may not be appropriate in every food crisis, these difficulties should not automatically prevent further attempts to apply them. Factors necessary for their successful implementation include adequate preparation, complementary monitoring systems at several levels and comprehensive public information. Where subsidies have not worked, it is likely that these and other prerequisites have been deficient.

### 2. Waiving user fees and other charges

User fees during drought reduce the amount of money villagers can spend on increased purchases of staple food. Where they exist, fees could be waived for schooling, health services and animal dipping. A clear announcement should be made that the fee waivers would end on a certain date.

Waiving fees on essential services would meet two objectives: it would increase villagers' disposable cash, so helping to finance increased purchases; and it would lessen the need for villagers to reduce or stop their use of

these services so as to save money for increased cereal expenditure. This would benefit poor villagers proportionately more than rich ones, because the former spend proportionately more of their earnings on cereals. It would also be administratively easier to implement than other measures, and would facilitate targeting between districts and between households. Fees could be waived only for drought-affected districts, or a sliding scale could be introduced, in which the proportion of the fee that was waived was higher for more severely affected areas. Fees could also be waived only for poor households.

Other regressive charges on the poor could also be waived, where they exist. These could include land and livestock taxes, and contributions to local government bodies.

### 3. Policies and programmes to support rural incomes during drought

#### *Cash for work projects*

Cash for work projects are one way of supporting rural incomes during drought. They should have two main objectives: to minimise reductions in the incomes of the poorest households during drought; and to produce outputs which will provide lasting benefits for communities, especially for the poorest households.

To achieve these objectives, certain criteria must be met. For example, projects should be planned in advance; villagers should participate in their planning and monitoring; projects should not draw villagers away from working on their own fields during the land preparation and planting months; and they should be limited to outputs which provide lasting benefits, and which villagers genuinely want and are prepared to maintain after the drought has passed.

These and other criteria place limitations on the number of public works projects that can be successfully implemented during drought.

#### *Supporting income-generating activities*

Maintaining incomes by supporting existing enterprises and income-generating activities is difficult, since most yield smaller earnings during drought. Furthermore, livelihood shocks, such as drought, often precipitate a shift to illicit or environmentally damaging income-generating activities. These include gold panning, tree-felling, prostitution and theft. It would be inappropriate to support activities such as these.

The number, type and mix of income sources vary greatly between districts; there can accordingly be no standard prescriptions for improving rural incomes. Consequently, interventions should be founded on a thorough knowledge of local livelihoods. Implementing organisations must have a good working relationship with drought-affected communities. Time and personnel constraints, in addition to the various problems caused by drought, mean that it is generally not feasible to support new enterprises and income-generating activities during drought.

#### *A developmental approach: increasing rural incomes during non-drought years*

Increasing the incomes of poor villagers during a drought is difficult. A more appropriate approach would be to ensure that poor smallholders enter a period of drought with as high an income base as possible. This means building on smallholders' strategies during non-drought years.

Responses to drought should be seen in a longer-term, developmental perspective, particularly as drought can no longer be regarded as an occasional, exogenous shock. The likelihood of drought, and of seasons with below-average rainfall or with poor rainfall distribution, needs to be factored into longer-term development policies and programmes, especially those concerned with poverty reduction.

Attempts to increase the income of poor smallholders during non-drought years should focus – as many longer-term projects do – on diversifying and increasing income sources, especially off-farm sources. This involves a range of measures, including micro-finance, greater access to inputs, improved access to output markets, improved rural roads and better rural transport. Women require particular support, given their varied contributions to household livelihoods.

### 4. Stabilising livestock prices

Livestock prices fall during drought for two main reasons: increased supply (because animals cannot be kept alive and/or because larger numbers than usual have to be sold to finance increased expenditure on cereals); and decreased quality (as worsening supplies of water and grazing make animals increasingly thin and sick).

During drought, decreases in livestock prices (especially cattle prices) interact with increases in cereal prices, resulting in sometimes large deteriorations in the pastoral terms of trade (the rate at which livestock products can be exchanged for cereals). Rural livelihoods are consequently compromised, both in the short and medium term. It may take many years to rebuild cattle herds to their pre-drought levels. Minimising decreases in livestock prices during drought will therefore reduce the extent to which drought, and villagers' responses to it, adversely affect livelihoods. Three ways of lessening reductions in livestock prices during drought are described below.

#### *Selling feed at subsidised prices*

Commercial stockfeeds (and/or fodder) could be sold at subsidised prices, preferably through rural stores, but also by NGOs and churches, and/or by ministries or local councils.

#### *Relaxing purchasing criteria*

Where parastatals and other organisations are involved in the purchase of livestock, consideration should be given to relaxing their purchasing criteria during drought; adhering to standard criteria can reduce the income-earning possibilities open to livestock owners.

*Supporting prices*

Where no parastatal is involved in livestock purchase, the Ministry of Agriculture, the local council or an NGO could buy cattle (and possibly goats) at reasonable prices, regardless of their condition. The animals could be slaughtered and the meat used in feeding programmes at schools or hospitals; or the meat could be dried and sold as *biltong*. Alternatively, animals could be purchased and kept alive, on the understanding that their owners could buy them back after the drought at a similar price.

**Conclusion**

Interventions which address market-related issues during drought are arguably more effective at protecting sustainable livelihoods than those which address food supply problems, at least in areas where markets are functioning reasonably well. Market-related interventions may be categorised as either expenditure or income measures. It is easier to increase villagers' purchasing power and disposable cash with interventions which address expenditure (such as subsidies and fee waivers) than by interventions which address income (such as livestock price maintenance and support for income-generating activities). The former, while not straightforward, have fewer logistical and local management requirements than the latter. They also have the potential advantage of minimising reductions in expenditure on essential services (and goods) which some villagers, especially the poorest, may make to finance increased expenditure on staple food.

Attempts to increase the incomes of people affected by drought should generally be complemented by other interventions, and should begin before drought occurs, within a developmental framework.

Timing and seasonality are important. Market-related issues must be addressed early in crises, not only because they should be, but also because they can be. The relative speed with which policies can be implemented to protect the purchasing power of the poorest households and their use of essential services and farm inputs during drought is a key advantage of this approach. Relief programmes take longer: in 1992, most of the relief food imports arrived in Southern Africa six or more months after orders were placed. The balance between demand-

and supply-side measures should vary during the course of a food crisis, with the latter perhaps becoming more dominant in the later phases.

Adequate financing is essential for the success of market-related interventions, especially for subsidies, which have significant budgetary implications. The four approaches outlined above may not be appropriate in all food crises. Nevertheless, market-related issues should be addressed in some way in most food crises, especially where purchases of staple food are likely to comprise a substantial proportion of the responses of poor people. Interventions which address market-related issues during food crises have been given much less attention than relief food programmes. They are not without their problems, but nor are food distribution operations. More policy-oriented research into factors which would lead to their success and more pilot projects are needed.

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**HPN Network Paper 40****Drought, livestock and livelihoods: lessons from the 1999–2001 emergency response in Kenya by Yacob Aklilu and Mike Wekesa. December 2002.**

The livestock intervention programme that took place during the 1999–2001 drought in Kenya's pastoral areas was the largest the country had ever seen. Donors made more funds available than ever before; more types of intervention were carried out; more agencies were involved in implementing programmes; a larger geographical area was covered; and coordination at national level was more extensive than ever before. This paper documents the experiences and lessons learnt from the livestock interventions in response to the drought. It describes the severity and impact of the drought, introduces some of the response activities that were implemented, and discusses their broader socio-economic impact. The costs and benefits of the various interventions are laid out, and the paper concludes with the key lessons of the intervention, and offers recommendations and suggestions to guide future work.



# Real-time learning in the Southern Africa food crisis

*The Southern Africa food crisis highlights yet again the humanitarian community's failure to learn the lessons of the past. Moira Reddick describes how the ALNAP Learning Support Office in Malawi aims to plug this gap at field level*

The notion that the humanitarian community is reluctant to learn is not new; again and again, evaluations of responses find that individuals, organisations and the system as a whole fail to learn from their experience, and to carry these lessons forward in any systematic way. While many agencies have sought to put in place mechanisms to improve their own organisational learning, there has been no multi-sectoral, cross-organisational work aimed at facilitating and promoting field-level learning. This article describes one such initiative, the ALNAP Learning Support Office (LSO), and its field-testing in Malawi.

## Background to the LSO

ALNAP members have been trying to develop a way to encourage effective learning at field level for some time. Discussions began with the Kosovo crisis of 1999, and consultations in the field in Orissa, Sierra Leone, East Timor and Malawi verified that there was a need for such a mechanism. According to fieldworkers, the greatest obstacles to learning were lack of time, conflicting priorities, information overload and difficulties in getting hold of documentation and accessing email and the internet.

The consultation process confirmed that, to be credible, any learning service would need to engage directly with those in the field, help them to prioritise and synthesise information and provide on demand as wide a body of knowledge and learning as possible. It would also need to arrive with a predetermined set of tools and resources at its disposal, and be established for a sustained period of time. Issues of access and time would mean that a remote learning service (such as a website or email list) was unlikely to be well-used, or up to speed with the current needs and priorities of people working in rapidly-evolving humanitarian crises.

Out of the interviews, three sets of learning needs and consequent possible activities emerged:

- 'learning in', providing learning already gathered in other comparable contexts, as well as agreed good practice;
- 'lateral learning', mapping knowledge and learning already contained within the response and affected populations, and sharing this knowledge with others; and
- 'learning out', capturing good practice and learning gained from the response in question, rapidly sharing this with others working in similar contexts and speeding up the lesson-learning cycle.

These three sets of activities would run concurrently,

though initially more emphasis might be placed on 'learning in' and 'lateral learning'.

ALNAP members approved the testing of the Learning Support Office (LSO) in 2001. While the objective of the LSO concept was to make a positive impact on the quality of emergency response, the Test LSO would verify the concept in a slow-onset emergency context, and obtain evidence to allow it to be refined and/or adapted to other types of disaster.

According to the plan, the Test LSO was to consist of a physical, independently-located office. This would contain a resource centre, which would provide physical and electronic access to toolkits, evaluations, training videos and CD-Roms, guidebooks and documented good practice. The Test LSO would also be able to draw on the combined resources of ALNAP's Full Member organisations. It would be staffed by a project director and programme officers, experienced in managing humanitarian response, with a knowledge of cutting-edge good practice and training and facilitation skills; and by a resource centre manager, with experience in the field and the latest information-management skills. As well as trying to address issues and problems directly, the Test LSO staff would, in line with identified learning needs, facilitate those offering training or other forms of support to fieldworkers. As far as possible, the Test LSO would avoid duplicating the efforts of those already on the ground, or willing to intervene.

## The Test LSO in Malawi

ALNAP considered 15 potential sites, and selected Malawi following a preliminary consultation and feasibility trip to clarify the nature of learning needs on the ground, the level of existing resources and the support available for the test.

The LSO Steering Group is responsible for managing the project director, and an Advisory Group of stakeholders at field level will work with the director to identify learning needs and ensure the timeliness and appropriateness of the Test LSO's activities.<sup>1</sup> The Test LSO is 'hosted' by the Malawi Red Cross in-country.

The Test is now under way, and will run until March 2003, coincident with Malawi's next major harvest. It will be subject to real-time evaluation, to see what effect it has on the quality of the response, and the effectiveness of the different learning techniques

<sup>1</sup> The ALNAP Steering Group members are: the ALNAP Secretariat, OCHA, CAFOD/Caritas International, CARE, the Disaster Migration Institute, RedR, Sphere and WHO. Confirmed donors to date are: USAID, DFID, CARE, World Vision Canada and CAO/Caritas.

employed. Given the emergency conditions in Malawi, Test personnel face a major challenge in identifying effective in-country partners and ensuring an appropriate exit strategy. Should the next harvest or the crisis escalate, these challenges will only increase.

The aims of the Test LSO in Malawi are:

- to determine whether, in practice, there is a 'market' for any of its proposed activities;
- to identify its most consistent users;
- to confirm which of its activities, if any, it can deliver effectively;
- to identify the constraints to effective delivery, and whether these can be addressed;
- to prioritise activities on the basis of the market and capacity to deliver effectively;
- to identify the key factors in effective delivery and replicability/transferability to other activities;
- to establish where the Test LSO's resources (human and financial) can be most effectively used;
- to identify linkages/partnerships/mechanisms (international and local) that might make on-site learning more effective, and avoid duplication; and
- to develop at least one possible exit strategy, and implement such a strategy.

The LSO team's first major activity is to facilitate the expansion and refining of the guidelines on community-based food distribution being used by the Joint Emergency Food Aid Programme (JEFAP) Consortium.<sup>2</sup> The process involves three regional workshops bringing the field officers from JEFAP member agencies together so as to draw lessons from the initial round of aid distributions. Lessons from community-based general food distribution in other operations are being drawn from documents in the LSO's comprehensive resource centre collection. The principal output is a practical manual tailored specifically to the situation in Malawi, that covers the whole cycle from community sensitisation to post-distribution monitoring. Experience of the workshops so far has been positive, and many agencies have responded warmly to the LSO 'getting stuck in and proving itself'. Bringing the field officers together, most of them for the first time, is proving a rich source of individual and cross-agency learning in itself. The fact that the agencies have already gained some experience during the first round of distributions provides 'lateral learning', and gives the LSO a role which, by combining the facilitation of 'lateral learning' with 'learning in' from other operations, is probably more acceptable to agencies than one based solely on 'learning in'.

<sup>2</sup> The Consortium comprises: WFP, CARE, Malawi Red Cross, CRS, Oxfam, World Vision, SC-UK, SC-US, Africare, the Salvation Army, Emmanuel International, GOAL and Concern Universal.

Other planned activities include video filming at distribution sites to facilitate peer exchange and learning between agency personnel; tailored training programmes (the first of which are planned in conjunction with RedR, which has just completed a training needs assessment facilitated by the Test LSO); and other forms of learning support to the government and other agencies (international and local) engaged in relief and recovery. While the precise form these other types of learning support will take are not yet clear, it is likely that they will include a mix of informal after-work discussion meetings, facilitation of after-action reviews, workshops, newsletters and the distribution of CD-Roms to people in the field with slow, patchy or no internet connections. Through these measures, Test LSO personnel will ensure that the knowledge and learning which already exists is shared between individuals and organisations. Hopefully, this process will also encourage a stronger understanding of why learning works in some contexts but not in others, and assist in identifying measures to reduce impediments to learning.

The challenges the Test faces are clear. One of the major questions is whether the mechanisms it develops can be sustained. Its six-month time frame will require sustained effort to ensure demonstrable impact; the indicators developed to measure impact will need to be constantly tested and refined during the course of the Test; personnel will face the same issues as operational agencies when seeking to consult and work with community-based organisations and beneficiaries; and consistent attention will be required if the Test LSO is to remain inclusive, and to work for the benefit of the entire humanitarian community in Malawi.

**Moirá Reddick** was the set-up consultant for the Test LSO. The LSO is located at Taurus House (off Convention Drive) in Lilongwe. Visitors are encouraged, to use the resource centre or to share experiences and information with Test LSO personnel. Alternatively, email the office at [office@lsomalawi.org](mailto:office@lsomalawi.org). The Test LSO website, with regular updates on the activities of the Test LSO, is at [www.lsomalawi.org](http://www.lsomalawi.org).

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For an extensive bibliography of related resources, see the Learning Support Office website: [www.lsomalawi.org](http://www.lsomalawi.org).

## CELPA: a local response to Congo's conflict

**Sadiki Byombuka** describes how one local organisation is working to bring relief to victims of Congo's war

The Communauté des Eglises Libres de Pentecôte en Afrique (CELPA) has worked in the DRC since 1922. Its activities include missionary programmes, education and community development and humanitarian aid. Its leadership is entirely African, though it works in collaboration with Norwegian churches, has received support from the Norwegian Foreign Affairs Ministry and benefits from advice and regular visits by a Projects Coordinator based in Oslo. CELPA is also active in missionary work in Niger, Rwanda and Tanzania. Financial support comes from the Pentecostal Churches Mission in Norway (PYM), as well as from local churches and individual CELPA members. CELPA also works in partnership with international bodies, such as Norwegian Church Aid, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Christian Blind Mission, and is a member of a network of Protestant churches in DRC known as the 'Church of Christ in the Congo'. As a missionary church organisation, CELPA's members are its faithful, namely Christians, and most of the people who work for it are Christian. However, its humanitarian work aims to benefit entire groups without distinction of race, religion or belief. In all, CELPA runs 179 schools, one hospital, 50 health centres, a rural development programme and peace education and humanitarian aid projects.

### The Humanitarian Aid Project

The first phase of CELPA's Humanitarian Aid Project (PAH) for war-affected people in DRC began in 1997. A second intervention was undertaken in 2000,

and a third was completed in May 2002. In each case, work was carried out in South Kivu, North Kivu and Maniema, in Eastern Province and in the capital, Kinshasa. Projects were coordinated at CELPA headquarters, in Bukavu in eastern DRC, now controlled by rebels of the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD). Under the PAH, CELPA has provided medicines and equipment for health centres; seeds and agricultural tools to get farming going again; food and essential goods for war-displaced people and help for them to return home; loans to help women undertake small productive activities; assistance with schooling for displaced children; rebuilding damaged schools; and psychosocial work.

Over the three phases of the project, CELPA helped thousands of war-affected people. Some 150,000 directly benefited from food and non-food aid items like household goods, clothing and salt during each phase. Eighteen thousand kilos of seed were distributed to some 4,500 families, and 20,800 agricultural tools supplied. Nearly 5,000 displaced children and orphans received help with their schooling, 65 health centres received medicines and equipment, and 63 schools were repaired. Loans were advanced to nearly 300 women, helping them to provide an income for their families.

### Challenges and benefits

Overall, the PAH broadly met its objectives, and an external evaluation for the PYM in October 2000 expressed full satisfaction with the work being done,

### Africa's world war

The latest conflict in the DRC erupted in August 1998, when rebel forces backed by Rwandan and Ugandan troops advanced towards the capital, Kinshasa; troops from Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola intervened and the rebels were pushed back to the east of the country. Peace talks followed in the Zambian capital Lusaka, and in 1999 the six governments involved, along with the rebel Congolese Liberation Movement (MLC) and Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD), signed a peace accord. Fighting continued, and in early 2000 the UN authorised a 5,000-strong monitoring force. Tensions persisted, and in January 2001 President Laurent Kabila, leader of the Rwandan-backed rebel group that ousted long-standing head of state Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997, was killed. His son Joseph took his place. Despite troop withdrawals and statements of support for the peace process, a UN panel reported in November that the warring parties were prolonging the conflict in order to plunder the country's mineral resources. Meanwhile, a US-based refugee agency estimated that around 2.5 million Congolese had died in fighting since 1998. By 2002, a power-sharing agreement was agreed between the Kinshasa government and rebels backed by Uganda, and a peace agreement concluded with Rwanda. Troops from neighbouring countries began to pull out, but there was little sign of a settlement between the various Congolese factions.



© Frances Stevenson

*An emergency water project under way in Bukavu*

and its impact on beneficiaries. However, CELPA faced a number of problems in implementing its humanitarian programmes. The main difficulties stemmed from the war and general insecurity in the country, and funding problems. CELPA has found it difficult to access funds from UN and major international bodies, and its insufficient range of partners means that it will be difficult to continue once Norwegian funding runs out. CELPA has also found it hard to secure training in, and information on, technical areas of work.

The volatility of the local environment meant that, at times, plans had to be changed. A massive influx of displaced people into Kisangani and Bukavu, for example, entailed spending more funds than had been initially allocated to helping displaced populations in these areas. New activities sometimes had to be developed; in Bukavu, assistance with schooling for displaced children was expanded to include supervision for these children for four months in 1998 and 1999.

These difficulties aside, the main lesson of the PAH is that CELPA could reach remote or insecure areas where there was no UN or other international relief presence. Access difficulties often mean that the major relief agencies do not go further than the main towns; in South Kivu, for example, international bodies stay within 50 kilometres of towns because of poor roads and security concerns. Yet a significant number of people have taken refuge in the bush and in isolated

villages, sometimes hundreds of kilometres from urban centres and only accessible on foot.

CELPA's strategic choice to favour the most damaged areas and ones which were not being served by other agencies meant that transport costs for bringing in aid were considerable, and logistics complicated. Sometimes aid had to be transported in small aircraft chartered from traders, and then carried on foot to the final destination in the bush. Poor security also incurred costs; those few brave traders willing to transport goods by lorry included insurance coverage in their haulage charge.

CELPA was the only agency bringing aid to areas such as Muhuzi, Malanda, Kilimbwe, Luhago, Kitibingi, Lweba, Magunda and Kalole in South Kivu; to Samba, Wamaza and Kailo in Maniema; and Weko, Yatolema, Yabaondo, Yalolia, Mombongo and Basoko in Eastern Province. CELPA's local knowledge was also a benefit in securing wider access than that open to international agencies. In eastern DRC, CELPA was able to deal even with local militia groups, called *Mayi-Mayi*, in villages like Kitopo, Ngomiano, Mboko and Kilembwe, gaining access to previously-unreachable populations in areas not under the control of the Rwandan army or the RCD. No international organisation had achieved this.

One of the key characteristics of CELPA's work was that, as a church organisation, programmes were implemented largely by volunteers drawn from its congregations and clergy. Services covering areas like agricultural and health training, loans and education already existed within CELPA, and staff were able to integrate activities associated with the PAH into their ordinary work. By operating through existing church structures, there is, however, a risk that CELPA is seen as partisan, favouring certain sections of the population over others. And as locals, staff may favour members of their own tribe and village. These local pressures are perhaps less felt by international organisations.

Conversely, CELPA's status as a church organisation offered benefits less easily available to international relief agencies. Staff are strongly motivated by their Christian beliefs, and provide a large number of services voluntarily. CELPA's workers have been prepared to take significant risks to help their fellows, whereas international staff may be more concerned for their own safety. Additionally, the use of existing staff and structures – schools, health centres and churches for storing and distributing goods – meant that administrative costs were kept to a minimum, and most of CELPA's humanitarian budget went directly to assisting war-affected people. In the third phase of work up to 2002, for instance, only \$18,000 or around 4.5% of the total fund of about \$400,000 went to project administration.

Compared with international organisations working in DRC, CELPA's humanitarian work has both strengths and weaknesses. Its strengths stem from its position as a local organisation, with access to a



network of existing facilities; significant resources of commitment and faith in its work; the capacity to treat with factions beyond the scope of international agencies; and the ability to reach populations in isolated rural areas, where there is no international assistance. Yet paradoxically, this strength is also CELPA's weakness. The decision to help people far from main centres and out of view of the international agencies means that CELPA's work has attracted very little outside publicity and attention. Although CELPA has done a considerable amount of work and is much appreciated by the population, it is often little known nationally or internationally, and the struggle for funds continues.

**Sadiki Byombuka** is Projects Coordinator for CELPA. His email address is [sadikiby@yahoo.fr](mailto:sadikiby@yahoo.fr).

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## Income-generation in post-conflict situations: is micro-finance a useful strategy?

**Ton de Klerk** reports on one agency's experiences of income-generation programmes in the wake of conflict

Many humanitarian crises are protracted. Political solutions are not found, the economic situation hinders successful reconstruction and development, and development agencies are slow to take over from their relief counterparts. Humanitarian agencies are working increasingly in the 'grey zone' between relief and development. In this environment, agencies are looking for more durable solutions than those offered by traditional relief work. Income-generation activities may offer one such answer by making beneficiaries less dependent on relief assistance, and helping in their economic and social reintegration.

This article is based on an evaluation of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC)'s income-generation programmes in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia, Montenegro and Somaliland, conducted in 2001. These programmes used a range of strategies: grants; interest-free or low-interest loans; and interest-bearing loans aimed at establishing sustainable micro-finance programmes.

### Grants

Grants are the most appropriate tool for income-generation projects in the early post-conflict phase, when conditions do not allow for the issuing of loans. Clients are not yet ready to plan for the future and for long-term economic activities, and their financial situation may not allow loan repayments.

Although there is a widely-held view that the same agency should not implement both grant and loan programmes, in later phases most DRC programmes had complementary grants alongside regular loans,

intended for more vulnerable beneficiaries. The continued availability of grants was appreciated by programme staff, and communities appeared to accept the introduction of stricter financing regimes if grant programmes remained in place. However, there needs to be a clear distinction between grant recipients, selected on the basis of vulnerability, and loan applicants, and the credit functions of each programme need to be kept separate.

The economic impact of grants appeared to be related to their size, and to the criteria used to select beneficiaries. If grants are too small to ensure that the economic activity can be sustained, the economic impact will be limited. Similarly, a tailored approach is required: beneficiaries should be selected on the basis of 'business assessments', and the products delivered should meet their individual business needs. So as not to exclude most vulnerable groups, redistribution mechanisms can be applied. Direct beneficiaries are selected on the basis of their business prospects, but requested to distribute part of their production, or to provide free services, to these vulnerable groups.

### Loans

It is difficult to define the point at which loans can be introduced. Socio-economic surveys or impact monitoring of grant programmes can provide information on the repayment capacity of beneficiaries, but these tools are rarely used in income-generation programmes. Introducing an interest rate can prepare beneficiaries for the interest payments that a micro-finance institution will require in the future. Although any undue competition with micro-finance institu-

tions should be avoided, favourable loan terms might be possible for those high-risk groups typically excluded from micro-finance programmes. This should not conflict as long as these target groups are clearly distinguished.

Loan applications should be assessed on the basis of the economic potential and sustainability of the proposed activity, and the applicant's repayment capacity and credibility. If vulnerability rather than 'business' criteria predominate, repayment problems are likely. An initial selection can be done by vulnerability, but this must be followed by a proper business assessment. In any loan programme, the repayment discipline of the beneficiaries should be of primary concern: if repayments are not enforced, massive delinquency will follow. This will have a negative effect on any future micro-finance programme.

#### Case-study: from grant to loan

Elderly farmer Mr S. lost everything when he and his parents fled Croatia in 1995. He settled in a village in southern Serbia, where he rented a small plot of land. In 1996, he received the grant of a cow from DRC, and four years later received a small interest-free loan to buy some sheep. The loan was repaid on time, and Mr S., now joined by two aunts, has applied for a new interest-bearing loan to buy another cow. He feels sure he can meet the repayment conditions, including interest payments, with the revenue from his small farm.

#### Micro-finance

Not all loan programmes are micro-finance programmes; some may simply aim to help beneficiaries start and develop economic activities. The aim of micro-finance programmes is rather to assure sustained access to financial services. This can be done through formal institutions, and through informal mechanisms such as community-based saving and credit groups.

Formal micro-finance institutions require strict financial management. To be sustainable, the income from interest payments and service fees needs to cover all operational costs, non-repayment losses, capital costs and depreciation of capital due to inflation or devaluation. Proper management information systems are needed to monitor financial performance, and senior staff need to be trained in how to run a 'banking' programme. Long-term commitment is also required: three to five years to establish a viable micro-finance organisation, and a minimum loan capital of at least \$200,000. Equally important are the determination and personal qualities of staff and the capacity to attract new donors.

While some DRC projects in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union developed into micro-finance programmes, in Asia and Africa the focus has been on community-based micro-finance. Since these informal

systems are managed by community members, the costs can be kept low. The use of organisational principles of traditional systems, such as rotating savings and credit groups, can give these systems great strength since the participants are familiar with them. A major weakness is that traditional systems are often based on relatively short rotating cycles. In most of the DRC's programmes, the plan was to hand over the revolving funds to the communities for communal investments.

#### Case study: DRC's income-generation programme in Serbia

DRC started an income-generation programme in Serbia in 1994 as an extension of its community services programme. Grants were issued to larger groups to ensure broad coverage and the democratic management of activities. This approach proved unsuccessful as a tool for income generation because no clear distinction was made between the programme's social and its economic aims. Later, as the purely economic aims of the programme gained precedence, group grants were replaced by individual grants, and proper assessments were made of beneficiaries and their business proposals. In 1997, a 'subsidised' loan programme was introduced, followed by a proper collateral/guarantor system and interest-bearing loans to ensure satisfactory repayment discipline.

The programme developed into two components: grants for the most vulnerable beneficiaries and, following the Kosovo crisis, for displaced people; and micro-credit for economically-capable groups. Separate criteria and implementing procedures were applied to each component. This parallel approach proved successful, and beneficiaries and local counterparts were extremely supportive. In 2002, the micro-credit component was handed over to a local NGO, though the success of this transition depended upon legal conditions, which were not at the time favourable, and on securing long-term funding.

#### How appropriate is micro-finance for a humanitarian agency?

The main reason for developing a micro-finance programme is the absence of financial institutions that meet the needs of poorer sections of a community. They thus fill an institutional gap. For a micro-finance programme, sustainability is an overriding aim, requiring cost-recovering interest rates and the protection of a high-quality loan portfolio. However, this can lead to risk avoidance, and may exclude the very people and sectors that humanitarian agencies aim to assist.

There is no clear answer to the question of whether micro-finance is the right choice for a humanitarian agency. Some argue that the repayment capacity of beneficiary groups is greatly underestimated. Furthermore, without a micro-finance programme the

target group has to rely on informal sources such as money-lenders, who charge even higher interest rates. The opinion of staff in some of the evaluated programmes was that the interest charged was not prohibitive; others were concerned that revenues from the economic activities, agriculture, for example, were too small for high interest charges, or to allow beneficiaries to repay loans.

A programme aware of its humanitarian mandate should be willing to take more risks and include more vulnerable beneficiaries and sectors, or the programme could include mechanisms designed to benefit the wider community. In the DRC's programmes in Azerbaijan, for instance, loan recipients paid into a fund that was used to finance community projects, instead of paying a standard interest fee. Others suggested the use of guarantee funds for such groups as a means of reducing risk. It was also noted that priority attention be paid to cost-efficiency. Efficient micro-finance, resulting in reasonable interest rates to recover programme costs, would be affordable for most clients.

The evaluation of the DRC's programmes showed that there is no one-size-fits-all income-generation strategy for a humanitarian agency working in the 'grey zone'. Micro-finance is attractive since it offers a durable solution, but it requires proper technical and financial support and a long-term commitment on the part of the humanitarian agency. Micro-finance also risks excluding vulnerable target groups.

A humanitarian agency should ask itself whether it really wants to get involved in the development of micro-finance. Specialist micro-finance agencies are better equipped to support such programmes. In some regions, there is a proliferation of small micro-finance

programmes when only a few larger ones have a chance of continuity. An alternative strategy would be to work in the gap between grant or soft-loan programmes and proper micro-finance. Grant or loan programmes applying best practices in micro-credit can be seen as a start; they prepare clients and programme staff for future micro-finance practices. Beneficiaries can upgrade to micro-finance programmes once their asset base has been rebuilt. Soft loan programmes can upgrade to micro-finance programmes or later merge their funds with such institutions. Such a strategy would make it easier for a humanitarian agency to act within its humanitarian mandate, while broadening the social impact of these programmes by linking them with community development efforts.

**Ton de Klerk** conducted the field studies for the evaluation of DRC's income-generation programmes, which was carried out by Quest Consult. He can be contacted by email at [klerkton@xs4all.nl](mailto:klerkton@xs4all.nl), or at [office@quest-consult.nl](mailto:office@quest-consult.nl).

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## NGOs and practical protection in humanitarian crises

*Susan F. Martin and Elizabeth Moller report on some of the key messages from a workshop on practical protection held in Washington late last year*

NGOs have traditionally avoided overt involvement in protection activities; instead, this work has typically been seen as the preserve of specifically mandated organisations such as UNHCR and ICRC. However, when these agencies are absent or over-extended gaps in the protection regime emerge, particularly for internally-displaced and other war-affected people. As a result, the current protection regime is coming under increased scrutiny. NGOs are discussing new roles in protection at field level, and looking for practical approaches to improving the safety and security of refugees and the displaced.

### Promoting practical protection

In December 2001, the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University in Washington DC and the American Red Cross International Division co-sponsored a workshop on practical protection. The workshop offered a four-part strategy to increase the protection afforded by NGOs to refugees and internally-displaced people (IDPs).

First, by their very presence NGOs support protection. Humanitarian presence, by witnessing abuse, can contribute to deterring it. This can, however, create

dilemmas about what to do with this information. If a humanitarian NGO remains silent about the human rights abuse that it has seen, it fails to deter violations, and may even be construed as legitimising these actions. On the other hand, publicly releasing information on abuses could lead to expulsion from a country, thereby depriving civilians of the NGO's assistance altogether.

Second, a relief NGO can provide protection through education and training. The availability of primary and secondary education tends to reduce the number of children conscripted into the military, for example. When women are trained in income-generation skills and are able to reduce their dependence on relief, they also reduce their vulnerability to abuse. They have less need to trade sex for food or other assistance, and they can better protect themselves and their children from other abuses.

Third, NGOs can encourage self-protection by mobilising vulnerable groups. A community that is educated about its rights and endowed with a sense of entitlement can organise its members for mutual protection. This can prove an even more effective deterrent than the presence of outside NGOs.

Finally, a wide range of NGOs can partake in direct primary protection activities. For example, to better protect unaccompanied and separated children from physical abuse, NGOs can help identify family members, reuniting children with relatives or developing networks of foster families. Human rights training can help reduce attacks and other abuses by the local police. Having advance teams scout out and secure areas before displaced people return helps ensure safe repatriation. The design of a refugee or IDP camp also plays a role in protection. Well-planned latrine placement, for instance, protects women by reducing their exposure to sexual aggression; promoting food security reduces the vulnerability of refugees and displaced people to physical and sexual exploitation.

No doubt each NGO evaluating its protection role will establish a different strategy in line with its specific mandate. However, the framework discussed here may serve as a starting-point for NGOs seeking to identify and expand their protection activities.

### **Incorporating practical protection into NGO activities**

The workshop identified two approaches to incorporating protection into NGO activities:

- creating a separate focal point with principal responsibility for protection; or
- revamping every programme with the concept of protection in mind.

There are benefits in identifying protection as a unique and separate function inside an NGO, not least that it gives the protection issue organisational prominence. This kind of internal demarcation can help ensure that NGOs devote resources and time to highlighting protection and working with UNHCR, governments and other NGOs on the issue. However, a separate protection person or unit may have the unwanted side-effect of relieving other

divisions from the need to give protection the necessary attention. The alternative approach – redesigning every programme with protection in mind – essentially means looking at all programming through a ‘protection lens’. This is not a new idea; it has been used in public health and other fields for years. Decisions about vaccination or treatment, for instance, are made with a view to the potential impact on other people and other diseases. At the workshop, there was general agreement that failing to ‘wear a protection lens’ when creating and developing programmes risks causing great injury to the people and societies organisations are trying to help.

### **Forming strategic partnerships to enhance practical protection**

Regardless of the overall approach, protection must occur at the field level, not just at headquarters. Establishing strategic partnerships is among the most effective means by which NGOs can broaden their protection roles in the field, gain access to target populations and increase the resources available for more explicit protection activities. For most of the international NGOs at the workshop, local NGOs offer a way of reaching vulnerable population groups and assessing their protection needs. There are, however, drawbacks and potential dangers to forming partnerships with local NGOs for protection. Political bias is one, cultural bias another. Local NGOs may, for instance, give priority to the education of boys over girls. Another problem is that local NGOs are not necessarily well-informed about conditions in areas of displacement or return, as they may have been forced to curtail their work or even shut down during wartime.

NGOs have facilitated stronger protection at field level through alliances with UNHCR. During the late 1990s, for instance, Save the Children and UNHCR undertook a joint project – Action for the Rights of a Child – which detailed the protection needs of children. The project is now on UNHCR's website. IRC has also undertaken a pilot protection project with UNHCR in Pakistan to screen candidates at risk, and therefore in need of resettlement. IRC works with local NGOs to identify those lacking assistance or prospects of repatriation. Locally-hired lawyers interview applicants to determine if they meet UNHCR's resettlement criteria. In this way, the local NGOs–IRC–UNHCR alliance can distinguish those refugees most in need of UNHCR's protection and resettlement assistance from a much larger group, thereby lightening the burden on UNHCR. This contribution was especially important in Pakistan where, prior to 11 September, UNHCR had only two or three international protection officers for one and a half million refugees.

ICRC has also taken important steps to strengthen its collaboration with the NGO community, particularly through a series of workshops since 1996. Over 50 organisations have participated, and the meetings have promoted useful debates on a wide range of protection questions. Finding new mechanisms for collaboration with NGOs is important in part because of ICRC's strong commitment to confidentiality. ICRC often does not share information with other groups working in the



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field, making partnerships difficult. As relief agencies increasingly advocate speaking up when made aware of unpublicised abuse, ICRC works behind the scenes to gain adherence to the Geneva Conventions. A division of labour between ICRC and NGOs can help ensure that a wider range of strategies is used to protect civilian populations.

Peacekeeping is a further area requiring collaboration. One of the most critical impediments to practical protection is insecurity during conflict. Often, civilians and the humanitarian agencies that seek to aid them are themselves targeted by warring parties. International and local military forces engaged in peacekeeping can play an important role in protecting civilians and aid operations. NGOs in turn can help train peacekeepers and the local military in fundamental human rights.

Partnerships with human-rights groups and refugee advocacy organisations can play an important role in publicising protection problems that go uncovered by operational humanitarian agencies. In one situation, a call from NGOs in Bangladesh alerted an advocacy agency that refugee women and children were being harassed at night. After confirming the information, the agency contacted the US Ambassador, who approached senior officials in the host country. As compared to the local NGOs, the advocacy NGO was able to gain access to key locations, to verify the relevant information from refugees and bring the information quickly to influential decision-makers.

### Training for protection

Before humanitarian workers can promote protection effectively, they must be properly trained. Designing training on protection for field staff whose tasks do not officially encompass this is as challenging as it is important. How should a training component be incorporated into the organisation? Should outside human-rights experts be brought in on a regular basis? Should there be regular training of trainers among the organisation's staff? The financial implications are significant, and high staff turnover in the field only exacerbates the difficulties.

The Reach Out initiative, which began in November 2000, is one potential model for such training. Reach Out has delivered nine training sessions that address protection services to refugees. Sessions use dialogue with participating organisations, covering the gamut of refugee-related activities. Reach Out works closely with UNHCR, and has led training in a variety of refugee locations, including Zambia, Pakistan, Serbia and Thailand. Reach Out holds its training sessions in the field, with a non-legalistic, programme-oriented approach that is hopefully relevant to most aid workers. The principal focus is on refugee protection, rather than the protection of IDPs.



*Children displaced from Kosovo return from a camp water-point*

Local training initiatives are essential to enhancing protection. The internet provides new opportunities to reach large numbers of staff, particularly through interactive websites with online protection training. By making training user-friendly, staff can access it themselves from the field. Ideally, there should be a website with a chat room for sharing ideas and an expert on call to answer field workers' questions and requests. ReliefWeb is a possible portal for this.

Protection training must be more continuous. UNHCR is developing a training programme based on self-learning and self-testing. This requires participants to complete a number of exercises over several months, and to test the results in the course of their work. UNHCR is designing specific modules to train staff generally in protection. After completing the self-taught course, staff attend learning and discussion workshops. Another effective way to train is through mentoring, where less experienced people are paired with more experienced colleagues on a particular project.

### Conclusion

The late Fred Cuny, one of the most creative leaders in the field of disaster response, used the term 'practical protection' to refer to the many activities that field staff could undertake to help ensure the safety and security of the beneficiaries of their assistance. From their own presence in the field and the strategies they adopt, NGOs play an important role in securing greater protection for vulnerable groups. These practical approaches to protection hold great potential for improving the lives of the people whom humanitarian NGOs seek to assist.

**Susan F. Martin** is Director of the Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) in the Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, Washington DC. **Elisabeth Moller** was a Research Assistant at ISIM. The workshop on practical protection was held in Washington DC on 17–18 December 2001. A full summary will appear in *International Migration*, vol. 40, no. 6. See [www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/isim](http://www.georgetown.edu/sfs/programs/isim).

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## Finding, developing and keeping programme managers: a sector-wide problem

*Field programme managers are the lynchpins of any emergency operation. Yet finding them is difficult, managing them is challenging, and they tend to leave their agency – and indeed the sector – at an alarming rate. Barney Mayhew reports on a recent seminar that sought to tackle these problems*

'Which post do humanitarian agencies have most difficulty filling?' If you were asked this question, what would your guess be? The answer, according to many human resources (HR) professionals, is field programme managers. In June, some 50 HR professionals and programme managers attended the fourth Emergency Personnel Network Seminar in the UK to debate why agencies have such difficulty finding, developing and retaining good staff in this crucial role.

### A job for Superman or Wonderwoman?

The key message to emerge from the seminar was that the programme manager's job is exceptionally tough. Any attempt to catalogue the tasks involved, or the skills and personal qualities required, leads to an almost comically long list, for which Wonderwoman or Superman would probably be under-qualified. In March 2002, for instance, the French training organisation Bioforce produced a generic job description that ran to 15 pages. Management responsibilities covered everything from people to finance, security, legal issues and negotiations, while 25 different personal attributes were listed, from patience and common sense to a belief in social justice, sensitivity and the ability to say no. It is not surprising that relatively few people offer themselves for the job, or that many burn out sooner than expected.

Even the most able candidates need training, plenty of support and good people-management skills if they are to succeed. Agencies try to meet these needs, but find it hard to meet them all. As part of the background material for the seminar, 14 current or former programme managers related their experience of being recruited, trained and retained (if they were) by

their agency, whether NGO or UN. Their accounts make fascinating reading. None of the 14 felt that all three stages – their recruitment, training and retention – had been handled in a reasonably professional way. Only two received training before taking up their position. Four said that their agency had made a conscious effort to retain them once their initial contract came to an end, implying that ten had not, even though none indicated that the agency was unhappy with performance.

There is clearly plenty of room for improvement. Development and relief agencies in the UK alone receive thousands of enquiries every week about work opportunities, yet many programme-manager posts go unfilled for months. Short contracts are overused, leading to high staff turnover and loss of programme quality. There is no minimum standard of training for aid workers, nor for programme managers. Many arrive in the field with no specific training for their job, and some without sufficient experience to replace the need for training. Only a handful of agencies have a firm requirement that their staff receive security training before deploying to a war zone, a situation akin to sending a new driver onto the roads without first requiring that they take lessons. It is hard to see how this is justifiable, either in moral or in legal terms. No seminar participant could think of a reason why mandatory security training should not be standard for all new relief workers, before their first assignment to an insecure country. It is hard to see donors refusing to pay for it. Finally, very few agencies have a policy requiring full and detailed handovers between managers in the field; handovers are frequently missed, affecting programme quality, institutional learning and staff morale.

## What can be done?

What can be done to find, develop and keep more programme managers? Many detailed points were raised at the seminar, of which the following give a flavour.

### *Finding staff*

A greater emphasis is needed on 'growing your own' programme managers. Agencies need to take responsibility for producing future programme managers. Too many rely on recruitment from outside, in the hope that other agencies will have provided the necessary training and experience. Agencies should offer longer contracts, possibly for as many as five years, and which are flexible as to location of work. Clearer routes into the sector are also needed. Enthusiastic recent graduates find it hard to get their first job in humanitarian relief, despite the shortage of field staff in many emergency programmes. Individual agencies or inter-agency action could devise various ways to attract new blood. These could include management training schemes or internships, especially if funded by donors, or job-share posts to attract couples. There seems to be an increasing trend towards

### Addressing a new recruit

Below is a suggested 'package' that an agency might offer to a new recruit, in line with the general feeling at the seminar.

- We'd like you to stay with us in this role for five years.
- During that time you will have a secure contract.
- You will be part of a rolling capacity and a nationally and sectorally diverse team.
- You'll begin as a technician/intern/project officer/manager.
- Your promotional prospects could see you as a senior programme manager/agency adviser/in a regional post, etc.
- At the end of your induction your learning and development needs will be assessed, and a personal development plan drawn up. Specific learning will be planned and budgeted for. This will include ten days' formal training per year, and a 2.5% training allowance in your staffing budget.
- For up to one month per year, you will work in other departments or in a development programme, contributing to policy formation and learning.
- Person x will be accountable for ensuring this happens, and that lessons are acted on.
- You will be assigned a mentor, and join a peer learning set.
- You will act as a mentor for persons x, y and z.
- Your role will have an explicit training/person development function.
- We will be open to secondment opportunities with other organisations on a reciprocal basis.
- There will be a system for tracking and recording your performance.

employing nationally-recruited staff on international contracts. This has several benefits, including the experience that such staff can bring, and the often greater loyalty that they display to their employing organisations. The issue of equitable pay remains difficult: should the cost of living in a staff member's home country be a factor in determining levels of pay, or should there be equal pay for equal work, regardless of other factors? The general, though not unanimous, feeling at the seminar was that it is probably fair to take the cost of living into account.

### *Developing staff*

Appraisals of staff performance are essential to ensuring quality, and should assist managers in developing their staff. But because emergency contracts are often for less than one year, the normal system of annual staff appraisals can fall down. More frequent appraisal may be needed.

At the end of a contract, good HR practice is to debrief a departing member of staff. This enables any outstanding issues to be resolved, and produces valuable information and lessons for the agency. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many agencies do not have a system for collating the information and lessons from debriefs, for bringing important items to the attention of the agency's governing board, or for ensuring that policies and procedures are modified accordingly.

Training is also much misunderstood, and apparently undervalued. Recently returned programme managers represent a huge pool of potential trainers, but few are used in this way, and many are lost to the sector altogether. Individual agencies could make more use of them. With the necessary funding and support, training organisations could build a strong team of full-time professional trainers. Most of the skills needed by programme managers are the same, whichever agency they work for. A common training package is an obvious solution. Training costs could be shared if agencies agreed such a package between them, and trained their programme managers (and other staff) in shared courses, run either in-house or by a training organisation.

Having reached the top of their profession as far as field work is concerned, some programme managers may want to stay there. But others may wish to develop their career through a spell at headquarters, time out for a Master's degree, or a secondment elsewhere. Their distance from headquarters, and the high-pressure nature of their work, mean that career development for programme managers needs to be proactive, to ensure that their experience and knowledge is not lost to the agency through neglect. A 'personal development plan' for each staff member is one option, coupled with allocating time and funds for training and mentoring.

### *Retaining staff*

Retaining programme managers requires deep care and attention to them while they are in post. Feeling – and being – valued is crucial. It would be easy to research the

reasons why programme managers leave at such a high rate, with a simple questionnaire covering programme managers from a range of agencies. Once the reasons are known, they can be addressed. Likely reasons include:

- a desire to work in different regions;
- career aspirations;
- being asked to do the wrong job or the job changes in unwelcome ways;
- poor people-management from superiors;
- a lack of recognition of successes;
- isolation;
- weak team structure, cohesion and dynamics;
- the general environment, including risks and work-life balance;
- a lack of accompanied posts;
- stress and burnout;
- issues of leave and rest and recreation;
- dissatisfaction with pay levels;
- a lack of commitment from the agency to the individual; and
- a lack of involvement in senior decision-making.

Research more widely on careers within the sector would help to put the situation of programme managers into perspective. This could include benchmarking staff turnover or retention rates, so that individual agencies could measure their retention performance against the sector average.

The majority of programme managers stop in their thirties. Agencies need to encourage programme managers to stay with their agency once they move on from field work. Such 'routes out' might include:

- subsidising Master's studies in return for a commitment to further service;
- providing funding for part-time study;
- encouraging field staff who need a break to spend time at headquarters, to learn and gain or share experience;
- secondments to headquarters for national staff, and vice-versa;
- making internal vacancies known within the organisation; and
- identifying posts within the organisation that programme managers can be encouraged to consider as possible next steps.

### Towards an HR strategy

Ultimately, agencies need an explicit HR strategy. This should have board-level endorsement and support, should evolve over time and should be incorporated into the evaluation process: standard terms of reference for emergency evaluations should include an assessment of HR performance in the emergency in question.

Measuring the cost of poor HR would show the cost to programmes, in quality and in financial terms, resulting from HR problems. This may not be entirely straightforward to measure, but it should not be too difficult to make a start. It should be possible to measure, for example:

- staff turnover rates;
- the correlation between HR practices (such as average contract length) and staff turnover rates;
- the average time taken to recruit and deploy a new programme manager;
- the cost of recruitment and deployment, compared to the cost of retention measures for existing programme managers;
- the proportion of new programme managers who receive a full handover in the field from their predecessor;
- the number of programmes that didn't happen, or ran into serious difficulty, as a result of HR problems; and
- the costs and benefits of different training courses.

Care would be required in interpreting the results of such measurements. Agencies should avoid industry's apparent addiction to 'metrics', yet some measurement is necessary if senior managers are to know what is really happening with their staff.

A personnel strategy is essential if agencies are to fill their programme-manager posts on time, with qualified people, and keep them. Agencies also need to invest in *potential* programme managers, to ensure a sufficient pool of suitable people for the future. The advantages of doing so are numerous and will have a swift effect on staff morale and the quality of programmes. An agency that sets the lead in this respect will have ex-programme managers banging on its doors, wanting to return to the field. This is a sector-wide problem that will not go away unless agencies address it. Will they take up the challenge?

**Barney Mayhew** is an independent consultant, focusing on ways of improving the effectiveness of international interventions during complex emergencies. He is also involved in training new aid workers, and military and police officers for peacekeeping assignments. He was the Convenor of the EPN Seminar, but writes here in a personal capacity. His email address is [bmayhew@btinternet.com](mailto:bmayhew@btinternet.com).

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For a full report of the Fourth Emergency Personnel Network Seminar, visit RedR's website at [www.redr.org/ePN/coventry/EPN4.htm](http://www.redr.org/ePN/coventry/EPN4.htm).

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# Institutionalising Sphere: 2000–2002

For more than two years, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards have been piloted in 20 different NGO organisations worldwide. In this article, **Sphere Project staff** take stock of progress, and plot a course for the future

The Sphere Project was launched in July 1997 by a group of humanitarian agencies to improve the quality and accountability of disaster response. It has developed a Humanitarian Charter and a set of universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian assistance: water supply and sanitation, nutrition, food aid, shelter and site planning and health services. This article describes the experiences and perceptions of key actors in the Sphere process: the pilot agencies at headquarters and in the field, the Sphere Project staff and Sphere trainers, and the Sphere Management Committee.<sup>1</sup> It is based on visits to 102 pilot-agency field offices in Central America, East Africa and South Asia in late 2001, as well as the views of participants in Sphere training workshops over the last two years.

## Increased awareness ...

Overall, there is evidence of a growing awareness of Sphere among humanitarian actors at all levels: pilot agencies, the NGO community, UN agencies and national government disaster-management departments. Sphere is being incorporated into agencies' policies and procedures for disaster response: of the 102 offices visited, 37 had used Sphere in assessments; 54 had used it in project proposals; 27 had used it in project monitoring; and 24 had used Sphere in evaluations. In some countries, national governments have incorporated some of the Humanitarian Charter's principles and minimum standards into national policies, and even into legislation. In nine out of ten pilot-agency offices visited, at least one staff member was aware of Sphere, and most offices had at least one copy of the Handbook. The majority had first heard of Sphere through internal communication or training, suggesting that pilot agencies have made concerted efforts to communicate information on Sphere to the field. National NGOs tended to hear about Sphere later than did international agencies.

## ... but limited systematic application

Although Sphere has been incorporated into many pilot agencies' procedures, the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards are not yet implemented systematically in the field; while there are many examples of good practice, there is still a gap between awareness and application. The following factors appear to be particularly important in effectively applying Sphere in disaster response:

- country-level support;
- significant investment in well-planned staff training prior to a disaster event;

<sup>1</sup> Sphere's 20 pilot agencies comprise large international organisations and small national agencies, both faith-based and secular. They are based across the world.

- skills, commitment and experience in promoting the participation of affected people in programmes;
- skills in project-cycle management; and
- an agency-wide commitment to Sphere.

Questionnaires conducted during field visits show that Sphere is applied more extensively in project planning and proposals than in assessments, monitoring and evaluation, but that overall application is still limited.

The principal reasons for the limited application of Sphere in assessments are the pressure to respond rapidly following a disaster, and a weak skills base in project-cycle management. In relation to time pressure, most pilot agencies accept that assessment should be iterative, gathering and reviewing situational information over time. For that reason, pilot-agency representatives consider that shortage of time is not an adequate justification, and that Sphere should be used to analyse assessment information, even if this does not happen in the first-stage response. Building skills in project-cycle management should increase Sphere's use in assessments. In relation to the use of Sphere in monitoring, pilot agencies are aware that monitoring in general is a particular weakness. Additional simple monitoring tools in the Sphere Handbook could help to reinforce monitoring capacity. To promote more effective participation of the population at all stages of the project cycle, it would also be helpful to include meaningful indicators on participation in the revised edition of the Handbook, which is due out in October 2003.

Although Sphere is not yet applied *systematically* around the project cycle in disaster response, there are many individual instances where Sphere has been used by pilot agencies. These reveal both successes and difficulties, generating useful conclusions, as well as helping to form views on why Sphere is important, and how it can enhance quality and accountability.

## Beyond the project cycle

The use of Sphere within participatory disaster-response programmes appears to be growing. Agencies with long-term experience of participatory methodologies have been able to share Sphere standards and indicators with communities, and negotiate disaster response or rehabilitation targets based on them. Responsibility for achieving the targets has been divided between the community and agency. Some agencies are debating the relevance of Sphere as a source of long-term development indicators in addition to its use in disaster response. Pilot-agency representatives considered this particularly important for accountability to the affected population. More active preparation and distribution of examples of

## Using Sphere in disaster response

### *In assessments*

- In Sri Lanka, the IFRC and National Red Cross Society undertook a vulnerability survey of a drought-affected population, covering health, water and nutrition. The survey showed that the population could only meet half of the calorie requirements recommended by Sphere. This information was publicised to ensure that the population understood the criteria for food distribution.
- CRS used Sphere in an assessment of the camp-based population in South Sudan, and concluded that good technical staff were essential for an effective assessment/project plan by sector.
- The Red Cross in Rwanda used Sphere to design an assessment for a flood-affected population in Kinyarwanda. The exercise was considered a success.

### *In project planning and implementation*

- Caritas Rwanda used Sphere in calculating food rations for prison populations and those affected by HIV/AIDS.
- In Sri Lanka, Oxfam has systematically worked to bring welfare camps from around 40% of the Sphere indicators to 80%. The team has found that the population must fully participate in order to maintain the standards once they have been reached.
- In Gujarat, CARE used Sphere in planning shelter needs. While generally useful, questions were raised about the size and gauge of tents.

### *In monitoring*

- AHA used Sphere in monitoring sanitation and health conditions in refugee camps in Rwanda; Sphere helped to highlight areas that needed improvement.
- In refugee camps in Pakistan and displaced camps in Burundi, IRC analysed the sanitation conditions in relation to the Sphere indicators, and drew up a detailed plan for improvement.

### *In evaluation*

- The Disaster Emergencies Committee (DEC) used Sphere in its evaluation of the response to the Gujarat earthquake by DEC-funded agencies. The team found that, if information was not collected continuously throughout the monitoring, it is extremely difficult to use Sphere at a later stage.

participation would increase experiences of this nature.

## Inter-agency coordination

Pilot agencies in most countries acknowledged that inter-agency coordination on humanitarian assistance is weak. In some countries, agencies recognised that Sphere has the *potential* to enhance coordination and provide a common perspective on disasters, although this has generally not happened. Although there has been limited coordination in disaster response using Sphere, there are a number of examples of joint agency work using Sphere. Three models have emerged:

- integrating Sphere as a tool for quality and accountability into an existing NGO umbrella or coordination body, and promoting Sphere's application by members, for example the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA) in Sri Lanka and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA);
- establishing new interagency (pilot) groups to promote Sphere. This has been discussed in Honduras, Kenya and India, but it is not clear whether these initiatives were sustained; and
- using Sphere in inter-agency work in a disaster response that is not likely to be ongoing and does not have a separate structure, for example joint assessments using Sphere in the refugee camps in Pakistan, and attempted joint work in Orissa.

## Advocacy

Advocacy using Sphere has met with mixed success,

but some NGOs believe it to be significant in raising the awareness of government officials and donors of the rights of disaster-affected populations. For many, the concept of life with dignity is the most significant principle in advocacy. Pilot agencies report that they are confident in using Sphere as a basis for advocacy given the legitimacy that it has achieved through wide consultation and consensus. In debates on applying Sphere in lobbying and advocacy, some pilot agencies suggest that national NGOs can make a greater impact at local level, while international NGOs may be more effective at national and international levels.

Pilot agency staff members in various countries reported that it is essential for NGOs to share Sphere with government agencies in order to create a favourable policy framework for implementation. Governments also expressed interest in using the Sphere Handbook to inform disaster policies, procedures and legislation in Nicaragua, Honduras, India, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Kenya. In Angola, the government used Sphere and the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced Populations to inform legislation for the displaced. The government has trained Provincial Humanitarian Coordinators in all 18 of Angola's provinces in Sphere, and uses Sphere in planning humanitarian services.

Early in the development of the Sphere Project, agencies expressed concern that some governments

might use it to make increased demands on international agencies and donors by making them accountable for the use of resources at the level of indicators. Except in extreme circumstances, such as Afghanistan in 2001, this does not appear to have been the case. On the contrary, it seems that most of the nine governments visited by the pilot implementation team understand that achieving standards is a joint responsibility, and one which can be constrained by resources.

### Quality

On field visits, pilot agencies frequently noted how Sphere has helped to improve the quality or effectiveness of humanitarian assistance:

- Sphere provides technical indicators of performance, rather than basing proposals on previous emergencies;
- using Sphere as a comprehensive checklist has drawn attention to issues that may otherwise not have been noticed, for example gender and participation;
- exposure to Sphere helps to minimise the misuse of aid. In the Gujarat earthquake response, for example, those agencies that were not aware of Sphere tended to provide culturally-inappropriate items, which were later rejected by the population; and
- Sphere outlines the skills required for a professional response to disasters and demands that NGO staff are better trained and adopt a more professional approach.

### Accountability

Pilot agencies mentioned Sphere's impact on accountability less frequently than they talked about its effects on quality. Nonetheless, Sphere can help to promote accountability to affected people by encouraging participation in assessment and project design and management. Where the population had been informed about the Sphere standards and indicators, pilot agencies reported that communities felt valued, and expressed satisfaction with the disaster response. Following the earthquake in El Salvador in January–February 2001, for instance, the Lutheran

World Federation worked with the local community to assess, design and manage a disaster response programme in shelter, water and sanitation. In Central America and India, World Vision is considering sharing Sphere with local communities as a point of reference.

Some pilot agencies reported that Sphere is particularly important in promoting equity in the distribution of goods and services. The existence of standards helps to increase predictability and reduce differences between agencies working in the same disaster response. One pilot agency observed that this is particularly important in situations of ethnic tension, where differences in rations can rapidly be blamed on discrimination. In trying to promote global equity, Oxfam has used Sphere to analyse differences in disaster response between regions, for example between the Balkans and Africa.

### Ongoing issues

While pilot agencies have made significant progress in training and disseminating Sphere, its practical application in fieldwork remains modest. This gap must be bridged if Sphere is to become a relevant and powerful resource in disaster assistance. This process will clearly take time, but must include a concerted effort to support direct application at the field level. While much of this effort must be done by agencies themselves, there was broad agreement among pilot agencies and Sphere staff that the Sphere Project office should provide support through modest, targeted activities that build on existing foundations and agency interest.

**Sphere staff** are Maggie Brown, Nan Buzard, Sean Lowrie and Joao Neves. An evaluation of Sphere is currently under way, and is due to report in August 2003; interim reports will also be made available on the website: [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org). The revised Handbook is due out in October 2003; in the meantime, feedback forms are available on the Sphere website.

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## The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund: a 'lack-of-Trust' Fund for Afghanistan?

**Jonathan Goodhand and Jawed Ludin** reply to Valéry Ridde's critique of a trust fund for Afghanistan, published in the July issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*

In the last issue of *Humanitarian Exchange* (number 21), Valéry Ridde argued that the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) will (1) sideline NGOs; (2) complicate coordination mechanisms; and (3) lead to the privatisation of health systems. Alternatives to the ARTF are not suggested.

While in our view the article is right to point out the potential pitfalls of the ARTF, it shouldn't dismiss it out of

hand. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the mechanism – in fact, the principle of a central trust fund which all donors support and subscribe to is a good one. It is essential (though possibly too late) to avoid the aid 'free for all' that has characterised other high-profile emergencies in recent years. The key issue in our view is not *whether* there should be a trust fund, but *what kind* of a trust fund it should be, who controls it and in whose interests. Potentially, such a mechanism could help

strengthen and legitimise an embryonic government, enabling it to lead and direct the reconstruction effort.

Ridde's article implies that continuing with 'business as usual' is preferable. This conclusion is based upon a questionable reading of past lessons in Afghanistan and elsewhere. It is also symptomatic of a lack of trust between various aid actors in Afghanistan – something which has a long history and is likely to impede future reconstruction efforts.

To take the author's key arguments in turn. First, to say that the ARTF will complicate aid coordination is rather disingenuous since NGOs have had up to five competing coordinating mechanisms for at least a decade. Adding another will indeed complicate things if no attempt is made to rationalise current arrangements. One of the lessons from the Strategic Framework process is that top-down, centralised, managerial approaches do not work in a fast-changing and complex environment. However, this does not obviate the need for a more coordinated and rational division of labour. NGOs have been able to go it alone for the last two decades because they have not had to work with (and be coordinated by) a central state. Consequently, the aid system has always been a foreign-dominated system, with little Afghan voice and ownership. The ARTF has the potential to enhance coordination and bring coherence to aid efforts around an Afghan-owned reconstruction agenda. The author rightly points to the dangers of 'neo-colonialism' and the aid effort so far has hardly been the 'light footprint' (more of a heavy jackboot) that Brahimi promised. But blaming this on the ARTF is wrong – the same charges of neo-colonialism can be made both in Mozambique, where NGOs had a free hand, and in East Timor, where there was a top-down, UN-dominated structure. The key issue is therefore one of ownership and local control. The current fragmented aid system in Afghanistan is likely to prevent this from developing.

Second, the author is concerned that the ARTF will sideline NGOs. Over the last two decades, international and Afghan NGOs have played a primary role in responding to humanitarian needs and providing basic services in Afghanistan. NGOs have also been important in supporting and training a cadre of educated and committed Afghans who might otherwise have left the region; at least three ministers in the current government come from NGO backgrounds. NGOs are likely to be central to reconstruction efforts in the future, and for the time being have greater operational capacity than any other delivery mechanism. However, the author perhaps champions the role of NGOs too uncritically, and takes an 'NGO-centric' view of the 'post-conflict challenge' in Afghanistan. Reconstruction efforts need to be based upon a more realistic assessment of NGOs' past performance and future role in reconstruction. Although their role will remain important – particularly with respect to the continuing need for humanitarian aid – they will also need to accept that being 'sidelined' is a positive development if this means that the reconstruction agenda is being led by a legitimate Afghan government. This will

mean that NGOs will need to change their outlook. Will they be prepared to relinquish some of their sovereignty and profile? Will they engage with the government (at all levels) rather than attempting to go it alone? Will they make the shift from direct intervention to capacity-building? The task of 'rebuilding a country' should not simply be farmed out to NGOs.

Third, the author cites the 'danger' of privatising health care. In a sense, the Afghan health system is already one of the most 'privatised' in the world – two decades of war and *Taliban* 'downsizing' have meant that government services are skeletal at best. Afghan families rely on a combination of traditional remedies, NGOs and private clinics for health services. To talk of a state-sponsored national health service funded through tax revenues is, for the foreseeable future, as much a donor fantasy as the idea of a liberal, democratic enabling state in Afghanistan. This argument does, however, highlight a more serious point regarding the kinds of policy prescriptions that are likely to emerge from the World Bank. Tensions are already beginning over whether Afghanistan should, for instance, accept loans for road-building, rather than grants. Experience from other 'post-conflict' settings suggests that the standard package of neo-liberal policies is likely to exacerbate structural tensions and increase the risk of renewed conflict.

Returning to the ARTF, we recognise that, although the concept is a good one, there will inevitably be pitfalls associated with the way it is implemented in practice. How to strike a balance between developing capacity at the centre with the imperative for quick delivery in the provinces? How to ensure that donors follow through on their aid pledges? How can donor rhetoric about putting the Afghan people in the 'driving seat' be translated into meaningful ownership and control over aid strategies and practice? NGOs can play an important role in influencing how the 'rules of the game' are played out, but they are no longer the only game in town. They are likely to be more influential if they recognise the need to engage and adapt. While pinpointing weaknesses is in order, to rule out what could potentially be a constructive initiative is wrong. In the context of a chronic aid deficit in Afghanistan (to which Ridde also alludes), it is a priority that a mechanism is put in place that encourages sustained donor commitment, enables the Afghan government to lead the reconstruction agenda and brings a level of coherence and transparency to a historically 'anarchic' aid scene.

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Valéry Ridde's article, 'Why a Trust Fund Won't Work in Afghanistan', is on the HPN website at [www.odihpn.org/report.asp?reportID=2458](http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?reportID=2458).



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# Hard choices: a critical review of UNHCR’s community development approach in Nepal

**Robert Muggah** describes the effects of a decade of ‘developmentalist’ programming in Nepal’s refugee camps

The UNHCR’s community development approach (CDA) consists of a disparate set of guidelines designed to strengthen the self-reliance of refugees during protracted refugee situations. It sees refugees as agents of their own development, and aims to prepare them for a durable solution to their plight. Key features include promoting democratic camp management and participatory decision-making, encouraging women’s involvement in camp life and expanded access to health care and education. But in the absence of basic standards or benchmarks, the CDA is being used by UNHCR’s implementing partners, as well as by specialised units within the agency itself, as an opportunity to advance rights-based development for its own sake.

This raises a number of concerns to do with the desired aims of the CDA, the accountability of UNHCR and its implementing partners, and the capacity of UNHCR to administer development while preserving its core mandate. Critics argue that the embrace of a more developmental approach has corroded what should be UNHCR’s main focus, namely legal protection and a more vocal and political engagement with governments that abrogate their legal obligations to refugees; in effect, the burden of responsibility has shifted from expelling countries and donor governments to UNHCR, its implementing partners and host states. In the light of these concerns, this article casts a critical eye over CDA as experienced in Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal.

## The evolution of the CDA

Since the early 1990s, protracted refugee situations have become the rule rather than the exception. In Africa alone, millions of refugees have spent perhaps

decades in camps with little or no prospect of returning to their home countries. In many cases, decades-old camps still operate with the same procedures and standards as when they were first established. The increasingly entrenched nature of these refugee situations has coincided with growing intolerance for them among donors, and debate over the merits of linking relief and developmental approaches to assistance. It has also come amid a drastic reduction in funding for UNHCR; on the eve of its fiftieth anniversary, for example, the agency was forced to borrow \$40 million from its working capital to finance programmes. Since 1992, when contributions to UNHCR peaked at over \$1,000m, there has been a steady decline; in 2000, contributions stood at around \$700m. The agency is unable to fund its most basic protection and assistance work, especially in Africa.

The CDA emerged in response to these various pressures. Its stated objectives are fourfold:

- to strengthen refugee initiative and participation in order to ensure ownership of all phases of a programme;
- to reinforce the dignity and self-esteem of refugees;
- to increase self-reliance; and
- to increase the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of UNHCR’s work.

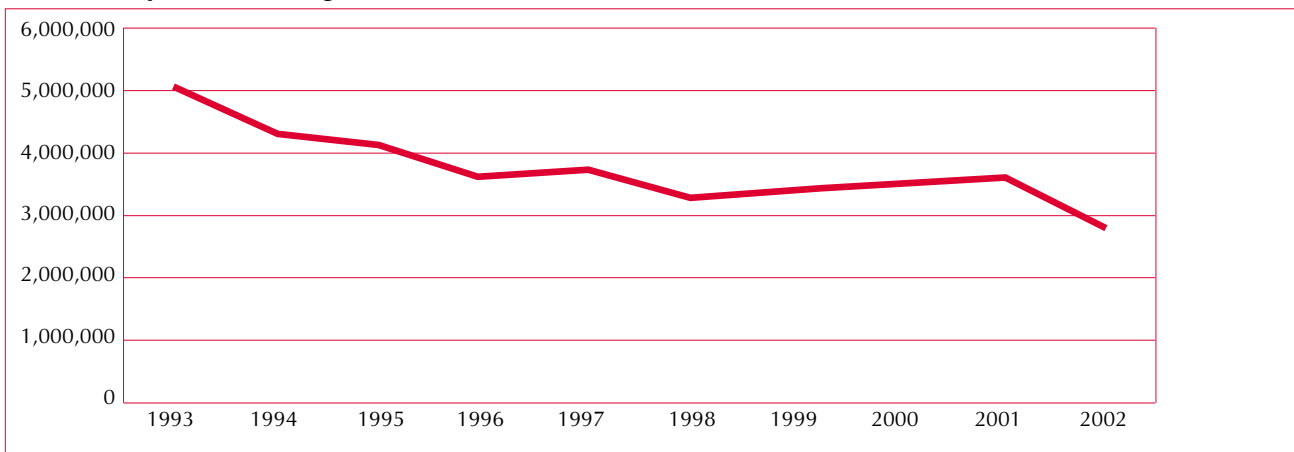
The guidelines that make up the CDA reflect progressive thinking in the development community, which has seen a shift away from a service-delivery culture to one that engages refugees in their own development and treats them as agents rather than subjects. UNHCR’s approach is, however, distinct from more conventional development thinking in one important

## Literacy and mortality rates: a comparison

Country/group	Youth literacy rate (%)	Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000)	HDI ranking
India	72.6	96	124
Pakistan	57.0	110	138
Bhutan	–	100	140
Nepal	60.5	100	142
Nepal refugee camp population (1997)	75	39	

Note: Interviews with staff from Caritas and the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA) indicate that the indices of youth literacy and under-five mortality have continued to improve since 1997.

## UNHCR-Nepal annual budget, 1993–2002 (US\$)



Note: Figures for 2002 are projected, as of June 2002.

respect. The CDA does not explicitly promote development as a cluster of indivisible human rights, but rather protects a number of core rights *as a means to an end*. Whereas development agencies aim to promote the development of vulnerable groups irrespective of their political situation, UNHCR's objectives under the CDA are by definition limited to achieving a durable solution.

This distinction is crucial, but it does not seem to be fully shared by UNHCR's implementing partners, nor by specialised units within UNHCR itself, such as Gender, Children and Health. Rather, CDA is being used to advance rights-based development in its own right, with widely divergent standards and benchmarks, and without clear exit-plans. But while refugees in protracted situations no doubt warrant development, UNHCR is not a 'development' organisation; its primary mandate is to protect refugees in the short term, and to find durable solutions to their plight in the long term. As the case of Nepal demonstrates, the uncritical application of a rights-based approach can have unintended – and undesirable – consequences.

### The CDA in practice: Bhutanese camps in Nepal

Nepal hosts seven Bhutanese refugee camps in the Jhapa district in the east of the country. The official refugee population stands at 101,300, mostly Bhutanese of Nepali origin, referred to as *Lhotsampas*. The first refugees arrived in 1991 following new citizenship regulations and a 'Bhutanese programme' which discriminated against minority groups such as the *Lhotsampas*. There was a further influx in 1992, and a small trickle has continued in the months and years since.

UNHCR and its implementing partners have been promoting CDA since the earliest days of the emergency, with startling results. Refugees enjoy a high degree of self-reliance and participation in the delivery of goods and services, as teachers, health workers and construction workers. There is a widespread commitment to democratic decision-making, gender equality and the rights of women; levels of primary, secondary and tertiary education are

high – 75% literacy and almost 100% school enrolment – and levels of mortality and morbidity low in comparison with the Nepalese population. The primary and preventive health programme is believed to have contributed to a marked reduction in the birth rate, as well as reducing under-five mortality and malnutrition. Indeed, through a combination of outside help and their own resolve and dynamism, the refugee population's development indices exceed those of virtually every other population group in South Asia. Considering the circumstances, this is an admirable achievement.

Perversely, however, the very development of the refugee *population* has made the prospect of a durable solution to the refugee *problem* less and less likely. The programmes and interventions by UNHCR and its implementing partners, which have sought to promote the rights of refugees to democratic decision-making, education and gender equality, have also strengthened the resistance of the Bhutanese regime to repatriation. For Bhutan, permanently settling a radicalised, pro-democratic and rights-literate population is an unwelcome prospect in a country that denies its own people the right to vote. Negotiations between the Bhutanese and Nepalese governments have yielded little, and three years after the establishment of a Joint Verification Committee (JVC), not a single repatriation has taken place.

The prospects for settlement within Nepal are only marginally better. The disproportionate assistance and generally better well-being of the refugees has generated tensions with the host population, and the Nepalese government is increasingly reluctant to allow refugees the option of local integration for fear of labour competition and tensions over land. Although the Nepalese government has provided protection for the refugees since 1991, they are not legally entitled to work, own land or engage in political activities.

Within the camps themselves, there are also signs that the lack of a solution to the refugee situation is



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*A participatory exercise under way in a Nepalese camp in Jhapa*

having an increasingly corrosive effect. Participatory research and key informant interviewees revealed increases in alcoholism, child marriages, polygamy, prostitution and the trafficking of women; disappearances of handicapped children are on the rise, suicide rates have increased and levels of mental illness are unusually high. While the general welfare of refugees remains good in comparison with other refugee populations, and the problems emerging in the camps are also present in the host communities, their prevalence nonetheless illustrates a gradual social deterioration. Meanwhile, UNHCR's programmes in Nepal have suffered deep budget cuts, falling from just over \$5,000,000 in 1993 to a projected budget of \$2,800,000 in 2002. As a result, UNHCR has tried to scale back its CDA activities, particularly in health-care. This has met with fierce resistance from a well-educated and rights-aware refugee population, and there is growing dissatisfaction with the assistance provided by UNHCR and its implementing partners. Many leaders of the refugee community, as well as educated refugees, have left the camps, and there are clear signs of stress among those that remain.

Because UNHCR-Nepal has not set clear benchmarks or objectives for its care and maintenance activities, its implementing agencies have provided services and applied the CDA for its own sake. The UNHCR-Nepal operation has become, in effect, a development operation, but without a mandate for development. This has resulted in undeniable improvements in the health and well-being of the beneficiary population – yet at a cost. Developing the political rights of women and improving access to health and education have predictably led to heightened political activism and increased demands for constantly improving services. Perversely, the refugee population's sustained access to development assistance and prolific campaigning for democracy have damaged prospects for a durable solution. The more democratically-inclined the

refugees, the less likely it is that the Bhutanese government will allow their safe repatriation. Even if repatriation was a possibility, refugees with a strong desire to promote gender equality would find integration into Bhutan's traditionally patriarchal society difficult. The wider Bhutanese population, let alone its government, shares few common values in this regard.

### **Setting the bar too high?**

The CDA consists of a set of pragmatic and cost-saving guidelines for UNHCR and its implementing partners. In as much as these policies endeavour to promote self-reliance and refugees' ownership of services and programmes, they also reflect the dominant rights-laden norms advanced by Western institutions,

including the UN. It is impossible to refute the inherent value of education, healthcare, women's empowerment and democratic decision-making, and many NGOs have applauded UNHCR's espousal of a developmental approach to the care and maintenance of refugees in protracted situations. However, where this approach is uncritically interpreted, and in the absence of clear or acceptable standards and benchmarks, the CDA may have unintended – and in some cases negative – consequences for refugees' well-being, promoting dependency rather than reducing it, generating expectations that the cash-strapped UNHCR cannot hope to meet and undermining the prospects for safe and dignified return or permanent host-country settlement.

The CDA was conceived by UNHCR as a means of strengthening self-reliance and improving the 'delivery' of services in lieu of a durable solution. But instead, the bar has been set higher – if indeed it has been set at all. It is vital that the UNHCR recognises the distinction between means and ends. There is an urgent need for UNHCR and its partners to develop appropriate standards for CDA. At the very least, the organisation must move beyond basic emergency standards in protracted refugee situations towards minimum standards that strengthen self-reliance and empower refugees, but do not simultaneously undermine the prospects of achieving a durable solution.

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## Australia and regional humanitarianism

*The bomb attack in Bali in October 2002, in which many Australians died, underscored Australia's particular vulnerability to events in its immediate region. In this piece, part of our series on major donor governments, Adele Harmer looks at the regional focus in Australian aid*

Because of where it is, Australia more than most government donors is closely associated with a particular set of developing countries. It is one of few OECD DAC donors located in a developing region, and the needs of the Asia-Pacific are at the forefront of its overseas aid programme. Given the limited resources available, this is arguably necessary and appropriate.

### The policy context: humanitarian need in the Asia-Pacific

For 2002–2003, the humanitarian programme has a budget of A\$116m (\$63m), of which A\$52m is for emergency aid, A\$49m for humanitarian aid as contributions to specific humanitarian agencies and A\$15m for a new refugee allocation. While modest compared to the larger humanitarian donors, the Australian humanitarian aid budget has grown by 30% over the last five years, and now comprises some 7% of the overall aid programme of A\$1.8 billion (\$980m). The increased importance of humanitarian aid within the aid programme reflects the increased need for humanitarian intervention in the Asia-Pacific.

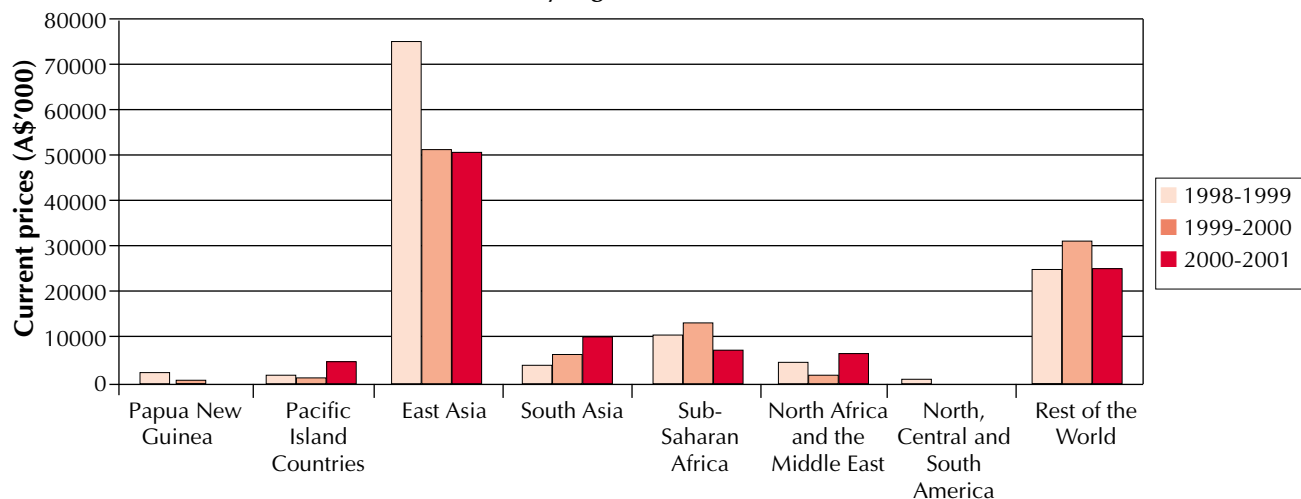
Over the last five years, the Asia-Pacific has suffered an unusually large number of shocks. These include:

- civil war in the Solomon Islands;
  - separatist conflict on the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea (PNG);
  - drought in PNG, a devastating tsunami and recurrent severe flooding in China, Vietnam and Cambodia;
  - continued humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in Cambodia, particularly landmine clearance; and
  - famine in North Korea.
- a major financial crisis, with attendant political instability in major regional states, notably Indonesia;
  - upheaval and violence in East Timor;
  - internal conflict in Indonesia's Maluku islands and the provinces of Aceh and Ambon;

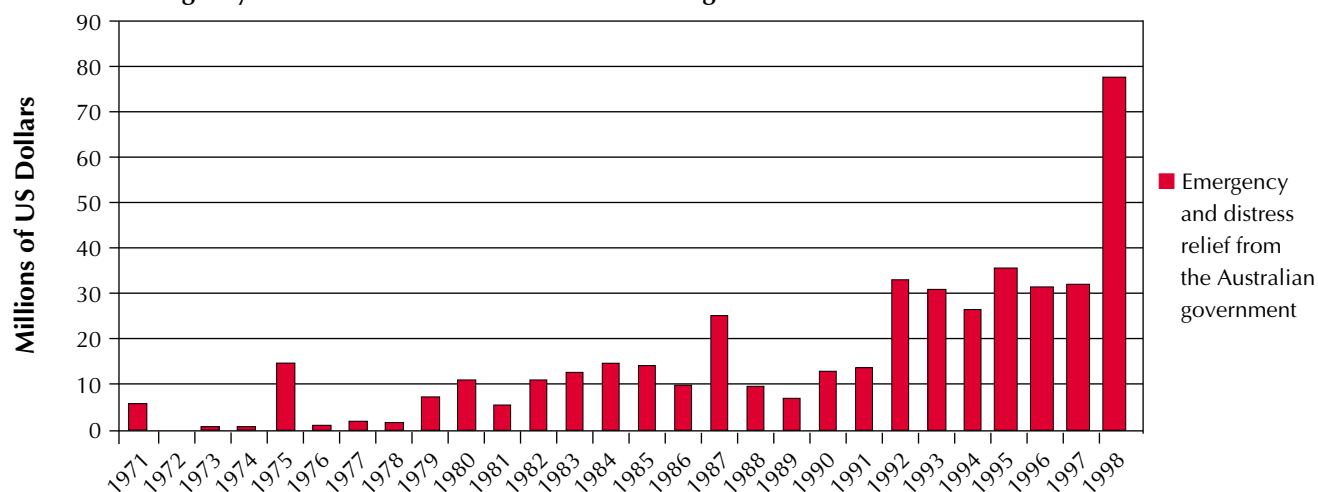
For Australian policymakers, crises in the so-called 'Arc of Instability' to the country's north have underscored just how closely the country's future is tied to the stability of its neighbours. In 1997, this regional focus was given policy expression in *Better Aid for a Better Future*. Although there have been subsequent statements, including *Australian Aid: Investing in Growth, Stability and Prosperity* (2002), *Better Aid for a Better Future* remains the government's principal policy statement on the aid programme.

*Better Aid* stated that the objective of the Australian aid programme is 'to advance Australia's national interest by assisting developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development'. This expressly recognises that, given the importance of Australia's regional relations, reducing poverty in the region contributes directly to the national interest. Conversely, this formulation also recognises that the national interest can influence how, where and on what Australian overseas aid is spent. The policy statement identified 'rapid relief in natural disasters and emergencies' as one of six principles guiding the aid programme, thereby recognising

**Australian humanitarian assistance by region, 1998-1999 to 2000-2001**



**Emergency and distress relief from the Australian government**



humanitarian assistance as an integral component of Australian official aid.

In 2001, the government unveiled its *Humanitarian Program Strategy*. The strategy reflects the changed regional setting through a tighter regional focus in support of peace and stability. It explicitly incorporates a number of current trends among donors, such as improved humanitarian analysis and planning, better policy coherence across government departments, a move away from simply responding to disasters to a better incorporation of disaster preparedness and mitigation, and capacity-building for international humanitarian organisations and local groups.

It is especially noteworthy that the strategy addresses people trafficking, particularly trafficking to Australia. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which administers Australia's aid programme, has been tasked to work closely with the Immigration Department to develop and manage support for countries of first asylum and to support voluntary return. Attention to this issue reflects a recent and potentially unwelcome develop-

ment in Australian policy, whereby the aid programme has been used to help finance responses to the country's asylum dilemma. Asylum is a contentious and sensitive issue in Australian politics, as demonstrated by the coverage of the *MV Tampa* case and the relocation of Afghan asylum-seekers to the Pacific island of Nauru, as well as continued discussion of the treatment of asylum-seekers in detention.

A second key policy development has been the formal recognition of conflict as a major feature of the Australian humanitarian environment. This year's budget states that a major task for the aid programme is to deliver a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, reduction and management, as well as recovery in the aftermath of conflict. To this end, a *Peace, Conflict and Development Policy (2002)* has been formulated. This supports foreign and defence policy goals in areas where humanitarian and development activities are seen as useful in supporting peace and stability in the region. The policy identifies in particular aid interventions that support conflict prevention, peace-building and good governance.

Alongside its regional obligations, Australia also seeks to contribute to major global emergencies. These contributions are made through core funding of the UN and other international humanitarian organisations, as well as in response to particular emergencies. In 2001–2002, Australia allocated A\$40m to Afghanistan, making it the country's second-largest humanitarian response ever, surpassed only by East Timor in 1999–2000. The 2002–2003 Aid Budget Statement notes that 'this contribution complements Australia's military and diplomatic support as part of the international coalition against terrorism' – a good example of how Australian national interest influences Australian aid programming.

### Structure, administration and bureaucracy

AusAID is an autonomous government agency under the portfolio of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The aid programme also has a Parliamentary Secretary to whom the Minister delegates a number of day-to-day responsibilities. The Director-General of AusAID reports directly to the Minister on all aspects of aid policy and operations, and reports administratively to the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as a member of the department's executive management group.

AusAID's Humanitarian and Emergencies Section (HES) is responsible for administering the humanitarian aid programme. HES also takes the lead on issues such as landmines and relations with key multilateral humanitarian organisations, like the UN and the Red Cross. AusAID does not have an operational role in delivering Australian humanitarian aid, which is most often provided through multilateral agencies and Australian NGOs. Where an operational response by the government is required, AusAID can draw on the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Emergency Management Agency.

The humanitarian programme budget falls under AusAID's Global Programme, which also includes the multilateral, NGO and Volunteer, Development Research and Public Information programmes. Humanitarian funds also come from country, regional, NGO and multilateral programmes, which by the end of a financial year can considerably increase the amount spent on humanitarian assistance across the Agency. AusAID also funds a Direct Assistance Programme for diplomatic missions to undertake small grant activities, which can be used for humanitarian interventions.

AusAID's closest partners within government are the DFAT, the ADF and the Department for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). These three are much larger entities than AusAID, and each has a strong Cabinet Minister. The closest department, DFAT, also shares the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who has the final word on all aspects of aid and foreign policy. AusAID has some sway in inter-departmental issues in those countries where it is most heavily engaged, particularly PNG and the Pacific, and where the aid relationship is a major part of overall bilateral relations. However, the

larger and more powerful bureaucracies are usually more successful in pushing through their preferred policies. As with many donor organisations, the Defence Department has become a more regular partner for AusAID. The ADF has operated parallel to, or directly with, AusAID in several of the region's largest humanitarian situations, including in East Timor, PNG and the Solomon Islands. Relations between AusAID and the ADF, while new and evolving, have been positive overall, although AusAID remains much the weaker partner.

### Public debate

There is an absence of energetic national debate or discussion on humanitarian issues within the NGO or academic community, and among the Australian public more broadly. This is a product of the weakness of the debate on development issues as a whole. The government struggles to communicate effective messages on the importance of Australia's aid programme, and often finds itself having to counter the public perception that aid is ineffective and a waste of public funds that should be spent at home. Although public support does surge following major crises – notably East Timor in 1999–2000 – this sporadic engagement has not translated into sustained or informed dialogue. Australian academics and NGOs occasionally stimulate internal debate on humanitarianism, but this is often inward-looking and far below the level of discussion in Europe and North America.

### Future directions

By global standards, Australia's humanitarian aid programme is modest, and AusAID has limited resources to dedicate to humanitarian issues. Given this, the regional approach that is the basis for Australian humanitarian assistance is arguably most appropriate. Unless the regional environment improves and the local pressure on Australia's humanitarian aid programme diminishes, it is unlikely that the country will manage to do more.

Within this context, the aid programme faces a number of challenges. Policy parameters and strategies are now being put in place to govern humanitarian aid. However, strong analysis, sound programming and good operational execution must underlie this policy guidance. To ensure that AusAID develops and maintains a strong humanitarian aid culture, there must be investment in expertise and there must be greater debate on humanitarian issues. Humanitarian aid is moving in complex new directions, which call for a deeper understanding of the humanitarian aspects of Australia's regional environment, and greater expertise in the practice of aid.

This will not only improve internal analysis and decision-making, but will also enable AusAID to make a more persuasive case for effective humanitarian response, in the face of stronger departments with differing policy objectives. This requires building a comparative advantage in lessons learned and best

practice in policy and operational issues. It also calls for a strong understanding of past and potential humanitarian issues affecting the region. In a country focusing on regional results and improved performance, good humanitarianism and development should have a voice when policy decisions are being made.

There is a need to invigorate humanitarian debate in Australian society, at least within the NGO community and universities. In the absence of informed public debate, there will be limited room for improvement and innovative solutions. It should be a responsibility of government to engender more expertise and interest in the delivery of good humanitarian aid.

**Adele Harmer** is a Research Officer with the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI. Between 1998 and 2001, she worked for AusAID. In addition to working on policy development, Adele was posted to the Parliamentary Secretary's office to provide advice on policy and programming issues regarding the implementation of the Australian aid programme.

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For more on Australia's aid programme, see AusAID's website: [www.ausaid.gov.au](http://www.ausaid.gov.au). Other useful sites include the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: [www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au); the OECD: [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org); and the Australian Council for Overseas Aid: [www.acfoa.asn.au](http://www.acfoa.asn.au).

See also:

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## War, money and aid

*That relief aid has an impact on war economies – and at worst is guilty of fuelling or prolonging conflict – has become almost an article of faith within the humanitarian community. Yet this has been accepted in the absence of any real monetary analysis. As Roger Persichino explains, a close look at the economics of money in relief yields some surprising results*

Over the last decade, a great deal of attention has focused on the impact of relief aid on local power structures and the political economy of conflicts. Although the impact of relief is traditionally hard to assess, most observers now believe that, in one way or another, assistance fuels conflict. In other instances, aid has been said to distort local prices or salary scales. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to analysing the actual economy (or economies) in question. By looking at specific examples of actual war economies, this article aims to show that the adverse impacts of aid may in fact be overstated.

### The valuation of aid: the case of Afghanistan

One way to gauge the real impact of relief assistance in conflict areas is through the valuation of aid relative to other sources of money within the economy. Thus, in Afghanistan we can compare the local value of aid with the value of opium sales and local trade under the *Taliban*.

In 1998 and 1999, according to the UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, Afghanistan produced about 2,500 tonnes of opium, the proceeds from which were said to fund the *Taliban* regime. A kilo of opium exiting Afghanistan was sold at about \$10. Thus, total opium production

could be valued locally at about \$25 million per year. If we assume that the *Taliban* received 50% of this amount in 'tax' – a high-end estimate – that would imply that the opium trade earned the regime \$12.5m a year. In comparison, in 1996 and 1997 aid to Afghanistan was worth \$250m a year, according to the UN. If we assume that, at a minimum, 5% of this amount was diverted by the *Taliban*, then that would give us a figure of, again, \$12.5m. In this model, the *Taliban's* revenues from taxing opium at 50% equal its revenues from the diversion of 5% of total aid, although it is certain that the actual revenues accruing to the *Taliban* were in fact lower than this.

To put these figures into perspective, according to the World Bank some \$3 billion-worth of trade, excluding drugs and guns, was done each year in the Kabul Valley, roughly between the Kabul-Jalalabad area and the tribal zones in Pakistan. This is over *ten times* the amount of aid for the whole country, and over 100 times the local value of opium production. Again, the actual taxable amount on which the *Taliban* could gain revenue is impossible to estimate, but is certainly much lower than the overall total turnover. Nonetheless, since the figures for opium production and local trade both signify turnover, we



can compare their relative magnitude. There is no doubt that, to an extent, aid financed the war economy in Afghanistan. However, the total aid that entered Afghanistan paled in comparison with the size of the local economy, and its impact was dwarfed by the local economy's contribution.

A related point raised by the Afghan example is that, for any analysis of the potential impact of aid on a war economy to be meaningful, aid has to be valued locally. In Afghanistan, aid, and the World Food Programme's food aid in particular, are valued at the point of origin, and include costs for shipping and logistics which have little relevance to local economics. The actual local value of aid is therefore substantially lower, further decreasing the potential contribution of relief to the war economy.



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*A man surveys a poppy crop in Jalalabad, Afghanistan*

### **The velocity of money: the case of Somalia**

The following example, concerning currency fluctuations in Somalia, shows that we also need to take into account the speed, or what economists call the *velocity*, at which money, including aid money, circulates within the war economy. In other words, it is not only a question of the value of aid relative to other sources of revenue, but also of how quickly and in what ways aid funds are circulated and used.

Currency fluctuations in Somalia have been erratic since 1993, though broadly speaking depreciations in the Somali Shilling against the US dollar can be traced to fresh currency inflows in the large markets of Mogadishu, via transactions by a handful of local businessmen. The total amount of money introduced into Somalia in this way in 2001 has been estimated at between \$30m and \$50m. It is uncertain whether this amount was directly related to the introduction of newly-minted currency or to the re-injection of other money (for instance laundered cash); probably a combination of the two. For practical purposes, it can be considered as an inflow of new money relative to the local market. In comparison, remittances reaching Somalia through the Al Barakaat money-transfer service until its closure in November 2001 were estimated at \$250m to \$300m yearly. Remarkably, although remittances were so much larger than fresh currency inflows, they accounted for virtually no devaluation in the Shilling against the dollar on local foreign-exchange markets.

This apparent paradox is explained by the differences in how the two types of inflow actually reach the market. The total amount of remittances is indicative of Al

Barakaat's financial turnover, but can also be interpreted as the aggregate sum of many small individual holdings. This sum is actually split over time between thousands of small households in several distinct geographical areas, all linked to numerous distinct local markets. In turn, these households can save part of this money, and spread their expenses over time. This results in a slow diffusion of each holding into the local markets. This steady inflow of currency has little effect on the Somali Shilling's value. Conversely, currency inflows channelled by businessmen reach the money market in bulk. There is no gradual diffusion process, and monies are tied not to a multitude of small markets, but to one or a few large ones. This means that this inflow is much more disruptive, hence the observed depreciation of the Somali Shilling against the dollar.

Both types of currency inflow are foreign-exchange transactions. In that sense, they are of a similar nature; where they differ is in how they are actually used. Remittances are used as a means of payment (with savings held for future payments by households), while 'businessmen inflows' are used for financial transactions. This distinction suggests that the economic concept of velocity – 'a statistical averaging of money that moves with money that is mostly at rest' – may be a useful tool in analysing the impact of aid on a war economy. Crudely put, velocity measures the speed at which money circulates in an economy. The example above discussed how two monetary inputs entered the Somali markets at a different velocity, with very different effects on the local economy. In the Somali context, the velocity of remittances is much smaller than the velocity of fresh currency. Although much more difficult to quantify, it is likely that the Afghan Hawalas, operating under almost the same procedures as Al Barakaat, lend

themselves to the same conclusions and analysis. Essentially, small amounts with high velocity have a substantially larger impact than large amounts with low velocity.

### The velocity of aid: the case of southern Sudan

Either through distributions targeting individuals or households, or through the payment of salaries to national staff, relief disbursements are by nature discrete, and in that sense similar to the Al Barakaat remittances. In most cases, they can thus be expected to have *neutral velocity* relative to the local economy. In other words, they are not distorted by velocity-induced effects.

However, as the case of south Sudan shows, this is not always the case, nor does it account for the micro-effects of aid when distributions are concentrated in one geographical area. The economy, or rather the economies, of southern Sudan are very different from Afghanistan or Somalia. First, they rely on barter or other forms of valuation, such as cattle in Nuer and Dinka areas, while cash trade predominates in the areas bordering Uganda. Second, the geography is hostile and the transport network, where any exists, is at best dilapidated. This has the dual effect of inducing a very low velocity baseline and fragmenting the economy into several small units concentrated around major local markets. By contrast, aid has a much greater velocity. At the local level where distributions actually occur, it is extremely likely that aid has a greater impact on the local economy in terms of relative volumes than it would have in other contexts. This has the well-known effect of making any distribution site a potential target for raids.

In cash-based areas, relief items can be sold on the market or confiscated. The analysis developed above for Somalia and Afghanistan is thus likely to hold. However, this cannot apply in most of the northern regions of southern Sudan, where the local economies are not monetised. Local market constraints obviously prevent any meaningful transfers from one area to another to the benefit of a faction engaged in the conflict. Aid must therefore be consumed locally, which can only benefit a small proportion of any given warring party. If we assume that most aid is concentrated in only a few areas, it may follow that the impact of aid is uneven across a war economy, and so needs to be assessed in a more localised way. The concept of ‘economy zones’, introduced in relief work by Save the Children, might prove a useful starting point from which to define the relevant geographical units within which such measurements could be made.

### Conclusion

Standard tools of monetary analysis can usefully address the question of whether aid delivered into a war economy has a quantifiable impact upon the finances available for, or accessible through, war. Specifically, valuation based on local rates can be used for comparative and policy-making purposes. A careful examination of the velocity of aid relative to the local environment

would allow for considerable fine-tuning of the analysis. Standard tools for this purpose exist for peacetime economies, and could be applied to conflict economies at macro and micro levels.

A further issue is to do with *timing*. For example, it is likely that, in the crises in Kosovo or East Timor, there was a very high level of inputs in the first months of the response, and a lower level of inputs in later months. Consequently, the impact on the local economy is likely to be greater in these first months, certainly in terms of magnitude and probably in terms of velocity. An analysis such as this might prove useful when phasing relief in and out.

The examples above suggest that the overall impact of aid on conflicts may be overstated, but they do not imply that there is no impact at all. It is clear that, in countries like Afghanistan, relief aid to one degree or another is absorbed into the wider economy. Some proportion of relief resources is likely to reach warlords or rebel movements, whether through neglect or diversion. What these examples do demonstrate is the need for a clearer analysis of this process. By comparing the local value and velocity of aid to that of the overall resources a given group can access, it might be possible to approach an answer.

**Roger Persichino** has worked in Afghanistan and Sub-Saharan Africa as project manager and head of mission for several years. He recently carried out assessment missions in Zimbabwe, the northern Caucasus and Côte d’Ivoire. The Afghanistan and southern Sudan examples draw on personal experience and conversations with people familiar with both countries; for Somalia, material is drawn from meetings with NGOs and agency representatives in Nairobi, and from NGO situation reports.

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## HPN Network Paper 41

### **Towards a politically informed approach to humanitarian programming: how can a political economy approach help?**

**By Sarah Collinson with Michael Bhatia, Martin Evans, Richard Fanthorpe, Jonathan Goodhand and Stephen Jackson. December 2002.**

A widening recognition of the ethical, political and practical complexities of providing relief in situations of conflict has led to increasing debate among humanitarian agencies on the meaning, implications and delivery of humanitarian assistance amid chronic conflict and political crisis. Humanitarian agencies have come to recognise that, while they are mainly concerned with delivering neutral or impartial emergency assistance to populations in need, they are also important political and economic actors. By providing public welfare services and relief goods like food, or more directly through protection, rehabilitation or peace-building activities, agencies unavoidably form part of the local political economy.

This paper describes a recent ODI project exploring how political economy analysis could contribute to improved humanitarian programming in situations of conflict and political instability. The project was based on case studies in four countries: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Senegal and Sierra Leone. The case studies had two principal objectives. The first was to identify key themes arising from political economy analysis that could have direct or indirect implications for humanitarian aid interventions. The second was to develop practical guidelines to help agencies integrate political economy analysis into their programming. Through this work, the paper provides appropriate analytical tools that humanitarian agencies can use to help them understand the often complex and difficult environments in which they work.

A political economy approach takes context analysis beyond a 'snap-shot' approach to assessing the status and needs of particular groups or communities. It incorporates a wide historical and geographical perspective, seeking to explain why the relative power and vulnerability of different groups changes over time, and how the fortunes and activities of one group in society can affect others. It therefore encourages an understanding that is dynamic (by focusing on change), broad (by connecting changes in one place or group to those in another), longitudinal (by incorporating a historical perspective), and explanatory (by asking why certain people are affected by conflict and crisis in the ways that they are). If, by using this approach, agencies assess, anticipate and monitor vulnerable people's assistance and protection needs more effectively, it follows that they will be better equipped to plan and refine appropriate responses.

### **The practice and policy of protection: a forthcoming feature in Humanitarian Exchange**

In the next issue of Humanitarian Exchange, due out in March 2003, we hope to have a special feature on the policy issues and programming implications of humanitarian protection.

If you or your agency have experience, insights or lessons to share on this issue, drop us a line at the HPN, at [f.stevenson@odi.org.uk](mailto:f.stevenson@odi.org.uk) or [m.foley@odi.org.uk](mailto:m.foley@odi.org.uk), or you can call us on +44(0) 207 922 0331.

We prefer work in English, though we can translate from other languages. Articles should be 2,000 words in length and need to reach us by the end of January 2003.

## The war on terror's challenge to humanitarian action

Nicolas de Torrenté outlines what the profound changes wrought by 11 September mean for humanitarians – and what should be done in response

It is a commonplace to say that the world has changed since 11 September. This also holds true for those dedicated to humanitarian action. The cause of the change for us, however, is not so much the attacks themselves or their vicious character. What has changed is that the US, the leading international power, has declared a new global 'war on terror'. As defined, this war pits terrorism against freedom, and those who imperil humanity against those who defend it. While the main focus has been on Afghanistan, the repercussions have swiftly embraced the entire planet. Like the Cold War, this is an open-ended, global fight for both interests and values. Yet unlike the Cold War, alliances are constantly shifting, the 'enemy' consists primarily of an ill-defined set of non-state actors and their purported state sponsors, and territorial control is not necessarily an aim.

This new war presents a number of challenges for independent humanitarian action and the principles that underpin it. First, it seeks to subordinate humanitarianism to the conflict's broader purpose, undermining the impartiality of humanitarian action. Second, by questioning the applicability of international humanitarian law, the anti-terrorism campaign could threaten fundamental restraints on the conduct of warfare, thus weakening the protection and assistance to which civilians are entitled. Third, worldwide attention to conflicts, and the victims they generate, is shifting, making it more difficult to respond to crises at the margins.

### Subordinating humanitarian action to the anti-terrorism campaign

During the 1990s, humanitarian concerns were subject to intense political calculation. This yielded highly selective results for victims, ranging from absolute non-intervention in the Rwandan genocide to a 'humanitarian war' in Kosovo. The common thread was that humanitarian concerns were often put at the forefront of public discourse, either as a smoke-screen to mask the absence of genuine political engagement, or to justify intervention in fact motivated by other interests.

With the advent of the global war on terrorism, the situation is much clearer. The US government declared that it was going to war in defence of national security interests. The means employed have been diverse: according to the Bush administration, the campaign is 'being fought at home and abroad through multiple operations including diplomatic, military, financial, investigative, homeland security and humanitarian actions'. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has spoken

of a 'military-humanitarian coalition' – epitomised by his evocation of a 'bombs-and-bread' campaign in Afghanistan. Secretary of State Colin Powell has argued that NGOs are a 'force multiplier', essential contributors to the United States' 'combat team'.

In this view, humanitarian action, whether conducted by military forces or by civilian agencies, should be subordinate to a broader politico-military objective. Assistance is understood as part of a strategy to win the 'hearts and minds' of civilians, and fits nicely with the doctrine of 'compassionate conservatism', in which a clenched fist towards a hostile regime is accompanied by an outstretched hand towards that country's population. Thus, in Afghanistan coalition air forces dropped food to Afghan civilians, while simultaneously bombing military targets. Special military units engaged in civil affairs, such as rebuilding bridges or digging wells. The effectiveness of these interventions is questionable: the unmonitored dropping of individual food rations from high-flying planes provides little relief for those most in need, even if this food reaches them. The usefulness of the food drops in winning over Afghan support is also doubtful. Northern Alliance commanders sealed off some drop zones in order to confiscate food rations, and several children were injured after mistaking cluster bombs for food rations. Meanwhile, the authorities in neighbouring allied countries such as Pakistan essentially sealed their borders, trapping would-be refugees in the violence they were seeking to escape.

The assistance provided by the military coalition in Afghanistan is not humanitarian action, which is required by the Geneva Conventions to be neutral, independent and impartial. By blurring the line between military and humanitarian agendas, and by making aid delivery a means of attaining its politico-military objectives, the coalition's actions endangered the security of humanitarian staff and their access to populations in need. Throughout Afghanistan, coalition soldiers still wear civilian clothing and carry concealed weapons. While some take part in combat operations, others engage in relief activities, and their civilian clothing is meant to facilitate contacts with the local population. In south-eastern Afghanistan, where foreigners are often viewed with suspicion and where US forces continue to battle presumed *Taliban* fighters, this has raised tensions and contributed to preventing unarmed humanitarian personnel from accessing rural areas. In Kandahar, MSF teams are often asked if they are US soldiers, and have been warned not to venture into outlying areas.



For more than 20 years, maintaining a clear humanitarian identity in Afghanistan has been crucial for the provision of assistance. Humanitarian agencies will continue to respond to the needs of Afghans once the coalition's priorities have shifted. Now, however, humanitarian actors will find it increasingly difficult to establish the trust that is necessary for this assistance to take place.

### **International humanitarian law and the war on terrorism**

The second major challenge to humanitarian action concerns the role of international humanitarian law. Humanitarianism is based on a key distinction between combatants, who are considered legitimate targets of violence, and non-combatants such as civilians and prisoners of war, who should be spared. This cardinal principle is enshrined in international humanitarian law. Whatever the aims of belligerents, humanitarian actors seek out the victims of violence.

The terrorist actions of 11 September raise disturbing questions about how to combat an ill-defined enemy that, through its actions, has placed itself outside the prevailing normative framework governing warfare. To deal with this challenge, the US is considering jettisoning international humanitarian law. The prevailing description of the conflict relates not only to the type of military operations and forces being employed, but also reflects claims to unambiguous moral supremacy. By defining its cause as just and vitally important, the US believes it should fight this war unfettered by cumbersome international rules. Deciding that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to al-Qaeda and *Taliban* combatants captured in Afghanistan was a clear indication of this.

This line of thinking contains serious dangers. It is based on the false premise that forces acting in the name of a greater good cannot commit abuses. There is a precedent here: in the Somalia intervention, forces operating under the UN banner refused to be bound by international humanitarian law, under the assumption that, because they were carrying out a peacekeeping mission in the name of the international community, they could by definition do no wrong. After UN forces bombed hospitals, humanitarian compounds and civilians, this stance was reversed, and peacekeeping forces agreed to be held to international standards.

The same logic applies to the war in Afghanistan. Incidents such as the US bombing of ICRC warehouses in Kabul and the dropping of cluster bombs in populated areas are violations of international humani-



*An Afghan mujahideen poses with his weapon*

tarian law and must be opposed, irrespective of the cause that is being pursued. In fact, compliance with international humanitarian law in no way constitutes an obstacle to the struggle against terror and crime. International humanitarian law grants the detaining power the right to legally prosecute prisoners of war suspected of having committed war crimes or any other criminal offence prior to or during hostilities. International humanitarian law does not prevent effective military action; rather, it regulates it so as to minimise non-combatant suffering in a manner consistent with military necessity.

Around the world, conflicts and their victims have been cast in a different light since 11 September, with the loosely-defined concept of terrorism as the dominant mode of interpretation. As a result, in the name of fighting 'terrorism', violations of international humanitarian law are increasingly being condoned. The brutal war in Chechnya is a good example. Although political interests have long allowed the Russian government to escape meaningful sanction for its conduct, the absence of public international scrutiny and concern since 11 September is particularly striking. Whether this conflict is called a 'war of national liberation' or an 'anti-terrorist operation' does not change the fundamental fact that Chechen civilians are being victimised by abusive military operations conducted by Russian forces.

This shifting categorisation of conflicts and their victims is another fundamental reason why independent humanitarian agencies need to resist subordination to the anti-terrorism campaign. Humanitarian action does not categorise: civilian victims continue to be just that, irrespective of the label applied to the violence that causes their suffering.

## Shifting attention to crises

The anti-terrorism campaign has bestowed international relevance on certain local situations, while relegating others to oblivion. This has not changed the priorities for independent humanitarian agencies, but it has changed the environment in which we operate. In particular, it has been difficult to attract attention to the human cost of conflicts in regions peripheral to the anti-terrorism campaign.

In Angola, for instance, the conflict between the government and UNITA thankfully appears to be coming to a close. Following a ceasefire agreement in April, hitherto inaccessible areas opened up to humanitarian agencies, revealing thousands of famished people who had endured years of isolation, abuse and neglect. The government of Angola was, however, far from alarmed at the massive crisis affecting its citizens. Meanwhile, the international community, which has for years backed the Angolan government against UNITA, was slow in responding to this major emergency. MSF mounted one of its largest nutritional interventions in years, but struggled to attract attention. Not one US-based TV network sent a team to cover the story, while radio and press coverage was few and far between. UN appeals for aid in Angola, as well as in other neglected crises such as Sudan or West Africa, have been woefully underfunded. Clearly, the resources and focus are elsewhere.

There has been much hopeful talk of a surge of public interest in international issues, particularly in the US. Even in Washington, commentators have noted that engagement, even if starkly self-interested and unilateral, has apparently been rekindled, as pledges to increase development aid seem to indicate. However, the level of commitment to social and economic problems remains crassly insufficient and pales in comparison with the push towards heightened military engagement and spending. Moreover, whatever momentum exists seems to be predicated upon the tenuous and unproven link

between poverty, disease and terrorism. This reveals a worrying absence of critical reflection about political responsibility, and underlines the subordination of 'humanitarian' concerns to the broader politico-military agenda.

## Conclusion

In defining the war on terror, President Bush drew the line clearly: 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists'; the war, he declared, 'is civilisation's fight, the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance, and freedom.' Humanitarian organisations unambiguously reject terrorist attacks, condemning them as an illegitimate means of waging war and an all-out assault on our fundamental values and principles. Yet in the interest of victims of all violence, whatever its cause, humanitarian agencies must strongly resist entanglement in this 'terrorism versus anti-terrorism' view of the world.

Humanitarian agencies have much to beware in the new environment the anti-terrorism campaign has created. Above all, the selectivity that politicisation engenders is a poor guide to the effective alleviation of suffering. As battle lines mutate in unforeseen ways, the imperative to reach out impartially to protect and assist victims of crisis and conflict is more critical than ever. This can only be accomplished by making a commitment to fundamental rules of warfare central to the anti-terrorism campaign, by not allowing the campaign to determine who and where the only 'real' victims are, and by respecting the necessary independence of humanitarian action.

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A version of this article appears in *Ethics and International Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 2, Autumn 2002. See the website of the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs: [www.cceia.org](http://www.cceia.org).

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## The changing role of official donors in humanitarian action: new research from the Humanitarian Policy Group

Historically, humanitarian assistance accounted for only a very small part of official aid programmes, and attracted relatively little scrutiny and attention. During the 1990s, however, humanitarian issues became mainstreamed into international relations, and more explicitly linked to efforts to enhance international peace and security. The rising volume of official humanitarian aid brought with it heightened concerns for its effectiveness, and the need to improve the performance and accountability of partner organisations.

Against this background, a number of important changes have taken place in the financing and management of official humanitarian aid. These include:

- an apparent shift away from supporting multilateral humanitarian action and towards NGOs;
- the increased earmarking of contributions, and the concentration of resources on highly visible emergencies;
- an increasing donor role in the coordination of humanitarian action;
- tougher contractual and managerial regimes to scrutinise the performance of implementing partners; and
- increased donor presence at field level.

These multiple and complex changes have been subsumed under the catchy, but misleadingly simple, label of 'bilateralisation'.

A new report from the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the ODI, entitled *Uncertain Power: The Changing Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action*, charts the changing role of donor governments in the management of humanitarian assistance. Based on field studies, documentary reviews and case studies of official donors in the UK, Denmark, Canada and the US, as well as ECHO, it examines:

- the changing financing, contractual and management environment of humanitarian aid;
- the changing role of donors in the coordination of humanitarian action; and
- the mechanisms by which donors themselves can be held to account for their use of humanitarian aid funds.

The report concludes that the increasing involvement of donors in humanitarian decision-making is both legitimate and appropriate. However, there has been little discussion as to what constitutes a 'good' humanitarian donor. Establishing such an agreement would be timely. Humanitarian aid flows are increasing, humanitarian decision-making is becoming more complex and sensitive and the framework for measuring donor performance is weak, undermining accountability and the trust necessary for positive relations between donors and their partners.

The report identifies three core principles that might provide the basis for such a discussion:

- a commitment to international humanitarian law and principles;
- a commitment to needs-based programming; and
- predictable and adequate funding.

In operationalising these principles, donors should commit themselves in domestic law to the impartial allocation of official humanitarian aid, and should reaffirm the independence of humanitarian decision-making from wider foreign policy. Systems to measure humanitarian need and monitor the allocation of resources need to be more robust, and the predictability and adequacy of official funding need to be strengthened.

The report also argues that there is a need for humanitarian organisations to maintain a critical dialogue with the official aid community, demonstrating their legitimacy as independent humanitarian actors, based on their competence as well as their mandates, and the inherent value of organisational autonomy in enhancing aid effectiveness. Agencies have varied in their capacity to engage in and sustain such dialogue.

*Uncertain Power: The Changing Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action*, by Joanna Macrae *et al.*, is published in December 2002. A series of related briefing papers summarising key aspects of the work, together with background papers informing the report, are also available. Copies of all of these research outputs are available from the ODI website, at [www.odi.org.uk/hpg/publications.html](http://www.odi.org.uk/hpg/publications.html), or from Alison Prescott at the ODI ([a.prescott@odi.org.uk](mailto:a.prescott@odi.org.uk)).

## Humanitarian Practice Network

The **Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)** is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience.

**HPN's aim** is to improve the performance of humanitarian action by contributing to individual and institutional learning.

**HPN's activities** include:

- A series of specialist publications: Good Practice Reviews, Network Papers and *Humanitarian Exchange* magazine.
- A resource website at [www.odihpn.org](http://www.odihpn.org).
- Occasional seminars and workshops to bring together practitioners, policymakers and analysts.

**HPN's members and audience** comprise individuals and organisations actively engaged in humanitarian action. They are in 80 countries worldwide, working in northern and southern NGOs, the UN and other multilateral agencies, governments and donors, academic institutions and consultancies.

**HPN's publications** are written by a similarly wide range of contributors.

**Funding** support for HPN is provided by institutional donors (DFID, Ireland Aid, DANIDA, SIDA, MFA Netherlands, OFDA and ECHO), non-governmental organisations (the British Red Cross, Save the Children UK, Oxfam GB, Médecins Sans Frontières and CARE International), and UN agencies (WFP, UNDP and OCHA).

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*Humanitarian Exchange* is edited by Frances Stevenson and Matthew Foley. Produced, printed and bound in the UK by Publish on Demand Ltd.

ISSN: 1472-4847

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