

Humanitarian Practice Network

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Humanitarian Exchange

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About HPN

The Humanitarian Practice Network at the Overseas Development Institute is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policymakers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience. *The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or the Overseas Development Institute.*



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This edition of *Humanitarian Exchange*, commissioned in collaboration with the Humanitarian Studies Institute (Instituto de Estudios Humanitarios), focuses on the humanitarian situation in Colombia. Although the Colombian government has been keen to demonstrate progress in defeating and demobilising the country's various armed groups, and to depict Colombia as having entered a post-conflict phase, pressing humanitarian concerns remain, related to mass internal displacement and continuing human rights violations.

Although the government uses 'post-conflict' discourse, articles in this issue highlight continued obstacles to returning the internally displaced, delivering relief and providing protection to those in need. These challenges largely stem from ongoing conflict, including the use of landmines. The government's decision to redefine the conflict as a war against terrorism has further constrained the space for neutral and impartial humanitarian action.

The policy and practice section of this issue contains a trio of articles focused on humanitarian reform, including a summary of a recent report on NGO engagement with the humanitarian reform process in five countries, the findings from the Global WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene promotion) Cluster's learning initiative, and an analysis of how institutionalising inclusive and consultative attitudes and behaviour among cluster



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leaders can improve cluster performance. Other articles examine the importance of NGOs doing less talking and more active listening when trying to gain acceptance at local level, the challenges of tackling Sleeping Sickness during conflict, addressing the impact of urban growth and displacement in Kabul, how effective NGO collaboration can enhance humanitarian response and a new tool designed to help humanitarian agencies better analyse market-systems in emergencies.

As always, we welcome any comments or feedback, which can be sent to hpn@odi.org.uk or to The Coordinator, Humanitarian Practice Network, 111 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JD, UK.

Implementing humanitarian reform in Colombia

Bruno Moro, Humanitarian Coordinator in Colombia

The Humanitarian Reform (HR) process, initiated three years ago in Colombia, has significantly improved the quality of humanitarian coordination and response. Although much is still to be done to fully consolidate the reform, Colombia has made great progress towards its ultimate objective, which is ‘to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response by ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership; and to reach more beneficiaries, with more comprehensive needs-based relief and protection, in a more effective and timely manner’.¹

Why Colombia?

Back in 2006, a number of reasons for selecting Colombia as one of the reform’s roll-out countries were considered. First and foremost was the need to better address the humanitarian problems of those most affected by the longstanding internal armed conflict in the country, and by increasingly severe natural disasters. With different armed actors locked in constant fighting, and two yearly rainy seasons that recurrently flood vast areas of the country, rural communities remain extremely vulnerable.

The second factor was the increased international humanitarian presence, which required improved coordination mechanisms to ensure a non-duplicative and value-added humanitarian response. It appeared necessary not simply to improve coordination within the international humanitarian community, but also between international organisations and the national authorities. The government of Colombia is by and large the main provider of assistance to internally displaced people (\$500 million yearly since 2004). However, local institutional response capacities are often insufficient or overstretched by the magnitude of emergencies, either because municipal budgets leave narrow margins for humanitarian assistance or because there are gaps in technical knowledge. In certain cases, such as displacement caused by the eradication of illicit drug crops, no assistance is provided by the central government and local response capacity is rapidly overwhelmed. While the Constitutional Court has established a solid legal framework for attention provided to IDPs and vulnerable groups, and the government’s commitment is significant, adding value to national response capacity required a major shift in the way humanitarian organisations worked, increasing humanitarian presence on the ground; setting up effective coordination mechanisms at the local level; conducting sectoral, geographic and demographic needs analysis, with evidence-based plans for humanitarian response; developing resource mobilisation strategies; and establishing a consolidated Humanitarian Country Team.

Finally, it was acknowledged that implementing HR in Colombia represented an opportunity to develop a context-

based framework for humanitarian action. Inasmuch as global policy guidelines outline the main components of HR, in Colombia – as in many other countries – from the outset the objective was that new structures and mechanisms should be reflective of and adjusted to the local context.

Humanitarian Reform in Colombia

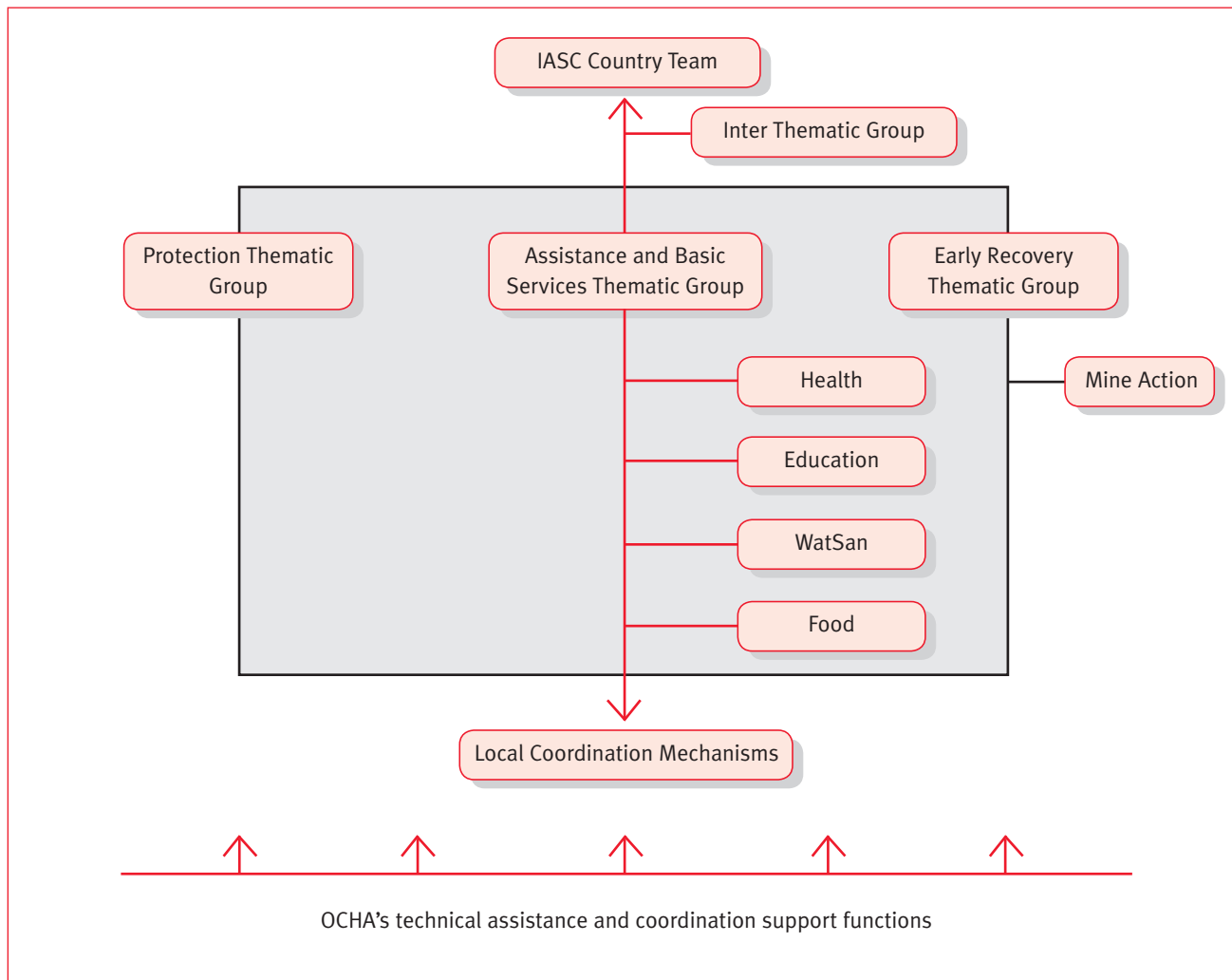
In September 2006, a group of delegates from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), led by Dennis McNamara, UN Special Representative on Internal Displacement, visited Colombia. The delegation made nine recommendations to the Humanitarian Coordinator and the UN Country Team, recommendations that still serve as benchmarks against which to measure progress in implementing HR:

1. Consolidate the Humanitarian Country Team (or IASC CT) as the primary mechanism for coordination, policy formulation and decision-making on issues related to the international response.
2. Ensure a coherent approach to humanitarian action and a common vision.
3. Coordinate with government authorities, state institutions and civil society.
4. Develop an IASC CT strategy and yearly work plan.
5. Establish three IASC Thematic Groups to promote common approaches and avoid introducing too many coordination mechanisms (the groups are Protection, Assistance and Basic Services and Early Recovery).
6. Strengthen field presence.
7. Promote area- and community-specific approaches.
8. Strengthen local institutions through capacity-building programmes.
9. Improve information management to ensure that information on the humanitarian situation and the response is available at any given time.

An IASC CT was established with the participation of 11 UN agencies and nearly 80% of all humanitarian INGOs operating in the country, plus the ICRC, IFRC and ECHO as observers. The monthly meetings of the IASC CT (chaired by the HC) serve to share information and facilitate planning and decision-making on strategic issues. The three Thematic Groups, with their sub-groups, correspond to areas of focus within the Cluster approach at the global level. These groups take the lead in developing and implementing sectoral plans. An Inter-Thematic Group was also created to ensure coherence among the three groups and their sub-groups. The first objective of the IASC CT and the Thematic Groups was to conduct a country needs assessment – which has been kept updated ever since – and, in accordance with its findings, establish local IASC coordination mechanisms (LCMs). Figure 1 illustrates the current humanitarian coordination architecture.

¹ See <http://www.humanitarianreform.org>.

Figure 1: Humanitarian coordination in Colombia



Today, there are nine local ‘IASC-like’ coordination mechanisms in ‘hot-spot’ regions/provinces. In these regions, specific communities are prioritised. Humanitarian workplans formulated at the beginning of each year have helped in bringing together the combined capacities of UN agencies and INGOs on the ground to address protracted and sudden emergencies. In addition, through the LCMs, the humanitarian community has conducted advocacy designed to integrate humanitarian and development issues in Departmental and Municipal Development Plans and other policies, such as contingency planning, protection of civilians, preparedness and disaster risk reduction. The objective of this process is to ensure a strong field presence and coverage in areas prone to humanitarian emergencies. LCMs are facilitated by OCHA. Thematic Groups have provided technical assistance and work jointly with the LCMs in order to ensure sector- and area-specific approaches. OCHA compiled information and conducted research for selecting the nine prioritised regions. Among other initiatives carried out by the LCMs are joint field missions and follow-up reports on humanitarian situations, support for the implementation of projects funded through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and wider advocacy activities conducted with regional Ombudsmen and Governors.

In February 2009, the HC and OCHA organised a national retreat to evaluate the implementation of these reforms, as well as to outline priorities and goals for the year. One important result of this retreat was the preparation of a joint paper on impact criteria and indicators to better measure progress. In particular, participants agreed on the need to increase humanitarian response in areas where there was no field presence, to mainstream disaster response within the IASC structure and to strengthen humanitarian advocacy in Bogota and in the field.

an Emergency Response Fund was established in 2009

The overall capacity of the IASCCT to address humanitarian needs has been boosted through the mobilisation of additional resources since 2007. In particular, \$11 million from the CERF Rapid Response Window has been allocated to address disaster-related emergencies, and an additional \$5 million from the Under-Funded Emergencies Window has been used to address protection and assistance needs among Afro-descendant and indigenous communities along Colombia’s Pacific coast. Meanwhile, in 2009, an Emergency Response Fund (ERF) – a local pooled fund

mainly for NGOs – was established, under the supervision of the HC and managed by OCHA. Delegates from the Thematic Groups make up a review board that vets projects submitted to the fund.

Colombia does not have a Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). While the government argues that national capacities make this mechanism unnecessary, it also acknowledges that UN agencies and their NGO partners need more coherent and strategic planning and funding mechanisms. The government and the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, who visited Colombia early in 2009, agreed that the IASC CT would develop local humanitarian frameworks or plans for the most affected regions of the country.

It is also worth mentioning that the UN Emergency Technical Team (UNETT), which includes INGOs, the Colombian Red Cross and national authorities, has developed a Flood Response Plan to address the immediate humanitarian needs caused by severe floods across the country, and to mobilise resources for early recovery and actions oriented towards more durable solutions, particularly in the areas of water and sanitation and income generation. The UNETT and wider Humanitarian Reform structure, while broadly divided into natural disaster and complex-emergency themes, interact on a number of levels, and involve many of the same members.

What has been achieved?

Implementation of HR implied learning a new language and rationale, organising numerous meetings to establish common ground on strategic and operational guidelines, (re)thinking terms of reference for Thematic Groups, undertaking the collective production of common action plans and sustaining the required level of commitment and engagement among key actors. Three years in, an overall improvement in humanitarian coordination and response effectiveness has gradually been observed. Information costs have dropped significantly through a common information-sharing and coordination platform. Logistical costs are also being reduced as a result of enhanced coordination. Joint field missions over a period of nearly three years have become a distinctive and standard characteristic of the international humanitarian response, involving UN agencies and their international

NGO partners. More importantly, implementing HR is increasing the ownership of common strategies, plans, interventions and actions, and enabling the international humanitarian community to better interact with governmental authorities.

However significant the overall improvements might be, challenges remain. The international presence on the ground is still insufficient and greater efforts are needed to strengthen the protection of civilians. As Colombia is a vast and diverse country, and protection by presence is essential, humanitarian partners must increase their presence to assist and advocate for communities affected by conflict and disaster, and better respond to specific needs at the local level. It is also important to emphasise that all humanitarian interventions should be framed and implemented such that they reflect protection concerns. A differentiated approach is needed which recognises differences according to gender, age and community (afro-Colombian and indigenous). This includes supporting efforts to prevent displacement, such as the Ombudsman Early Warning System, looking at ways to develop a strategic and systematic dialogue with the military and other parties to the conflict and the implementation of a strategy to reduce sexual and gender-based violence, as an integral component of humanitarian work.

Finally, in the absence of a CAP it is necessary to find ways to secure funding for humanitarian operations in Colombia that allow flexibility and rapid response to regionalised conflicts and disasters. It is particularly important to continue the dialogue with the Colombian government on a framework to mobilise resources, and for the government to increase its own allocations for humanitarian interventions. A possible way forward could be the definition of local humanitarian action plans, one of which is currently being prepared for the Pacific coast. In this regard, the recent approval of \$5 million through the Under-Funded Emergencies Window is a significant step forward. Donors are increasingly interested in pooled-funding mechanisms, and supported the establishment of the ERF for Colombia. It is essential that humanitarian funding is linked to issues related to early recovery and preparedness, and that humanitarian and relief work is linked to durable solutions.

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Neutrality, impartiality and independence in Colombia: an ICRC perspective

Maurizio Geremia, ICRC

At 45 years and counting, Colombia's internal armed conflict is one of the longest in recent history. Its consequences are dire. Summary executions, threats, the forced recruitment of children, hostage-taking, sexual violence and the use of anti-personnel mines have all had serious humanitarian costs, especially during the

past 20 or so years. The conflict has also produced one of the world's largest populations of displaced civilians. According to government and civil society figures, between three and four million people have been forced to flee their homes due to threats, armed clashes and forced recruitment.

The ICRC and 'humanitarian space'

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been present in Colombia since 1969, when the government permitted delegates to visit people detained in relation to the conflict. As the conflict intensified and humanitarian needs increased, a Headquarters Agreement was signed in May 1980 between the government and the ICRC, allowing the agency to implement the full range of activities in support of victims of the conflict. The Headquarters Agreement also implicitly recognises the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality, the main *raison d'être* of the ICRC.



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An ICRC staff member with displaced people in the El Charco rural zone, Nariño Department

Together with the 'supreme principle' of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality are fundamental to the ICRC's ability to fulfil its humanitarian mandate in relation to the victims of armed conflict. The ICRC strongly believes in the importance of these principles, not only in Colombia but in every country where the ICRC works. These principles are more than theoretical expressions of basic moral values; they are a means to allow safe access to populations in need, in order to help those who bear the brunt of conflict and violence and to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian aid through protection and assistance. Simply proclaiming that it is guided by the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality is however insufficient: the concrete humanitarian actions the ICRC takes are perhaps the most important component of the humanitarian space. It is the ICRC's operational effectiveness that opens the door to discussions of its mandate and principles, not vice-versa. Words have little value without action, and it is action that establishes the ICRC's credibility, giving it access to victims and enabling it to play an effective role. Access has to be earned through acceptance. Acceptance in turn is earned through the relevance of the humanitarian action, the difference it makes and ultimately the utility (or at least absence of threat or detrimental effect) of the humanitarian action for all stakeholders. These are elements of perception: not the perception of humanitarian actors, but of the stakeholders in any given context. The distinction between humanitarian presence and action and political or military actors can be an essential element of such perception.

Humanitarian space should also be understood as that part of the response to conflict that deals exclusively and credibly with humanitarian concerns, and thus poses no threat to any of the parties involved in the conflict. For this to work, however, a humanitarian actor has to uphold these principles consistently across time and space. A politically motivated or

tainted action at one time, in one context, tends to influence how future actions are perceived. The same is true for the actions and behaviour of individual staff.

words have little value without action

The ICRC subscribes to what is probably the most restrictive interpretation of neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action. Physical access to populations affected by conflict is at the core of its mode of operation. Perception and acceptance among all stakeholders are key to ensuring access. Persuading stakeholders of the ICRC's neutrality, independence and impartiality, as well as its capacity to deliver a credible and purely humanitarian response, depends on a broad dialogue with all stakeholders, as well as on its actions in all its operational contexts. Strict confidentiality, sparse recourse to public denunciation and the formal refusal to collaborate with or testify in tribunals all serve to diminish any perceived threat deriving from the ICRC's presence.

Principles in practice

Among the range of humanitarian activities implemented by the ICRC in Colombia, its role as a neutral mediator in kidnap cases best illustrates the importance of being perceived as a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organisation. The ICRC has been involved in the release of hundreds of hostages in Colombia, dating back to 1980. In order to continue acting as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC has had to develop and maintain a dialogue with all the parties involved in the conflict. It is only through this dialogue that the organisation can maintain the necessary trust and acceptance of all stakeholders, allowing the ICRC to operate effectively and safely in the territories these actors control. Building this trust and acceptance takes time and demands patience; it is a long-term process aimed at

convincing all the stakeholders that the ICRC is effectively neutral and is not part of any political or military agenda.

The fact that the ICRC has been present in Colombia since 1969 and has been able to develop the full range of humanitarian activities since then has certainly helped the organisation to be known, recognised and respected as a *strictly* neutral, independent and impartial actor, with an exclusively humanitarian mission. Nevertheless, such trust is fragile. Misperceptions, misunderstandings and confusion with other actors can rapidly destroy this capital of trust and endanger humanitarian action. It is essential that all parties respect the specific mandate of the ICRC, and do not seek to exploit or instrumentalise the organisation's strictly neutral and independent character.

ICRC delegates need to be present in the field, close to those who are affected by the conflict, to meet their need for protection and assistance. To do this, they need to meet, negotiate or deal with the whole range of different arms carriers or other influential stakeholders. Through this permanent dialogue, the ICRC also tries to influence the behaviour and attitudes of those who are often the source of the humanitarian problem.

The ICRC contends that seeking dialogue with all parties to a conflict and abstaining from any action or declaration that could be interpreted as taking sides with one party or another is what makes the ICRC's presence possible in the long run, because it offers the best chance of being accepted by all parties in a safe way. It is therefore an important aspect of the ICRC's policy on staff security. The ICRC is convinced that it is this strictly neutral approach that allows the institution to continue its humanitarian work. In 2008, the ICRC provided over 73,000 displaced people with food and household items, a 10% increase over 2007. This increase is partly due to the fact that the ICRC and its local partner, the Colombian Red Cross, have improved their ability to reach displaced families in the conflict-affected south-western state of Nariño. Thanks to its strictly neutral, independent and impartial character, the ICRC is able to reach areas that are out of bounds to governmental bodies (whether military or civilian).

The ICRC's approach to the problem of humanitarian space is not the only one, and we claim no monopoly on humanitarian action on behalf of the victims of conflict. In that sense, 'humanitarian space' may be open to a range of actors – both civilian and military. In addition to humanitarian NGOs, the state has a responsibility and a duty to assist and protect its own citizens. There is however a risk that 'humanitarian' action may be instrumentalised and used for political, military or propaganda aims, distorting the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality and potentially jeopardising or endangering the work of official humanitarian actors in Colombia (with possible repercussions in other contexts where ICRC is also present). For all these reasons, the specific mandate of the ICRC, based on its fundamental principles, must be preserved.

'humanitarian space' may be open to a range of actors – both civilian and military

Confronted with different approaches (some of which are called 'humanitarian' when they are not), the ICRC's main objective is to ensure greater respect for its particular approach, based on strict observance of its neutral, independent and impartial character as a humanitarian actor. Without diminishing the effectiveness of different approaches, the ICRC is convinced that there remains a need for neutral and independent humanitarian action in times of armed conflict; neutrality is a pivotal aspect of humanitarian intervention and is not a concept that can be abandoned and taken up again at will. Neutrality is not a given: no one is neutral by essence or by merely declaring themselves so. Neutrality is a quality that must be recognised by the parties themselves, as they perceive it through the ICRC's actions and communications. Be it in Colombia or in any other context where an armed conflict is still affecting the civilian population, the ICRC will continue acting as a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian actor.

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Military participation in humanitarian action: reflections on the Colombia case

Francisco Rey Marcos, Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action

The role of the armed forces in humanitarian operations has long been an issue of debate. With the end of the Cold War and the growing importance of humanitarian issues during the 1990s, the participation of military contingents in aid operations has been re-examined, and the UN has launched initiatives to address this issue and agree

criteria to govern military involvement in humanitarian action. While some agencies, chief among them the ICRC and MSF, seek to avoid contact with the military, most humanitarian organisations at one time or another have worked with armed forces, particularly for logistical support and protection and security. Under the Oslo



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A soldier checks a woman's bag near Toribio, Cauca Department, scene of fighting between the Colombian army and FARC rebels.

The new war plan is based on the Integrated Action Doctrine (IAD), a 'group of principles that seek to orient the coordinated action of legitimate force with the social action of the State and civil society'. The objective is to deploy resources from the defence sector to welfare projects in which the armed forces are involved, but where the rest of the state is still not present. With this approach, the government has sought to strengthen the governance, credibility and legitimacy of the state in areas where there has been no or only precarious state presence.

The instrument for implementing this strategy is the Centre for the Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), led by the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (Social Action or SA), of which the military and the police form a substantial part. The SA is a governmental entity responsible for public policy related to populations affected by armed conflict, and serves as a fundamental channel for international assistance. The CCAI has initiated activities in 60 municipalities in 11 areas of the country. The criteria for choosing areas for intervention include whether special military activities are being carried out; humanitarian needs are present that require urgent attention; there are high levels of poverty and marginalisation; illicit crops are being grown; and the state's presence is weak.

Presidential Directive 01 of 2009 reinforces the link between military and civil components for 'integrated action':

With the goal of complying with the objectives of the Democratic Security Consolidation Policy, maintaining investor confidence, and advancing effective social policy, the national Government has concentrated on a mechanism that enables the strengthening of the alignment of the military, police, and anti-drug trafficking efforts with efforts in the social, justice, economic development, and institutional spheres of the State in strategic zones of the national territory, entitled Strategic Leap.

The Directive goes on:

it is the responsibility of each entity to supply information and territorial analysis for the definition, execution, and monitoring of regional consolidation plans, oriented at the coordination of military and civilian forces. These will be elaborated and approved during the first quarter of 2009 and will take into consideration the components of Humanitarian Assistance as related to Emergency, Justice, Security, Social Development, Economic Development, Governance, and Property Allocation. It is fundamental to collaborate with local governments to define and realise the prioritisation of each one of the intervention components as proposed in the Strategic Leap.

Finally, Directive 01 states that 'potential sources of international cooperation will be coordinated by SA through the International Cooperation Office'.

process, a set of directives has been developed to guide military involvement in humanitarian response, including respect for the principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality, the utilisation of military assets as a last resort, civilian control of the humanitarian component and no direct military participation in aid missions.

The issues military engagement in humanitarian action raises apply with particular force in Colombia, where the armed forces are directly engaged in conflict with the country's various armed groups. This article explores the involvement of the military in humanitarian assistance, the policy context within which this engagement takes place and the difficult implications for humanitarian action military involvement poses.

Context

The first government of Alvaro Uribe, between 2002 and 2006, introduced a 'Democratic Security Policy' designed to restore state control 'over the majority of national territory'. This policy has subsequently been revised during Uribe's second administration, resulting in the Democratic Security Consolidation Policy (DSCP). Under the DSCP, the government has prioritised territorial control by the armed forces over social recovery.

Challenges for humanitarian action: the thin red line

The 'Strategic Leap' presents a series of challenges to humanitarian action in Colombia. The first concerns the maintenance of and respect for humanitarian principles. The government's policy converts humanitarian action into an instrument for achieving distinct non-humanitarian objectives, without consideration of the impartiality, neutrality or independence of humanitarian organisations. Evidently, neither guerrillas nor paramilitary groups respect humanitarian norms, but this does not mean that the state should not demand respect for the international legal instruments that govern the status and role of civilian organisations in conflict. Humanitarian assistance is clearly being manipulated to serve other ends, and is perceived as partial and politicised by the very people it is trying to help.

the issues military engagement in humanitarian action raises apply with particular force in Colombia, where the armed forces are directly engaged in conflict

Second, the principle of distinction between military and civilian action has been lost. According to Gloria Flórez, Director of the NGO Minga: 'When a social or humanitarian programme depends on the Armed Forces, it involves the population in armed conflict. To receive aid or any kind of support from one of the groups in the conflict immediately turns them into a military objective of the other'.¹ In a case such as Colombia, where armed groups have not complied with the principle of distinction, thereby exacerbating the suffering of the civilian population, this increased confusion is dangerous. On numerous occasions, the mere presence of an armed group in a territory has been used to stigmatise the civilian population residing there, justifying attacks against them.

Third, social organisations are being coopted by the state and by the armed forces. The predominance of government entities in the CCAI and the instrumentalisation of humanitarian and development assistance make aid organisations appear as institutions serving the government. This is complicating access to certain zones by humanitarian organisations. A recent communiqué from the Revolutionary

Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)'s Front 29, received by humanitarian agencies in Nariño Department, states that the guerrillas consider the CCAI and the organisations that participate in it to be military targets.

Fourth, civilian life is being militarised and peaceful space in the midst of conflict is being constrained. Relying on military 'solutions' assumes a refusal to address the root causes of the violence, and rejects local approaches to resolving them. According to one activist: 'Peace is generated by recognising the local way of life, and consequently the integral action of the strategy should strengthen the abilities of the communities to promote their development'.² The militarisation of civilian life will, in fact, hamper attempts to reinforce civilian institutions in Colombia. Moreover, it presupposes the usurpation of local autonomy and destroys the potential to construct any local capacity for peace.

Lastly, humanitarian space is being reduced. All of the issues discussed above lead us to conclude that the space for principled humanitarian action oriented towards meeting the needs and protecting the rights of victims of conflict is shrinking.

Conclusion

Ever since the birth of modern humanitarianism in the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino in 1859, international society has sought to articulate a clear distinction between the rights and responsibilities of combatants and the role of civilian organisations in alleviating the suffering conflict causes. The humanitarian paradigm that emerged after Solferino emphasises that aid should be provided by impartial organisations, ensuring that relief reaches victims on both sides of the conflict. This principle applies to states, as signatories of international legal instruments, and to armed forces, both of which must respect the legal provisions that allow civilian organisations to carry out their work. In Colombia, however, this distinction between the civilian and the military realm has come under increasing pressure as the government has sought to instrumentalise humanitarian action in the service of political, military and strategic ends. The debate over the participation of the Colombian armed forces in humanitarian operations must be addressed with greater rigour and clarity: in Colombia, as indeed in other difficult contexts, the thin red line between humanitarian and military action is as vital now as it has ever been.

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¹ Statement by Gloria Flórez, Director of the non-governmental organisation Minga, 'Lines of Thought on Social Recovery', *Hechos del Callejón 36 (On the Road to Peace)*, UNDP, June 2008, p. 5, <http://indh.org>.

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Colombia's landmine crisis

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Anti-personnel mines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) kill or injure approximately 1,000 Colombians each year, more than any other country in the world. For this reason, the government and the international community have sought to stop the use of these weapons and to assist Colombians affected by them. The Office of the Vice-President has developed a special programme to address the issue, and acts as a centre for the coordination of the National Inter-Sectoral Commission for Unified Action against Anti-Personnel Mines, a group comprising 14 state institutions. In addition, the government has passed a significant number of laws and established programmes, processes and procedures related to mine problems, as well as adopting international norms prohibiting the production, storage and use of these weapons. Several national and international NGOs also work to support mine victims and to strengthen the government's capacity to tackle the problem. Despite these efforts, however, the illegal armed groups in Colombia's long-running conflict continue to plant mines across the country, with devastating effects on the civilian population.

A country in fear

Colombia's armed conflict has been bleeding the country dry for over five decades. Guerrillas and paramilitary organisations are present in 31 of the country's 32

departments. These armed groups sustain their military operations by controlling land and people, often through the use of IEDs. The close relationship between Colombia's armed conflict and drug-trafficking has further increased the use of landmines as armed groups deploy them to control land and enable the cultivation, processing and distribution of narcotics. Measures to restrict and prevent drug-trafficking adopted by the Colombian government, including the manual eradication of crops and the destruction of laboratories for drug processing, have encouraged the use of explosive devices as armed groups attempt to protect crops and laboratories.¹

As anti-personnel mines are costly and difficult to obtain, guerrillas and paramilitary groups tend to prefer 'homemade' ones (or IEDs), which are much less stable and more difficult to find than conventional landmines. These weapons are commonly directed at a specific target. In other words, their placement follows assessments by armed groups regarding the passage of enemy troops. As a result, the devices that affect civilians are generally isolated remnants left after an attack. This does *not*,

¹ For more information on drug-trafficking and the armed conflict, see Ana María Díaz and Fabio Sánchez, *Geografía de los Cultivos Ilícitos y Conflicto Armado en Colombia. Documentos*, CEDE 002766: Universidad de los Andes-CEDE, 2004.

however, diminish the suffering that these weapons cause, and can make it more difficult to remove the remaining mines. The Colombian government's military offensive against illegal armed groups has resulted in an increase in the use of these weapons; as armed groups are forced to be more mobile, identifying the location of minefields becomes more difficult. The battlefield has become ill-defined, overlapping with civilian settings, including population centres and roads used by civilians and in which combatants are not easily identifiable.

Anti-personnel mines and IEDs, along with the wider effects of the armed conflict, have created a sense of fear among part of the population. People become afraid to travel around their region, and as a result have restricted access to basic public services such as healthcare and education, as well as access to fundamental needs such as food and water. When the detrimental effects of landmines intersect with other aspects of the conflict, such as displacement, recruitment and isolation, the crisis becomes unsustainable for many affected populations.

In Colombia, there has been a continuous and increasing lack of respect for the rights and liberties of people not actively forming part of the armed conflict, while the 'dramatic spiral of violence that affects all sectors of society undermines the very foundations of the State and has been felt by the international community as a whole'.² Landmines, and with them massacres, murders, kidnaps and detentions, all combine to create an atmosphere of fear, intimidating thousands of Colombians every day and forcing them to abandon their land and their past. The fact that victimisation by landmines and forced displacement go hand in hand is not surprising. More than three million Colombians are displaced, and an unknown number of these people are also victims of anti-personnel mines and IEDs.

Responding in the midst of conflict

The army is the only entity authorised in practice to initiate demining operations in Colombia, yet this is problematic in that these operations often follow a military rationale rather than a humanitarian one. For example, a controlled detonation of a mine that has been discovered by the army during a military incursion will be perceived as a warning to armed groups that state troops are nearby. Likewise, if the army discovers the markings that armed actors use to establish the limits of minefields these are not

² Organisation of American States and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Comunicado de Prensa No. 20/97, Informe anual de la comisión interamericana de derechos humanos 1997, OEA/Ser.LVII.98, Doc. 7 rev. Washington DC: OEA, 1998, p. 1,153.

made public. An important step forward was taken at the beginning of 2009, when the Colombian government accepted the participation of civilian organisations in demining processes. This should help ensure that demining operations start to follow a humanitarian rationale rather than a military one, but more needs to be done to implement this policy in practice.

the battlefield has become ill-defined and combatants are not easily identifiable

Responding to the landmine situation is made difficult by the nature of the conflict in Colombia, which is both fluid and dynamic in terms of its intensity and location. There are regions that have been controlled by one or various illegal armed groups for many years, but change hands over time. There are regions that have been 'recovered' by the state, but even these will often relapse into conflict. For example, although the government recently announced that it had defeated the insurgents in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and in the Montes de Maria, both regions have since witnessed new armed confrontations. In other areas of the country the conflict is less fluid and is characterised by continuous combat. In this way, in Colombia, there are simultaneously regions in states of crisis, transition and recovery. As a result, assistance may be provided to some landmine victims, but as the nature of conflict changes these people are often affected again. Meanwhile, demining efforts that aim to reduce the risk that civilians face must contend with the fact that non-state armed groups continue to plant landmines.

The challenge is, therefore, enormous. In the midst of conflict, the state must eliminate the fear and damage produced by landmines. To that end, the state must initiate expensive demining processes, while guerrillas and paramilitary groups continue to plant explosive devices. The state also needs to identify and assist victims of landmines, although many are in hiding due to fear or are simply invisible among the many victims of the conflict and the wider population. The state also needs to guarantee the right to restitution to those affected by the violence, and guarantee that their victimisation will not be repeated – all while the state continues to participate in a conflict that is unlikely to end in the near future.

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Protecting civilians and enhancing security in Colombia: what's the difference?

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A cursory look at the Colombian government's policy discourse would lead one to conclude that its efforts to tackle armed groups and organised crime are synonymous with protecting the civilian population. This article argues that a more nuanced assessment of the discourse demonstrates that the government's security agenda, despite using the language of civilian protection and human rights, has in fact undermined respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and has failed to reduce levels of forced displacement and violence against civilians.



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A displaced child in Cazuca near Bogota

The discourse of security

Since the election of President Alvaro Uribe in 2002, the government has sought to enhance security in Colombia through what has been labelled a 'democratic security' policy. The objective of this policy is to defeat the guerrillas and regain territorial control by increasing the capacity and number of military troops and police units stationed across the country. Combating illicit crop production and drug-trafficking is central to the policy as these activities are considered the major source of revenue for armed actors. Action against drug production involves aerial fumigation, manual eradication, financing alternative development projects and carrying out operations aimed at capturing those involved in drug-trafficking.

of oil and mineral exploitation, large-scale agriculture and other investment opportunities.

The 'democratic security' policy also includes commitments to promote human rights, protect civilians from violence and enhance their livelihoods through development. To put this policy into practice, the Centre for Coordination of Integral Action (CCAI) was created in 2004, bringing together different government institutions focusing on issues related to development and security. The aim is to provide basic welfare, protect and promote human rights and implement the rule of law in areas regained by the government, enhancing government legitimacy, attracting investment and encouraging development. In theory, therefore, the government has integrated efforts to enhance security with strategies to ensure the protection and basic welfare of the civilian population. In practice, however, the one can sometimes undermine the other.

an estimated 30,000 paramilitaries have gone through the disarmament and demobilisation process

Untangling security and protection

A softer approach has been adopted with the country's paramilitary groups, with the government engaging them in peace talks and negotiating their disarmament with relatively lenient terms with regards to justice. It is estimated that 30,000 paramilitaries have gone through the disarmament and demobilisation process. The policy has also sought to secure the country's main economic centres, including key urban areas, major roads and areas

The primary aim of the 'democratic security' policy is to protect the state against the threats posed by armed groups, particularly guerrilla groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and drug-traffickers (the distinction between the two is often blurred). The government's efforts to defeat the country's various armed groups are depicted as part of the international fight against terrorism. Although there is nothing new in armed groups committing terrorist acts, labelling these groups terrorist organisations serves to delegitimise them, garner

international support, particularly from the United States, and justify restrictions on civil liberties and the ability of civil society to question and scrutinise the aims and methods of government policy. Human rights organisations and civil society groups and NGOs that have been critical of the government have been described as defending terrorism.¹ With the exception of the ICRC, humanitarian agencies are prohibited from speaking to armed groups. The terrorist label also serves to deny the existence of an armed conflict, to which IHL would apply.

The government has also sought to undermine its opponents by claiming that they no longer have political aims, but are waging war simply for the economic benefits that they can accrue (hence their involvement in the drug trade). By challenging the perceived causes of the conflict, such as grievances around land ownership, access to resources, respect for people's rights and the nature of the political system and development model, the government is protecting the interests of groups that benefit from the status quo, including powerful elites, government officials and private companies.

the primary aim of the 'democratic security' policy is to protect the state against armed groups

The government claims that these efforts to enhance its security do not undermine civilian protection. In fact, studies looking at levels of violence, particularly between 2002 and 2004, suggest that the government has had some success in securing the country's main urban areas and forcing down levels of violence.² Yet many of those that disarmed in the demobilisation process are rearming themselves and forming new paramilitary groups, and levels of violence are rising again.

Similar trends can be seen in patterns of forced displacement. In 2002 and 2003, government figures show that levels of displacement went down by 44% and 9% respectively, but have since increased by 19% in 2004, 5% in 2005, 6% in 2006 and 6.3% in 2007, making an estimated total of over 2.5 million IDPs registered with the government system. The large majority of these displacements – 65% – occurred between 2002 and 2008, and 83% are concentrated in 15 of Colombia's 32 departments.³ This trend, with a fall in numbers followed by a steady increase, can be attributed in part to the

1 For instance by President Alvaro Uribe: see Larry Minear, *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Colombia Case Study*, Feinstein International Centre, 2006, p. 32.

2 See for example M. Spagat, 'Colombia's Paramilitary DDR: Quiet and Tentative Successes', undated, http://www.cerac.org.co/pdf/UNDP_DDR_V1.pdf.

3 Figures from Accion Social, cited in a confidential internal agency document.

rearming of demobilised paramilitaries, increasing military action by the state and the development of counter-narcotic programmes.⁴

The fact that a significant amount of displacement has occurred from government counter-insurgency and counter-narcotic initiatives questions the extent to which civilian protection is given equal weight with other security priorities. There are increasing concerns among humanitarian agencies that these security priorities are in fact blurring the distinction between civilians and combatants, in violation of the Geneva Conventions, which call for effective measures to be put in place to ensure the protection of the civilian population in military operations.

In areas of military activity, civilians are often asked to provide intelligence about guerrillas or the location of landmines, in return for cash rewards, aid and livelihood support. This places civilians in danger as they are deemed to be participating in military activities. The FARC, for example, has attacked civilians on the basis that they are collaborating with the military; in one incident, in February 2009, guerrillas killed several people in an attack on the indigenous Awa community. The government was unable to provide protection, and could not even collect the bodies after the attack.⁵ The military has also been implicated in the killing of civilians in what has become known as the *falsos positivos* scandal. This involves government troops carrying out extra-judicial killings and claiming that the bodies belong to guerrillas, falsely boosting the numbers killed in combat – a key criterion by which the military's success in achieving security is judged. Furthermore, when territories are regained by the military, economic priorities often take precedence over the livelihoods of the population. For example, in La Macarena, historically a FARC-controlled territory, the government has refused to offer land titles to the peasant population, instead favouring large-scale agro-exporters. According to one analyst, many peasants have been compelled to engage in the production of illicit crops, despite the insecurity that accompanies such activities.⁶

In sum, despite the government discourse of enhancing security, we need to ask: security for whom? The evidence indicates that the state's security agenda does not necessarily align with the protection of civilians.

Implications for humanitarian actors

Humanitarian agencies involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance and in civilian protection in

4 UNHCR, *Balance de la política pública para la atención integral al desplazamiento forzado en Colombia Enero 2004–Abril 2007* (Bogota: UNHCR, 2007).

5 'Farc reconocen muerte de 8 indígenas Awá', *Semana*, 19 November 2009, <http://www.semana.com/noticias-conflicto-armado/farc-reconocen-muerte-indigenas-awa/120837.aspx>.

6 Alejandro Reyes, 'Consolidación del Territorio', *el Tiempo*, 25 March 2009, http://www.eltiempo.com/opinion/columnistas/otros-columnistas/consolidacion-del-territorio_4897542-1.

Colombia must understand the nature of governance and the manner in which institutions develop and behave, particularly with regard to violence against civilians. What is clear is that the discourse of belligerents does not always match the reality on the ground. If humanitarian actors decide to support and align themselves with government policies (or those of others), they must bear these discrepancies in mind. Attacks on civilians need to be seen as a strategy used by all armed actors in Colombia – the state, guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug-traffickers alike. At the same time, we need to bear in mind that these groups have also used restraint in their violence against civilians where they have seen military or political advantages in doing so.⁷ Thus, the challenge for humanitarian actors is to invest in political

7 F. Gutierrez Sanin, 'Internal Conflict, Terrorism and Crime in Colombia', *Journal of International Development*, vol. 18 (1), pp. 137–50, 2006.

analysis that goes beyond policy discourses and seeks to understand the underlying factors that drive individual and collective behaviour, and determine adherence (or the lack thereof) to a civilian protection agenda.⁸ This will provide the basis for developing strategies that aim to influence the behaviour of belligerents in a way that helps to protect civilians. This could entail, for example, advocating on the importance of the conduct of war in efforts to bring about stability, as civilian casualties can create resentment and undermine the legitimacy that these efforts depend upon.

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8 D. Keen and V. Lee, 'Civilian Status and the New Security Agendas', in S. Collinson et al., *Realising Protection: The Uncertain Benefits of Civilian, Refugee and IDP Status*, HPG Report 28 (London: ODI, 2009).

Displacement and return in Colombia

Andrés Celis, UNHCR, Colombia

Colombia is in the throes of one of the world's largest crises of internal displacement. Since the mid-1990s, more than 3.2 million people have been displaced. On average, between 2000 and 2009 300,000 people a year fled in search of protection. In 2008, 294,000 left their places of residence. In late 2008, the government estimated that nearly 40,000 households (176,000 people) had returned to their places of origin with the accompaniment of the authorities.

The official Information System on the Displaced Population in Colombia is one of the most highly developed such systems in the world (www.accionsocial.gov.co). However, it does not include data on households that have achieved lasting solutions through their return. The precariousness of figures on returns generates a distortion: there are estimates of the number of people who have been displaced, but not of how many of them remain in displacement. The absence of such information creates a gap in protection to the extent that little is known about the conditions in which returnees are living.

The government's returns policy

Thirteen years after Colombia enacted a law on displaced persons (Law 387 of 1997), state policy regarding return has yet to be consolidated. In 2006, the Constitutional Court identified lack of security as one of the gravest defects of the returns policy. Flaws in the implementation of this policy persisted in 2008, leading the Court to order once again that these problems be corrected (the ruling is Auto 08 of 2009). In response, the government presented the general guidelines of its policy on returns in October 2009. The government bases its policy on six axes: (i) security; (ii) participation by the displaced population; (iii) recognition of different needs – of women, boys, girls

and adolescents, indigenous people, Afro-descendants and the disabled; (iv) coordination between the central government and municipalities; (v) information systems to guarantee follow-up on the policy and to evaluate progress in stabilising communities; and (vi) effective enjoyment of rights (*goce efectivo de derechos* or GED in Spanish).

between 2000 and 2009 300,000 people a year fled in search of protection

The GED criterion is one of the Constitutional Court's most important contributions. According to this criterion, policies must be designed to guarantee the displaced population's enjoyment of their rights, beginning with their rights to life and personal integrity and security and including adequate assistance to enable them to achieve dignified and independent living conditions in order to re-establish their circumstances prior to displacement.

The policy on returns establishes 12 components to achieve the effective enjoyment of rights: (i) access to housing subsidy programmes; (ii) access to productive land through the recovery of abandoned land and the legal formalisation of ownership; (iii) inclusion of the population within the healthcare system; (iv) education for children under the age of 15; (v) rehabilitation of access routes to places of return; (vi) assistance in obtaining access to justice to make rights to truth, justice and reparation effective; (vii) basic public utilities, such as electricity, water and sewerage services; (viii) access to sufficient and

adequate food; (ix) access to income and employment; (x) humanitarian accompaniment, which is seen as a guarantee for the exercise of returnees' rights; (xi) support for social organisation; and (xii) psychosocial help for returned communities.

One of the policy's most important instruments is the protocol on return, the correct application of which would guarantee the principles of voluntariness, security and dignity. The protocol defines five phases: (i) exploratory, in which initial agreement is reached between the communities and the authorities to advance towards return; (ii) analysis of the situation, in which the causes of displacement, security conditions and the needs of the population are evaluated; (iii) preparation, which includes visits with the community to the place of origin, and in which institutional commitments are defined; (iv) return; and (v) follow-up, in which the conditions of the returning population and the rate at which entities fulfil their commitments is evaluated.

In order to comprehensively apply this policy, the government has prioritised the consolidation of 25 return processes involving around 35,000 people. The new return policy is correct in focusing on following up on returns that have already been carried out. In the past many such returns have not been consolidated because of weak institutional accompaniment. To guarantee the policy's impact, the current pattern, in which returns are promoted and carried out but institutional efforts later fall off, must be addressed.

Obstacles to return

The main restriction on returns as a lasting solution stems from the continuing conflict and high level of violence, despite progress in indicators regarding kidnapping, massacres and murders. Whereas in 2002 there were 2,986 kidnappings, 115 massacres and 28,837 homicides, in 2008 the state recorded 437 kidnappings, 37 massacres and 16,140 homicides.

The last four years have seen a transformation in the conflict as a result of the increased capabilities of the government's military forces and the near-total demobilisation of paramilitary groups. However, most of the causes of displacement persist or have been transformed. To counteract the expanded capabilities of the military, insurgent groups have increased their use of anti-personnel mines, while bringing greater pressure to bear on communities, particularly those taking part in state programmes associated with the substitution of illicit crops or collaborating with the security forces.

The impact of demobilisation has not yielded the hoped-for results in terms of reduced violence: numerous armed groups, many linked to drug-trafficking, operate in zones abandoned by demobilised actors, fighting for control over the production, processing and trafficking of drugs. The difficulty in identifying chains of command and command structures has facilitated the proliferation of threats against public officials, human rights defenders, community and social leaders and ordinary people, forcing many into flight.

Conditions are difficult in the municipalities where returns have been undertaken. For example, in 115 municipalities where returns have been carried out, 306,000 people were expelled between 2006 and 2009. During the same period, 1,157 were injured by explosive artefacts. In 95% of these 115 municipalities there were incidents involving explosive devices. The homicide rate in 52 of those municipalities is higher than the national average. One had a homicide rate of 312 per 100,000 inhabitants, and 12 reported murder rates of 100 per 100,000 inhabitants. Some 85% reported efforts to eradicate illicit crops. Just 53 accounted for 23,563 hectares of coca (27% of the national total, in a country with 1,098 municipalities). These figures highlight the risks that many returning families may face.

In terms of security, the authorities emphasise the importance of integrated action by the security forces and entities responsible for providing social services within the framework of presidential order 001 of 2009, the government's strategy of territorial consolidation, without warning of the risks facing communities and institutions carrying out humanitarian work. The confusion regarding humanitarian action is evident in that the policy links humanitarian accompaniment to programmes for dismantling illegal armed groups and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration.

insecurity partly explains people's general reluctance to return

Insecurity partly explains people's general reluctance to return. Between 3% and 5% of internally displaced people express a desire to return. Also important is the nature of displacement and resettlement. More than 2 million IDPs are dispersed in Colombia's large cities, 80% of whom arrived there as individuals or families. This scattered pattern makes returns difficult to organise; successful return processes are generally collective in nature. Other problems concern coordination among the 21 national entities involved, and between them and the municipalities, and land and housing issues in areas of return.

The weakness of the municipalities where many displacements take place and the long distances involved also pose problems. Follow-up by UNHCR has found that some returnees have received inadequate attention, that the protocol on returns is unknown by local authorities and IDPs and its application limited and that accompaniment is lacking, limiting sustainability. Returns are especially fragile where communities have been pressed into returning by armed groups, have faced difficulties in host communities, including a lack of attention from the state, and have suffered a lack of accompaniment following return.

Ensuring sustainable return

Even in the complex circumstances of Colombia's armed conflict, with diverse armed groups fighting for control over territories with strategic military, political or economic

importance, return remains possible. For many it may even be the best alternative, particularly for indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, where returns have been most successful. The instruments designed by the Colombian state are adequate to achieve successful returns, which is why greater efforts must be made to guarantee their application. Efforts are needed to strengthen the capacity for follow-up throughout all phases of return.

In terms of security, reports by military forces should be supplemented by comprehensive analysis of the conditions in these territories. There are zones where it is possible to promote returns. For example, in 27 of the 115 municipalities analysed (23%), homicide rates are below the national average, illegal armed groups are less active than in other regions, accidents involving mines are rare, illicit crop cultivation is less of a problem than in other zones and there have been very few new displacements between 2006 and 2008. In other words, there are objective conditions that point to successful returns in these areas.

Nonetheless, in all cases, the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring, early warning and prompt reaction are necessary to mitigate any future risk. To limit the stigmatisation of these communities, their involvement

in activities that could lead to reprisals by illegal armed groups, such as networks of informants or visible leadership in crop substitution programmes, should be avoided. Community participation in identifying needs and alternatives should be supplemented with instruments to facilitate financing of the initiatives identified; inflexible resources from the national government and the international community hamper community efforts and reduce the impact of investments.

A complete inventory of returns should be carried out to identify gaps in protection and highlight community needs. Accompaniment by humanitarian agencies can help to limit the pressure on communities in areas where illegal armed actors are a significant presence, and where there are considerable restrictions on movement. It is possible that, in certain cases, specific investments by the state or by international actors would help consolidate some of these processes. The proposal to prioritise the state response in 25 cases of return constitutes a positive first step in making return a genuine alternative and a lasting solution.

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Conflict transformation and the urban displaced in Colombia

Kimberly Howe

Trends in violence in Colombia have been changing over the past decade. Historically, the conflict has been fought mostly in rural areas. This has led to the massive displacement of rural populations to neighbouring rural areas, local cities and more distant urban areas. In recent years, however, the majority of violence (political and criminal) has taken place in urban areas, creating new forms of displacement. As a result, a full range of displacement patterns exist in Colombia: rural to rural; rural to peri-urban; rural to urban; and intra-urban, where individuals, families or whole neighbourhoods are forced to leave their homes and move to other areas in the same city, or perhaps to other urban areas. This article explores the phenomenon of urban displacement in Colombia and the challenges it poses to humanitarian action. A profiling tool for urban IDPs is discussed, drawing on the case of Santa Marta, the capital of Magdalena Department.

Urban IDPs and the case of Santa Marta

Internally displaced people in urban centres comprise a largely hidden population, for a variety of reasons. Some prefer to stay anonymous, protecting themselves against armed groups or seeking to avoid clashes with other urban residents. Some arrive in search of employment and mix with other migrants and (often poor) urban dwellers. Still others are hosted by non-displaced relatives and friends. Many are not aware that their IDP status may

afford them access to additional support and protection. Regardless of their circumstances and preferences, however, relatively little is known about urban IDPs, making it hard for humanitarian organisations to estimate their numbers, assess their assistance and protection needs or understand whether or how their situation differs from that of the urban poor. Without such baseline information, humanitarian organisations and governments face an enormous challenge in designing effective relief and protection programmes for these people.

IDPs in urban centres comprise a largely hidden population

Magdalena Department on Colombia's Caribbean coast has one of the highest per capita rates of displacement in the country. From 1996 to 2004, Magdalena was the site of a major paramilitary campaign against guerrilla groups. Civilians were targeted by both sides and large numbers were displaced, in particular to Santa Marta. After the paramilitary demobilisation programme was implemented in 2006, Santa Marta became one of many areas in the country which has seen power struggles between demobilised paramilitaries, newly formed illegal armed groups and drug-

traffickers, leading to new forms of insecurity for IDPs and other urban residents.¹

Despite these general facts, relatively little is known about IDPs in Santa Marta. How many displaced people are living in the city? How do they compare to their non-displaced neighbours? What are their livelihood characteristics and assistance and protection needs? To address these issues, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in Geneva and the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University created a profiling tool for urban IDPs, with Santa Marta as one of three case studies (the other two were Khartoum and Abidjan).

The tool allows for an accurate estimation of the number of IDPs living in an urban area. By using a three-stage randomised sampling strategy, we found that between 56,055 and 75,839 people, or between 13.4% and 18.2%, in Santa Marta have been internally displaced. The study also provided evidence that Santa Marta's IDPs fare worse than non-IDPs on almost all indicators of wellbeing.² For example, IDPs have lower levels of education than non-IDPs. While this is not surprising given that IDPs are mostly from rural areas, it does disadvantage them in terms of retaining a job in an urban setting. This is reflected in the finding that IDPs are more likely to be unemployed and less likely to have contractual employment than non-IDPs. Non-contractual employment is much less stable and secure, suggesting that IDPs' livelihoods are more precarious than those of non-IDPs. IDPs were also less likely to own their own homes, their homes were inferior and they were less likely to have a direct water connection, increasing the risk of water-borne disease and making them more vulnerable to environmental shocks, such as floods and mudslides. IDPs were more likely to report problems with infrastructure and insecurity, and their relations with the authorities, communities and neighbours were likely to be more troublesome. Infrastructure problems include exposure to sewage or refuse, noise and lack of access to public transport. These findings also suggest that IDPs have less physical security than non-IDPs, and face significant stigmatisation and discrimination in their social environments. In short, IDPs experience lower levels of human security than non-IDPs.

In comparing IDPs and urban migrants (that is, people who migrated to Santa Marta for reasons not related to conflict), IDPs were more likely to have left or abandoned land, a house, a harvest, livestock and possessions in their home area. IDPs were more likely to anticipate problems should they try to return home than non-IDP migrants, including access to food, education, healthcare and housing in the return area, as well as problems with security. These findings are not surprising given that IDPs are more likely to have been forced to leave their homes quickly, without either liquidating their assets or bringing their assets with them. Insecurity in their home areas

¹ Karen Jacobsen and Kimberly Howe with IDMC, *Rural Displacement to Urban Areas: The Tufts-IDMC Profiling Study: Santa Marta, Colombia*, available at www.internal-displacement.org or <http://fic.tufts.edu>.

² All results discussed here were found to hold at least a statistical significance at the .05 level.

means that they have little prospect of recovering assets, putting them at a further disadvantage in urban areas.

All of these findings suggest that it makes sense to create IDP-specific programming in Santa Marta, as IDPs have significantly more problems with protection and have very specific vulnerabilities when it comes to livelihoods, housing and other dimensions of human security. As with any targeted programming, however, it must be balanced with the needs of other disadvantaged groups. Introducing resources into a resource-poor community can create competition, tension and resentment.

Government efforts

Since 1997, the government has provided some humanitarian assistance to IDPs. Efforts were increased after the Colombian Constitutional Court's landmark decision in 2004, declaring that the government's response to displacement was unconstitutional. Under new legislation and with increased funding, Accion Sociale was charged with providing assistance to IDPs. However, there are still concerns that significant numbers are not included in the registry, and barriers remain in accessing benefits. For example, there is a time limit within which IDPs must register after their displacement, and they are only considered displaced under certain circumstances (e.g. displacement due to drug-eradication efforts such as aerial fumigation, paramilitary activity and intra-urban displacement are not recognised). Long queues for registration determination and burdensome documentation requirements further limit access. Our study confirmed the concerns of humanitarians. We found that less than half (42%) of IDPs in Santa Marta have been included in the official IDP registry. When asked why they did not apply, IDPs reported that they did not know how to register, that they did not think doing so would be helpful or benefit them, or they did not think that the authorities would believe their displacement stories.

introducing resources into a resource-poor community can create competition, tension and resentment

Generalising to other cities

There are limitations to the survey. First, the survey design did not allow us to explore sensitive issues such as problems related to registration, discrimination or harassment by non-state actors or authorities. We also had trouble generating a gender-representative sample, as we needed to conduct interviews during daylight for safety reasons, which produced a strong female bias. Furthermore, basing IDP estimates on the official government census data (gathered by DANE – Departamento Encargado de las Estadísticas en Colombia) for the city of Santa Marta meant that spillover or shanty areas were not included in our estimates, which probably created an under-estimate of IDPs in Santa Marta.

Despite these limitations, however, this profiling tool is a promising methodology that can be utilised by humanitarian organisations and academic institutions in a variety of urban areas, within Colombia or elsewhere.

While the results of this profiling study could be helpful for service providers in Santa Marta, it is not immediately apparent how applicable they are to other cities in Colombia. One way of testing this is to identify some salient characteristics of Santa Marta, compare them with other Colombian cities and draw parallels between the two. In lieu of a proper matching study, we can still assume that certain themes identified in the Santa Marta study will translate to other cities. One such is the IDP registration process, which is administered by a single agency (Accion Sociale) across the country. In Santa Marta, less than half of the displaced population was included in the registration. It is likely that IDPs in other cities are also significantly under-represented. As such, it is important that humanitarians do not take this roster as an accurate and exhaustive list of IDPs in any given area. Other methods must be used to estimate their numbers.

While there is much regional variation in the Colombian conflict, the main organised violent actors have a national presence and tend to employ similar tactics across the country. As mentioned above, paramilitaries and guerrillas displaced rural civilians as part of their campaigns in Magdalena Department, with many either immediately or subsequently displaced to Santa Marta. Our research showed that IDPs were disadvantaged compared to other urban migrants and the urban poor. Given the consistency in the behaviour of violent groups across the country, we can assume that IDPs in other urban areas are similarly disadvantaged.

Third, while many human rights organisations and humanitarians are aware of the problem of intra-urban displacement, there is as yet no systematic documentation of its scale or scope. Accion Sociale, the national organisation

responsible for providing assistance to IDPs, does not include intra-urban displaced in the national IDP registry, nor do they receive benefits. This problem is further complicated because this form of displacement, along with general rates of violence, vary widely from city to city. Thus, it is very important that providers of humanitarian assistance have a nuanced understanding of conflict dynamics in specific urban areas. This means forging relationships not only with officials and other organisations, but also with the academics and research institutes that keep track of illegal armed groups.

This article has highlighted the challenges humanitarians face in attempting to operate effectively in exceedingly complicated situations, where the line between war and peace is not well-defined, where the conflict context is constantly changing and where it is unclear who is responsible for conflict, displacement and its aftermath. One useful step in facing these dilemmas is to obtain sound information, from rigorous methodologies. With urban IDPs, for example, humanitarians need to know how many there are, where they are, why they are displaced and what their protection and service needs are, both in general and in comparison to those around them. Accurate information not only assists in effective programming, but can also serve as a tool for lobbying the authorities to take proper responsibility for the humanitarian situation in Colombia. The urban IDP profiling tool described in this article is one means of achieving this goal. It is flexible enough to work with a variety of hidden populations in urban settings, and can be used by a number of different actors, including academics, international organisations, humanitarian agencies, governments and civil society groups.

Kimberly Howe is a PhD Candidate at the Fletcher School, Tufts University, Medford, MA. The authors of the study are interested in further field testing this methodology, either independently or in partnership with humanitarian organisations. Please contact Kimberly at Kimberly.howe@tufts.edu for further information.

Drug-trafficking, anti-narcotics policy and security: another humanitarian cost of the Colombian conflict

Ricardo Vargas Meza, Transnational Institute

In the two decades prior to President Alvaro Uribe's election in 2001, illicit crop production in Colombia grew from 3,500 to 144,000 hectares, representing an annual increase of 25.6%, with Colombia producing more than 70% of the world's cocaine. This trend was coupled with a worsening of the armed conflict, which according to Uribe was due to guerrillas' involvement in the drug trade. Drug-trafficking was deemed to constitute one of the main sources of funding for Colombia's guerrilla groups; according to government figures, between 1991 and 1996 \$470 million was raised from the illegal sale of narcotics, representing 41% of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)'s

income.¹ To tackle the problem, the government's National Development Plan 2002–2006 proposed that 'the battle against terrorist groups, drug traffickers, and transnational organised crime will focus on their financial structures', that is to say on the illegal drugs industry.

Strategies being used to eradicate illicit crops, such as aerial spraying, forced manual eradication and alternative development programmes have become tools to support the government's security objectives. Yet the government

¹ National Planning Department, National Development Plan, 'Towards a Communitarian State', 2002–2006.

does not distinguish between those that grow illicit crops for large-scale processing and poor rural communities that have small plots as a means of livelihood. Furthermore, there is an absence of viable development alternatives for these communities, with government programmes just offering subsidies for eradicating crops. There is also a lack of consultation on these programmes, with the government determining their scope and objectives unilaterally, eroding levels of trust between these communities and the state. This has occurred despite the goals expressed in the government's Alternative Development Programme, which include 'strengthening social capital and stimulating organisation, participation, and ownership of the community in order to consolidate democratic security and establish the basis for sustainable development in areas free of illicit [crops]'.² Despite this discourse of sustainable development, this eradication framework is based on the use of force as a deterrent, which is not an effective approach in areas suffering from problems of severe exclusion and marginalisation. The government's policy of *solely* viewing coca cultivation as a financial resource for the guerrillas has led to neglect of the social, economic and political problems affecting coca-growing communities and their humanitarian implications.

Colombia produces more than 70% of the world's cocaine

An example of the problem with the government's policy can be seen in the way forced manual eradication programmes have been implemented in practice. They have been used as a weapon in Colombia's armed conflict, with the first incursions carried out in response to attacks by the FARC, notably on a military unit on 27 December 2005 in the Sierra de La Macarena, which left 29 people dead. The strategy has also been pursued in Nariño and Putumayo departments bordering Ecuador. They have led to protests by rural communities that oppose the violence and forced displacement that accompanies these programmes and their impact on livelihoods.³ Crop fumigation operations will often affect livestock, crops, pastureland and forest areas; in response to an incursion in Tarazá, Nechí and Valdivia municipalities in Antioqueño region in January 2008, more than 1,500 farmers staged protests, demanding talks with the government over a series of issues, including the suspension of crop spraying, economic assistance for farming families and infrastructure development.⁴

In response to these protests, the government has generally sought to appease rural communities in the short term,

² National Planning Department, Conpes 2318, Alternative Development Programme, 2003–2006, 3 March 2003.

³ See 'Choques entre coccaleros y policías', *El Tiempo*, 1 September 2007.

⁴ Antioquia Farmers' Association, 'La legitimidad de la protesta social en el marco de la erradicación de la coca en el Bajo Cauca Antioqueño: Consecuencias y proyecciones', January–March 2008.

rather than resolving the underlying structural problems that prompt them. Meanwhile, eradication strategies continue, often in the form of aerial spraying. For example, on 3 April 2009 a plane escorted by the Colombian army flew over several population settlements in Santa María, Coteje, Cheté, Velásquez and La Fragua, spraying glyphosate over water sources, forests, houses and crops, seriously affecting communities' health and sources of food and water.⁵

By linking coca producers with the FARC's financial and support structure, the government has rejected dialogue with the communities involved, prioritising security objectives at the expense of efforts to address complex problems such as the marginalisation of many coca-producing areas. In effect, the government's overarching 'democratic security' and 'territorial consolidation policy' (CTS) further reinforces and deepens this erroneous policy. Development has become part of the war against drug-trafficking and terrorism, neglecting issues related to serious social exclusion and humanitarian needs. As a result, rural demonstrations and protests will continue, sending a clear message that force is not the answer to Colombia's drug problem.

Security and development strategy

The CTS is implemented according to the progress achieved in the government's military offensive in particular areas. Targeted areas are:

1. Areas where guerrillas have retreated.
2. Zones where paramilitaries have demobilised.
3. Border areas, where the influence of the guerrillas is generally contained.
4. Areas where insurgent groups have retreated but continue to be concentrated.

Colombia's development model is increasing inequality and exacerbating social exclusion

In the first two categories, a combination of military force and aid is designed to increase the legitimacy of the armed forces by addressing the basic needs of communities where military offensives have occurred, including health and infrastructure work. This is carried out through the government's Centre for the Coordination of Integrated Action (CCAI), which brings together various government ministries. Interventions in the last two categories, border zones and areas where insurgent groups have retreated, consist of military offences and vast aerial spraying, aimed at preventing the insurgents from profiting from the illegal drug industry.

Additionally, in categories one and two, interventions seek to further establish the agrarian model that is currently being pursued in Colombia. This consists of strengthening large-scale cattle ranching and agro-industrial plantations

⁵ See Diakonia, 'Fumigaciones en Timbiquí afectan proyectos de seguridad alimentaria', Field Report, Popayán, 12 May 2009.

with the aim of increasing the export of products such as African palm and bio-fuels. Controversially, the land used has often been acquired through the violent expropriation of rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Their livelihoods are further disrupted by the activities of extractive industries, including mining, petroleum and timber, often forcing communities to relocate and polluting local water and food sources. These areas are also targeted for infrastructure projects that connect points of production or resource extraction with international transport outlets in order to facilitate their export. The result is a development model characterised by increasing inequality and social exclusion.

These structural problems are at the root of the continued production of coca in the rural areas to which the poorest sections of Colombian society are banished. As such, the government's anti-narcotics policy addresses the effects, rather than the causes, of what is a complex problem. Recurrent social unrest, high levels of crime in cities such as Medellín and other departmental capitals, the persistence of forced displacement, increasing criminal violence and burgeoning illegal activities, including coca cultivation – all are symptoms of a socio-economic model that continues to exclude a large segment of Colombian society.

Conclusion

With the integration of illicit crops and armed conflict and the criminalisation of coca growers, the government

has also blurred the distinction between civilians and combatants, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Colombia. The war on drugs has in fact concentrated on coca-producing areas (mainly under guerrilla control), with far less radical action being taken against other elements in the production chain. As a result, the power of drug-traffickers is growing in terms of their control of territory, the privatisation of security and the reconfiguration and cooption of the state. In the face of these facets of the problem, current policies are deficient or non-existent. Meanwhile, in the rural, indigenous and Afro-descendent population, humanitarian needs have been aggravated. When these populations resort to coca as a way out, they are attacked not so much for engaging in illicit activities, but rather because the production of coca provides resources to the principal enemy of the state. On the other hand, these communities also face pressure from other armed actors and the private sector as they seek to take control of natural resources in the territories that they occupy. In light of this increasing humanitarian crisis, there needs to be a serious rethinking of government counter-narcotic strategies, differentiating between security objectives and the underlying problems that drive communities to engage in cultivating illicit crops.

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Evidence-based decision-making in humanitarian assistance

David A. Bradt

Network Paper 67, December 2009

Data limitations in humanitarian crises have led to an increasing number of initiatives to improve information and decision-making in humanitarian assistance. These initiatives are, however, beset with fundamental problems, including the definitions of key terms, conceptual ambiguity, a lack of standardisation in methods of data collection and an absence of systematic attempts to strengthen the capacity of field organisations to collect and analyse data.

This Network Paper presents an overview of evidence-based decision-making in technical sectors of humanitarian assistance. The goal of the paper is to provide a common understanding of key concepts in evidence-based decision-making in order to stimulate a discussion of evidence within the humanitarian community.

The paper highlights key concepts in evidence-based practices, examines recommendations from recent published humanitarian reviews, and presents options to strengthen evidence-based decision-making in the design, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian assistance.

The paper concludes that evidence-based decision-making often requires no additional scientific data *per se*, but rather an understanding of well-established technical best practices in conjunction with financial resources and political will.

Changing the way we lead: how changes in attitude and behaviour in Cluster Coordinators support humanitarian reform¹

Richard Luff, UNICEF

Effective leadership is mentioned in two of the three pillars of the Humanitarian Reform process, yet leadership issues have received least attention from the Global Cluster Leads (GCLs) and OCHA as they seek to build coordination capacity. This article seeks to illustrate how Cluster Coordinators, along with Humanitarian Coordinators, should lead change through demonstrating the right attitude and behaviour. However, there is clearly a need to value and support such behaviour change to ensure that it is sustained in a systematic and widespread way, otherwise leadership will remain ad hoc and personality-driven.

Managing 'the brand'

Humanitarian programme staff have to manage an inherent tension created by competition amongst agencies, which sometimes sits uncomfortably alongside an acknowledged need to work together. Organisations work hard to raise their profile, using T-shirts, flags and relief items bedecked with organisational logos, which forges the brand. However, if a Cluster Coordinator cannot shed their own lead agency brand, they will lose the trust of the cluster agencies faster than you can say 'humanitarian reform'.

Humanitarian reform demands that Cluster Coordinators act on behalf of the whole cluster's interests, and are seen as honest brokers, thus working on behalf of the 'collective'. Cluster Lead Agencies (CLAs), overwhelmingly from the UN and seldom direct implementers of programmes, must have the humility to ensure that others' work is fully credited. Cluster Coordinators must vigorously maintain this, and if required must challenge the practices of lead agencies where these emphasise the organisational brand at the expense of the work of the cluster members.

UN funding mechanisms: perspective and objectivity

Cluster guidance notes and training emphasise the role that Cluster Coordinators should play in prioritising allocations from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). UN lead agencies invariably require Cluster Coordinator input into their own funding mechanisms. However, Cluster coordinators need to recognise that UN funds are part of a more complex structure and may only be a small component of a bigger funding picture. A Cluster Coordinator must dedicate time and have the skills to encourage sharing of closely controlled financial information to build a total picture of the funds raised and requested, through NGOs and the Red Cross/Crescent movement as well as from UN-led appeals/funds. This enables a Cluster Coordinator to identify critical funding gaps and then ask the CLA to direct funds from UN-led mechanisms to address them.

¹ See <http://www.humanitarianreform.org>.

In Bangladesh during the first few weeks of the cyclone response in 2007, for instance, UNICEF, as WASH (water/sanitation/hygiene) CLA, directed funds to fill gaps rather than acting as the centre of the response.²

Focusing on UN-led funding mechanisms, the role of the Cluster Coordinator is to ensure that allocation decisions are clearly prioritised and objective, in line with the Cluster's strategy. There must be clear criteria, consistent with the agreed strategy, transparently shared and robustly applied, with allocation decisions taken by a group including non-UN agencies. The highest standards of integrity must be demonstrated by the Cluster Coordinator, otherwise trust in money matters will be lost, especially where decisions are hidden. Both the Afghanistan and Pakistan WASH clusters have formed strategic advisory groups to discuss and set out strategy, project selection criteria and the mechanisms for agreeing which projects will be funded.³

Cluster Coordinators have to understand what has to be communicated

The language of exclusion and confusion

The cluster approach evaluation noted that 'no significant (partnership) gains were seen for local NGO participants. Overall this is an area of significant weakness'.⁴ A key factor here is the challenge smaller national NGOs face in communicating with the higher levels of the coordination system, and vice-versa. Language is an obvious barrier, but it is the more complex structural aspects of how we work and communicate that are seldom addressed. As internet usage and e-mail connectivity increase, we take it for granted that ever-larger chunks of data can be easily shared and digested. Cluster Coordinators have to understand what has to be communicated, and more importantly whether the audience, particularly smaller national NGOs, will be able to access information that meets their needs.

Over the last 15 years or so there has been a trend towards more comprehensive funding proposals, more exacting financial rules and the generation of more comprehensive data to support proposed interventions. There is little doubt that this increasing complexity does not help smaller

² Bangladesh Emergency Response to Cyclone SIDR, Minutes of DER WASH Strategic Advisory Group, 17 December 2007.

³ See Afghanistan and Pakistan 2009 WASH cluster draft strategy documents.

⁴ Cluster approach evaluation, 21 November 2007.

national partners. At the very least it will require them to invest considerable time, often at their own expense, in comprehending what may well be a ‘foreign’ bureaucratic language. Given that each potential funding organisation measures, controls and communicates differently, trying to make sense of it all is a bewildering challenge, particularly for smaller national NGOs (but in reality, of course, for all of us).

The Cluster Coordinator and other CLA staff are critical in helping partners to navigate their way through this complexity. The key questions here could be summed up as ‘How can I help you (the potential partner)? How will I strive to help you overcome the complexity and transactional barriers to achieve greater collective impact?’.

Opening up communication

In reality, a Cluster Coordinator has no ‘hard’ authority over any organisation, only the potential for influence, as all organisations in a cluster are ultimately structured to work independently and to follow their own management directions, within their own specific mandates. The only real levers of ‘power’ or influence a Cluster Coordinator has relate to decisions over UN pooled funding allocations, which as explained above should be undertaken jointly. However, the Cluster Coordinator does have a formally recognised role on behalf of the CLA, and they should be selected for their personal leadership qualities, management skills and technical competence. Perhaps more significantly, the Cluster Coordinator should understand how knowledge management works and aspire to be the very best facilitator of information flows.

Effective information management is the key added value that a Cluster Coordinator can bring; information is the most important motivator for agencies to attend coordination meetings. Reluctance to release preliminary or incomplete information, sensitivity, security and control all conspire to block or strangle information flows. The Cluster Coordinator must seek to be the information management master, who can transcend these numerous obstacles and overcome the perception that providing information to the cluster only sends it into a black hole. It is therefore critical for a Cluster Coordinator to understand that good information flow is at the heart of communication, and that he or she is there to provide an information service to others.

Partnership through sharing challenges

The term ‘partnership’ is all too often reduced to meaning those organisations that have been funded (i.e. contracted) to undertake work. The cluster approach asks us to challenge traditional attitudes to partnership, and the sense that there is a UN-dominated hierarchy. The cluster approach emphasises the words *key partnerships*, though this has not been further defined.⁵ So while Cluster Coordinators should be open to including and listening to all relevant partners, it will still be necessary to identify and work closely with key partners, taking care not to create perceptions of favouritism or selectivity.

⁵ *Terms of Reference for Sector Leads at the Country Level*, IASC Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response, 24 November 2006. The term ‘key’ is not expanded upon.

A Cluster Coordinator must work hard to forge a strong sense of collective effort, in which a diverse team with different skills is working for the same overall goal. This goes far beyond the production of a joint cluster strategy and plans, as it requires trust and relationship-building to give a sense that this is a collective endeavour. A real sense of partnership can only emerge when we realise that training, working and analysing together moves us beyond passive and unchallenging cluster partnerships. Genuine dialogue, while struggling together on issues of shared concern, builds the professional respect that underpins the strongest partnerships.⁶ In addition, valuing the importance and added benefit derived from the diversity of the ‘cluster team’ allows us to respect the potential of all contributions, including from small national NGOs with small-scale delivery capacities.

Towards shared accountability

Enforcement of formal accountabilities, often linked to financial resources, is a powerful management tool in delivering change. Yet accountabilities within the cluster approach are limited, and there is little evidence that they are being monitored, let alone enforced.⁷ The WASH cluster has developed a performance tool under its learning project, but this has not helped to enforce formal accountabilities, especially when reviews are conducted some time after the acute phase of a crisis. Given the complexity and dynamic nature of crises, especially in the acute phase, how feasible is it to introduce means to address the poor performance of CLAs and Cluster Coordinators? Introducing more formal mechanisms would be enormously cumbersome, and would probably never be agreed.

the Cluster Coordinator must facilitate a peer review process for quality and performance

WASH cluster coordination training introduces a model of mutual accountability as an effective way to build shared responsibility for performance.⁸ The collective should be jointly responsible and thus accountable. The Cluster Coordinator should play a key role by conveying the strongest sense of mutual accountability to cluster members, initially by demonstrating their own accountability to the cluster members through being open to feedback. The Cluster Coordinator must then facilitate a peer review process for quality and performance as a key way of building mutual accountability. This both develops the skills to critique and appraise the whole picture, as well as sharing the responsibility for forming a view on what

⁶ In the author’s opinion, key agencies such as BRAC, NGO Forum, Oxfam and Save now sit alongside UNICEF and the government as equal partners in the WASH cluster in Bangladesh.

⁷ IASC Operational Guidance, Accountability of Humanitarian Coordinators and Cluster Leads.

⁸ See WASH Cluster Coordination training module 2.4 Working in partnership (see WASH page on www.humanitarianreform.org).

works and what does not. In the first phase of an acute crisis this could take the form of a review of interventions at cluster meetings, while at a later stage more formal peer-to-peer evaluations would be appropriate.⁹

Preparedness and predictability

The key to preparedness planning can best be summarised by this quote from Dwight D. Eisenhower: 'Planning is everything, the plan is nothing.' The Cluster Coordinator must not get bogged down in aligning many different agency plans, and must not be overly prescriptive in the production of the final plan. It is also critical to distinguish between what needs to be process-driven and what does not, and to concentrate on generic preparedness activities whilst not dwelling on detailed response planning. Ultimately, the Cluster Coordinator must not be over-controlling, but rather develop trust and engagement through a focused and relevant process where the achievement of key preparedness activities and relationship-building are recognised as key success factors.

The context within which any Cluster Coordinator works is everything, and achieving a quick grasp of this context is key to decision-making and prioritisation. Amidst the intensity of the emergency response, some process of collective information analysis and collective understanding of the situation has to be undertaken, otherwise understanding will be partial and CLA-centric.

⁹ As introduced in the WASH Cluster in Vavunia, northern Sri Lanka, in February 2009.

The Cluster Coordinator has to facilitate a process of building common contextual understanding and shared analysis, through open questioning and active listening, to develop so to speak the workings of a 'cluster brain'. This requires strong leadership, to prevent a mass of detail from obscuring the major issues, while at the same time challenging agencies to think together and work in a mutually supportive manner.

Conclusion

The Humanitarian Reform process has made some progress towards improving humanitarian response, even working within the pre-existing organisational structure and practices of the CLAs and the UN as a whole. Despite these limitations, there is considerable latitude for Cluster Coordinators to work in a way that transcends the old patterns of doing business. This requires the existing cadre of Cluster Coordinators to question how they work and step down from this role if they cannot be part of the reform process. While CLAs need to provide more systematic performance feedback on Cluster Coordinators, cluster partner feedback is just as important. However, unless CLAs can realign their institutional attitudes and priorities to ensure that their own humanitarian programmes and interests are subordinate to the higher-level objectives of humanitarian reform, Cluster Coordinators' efforts will be neither supported nor sustained.

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Humanitarian reform: a progress report

Anne M. Street, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project

First rolled out following the earthquake in Pakistan and Kashmir in October 2005, the Humanitarian Reform process sought to address gaps in the international response to humanitarian crises, and to improve timeliness, effectiveness and predictability. The reform's approach was three-pronged: first, the introduction of clusters to better coordinate sectoral responses and identify a lead agency which would provide predictable leadership and coordination and act as the provider of last resort; second, to improve the availability of quick-response funding through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), established in March 2006; and third, to improve humanitarian leadership by strengthening the role and capacity of Humanitarian Coordinators. Under the subsequent Principles of Partnership, endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007,¹ 40 heads of agencies, including from the UN and NGOs, agreed to a set of values to underpin their humanitarian work, including equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.

¹ The GHP, set up in 2006, brought together heads of agencies from the three main strands of humanitarian actions: UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, plus the World Bank. See www.globalhumanitarianplatform.org.

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project was set up towards the end of 2008 to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international NGOs in these new coordination and financing mechanisms.² The project began by commissioning a series of mapping studies in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Zimbabwe, to document NGOs' experiences of Humanitarian Reform mechanisms. The findings were brought together in a report published in October 2009, entitled *Synthesis Report Review of Engagement of NGOs with the Humanitarian Reform Process*. This article highlights the report's main findings and recommendations, and outlines next steps.

The chariot wheel of humanitarian reform

Instead of the usual model, which conceptualises reform as comprising three 'pillars' (coordination, financing and leadership), the synthesis report proposes a conceptual

² See www.icva.ch/ngsoandhumanitarianreform.html for further details. Six international NGOs make up the project consortium: ActionAid, CAFOD, Care International UK, IRC-UK, Oxfam and Save the Children UK. The International Council of Voluntary Agencies is also a member. The three-year project runs until October 2011, and is funded by DFID.

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Figure 1: The chariot wheel of humanitarian reform

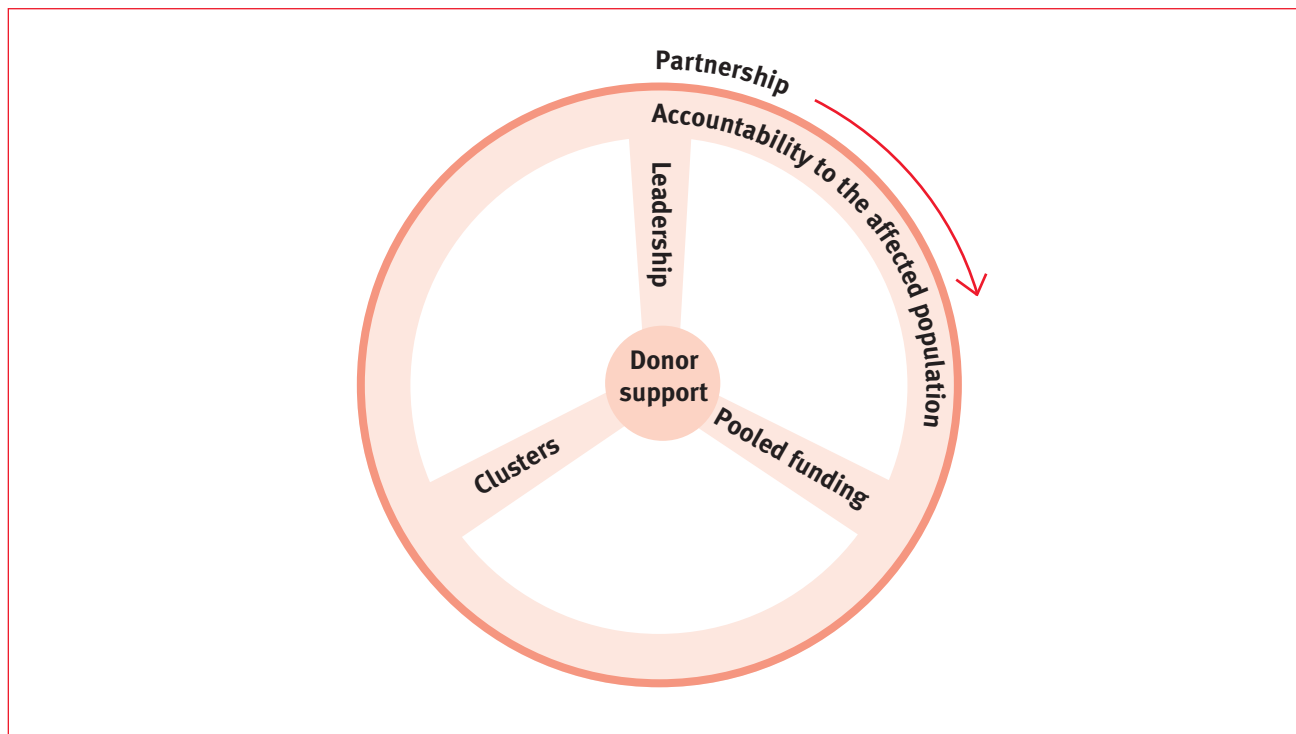


Figure by John Cosgrave

framework based upon a chariot wheel, with three spokes. These spokes are closely dependent on the central hub of donor funding, and the binding wheel rims of accountability to crisis-affected communities and partnership (both initially conspicuously absent from the Humanitarian Reform agenda). All must work in tandem if humanitarian response is to be fast and effective, and if it is to meet the needs of crisis-affected people.

Leadership and partnership

The five mapping studies found that two of the chariot wheel's spokes had been particularly poorly implemented: leadership and partnership. The analysis identified the fundamental role and importance of humanitarian leadership for all aspects of humanitarian reform: to ensure timely and coordinated needs-based responses and sufficient funding, allocated in the right places; holding actors to account for their commitments; and ensuring that partnerships include humanitarian actors across the spectrum. In four of the five study countries, the research found that strong humanitarian leadership was missing. NGO interviewees in each of these four countries felt that Humanitarian Coordinators (who also double as UN Resident Coordinators, and typically have further duties as country heads of UNDP or as Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSGs)) had failed to challenge governments on issues such as humanitarian space and principles, or had sidelined humanitarian issues in favour of other considerations. Only in the DRC did respondents feel that the Humanitarian Coordinator had played an effective role in advocating on behalf of the humanitarian community, as well as in pushing the various parts of the humanitarian system to work better together and to hold humanitarian actors accountable for the commitments

they make. These findings, although only based on five countries, demonstrate the lack of progress the reform agenda has made in improving leadership.

Although reform initially focused primarily on leadership in relation to HCs, the mapping studies demonstrated that strong and effective leadership must also be applied within the clusters, both at global and country level, where a good cluster lead can be instrumental in effectively involving a range of humanitarian actors. Cluster leads need, not just technical expertise, but also the skills to manage effective coordination and run meetings, and they need to ensure that the cluster functions in a partnership-oriented manner. Leadership is also important in coordinating between clusters, for example to ensure that gaps in the humanitarian response are addressed.

humanitarian leaders should work to create meaningful partnerships, including in areas related to funding

Humanitarian leaders should also work to create meaningful partnerships, including in areas related to funding. The research undertaken in the mapping studies found that partnership was unevenly applied across the humanitarian spectrum. Many stakeholders are still not familiar with the values set out in the Principles of Partnership, and a considerable cultural change is needed to embed partnership approaches within UN agencies.

In particular, national NGOs remain marginalised from Humanitarian Reform mechanisms, and are often unable to effectively engage with them. Although the reasons for this are varied, and depend in part on national and local circumstances, it is a fundamental fact that the reform process was driven by an international perspective which focused on international systems of humanitarian response, without sufficiently considering the implications of the proposed changes for national and local government structures, or the roles of national civil society actors and NGOs. Other more practical barriers for national NGO participation relate to issues such as the plethora of coordination meetings, which demand a level of staffing which most national and local NGOs simply do not have.

This situation is compounded by the sidelining of national NGOs due to their lack of access to funding. For example, out of the five mapping countries the Emergency Response Fund (ERF) in Zimbabwe provided the highest percentage of funding to national NGOs, at 8% in 2008, in Sudan the CHF provided a mere 0.5% whilst in Ethiopia national NGOs cannot even access the fund directly, but have to go through international counterparts. National NGOs also feel marginalised as meetings are conducted in English, with limited or no translation or interpretation facilities. Documents and training sessions are also primarily only available in English. In some complex humanitarian crises, such as Afghanistan, clusters barely operate outside the capital, while local NGOs work primarily at the provincial level.

the WASH cluster was seen as one of the most effective clusters

What makes an effective cluster?

In four out of five of the mapping study countries, the WASH cluster was seen as one of the most effective. There were a variety of reasons for this. One is that UNICEF has made a considerable staff investment, appointing full-time WASH cluster coordinators in a number of countries. In other countries, UNICEF staff have cluster-related responsibilities included in their job descriptions, and at least part of their performance assessment focuses on how they fulfil this role. In Ethiopia, UNICEF staff cited training for cluster leadership as critical to their ability to understand the breadth and function of the role, and stressed that this was not a one-off training episode, but is followed up with more in-depth work. The presence of active and committed international NGO co-chairs was also cited as being instrumental to the effective functioning of the WASH cluster in Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. The calibre of the cluster leadership also appears to be a critical element: in Zimbabwe the cluster lead was well-known and well-respected, and had previous WASH cluster experience in Pakistan. The INGO co-chair was also very active and engaged, and INGOs were prepared to invest technical expertise. Oxfam seconded a senior staff member to coordinate the global cluster, bringing together a range of actors who worked closely together over a period of time.

Relationship-building is another important element, and research for the report identified the importance of pre-existing relationships built on mutual trust as a key element of an effective cluster. In Zimbabwe, stakeholders also reported that the WASH was much more action-oriented with a good working atmosphere, unlike other clusters which were said to be more theoretical and less relevant to the implementation of response programmes. In the one country where WASH cluster coordination worked less well, Sudan, the cluster coordinator was heavily involved in managing his own agency programmes.

national NGOs feel marginalised as meetings are conducted in English

What next?

The report makes 15 recommendations to donors, the UN system and NGOs, focusing on leadership, coordination, accountability and funding. Of particular interest to NGOs is the report's recommendation that international NGOs (and UN agencies) should identify ways to better involve national partners in humanitarian coordination.

What steps should NGOs themselves be taking to enhance their participation in humanitarian reform? The mapping study noted relatively low awareness amongst NGO staff of the strategic input they could give within particular clusters, and a limited understanding of the potential benefit of involvement beyond accessing funding. In cases where NGOs do participate in clusters, this participation is constrained by staff availability, and NGOs are often unable to dedicate sufficiently senior staff to attend cluster meetings, limiting the level of engagement and reducing agencies' ability to make clear commitments within the cluster regarding the work they will carry out.

The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project has placed full-time Humanitarian Reform Officers (HROs) in four countries (Afghanistan, the DRC, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe) to work with humanitarian stakeholders to address some of the impediments to the effective engagement of NGOs, particularly national and local NGOs, in the reform process. Over the next two years, their findings and recommendations, as well as the good practice case studies which they will be identifying as part of their work, will be made available on the project website. We hope that this work will make a useful contribution to the policy debates and practical efforts which have taken place over the last four years to improve humanitarian response and preparedness.

Anne M. Street is International Project Manager of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the project consortium agencies. The project website is at www.icva.ch/ngosandhumanitarianreform.html.

Implementing the WASH Cluster: good practice and lessons learned

Louise Boughen and Henri Leturque, Global WASH Cluster Learning Project

This article summarises the findings of a learning initiative by the Global WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene promotion) Cluster, led by Action Against Hunger (ACF-UK). It provides a synthesis of good practices, lessons learned and recommendations for the roll-out of the cluster approach in the WASH sector. The analysis draws on performance reviews carried out by the Global Cluster Learning Project, self-evaluations, independent evaluations and internal and peer reviews. Progress towards achieving the cluster approach's objectives – improved leadership, accountability, predictability and partnership – is also analysed, although there is insufficient evidence to draw conclusions about the impact of the WASH clusters on the overall effectiveness of humanitarian response.

The cluster approach has been used by the WASH sector in more than 35 countries since 2005. Figure 1 provides an overview of countries that have established a WASH Cluster, either in response to a rapid-onset emergency or as part of the phased roll-out of the approach in ongoing emergencies. The Learning Project conducted reviews of WASH Cluster performance in seven countries: three 'roll-outs' (Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic) and four rapid-onset emergencies (Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic and Myanmar). It also drew on two external reviews (Pakistan and Mozambique) and a self-evaluation (Somalia).

The Global WASH Cluster Learning Project

As a part of the learning initiative, reviews were carried out using an inter-agency approach where possible, focusing on whether the cluster approach within the WASH sector:

- strengthened accountability, predictability, leadership and partnership;
- improved the planning and management of programming and procedures;
- improved service quality; and
- improved coordination.

Performance was assessed with reference to the IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster/Sector Leads.¹

Figure 2 summarises the strengths and weaknesses of the seven WASH Clusters reviewed by the Learning Project during 2007/8.

Coordination mechanisms have been established in all seven countries, with national/local agencies involved in the majority of cases. However, the effectiveness of these coordination mechanisms is limited in most countries. Reasons for this include a lack of clarity amongst WASH actors about the Cluster's purpose and their role within

¹ *Guidance Note on Using the Cluster Approach To Strengthen Humanitarian Response*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2006.

Figure 1: WASH Cluster activity

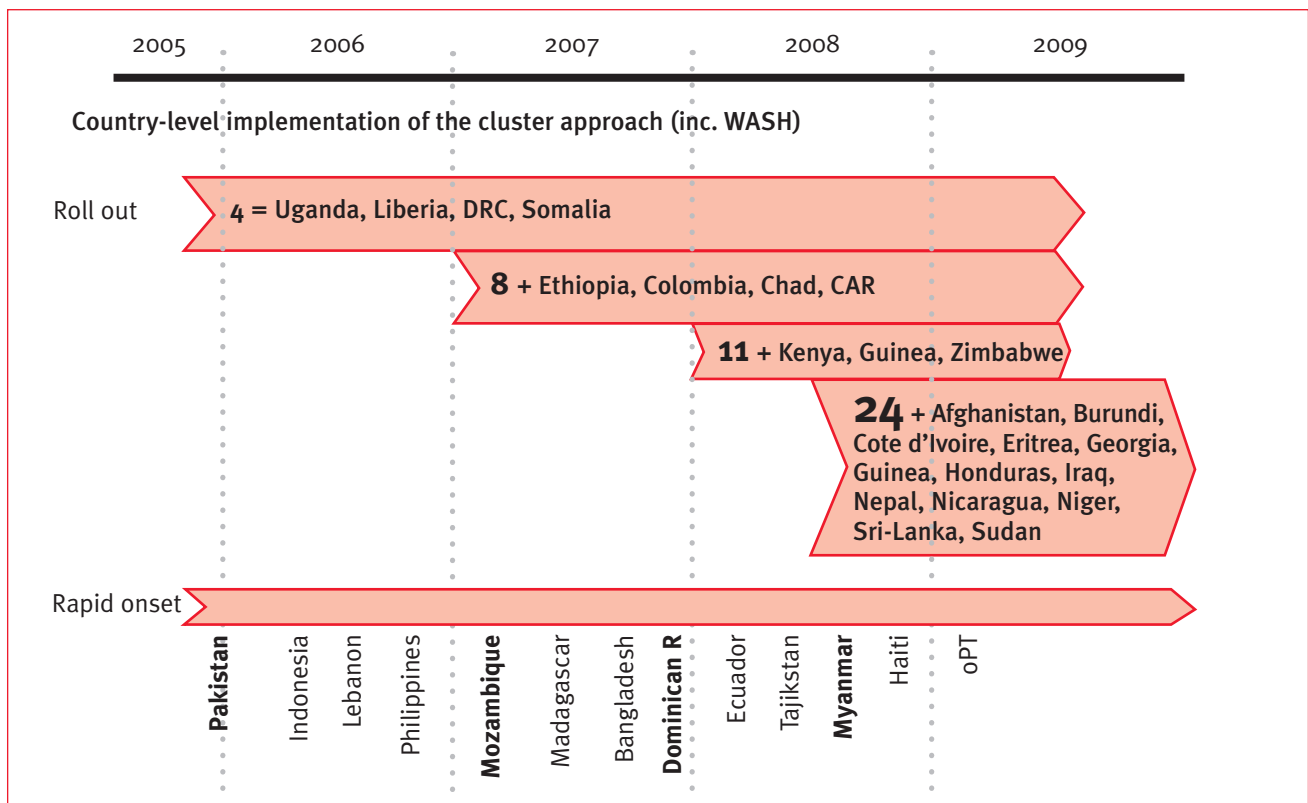


Figure 2: Strengths and weaknesses of country WASH Clusters

Area	Sub-area	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Objectives	Predictability							
	Accountability							
	Leadership							
	Partnership							
Coordination	Establishment of coordination mechanisms					😊		
	Effectiveness of coordination mechanisms		😊					
	Involvement of national/local organisations			😊			😊	
	Information management							😊
	Inter-cluster coordination							
Management of programming	Needs assessment							😊
	Gap analysis and prioritisation							
	Strategy and planning		😊					😊
	Monitoring							
	Funding and resource mobilisation		😊					
	Capacity for provider of last resort							
Quality of delivery	Advocacy		😊					
	Participatory and community approaches							
	Joint approach to cross-cutting issues							
	Agreement of standards							
	Compliance with agreed standards							
	Training and capacity building							
	Emergency preparedness						😊	

😊 Area of good practice 🟠 Improvements being made 🟡 Lack of improvements 🟢 Information not available

Note: 1 = Indonesia, 2 = Uganda, 3 = DRC, 4 = CAR, 5 = Bangladesh, 6 = Dominican Republic, 7 = Myanmar

Source: ACF-UK, 2008

it, poor meeting management, ineffective information management and physical constraints, for example when the affected area is large and/or remote. Several country WASH Clusters have set up information management systems, and there is evidence of improvement in the planning and management of the WASH sector in these countries. There is very little evidence of WASH Cluster activities having a positive impact on the quality of services, and only limited progress has been made in meeting the overall objectives of the cluster approach.

there is very little evidence of WASH Cluster activities having a positive impact on the quality of services

Lessons learned

Although examples of emerging good practice differ across countries and contexts, if lessons learned can be adequately captured and shared there is scope for these to be applied in other contexts. The following list of good practice and lessons learned is meant to be practical and actionable in the short term, as opposed to actions that require significant time to implement.

Coordination

1. *More clarity is needed regarding roles and responsibilities.* Cluster partners, including line ministries, international and national NGOs and UN agencies, often lack clarity regarding their roles and responsibilities within the cluster. Reviews frequently reported lack of awareness and understanding of the cluster approach and the wider Humanitarian Reform process at country level, including amongst UN personnel. Lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, coupled with poor monitoring and reporting, has been a major constraint to strengthening accountability in the sector, and could jeopardise the roll-out of the cluster approach. When terms of reference are being developed for cluster actors, NGOs are concerned that they could threaten their independence. To ensure that such issues are addressed in a consistent manner, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) should consider developing policy guidelines in this area.

2. *Agree a formal coordination mechanism.* See box 1.

3. *Coordination mechanisms at national level should be linked with district and field-level coordination mechanisms.* The Learning Project review in the DRC found decentralised coordination mechanisms to be a major benefit. Provincial WASH Clusters were often effective in engaging WASH actors on operational issues such as sector coordination,

Box 1: Coordination in Bangladesh

A formal coordination model introduced by the Shelter Cluster in Bangladesh is being promoted by the WASH Sector for rapid-onset emergencies. It includes the following key elements:

- A Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), comprising key actors and accountable to the Cluster members in charge of proposing and formulating Strategic Orientations.
- Early introduction of a Strategic Operational Framework (SOF), with a standard structure.
- Use of Technical Working Groups (TWIGs) to address specific issues.

Source: P. Mwaniki et al., *Review of the WASH Cluster in Bangladesh SDR Response*, Global WASH Learning Project, 2008.

identifying gaps and priorities and addressing technical challenges.

4. *Integrate with existing coordination systems, where appropriate.* In Uganda, the fact that the WASH Cluster is an adaptation of the local government coordination system has been beneficial in minimising the number of meetings, avoiding duplication of effort and increasing the potential for sustainability.

5. *Management capacity, relational skills and a good understanding of the WASH sector and country context are vital.* In Pakistan, the dedicated Cluster Coordinator is a local, experienced and well-known individual who speaks local dialects. The Coordinator has succeeded in engaging local NGOs at a time when entry into the conflict area by foreigners is severely restricted.

6. *Appoint a full-time Information Manager.* In Myanmar, a dedicated Information Manager has been appointed and a web-based information management system developed, enabling agencies to search for and access relevant information for the response, including digitised maps showing operational agencies by geographical area.

7. *Use incentives to encourage agencies to share information.* The use and timely dissemination of common analyses are strong incentives for cluster partners to share information. Indeed, the monthly dissemination of synthesised sector achievements in Uganda was greatly appreciated by WASH actors and was a positive way to encourage agencies to contribute to the Cluster.

8. *Strengthen cluster partnerships by:*

- Establishing clearly defined and agreed criteria for the prioritisation of funds at country level to improve transparency, and include local NGOs in the process. Joint strategy development, as practiced by the WASH Cluster in the DRC, or the early establishment of a WASH Strategic Operational Framework (SOF), as in Bangladesh, are good practice and should be duplicated.
- Developing clear and jointly agreed roles and responsibilities to deepen the commitment of cluster

actors. Provide cluster actors with additional joint responsibilities (local coordination, technical group coordination, joint project management), whilst acknowledging that government and NGO resources are limited.

9. *Regular cluster lead meetings can serve as an important forum for discussing cross-cutting issues and facilitating dialogue between the Health, Shelter and WASH clusters.*

Planning and management

1. *Enhance information management.* Information management in the context of humanitarian emergencies involves the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of information. Issues identified through the reviews relate to lack of common formats for data collection (resulting in incompatible data for collation purposes); inconsistent or inaccurate monitoring and reporting; and a reluctance to share information amongst cluster partners. Poor information management means that comprehensive needs assessments and gap analysis are lacking, and monitoring and evaluation are inadequate to support strengthened accountability and evidence-based management.

2. *Carry out joint needs assessments.* An example of such a joint needs assessment is the Post Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) in Myanmar, which was led by the Tripartite Core Group (comprising the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the UN and the Myanmar government), with technical support from humanitarian and development agencies.

3. *The strategic development process is critical* to achieving the objectives of the cluster approach, and may be a useful adjunct to fundraising activities. Good practices observed in the DRC include consultation with Cluster partners, including donors, and the development of a sector strategy which includes emergency response and rehabilitation components, and indicators to measure progress.

Service quality

1. *More emphasis is needed on quality.* The Learning Project analysis shows that the main focus of clusters has been the coordination and management of programming. Very little emphasis has been given to the quality of services. The Global WASH Cluster has a number of projects in development to support improved service delivery, covering areas including accountability, capacity-building, disaster risk reduction, the environment, hygiene promotion, WASH technical learning and technical support services.

2. *Consider standard-setting and monitoring at country level* and the challenges that this presents. Sphere standards and indicators are often promoted and recognised by agencies and governments during planning. It is important that these standards are later verified and amended, as appropriate. For example, clusters should be careful not to raise expectations that Sphere standards can be met where this is clearly not possible. Expectations must be realistic.

3. *The WASH Cluster has an important role to play in advocacy.* For example, the WASH Cluster in Uganda

Box 2: Emergency Preparedness in Bangladesh

As a result of the experience of working with the WASH Cluster for the cyclone response, the Department of Public Health Engineering can see some advantages to embedding aspects of coordination, such as the Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) and Technical Working Groups (TWIGs), in its preparedness for future emergencies. A learning and emergency preparedness workshop was used to mobilise the sector to strengthen emergency preparedness mechanisms.

Source: P. Mwaniki et al., *Review of the WASH Cluster in Bangladesh SDR Response*, Global WASH Learning Project, 2008.

identified water supply, sanitation and hygiene needs in the Karamoja region as a core advocacy concern and was successful in mobilising agencies at national and district levels to support the advocacy campaign.

4. *Capacity-building is critical* to improving the effectiveness of the WASH response – the ultimate aim of the cluster approach. It is important that training and capacity-building activities address the needs of agencies, as well as government and/or local partners, supporting sustainability and emergency preparedness.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted a number of examples of emerging good practice in the cluster approach in the WASH sector, many of which could be applied in other contexts to strengthen the emergency response. The analysis also reveals a number of critical issues which must be addressed if the cluster approach is to achieve its objectives in the WASH sector. Continued evaluation of WASH clusters is imperative to ensure that learning is incorporated throughout the roll-out and development of the cluster approach.

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Perception and acceptance at community level: the case of MSF in Yemen

Saleem Haddad, MSF-UK

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)'s approach to delivering aid is based on obtaining 'acceptance' of its work from the population, authorities and communities concerned. Acceptance here means that MSF seeks a social contract whereby its presence is respected by all parties to a conflict, including civilians, who all understand and accept that MSF's humanitarian identity is central to its operations, and that MSF is there to assist those in need of emergency medical care.

In practice, this approach is more complicated than it first appears. A lack of awareness of how we are perceived is proving to be a growing impediment to the effective implementation of programmes. This may lead to security risks and reductions in access and services. Although looking to the population for a better understanding of how NGOs are perceived might seem obvious, it has taken the humanitarian community a long time to put this into practice. As humanitarians, we lament the fact that some dislike our presence, and spend much time and energy debating why this is so. Gauging perceptions and determining how to gain acceptance at local level, however, often means doing a lot less talking, and much more active listening.

In 2007, MSF set up a project providing emergency medical care to Somali and Ethiopian refugees arriving by smuggler boats on Yemen's southern coast.¹ A year after the start of

the project, two months were spent assessing how local Yemenis perceived MSF and its work, with the intention of modifying parts of the programme and implementing a communications strategy to address misperceptions. What follows is an account of how community perceptions were measured, and what steps were taken to address these perceptions.

Methodology

The acceptance study had three objectives: (i) to improve MSF's understanding of the context – global, national and local; (ii) to gain a better understanding of how local Yemenis perceived MSF; and (iii) to use this knowledge and understanding to outline steps to improve MSF's communication with and acceptance by the local community.

as humanitarians, we lament the fact that some dislike our presence

Experts on Yemen were consulted and meetings held with tribal experts at the University of Sana'a. Based on these consultations, tribes were mapped by geography and lineage. Groups were organised with national staff to discuss their perceptions of community reactions to MSF's presence in southern Yemen. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with key authorities, including local council leaders, provincial tribal leaders and the local imam.

¹ For more information, see 'No Choice: Somali and Ethiopian Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants Crossing the Gulf of Aden', MSF.



©Angel Castillo/MSF, 2008

MSF doctors treat a Somali refugee

of Western political and strategic interests. This makes operating in contexts where there is opposition to Western military and political objectives very challenging. Western NGOs are often perceived as partial actors, inherently linked to the actions of Western governments. The Middle East tends to look to history to explain the present, particularly the history of Western colonialism and the Crusades. Additionally, conspiracy theories are common in Middle Eastern society, and are often used to confirm a particular worldview.

It is also important to understand how charity and humanitarian assistance are perceived in Islam, where charity is intricately tied to religion. Aid that is framed as part of a religious obligation does not provoke feelings of inferiority, but is seen as simply the fulfilment of a

Following a brief discussion of MSF's history and principles, a broader discussion with national staff and key authorities took place on the concepts of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Open-ended questions were also asked, such as 'how is humanitarian aid and charity understood locally?' and 'what kind of information would you like to have about organisations working in your community?'. Direct questions were also asked, such as 'does MSF do anything that may give the impression that they are not neutral, impartial or independent?' and 'what are the community's biggest complaints about MSF's presence?'. Limited access and the highly conservative nature of tribal society meant that MSF was unable to develop a full understanding of differences in opinion amongst different members of the community; in particular, MSF found it difficult to reach women, children and the very poor. Perception is seldom homogeneous within a community, and changes over time, so such monitoring should be done on an ongoing basis to determine whether original perceptions hold true.

The context

Any attempt to address perception and acceptance problems needs to include a thorough analysis and understanding of the political and historical context. Agencies also need to cast a critical eye over the humanitarian principles and laws that inform their work. This involves understanding how humanitarian organisations fit into a specific community's worldview, and considering how local perceptions of humanitarian organisations feed into a global perception of humanitarian action, and vice-versa.

Within the context of the 'Global War on Terror', humanitarian organisations have increasingly been seen as an extension

religious commitment. Secular charity, on the other hand, is much less understood, is viewed suspiciously and can often evoke feelings of humiliation or a loss of pride in the recipient. It is important to understand this when structuring programmes and communication messages surrounding aid delivery and humanitarian assistance. Tribal politics, though often ignored, are also important.

Finally, understanding the local context includes understanding the community's experience with NGOs. In southern Yemen, NGOs have historically focused their projects on Somali and Ethiopian refugees at the expense of the local Yemeni population. Over time, a certain level of resentment towards these NGOs has developed, despite the fact that the community is generally sympathetic to the plight of the refugees. This resentment took the form of conspiracy theories about MSF's presence in the community.

Perceptions

Perceptions of NGOs

Perceptions are important: whether right or wrong, they have real consequences for the acceptance of an organisation and its projects. In Abyan, MSF was perceived as an inherently Western NGO, and this perception brought with it a number of assumptions about the organisation and the aid it was delivering. Some within the local community asked whether there was any connection between MSF and Bulgarian nurses accused of infecting children with HIV in Libya – a conspiracy theory that has affected the perception of many foreign NGOs working in Muslim contexts. As locals became more familiar with MSF and the project, these suspicions subsided.

MSF cannot escape its roots as a Western organisation: it is embedded not just in the presence of expatriate staff but in the very way the organisation operates on the ground, the way it articulates its identity and principles and, in some cases, the way it radiates Western ‘superiority’. Often referred to as *al-ajaneb* (the foreigners), MSF expatriate staff were perceived to be respectful of the local culture, albeit unnecessarily threatened by it: national staff reported that some in the community felt that MSF staff were often ‘frightened’ by Yemeni tribal culture, partly due to a lack of awareness and contact with the community (given the security situation, teams were essentially confined to a small number of public areas).

Perception and acceptance works both ways: NGO perceptions of local culture also need to be critically reviewed and challenged. In Yemen, for example, there was a general assumption that having a female field coordinator would be problematic in a conservative, patriarchal society. In fact, expatriate and national staff did not notice a difference between having a male or female expatriate field coordinator. However, the female field coordinator was French rather than a national staff member, and foreign women are often seen in a different light than local women.

Perceptions of MSF principles

Assessing how an organisation’s principles are understood and perceived is an integral aspect of acceptance. What it means to be a humanitarian is understood differently in different contexts. In Yemen, problems arose with the local population over who was responsible for the burial of dead refugees. The perception was that MSF was not a humanitarian organisation, because the local imam had stipulated that to be a humanitarian meant respecting both the dead and the living, and caring equally for both. Solidarity also emerged as a key theme.

MSF’s concept of neutrality was perceived differently in the Yemeni context. National staff suggested that it would be difficult for the community to conceive of an organisation without political motivations, partly because of linguistic and conceptual differences in understandings of ‘neutrality’. Given the highly politicised nature of Arab society, political neutrality is generally not understood in the same way that Western humanitarian organisations articulate the concept. For example, neutrality was not possible in the Iraq war or the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and individuals were generally assumed to have a political stance on most issues. Political neutrality in Yemen was thus more localised, and focused on MSF’s neutrality in tribal conflicts. In Yemen, emphasising ‘religious neutrality’, plurality and openness to all religions was seen to be more important than references to political neutrality.

Acceptance

A number of key points were highlighted to improve MSF’s acceptance. Initially, to address the problem of the community’s perception that international NGOs were focusing on providing assistance to refugees at the expense of the local population, MSF began to offer support to the local hospital. Delivering aid through mobile clinics, as was originally considered, was found to

pose potential problems in terms of perceived impartiality and tribal neutrality, and it was decided that support to the existing hospital would negate the possibility that certain tribes might be overlooked.

the Middle East tends to look to history to explain the present, particularly the history of Western colonialism and the Crusades

MSF also adopted an approach to refugee assistance that focused less on the ‘rights’ of refugees and more on MSF’s – and the community’s – *duty* to help them. Similarly, framing assistance as solidarity with the refugees resulted in a more positive response from the community. In Yemen, this was not difficult given that the local tribes were helpful and accepting of the refugees. By sending messages of solidarity and thanking the local community, MSF was able to integrate its project with other forms of local assistance. This included working alongside fishermen and developing a network of local focal points to inform MSF of refugee arrivals.

It is important, however, not just to focus on common shared values but also to discuss differences: focusing on commonalities may serve to bring various groups to agreement, but often an honest discussion of differences may bring forth greater understanding. This thinking was applied to Yemen in the context of the complaints over the burial of dead bodies and what it means to be a ‘humanitarian’. Meetings were held with key authorities and the local imam in order to discuss these concepts, and through an honest discussion of these differences MSF was able to better understand the community’s perception of humanitarian action, and find a way to communicate its own perception.

A communication strategy was developed based on getting to know MSF as individuals rather than MSF as an organisation, enabling expatriate staff to explain who they were, their background and their reasons for working with MSF, hopefully allowing for a deeper understanding of the organisation beyond institutional discussions about principles and funding. Gaining the trust and acceptance of a foreign organisation in Yemen begins with gaining the trust of individuals working *within* the organisation.

Local perceptions also led to changes in the MSF project itself. For example, a better briefing was developed for international staff on tribal dynamics and Yemeni culture, and a national staff member was recruited to analyse issues such as context, perception and acceptance.

Conclusion

Humanitarian action needs to adapt to a changing landscape, and this requires being more culturally sensitive and politically savvy, more resourceful, more accountable and more creative in the way we put principles into action. An

integral aspect of this involves working towards a more participatory, accountable, less intrusive and more self-aware form of humanitarian assistance. Following this study, sections within MSF have devoted resources to following up issues of perception and acceptance as an in-built measure to improve the delivery of aid. It is critically important that organisations engage with local communities on what their role should be and what the principles that they abide by

stand for. Ongoing studies on perception are one way to keep humanitarian values alive and universal, and continuously challenged and refined, ultimately leading to better, more effective humanitarian provision to communities in distress.

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Tackling Sleeping Sickness in conflict

Dr François Chappuis and Bruno Jochum, MSF

Political instability and violence have massive impacts on the health of affected populations. Studies show that more people die of treatable diseases during conflict than die from conflict-related injuries. This is because the already poor state of healthcare facilities is often further degraded, to the point where diseases that require only basic interventions – such as malaria or diarrhoea – cannot be cured. Human African trypanosomiasis (HAT) – or Sleeping Sickness, as it is more commonly known – is a particularly problematic disease. It tends to surge during conflict, unlike malaria or diarrhoea it demands difficult diagnostics and treatment and it is 100% fatal if left untreated.

Sleeping Sickness: scale and symptoms

Sleeping Sickness ravaged Africa in the last century, with severe epidemics in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). By the 1960s the disease had been brought under control, only to re-emerge in the mid-1970s. The disease is transmitted to humans by the tsetse fly. It comes in two human forms: *Trypanosoma brucei* (*T.b. gambiense* (in west and central Africa) and *T.b. rhodesiense* (in east Africa). It is estimated that 50,000–70,000 people are affected by the disease each year in Sub-Saharan Africa, with seven countries accounting for 97% of all reported



The challenges of active case finding

cases. Most cases are due to *T.b. gambiense*. Surveillance is however poor in many areas; affected areas tend to be remote, neglected or affected by insecurity or conflict, and the true size of the problem is unknown.

Stage 1 symptoms begin with fever, headaches and joint pains. If untreated, the disease slowly overcomes the defences of the infected person, and the parasite passes through the blood-brain barrier. The symptoms of stage 2, which give

the disease its misleadingly gentle common name, include confusion, motor disorders, reduced coordination, sleep disturbances and psychiatric problems. The manifestation of these advanced symptoms is frightening and causes household upheaval. It is common to see victims tied up to control them. Even if treated the damage caused in the neurological phase is largely irreversible.

more people die of treatable diseases during conflict than die from conflict-related injuries

Treatment

Sleeping Sickness is problematic because significant laboratory capacity is required to diagnose the disease. A lumbar puncture is also needed to differentiate between stages 1 and 2. Treatment is less complicated and still effective for patients at stage 1. However, most cases present at stage 2, which is when treatment becomes very difficult. One option is to use a drug, melarsoprol, but this is extremely toxic and kills between 3% and 10% of patients, with limited effectiveness in many endemic areas. The other option, eflornithine, only works for the *T.b. gambiense* form of the disease, and needs 56 intravenous infusions over 14 days. This requires specialised staff and infrastructure. Vector control can also be used, but it is very cumbersome to implement on a large scale.

There has been little in the way of research and development to produce more efficient diagnostics and safer treatments – Sleeping Sickness is one of the cluster of diseases that fall into the most neglected tropical disease basket (NTD), along with Chagas disease and Kala-azar. A new treatment developed by MSF, Epicentre, the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi) and other partners, called Nifurtimox-Eflornithine Combination Therapy (NECT), was approved as an essential medicine by the World Health Organisation in May 2009, and is being rolled out to the field. However, NECT only works for *T.b. gambiense* and still requires seven days of intravenous infusions and ten days of oral tablets. Although research is ongoing, there is as yet no magic bullet: a medicine that is oral, has limited side-effects, can treat both forms of the disease and is effective in both stages.

In general, there are two approaches to medical programmes: horizontal, meaning a clinic giving full services, and vertical, meaning radical targeted programmes that focus only on one disease, such as HIV/AIDS. There is also a hybrid approach, whereby services are integrated but specifically supported to manage a given disease with a passive case-finding approach. However, as Sleeping Sickness mimics other diseases in its early phase, most cases will not present until the point where difficult treatment is needed, and many affected people will die. The best method in heavily affected zones is therefore a radical vertical approach: teams are sent into remote areas to do initial diagnostics, and patients are treated either on site or referred to specialised services.

This method makes a big difference in establishing the true size of the problem (see Figure 1), and is the only really effective way of ‘cleansing’ an area that has a heavy rate of infection. This is nonetheless a long process: an MSF project in the West Nile region of Uganda, started in 1987, took 16 years before the disease was brought down to a level (less than 0.3% prevalence) that did not pose a public health threat.

‘Hot spots’: DRC and CAR

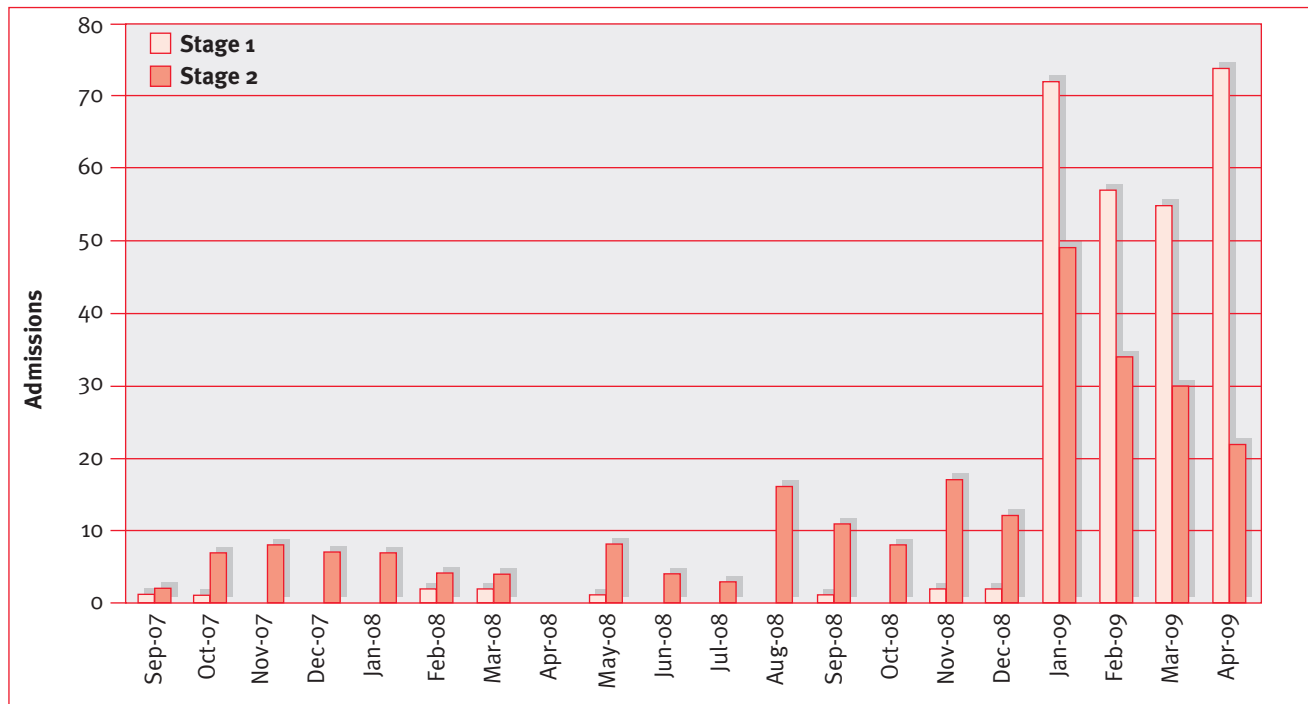
One very worrying Sleeping Sickness ‘hot spot’ is in Haut-Uélé, in Province Orientale in the DRC. MSF had projects there to detect and treat Sleeping Sickness from July 2007 until March 2009. During this period, the agency found areas of high infection – approximately 3.4% (n = 1,570) of the 46,601 people screened were positive and treated, with some small pockets as high as 10%. For this lethal disease, these rates are serious. Haut-Uélé borders the Central African Republic and Southern Sudan, is notoriously under-resourced and has been subject to sporadic conflict and political tension for many years. This insecurity and violence, exacerbated by military operations by Ugandan and DRC armed forces against the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), has caused almost all MSF activities to be shut down since March 2009.

The suspension of MSF’s work will have a substantial impact on excess mortality owing to the conflict. UN estimates of deaths due to violence are around 1,200, with many more abducted. Based on the 3.4% estimate of infection, more than 3,000 people are estimated to be affected by stage 1 and over 2,000 with stage 2. Stage 2 kills within six to 12 months, and within two years stage 1 will progress to stage 2. Therefore, for the excess mortality linked to the conflict from infectious diseases, it is feared that around 1,000 more people may have died from Sleeping Sickness alone within six months, and several thousand more will die within 2–3 years if insecurity does not allow for the resumption of medical activities. These numbers do not include the estimated 5–10% of all stage 2 patients treated with eflornithine who will relapse within two years after completing treatment. What is even more troubling is that, during the period of active case-finding, the borders of the endemic focus (area of transmission) were never reached. This means that these figures are probably conservative, and that the true number of people at risk may be higher still.

The concern does not end there, because the population is on the move. Refugees and internally displaced people are entering previously affected areas, raising the risk of reactivating historically cleansed pockets or creating new foci. The tsetse fly is abundant across this region, and an uninfected fly biting an affected person will in turn infect another person. This kicks off the cycle of transmission once again. For example, Congolese refugees are crossing into Southern Sudan, an area with a history of serious Sleeping Sickness and where hot spots of the disease still exist.

The Central African Republic (CAR) is another area that is characterised by political insecurity and also has a serious HAT problem. MSF is working in two areas in the north-east. One area bordering Chad has revealed a very serious

Figure 1: HAT admissions in Markounda/Maitikoulou, CAR, 2007–2009



problem, with 14% of people screened during active and passive case-finding infected by Sleeping Sickness. The high proportion of stage 1 patients (approximately 67%) means that transmission is very intense. Approximately 40% of these cases have crossed the border from Chad, where MSF is launching an assessment with a view to intervening. Away from areas of conflict and insecurity there are other pockets of concern. Recently another assessment was done in the West Nile region of Uganda, and some preliminary data suggests that this previously ‘cleaned up’ area may be at risk once again.

Conclusion

Although huge progress has been made to get Sleeping Sickness under control, it is not a disease that can be called a past public health problem. It has been suggested that elimination is feasible, and that the best approach is to integrate surveillance and control into existing services. Embarking on a HAT project requires firm commitment covering several years at a minimum, and substantial logistics as well as medical input. It takes many years to clean disease hot spots. Taking all of these factors into consideration, hopes that the disease can be eliminated in

the near future are too optimistic. In many areas, the best outcome for now is containment – and in Haut-Uélé, even this objective is impossible.

As with all public health problems, there has to be serious and committed collaboration between a variety of actors: national programmes, WHO, NGOs and donors. All actors involved must remain vigilant and active. MSF has been involved in Sleeping Sickness projects since 1987 in Uganda, Southern Sudan, the CAR, the DRC and Angola, treating over 48,000 patients. Several years ago MSF’s input was scaled down in the mistaken belief that the disease was under control. This was an error, and the agency has had to bolster its efforts to assist in the control of Sleeping Sickness. If this disease and its victims are neglected once again, history may well repeat itself.

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Kabul, Afghanistan: a case study in responding to urban displacement

Charles A. Setchell and Caroline N. Luther, USAID/OFDA

One in every six people on the planet currently experiences the kind of living conditions depicted in the recent film *Slumdog Millionaire*, set in the sprawling slums of Mumbai. Forecasts by UN Habitat and others suggest that slum

communities like those shown in the film will double in size to two billion people by 2025, accounting for one in four of the world’s population, making slums the fastest-growing form of human settlement and a key facet of global

urbanisation. With urban centres projected to double in size to four billion people by 2025, the equivalent of a city of nearly two million people will emerge every week of every year over the next 16 years. The challenges generated by such unprecedented growth clearly require urban stakeholders to adopt new approaches to urban management. While sufficiently daunting, however, projected global population growth fails to reflect urban growth attributable to displacement. Enduring conflict and frequent natural disasters in parts of the developing world encourage or force migration to urban centres at rates that accelerate and exacerbate the urbanisation process. As a result, approaches to urban management must *also* account for the humanitarian consequences of urban growth attributable to displacement.

This article presents Kabul, Afghanistan, as a case study in urban displacement, with a particular focus on some of the factors and effects of growth, recent institutional responses and projects supported by USAID/OFDA. The Kabul case provides insights into the merging and co-location of acute and chronic needs amid significant growth, resulting in new levels of disaster risk and increasing the likelihood of a large-scale humanitarian crisis.

Kabul case study

Kabul's population has tripled in size since late 2001, to approximately 4.5 million people,¹ making it perhaps the world's fastest-growing city in the last eight years. Rapid growth has not been confined to Kabul, however; in 2002, only 22% of Afghanistan's population lived in urban areas. By 2009, the figure had increased to at least 30%,² indicating unprecedented urban growth countrywide, a trend that will continue for the foreseeable future. Estimates indicate that roughly 60% of national population growth during the 2002–2009 period occurred in Afghanistan's cities.

What's fuelling growth?

Uncertainty perpetuated by a war seemingly with no end, the ravages of 30 years of virtually uninterrupted conflict on infrastructure, government capacity and local economies and the effects of climate change and natural disasters have all eroded or eliminated coping mechanisms in rural areas, prompting, even forcing, large-scale movement to Kabul and other cities. In addition, significant numbers of refugees returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan in recent years due to push factors like forced repatriation and economic challenges. Pushed rather than pulled into returning, and unable to return to or remain in rural areas of origin, many Afghans fled to Kabul and other cities as a means of survival. The figures speak for themselves:

¹ While current population estimates vary, and no recent census data exist, recent assessments by the World Bank and others suggest three-fold population growth since 2001.

² The World Bank estimates that 30% of Afghanistan's population is urban, but the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) considers this too low, in which case urban growth challenges and resulting needs are and will be even more exceptional than the international assistance community currently assumes. See J. Beall and D. Esser, 'Shaping Urban Futures: Challenges to Governing and Managing Afghan Cities', AREU, March 2005.

returning refugees, displaced persons and migrants – both economically motivated and forcibly displaced – account for 80% of population growth in Kabul since 2001.³

What are the effects of growth?

Prior to the influx of displaced people, migrants and returning refugees, Kabul confronted significant and fundamental development challenges. The Soviet occupation, failed governments, militant and Taliban rule, recurring disasters and perpetual conflict before 2001 ravaged the city's resources, economy and infrastructure, and all but curtailed urban planning and management efforts. The factional wars of the 1990s destroyed much of Kabul's commercial and residential infrastructure, particularly in the western half of the city. Rapid growth after 2001 set the city even farther back, with a weakened economy unable to absorb more low-skilled workers, city services inadequate to support proliferating informal settlements in hazard-prone areas and local and national government institutions reeling from the sudden demands placed upon them.

the figures speak for themselves: returning refugees, displaced persons and migrants account for 80% of population growth in Kabul

Three effects of recent growth are noted here. First, while Kabul's population has tripled in size since late 2001, the physical area of the city devoted to urban activities has increased four-fold. Few cities could manage such rapid and expansive growth, but a local government with limited capacity – the Kabul Municipality – has been further stymied by its reliance on a master plan dating from 1978, designed to accommodate up to two million people. Although recognised as inadequate, efforts to revise the plan to reflect current and foreseeable realities have been under-resourced, hindered by a lack of basic information and affected by bureaucratic infighting, and no revised plan has been adopted despite years of trying.

Second, with negligible access to formally recognised land, returning refugees and displaced persons have largely gravitated to unauthorised informal settlements. Although few city residents are truly homeless – a reflection of settlement construction keeping pace with displacement and return rates – the rapid expansion of informal areas has resulted in one of the highest rates of informal housing in the world. Approximately 80% of the total population now resides in officially unrecognised areas.

Third, vulnerability has increased as informal settlements have spread, and acute and chronic needs for basic services and livelihoods have merged almost indistinguishably. By compounding both acute and chronic needs, the physical

³ The balance can be attributed to net natural population growth and minor expansion of jurisdictional boundaries.



manifestations of unmanaged growth – refuse accumulation, inadequate drainage, poorly-constructed housing, often perched on steep slopes – also increase disaster risks, particularly from floods and earthquakes. The latter is a key consideration due to minimal emergency services in the city and the proximity of the Chaman Fault.

Humanitarian interventions to address growth and support development

Humanitarian organisations have often viewed large cities as incubators of chronic poverty or places of opportunity for economic migrants, but rarely as sources of protracted displacement and acute crises, except in the event of a major natural disaster. In Kabul, displaced persons have tended to find shelter amongst the general population, in part due to the low level of economic development, the social and familial networks linking resident and newcomer, limited humanitarian engagement in Kabul to offer alternatives and limited interest in monitoring displacement. This section examines the relationship between humanitarianism and development in Kabul, with an emphasis on collaborative efforts between USAID/OFDA, NGOs and Kabul Municipality to generate and sustain the conditions necessary to undertake larger developmental activities.



The Kabul Area Shelter and Settlements (KASS) project

Working closely with Afghan government ministries and international NGOs, USAID/OFDA initiated the Kabul Area Shelter and Settlements (KASS) project in 2006 to expand construction of seismic-resistant shelter, upgrade existing structures and improve basic services. The KASS project meets humanitarian needs among both direct shelter recipients and other community members, who also benefit from service upgrades in project areas. Upgrades include improving sanitation, increasing the availability of safe drinking water and reducing environmental hazards through proper drainage and refuse disposal. KASS focuses on construction of additional one-storey structures to alleviate overcrowding and reduce associated risks to life and health. The project uses local materials and labour, increasing income within settlements and local economic activity. This shelter-driven economic activity also helps to maintain the social cohesiveness characteristic of many informal settlements by keeping workers and businesses engaged in the community.



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The Integrated KASS Project: Kabul residents benefit from upgraded or new seismic-resistant shelter (top); improved drainage and gravelled roads (centre); expanded access to safe drinking water (bottom); and improved sanitation through the provision of latrines

KASS not only meets humanitarian needs in the short term but also serves to jump-start broader development initiatives by expanding and enhancing service delivery, with a view to eventually integrating informal settlements into the

wider urban scene. KASS also protects future development progress by incorporating disaster risk reduction elements into shelter construction and service upgrades.

In its first phase, from 2006 to 2007, KASS helped more than 26,000 people by addressing humanitarian needs for shelter, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, and improving access to services for thousands of other vulnerable individuals. The methods and means employed under KASS build physical and economic resilience, further reducing natural disaster and man-made risks. USAID/OFDA expects the second phase of KASS, scheduled for completion in early 2010, to benefit an additional 82,000 individuals in similar ways.

strong institutions are required to expand service delivery and plan for future growth

Building urban recovery management capacity within Kabul Municipality

Strong institutions are required both to expand service delivery and shelter improvements in the informal settlements and to plan for future growth in a manner that also accounts for the humanitarian needs of newly displaced arrivals. To that end, USAID/OFDA implemented a two-year capacity-building project within Kabul Municipality in 2008. The project emphasises technical assistance and technology transfer to improve the technical capacity of architects, engineers and urban planners. Advisors work to educate staff about conflict-related needs among displaced persons and returnees. Humanitarian and other vulnerability concerns are also communicated to the municipality through community councils developed under KASS. The project thus bridges the gap between civil society and municipal government, a gap that often hinders understanding of vulnerable groups and appropriate methods to protect those groups from urban disasters.

Municipal and technical assistance staff recently completed the first initiative of the two-year project – a hillside settlements assessment designed to improve settlement planning. The team methodically mapped household locations, identified hazards and calculated risks. Hazards included steep slopes, poor drainage that increases the risk of flash-flooding, structural hazards that increase earthquake risks, landslide and rockfall hazards and minefields from previous conflicts.

Summary and next steps

In a city like Kabul, with a large and growing displaced population, acute needs merging with chronic needs and increasing vulnerability to an array of disasters, a new approach to assistance is required that creates the stable conditions necessary for longer-term development projects to take root and succeed, before physical, economic, social and humanitarian conditions deteriorate further. Development actors thus have a strong incentive to work with their humanitarian counterparts to improve services and reduce disaster risk in order to build a foundation for sustained development. Alternatively, humanitarian actors have an incentive to devise projects with longer-term perspectives in order to avoid repeat responses and ultimately help people build better lives. However, it is past time for these actors to distinguish between the urban displaced and the urban poor in the way they demarcate assistance. It is, rather, time to collaborate to address displacement-related needs in Kabul and other urban settings. By design, the KASS project and capacity-building efforts promote collaboration; given the successes to date and the significant work yet to be done, USAID/OFDA plans to maintain consistent support to both.

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Solving the risk equation: People-centred disaster risk assessment in Ethiopia

Tanya Boudreau

Network Paper 66, June 2009

This Network Paper argues that a substantial new opportunity for people-centred disaster risk assessment in Ethiopia can be found in the information and analysis system recently established within the Ministry of Agriculture, through the Livelihoods Integration Unit. The national livelihoods database provides the capacity to understand the diverse vulnerabilities of populations and to mathematically link these to hazards – a core requirement for carrying out anticipatory disaster risk assessments. The vulnerability component of the analytical process was previously missing or patchy at best. With the new national livelihoods information system, this gap has been largely filled.

This paper also discusses several methodological and conceptual advances relevant to disaster risk reduction, including multi-hazard risk analysis, survival and livelihoods protection thresholds and seasonal tools for analysing intra-annual variability.

Collaboration and partnership in humanitarian action

Mark R. Janz with Noelle Soi and Rebecca Russell, World Vision International

Over the past 15 years, NGOs have focused much effort on improving collaboration amongst themselves to reduce duplication of effort and wasted resources, promote skilled institutional responses and simplify emergency response. Increasing complexity surrounding humanitarian policy and action, including challenges associated with climate change and the global economic crisis, further emphasise the urgency of collaboration and partnerships for improving the speed, quality and effectiveness of humanitarian response. By identifying factors affecting collaboration and partnership, this article outlines how effective NGO collaboration can enhance humanitarian response.

Humanitarian collaboration and the Principles of Partnership (PoP)

The Inter-Agency Working Group (IWG) was initiated in April 2003, concluding that the IWG could accomplish certain activities better together as a group. One such collaborative initiative is the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), begun in 2005 and implemented through seven IWG agencies: Oxfam-GB, Save the Children-US, World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services, the International Rescue Committee, CARE International and MercyCorps. Funded by the Gates Foundation, the Microsoft Corporation and most recently by an ECHO project grant, the ECB's overall aim is to improve the speed, quality and effectiveness of humanitarian response by addressing four capacity gaps identified by the agencies involved: staff capacity; accountability and impact measurement; risk reduction; and information and technology requirements. The ECB has produced and disseminated a range of tools and training exercises to build capacity. In the process, much has been learned about how to achieve effective collaboration and partnership.

The establishment of the IWG and the ECB reflect a move away from competition – with securing individual agency funding as a primary concern – to a focus on collaboration, with the objective of improving collective humanitarian response. As quality of impact becomes more important, so does inter-agency collaboration.

Recognising a need to establish standards and principles, the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP)¹ developed 'Principles of Partnership' (PoP), addressing equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. These principles support building effective partnerships, contributing in turn to enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian action. In July 2007, IWG members agreed to these principles and committed to mainstream PoP within their organisations.

Building on the Principles of Partnership

While the development of the PoP and agencies' commitment to them represent important achievements, the principles do not address the 'how' of effective

collaboration and partnership. To address this gap, the 12 Dynamics of Collaboration and Partnerships described here build on the foundation laid by the PoP. These 12 dynamics reflect lessons learned in five years of experience with the IWG and ECB projects.

1. Prioritising trust

Once trust is built amongst collaborating institutions it is much easier to agree on joint action processes, investments and tools.

In ECB and IWG collaboration, although building trust was not initially a recognised goal, once trust between agencies was established it became the most significant factor in timely and effective collaborative humanitarian responses. Subsequently, the IWG and ECB inter-agency experiences led to the publication of *Building Trust in Diverse Teams*.²

2. Shared vision

*Evidence from coordinated efforts and partnerships shows that groups benefit from developing a shared vision for wider influence.*³

When the IWG constructed terms of reference (TOR), the scope envisioned common priorities having widespread beneficial consequences for other agencies, 'increased capacity' being one key initiative. Fruits of this wider vision included lessened workloads and honed skillsets.

3. Accepting time and transaction costs

Building partnerships takes time. Results require commitment, patience and persistence.

ECB Phase I experiences reinforced that collaboration, coordination and trust-building take time. To avoid delays and interruptions, and to retain staff, full-time 'Focal Points' were identified to build relationships and lead initiatives for Phase II. Institutions do not make partnerships and collaboration work in the early stages – individuals do.

4. Shared risks and costs

Partnering agencies need to demonstrate financial, staffing and organisational commitment.

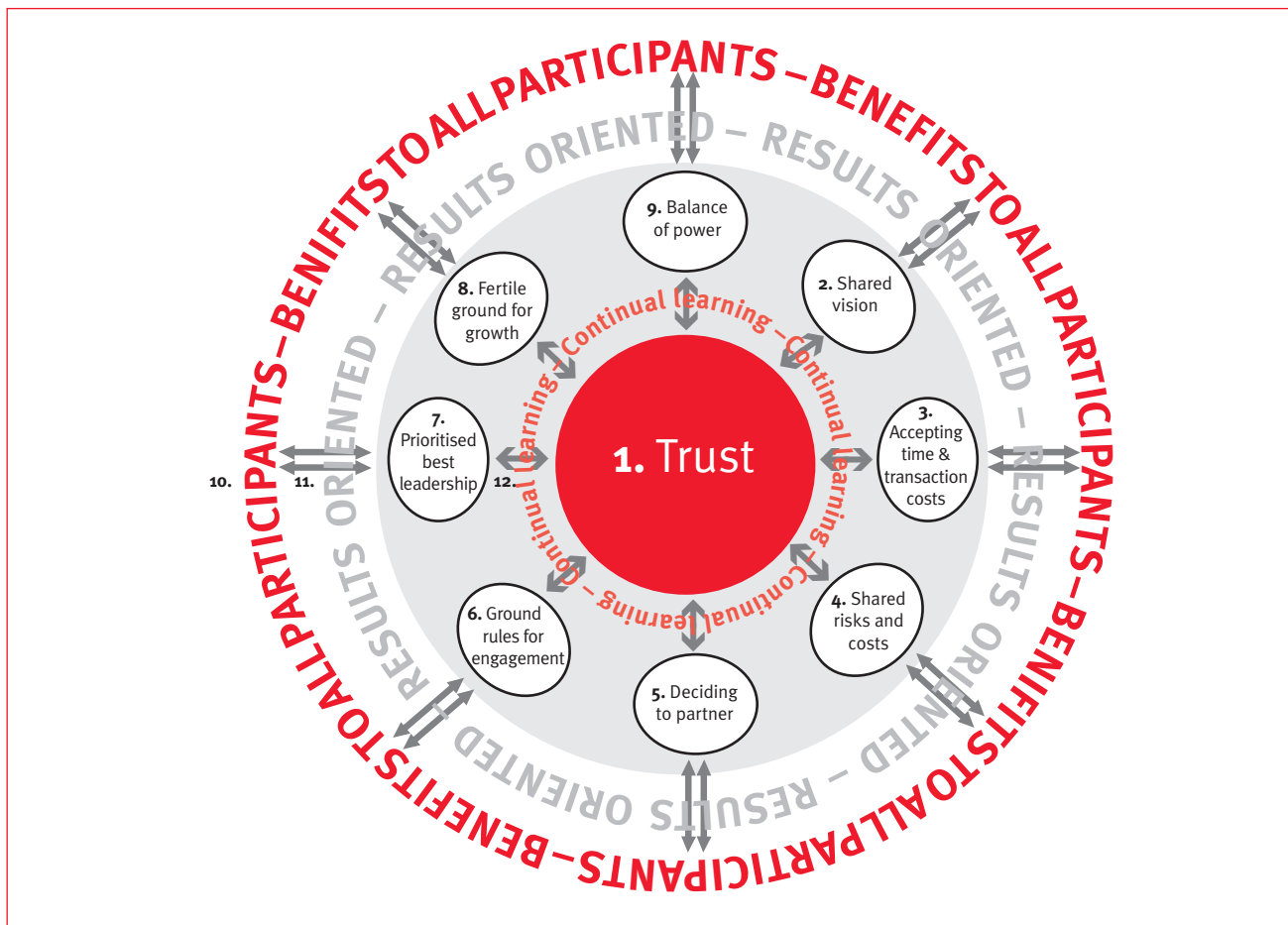
Significant financial risk has been incumbent on individual IWG agencies, notwithstanding the funding the ECB has received. Applying to the Gates Foundation for Phase II required IWG agencies to commit to providing more than \$6 million in matching funds over five years. Another inter-agency joint initiative in Zimbabwe reported streamlined costs 'as a result of needing only one contracting partner,

¹ The GHP was established in 2006 by 40 leaders of the UN, humanitarian organisations, NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank.

² *Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The Toolkit for Emergency Response* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2007).

³ Accenture Development Partnerships, The Partnering Initiative and World Vision, *Emerging Opportunities for NGO-Business Partnerships* (Monrovia, CA: World Vision, 2008), p. 30.

Figure 1: The 12 Dynamics of Collaboration and Partnership



harmonised financial and procurement rules and unified reporting⁴.

5. Deciding when to form partnerships

Not all circumstances call for coordination and partnership initiatives.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to insist on collaboration for its own sake. Engagement requires incentives to collaborate, parties that are equitably committed and motivated and agreement on desired outcomes. In the IWG experience, if some or all of the above factors are not considered, successful collaboration and partnership may be unlikely.

6. Ground rules for engagement

A documented TOR ensures that all parties understand the purpose and structure of engagement.

The IWG and ECB found it vital to express agreements in writing so that participants could inform their respective organisations and to clarify external organisations' participation. If organisational or inter-personal conflicts arise, these basic agreements can facilitate resolution.

7. Prioritising best leadership

Real partnership requires putting the best leadership forward on the basis of adequate capacity.

The ECB project is managed by CARE, the agency with most familiarity with the funder, the Gates Foundation. Likewise,

⁴ Lovemore M. Zinyama, *Final Evaluation of the NGO Joint Initiative for Urban Zimbabwe Community Based Support for Vulnerable Populations*, Frontiers Consultancy Services Ltd, 2008, p. 24.

World Vision was selected, based on organisational history and staff capacity, to lead and manage linkages with IWG agencies for the expanded Ambiguity and Change MK II⁵ research to which IWG members are contributing.

8. Fertile ground for growth

Partnership done well promotes innovation and growth. IWG collaboration became fully productive only after trust and consensus had been built and leadership was engaged at points of strength. Having a number of well-known and widely respected agencies collaborate enhances product credibility, and widens dissemination throughout the humanitarian community. One example is *The Good Enough Guide*, which in June 2008 became one of Oxfam Publishing's best-sellers.⁶

9. Equality of members and balance of power

The size or influence of agencies ought not to affect equity in shared leadership and decision-making; equality is key if members are to remain willing to invest their best. Both the IWG and ECB adopted a team perspective that the size or influence of a particular IWG agency would not affect its input into decision-making. All IWG decisions

⁵ Ambiguity & Change MK II 2008–2010, now Humanitarian Horizons, is a study to better understand future projections for humanitarian hazardscapes and how humanitarian agencies can be better equipped to anticipate, adapt and respond to potential outcomes amongst marginalised populations.

⁶ *The Good Enough Guide: Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies* (Oxford: BEBC Distribution, 2007).

are consensus-driven, and initiatives are forwarded to the agency best equipped to manage them.

10. Benefits for all

Investments will grow if partners can see clear incentives and outcomes valuable to their agency.

Continuing engagement by IWG and ECB agencies is evidence that members see benefits accruing to their respective institutions. These benefits include sharing staff, funding for emergencies, operational information and access and jointly addressing areas of common concern, such as standards, accountability and good humanitarian donorship. Products are attributed to the ECB, not to individual agencies, and a spirit of 'ours not mine' has prevailed.

11. Results-oriented action approach

Success is built when skilled implementers link conceptual tools with global field realities in pursuit of measurable goals.

The ECB has developed more than 20 products⁷ in the past three years. A prime example is *The Good Enough Guide*, which is being used extensively in Indonesia, East Africa, Zimbabwe and West Africa by IWG members as well as other NGOs. The *Guide* was used to develop a beneficiary complaint system in Indonesia during the Yogyakarta.

12. Perpetuating a learning culture

Successful partnerships and collaboration encourage a learning culture.

The IWG has agreed to carry out inter-agency emergency learning events. The ECB has produced 12 research products in the past three years to promote good and promising practice. Collaborating agencies enhance one another's evidence-based learning by sharing tools and resources. The ECB project went even further, establishing standing teams for joint evaluations and learning around emergency responses.⁸

Conclusion

In reflecting on the PoP and the 12 Dynamics of Collaboration and Partnership, it is clear that building successful collaborative partnerships between multiple humanitarian agencies takes time, hard work and a shared commitment of resources.

Although collaborative efforts are time-intensive and have higher up-front costs, greater return-on-investment results as collaboration unleashes catalytic processes within and between agencies. Increasing creativity,

⁷ In addition to the *Good Enough Guide*, other products include *Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The Toolkit for Emergency Response* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2007); and *Leaving Disasters Behind: A Practical Guide on Disaster Risk Reduction* (available in downloadable chapters at www.ecbproject.org, October 2007). Other resources can be found at www.ecbproject.org.

⁸ In Yogyakarta, outputs of joint evaluations included sharing of joint databases and an inventory of prepositioned non-food items for emergencies, along with the development and maintenance of disaster preparedness plans and engagement with local government and emergency responders. Other joint evaluations have looked at the response to Tropical Storm Stan and the Indian Ocean tsunami.

innovation and mobilisation of an important multiplier effect lead towards positive humanitarian outcomes, as in *The Good Enough Guide*, ECB's Trust Tool or World Vision Ethiopia's utilisation of ECB links in disaster risk reduction. Given an increasingly complex and challenging global environment, the humanitarian community must find ways of working that enhance the quality, speed and effectiveness of response.

When collaboration and partnership thrive, humanitarian action and response everywhere benefits, as new learning accumulates, new tools are developed and mainstreamed, operations link more donors, governments and factions with their varied experiences and perspectives, accountability increases and better practices are disseminated, to more effectively meet human needs with dignity.

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Analysing market-systems in emergencies: the EMMA Toolkit

Karri Goeldner Byrne, International Rescue Committee, and Mike Albu, Practical Action

In nearly every country facing a crisis, rumours abound of relief programmes that distort local markets, especially food markets, discouraging local farmers, displacing traders and prolonging dependence on outside assistance. Many agencies have started using cash-based initiatives, but still worry about the harm these programmes might cause. All of these problems reflect the difficulty of adequately understanding the market-systems that people affected by emergencies depend upon for their income, livelihoods and food, or to meet basic needs. Until recently, market analysis was seen as a specialist and time-consuming activity which could not be a high priority in emergency situations. The Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis Toolkit – EMMA – changes that.

Development of the Toolkit

The greatest obstacle to adequate economic analysis is time: in an emergency, urgent needs have to be addressed and there is no time for complex or lengthy exercises. In 2007, Oxfam and the International Rescue Committee joined forces to address the problem, with the support of Practical Action. The result of this collaboration was EMMA.

The EMMA began after a desk review in 2007 to determine if tools were already available. This confirmed that, in order to get the right balance between economic rigour and speed and ease of use, it would be necessary to create something that was largely original. After a development phase, the Toolkit was piloted in four countries: Kenya in April 2008 (after election violence), Myanmar in July 2008 (following Cyclone Nargis), Haiti in October 2008 (after hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike) and Pakistan in February 2009 (following large-scale IDP movements). After each pilot the Toolkit was substantially revised. It was completed in August, and will be published in January 2010. The EMMA development team has also designed an induction course and training materials. Initial induction courses have involved 15 organisations. Future training events will be offered in January and February 2010, in Jordan and Indonesia respectively, with more planned throughout 2010.

What it is

EMMA was designed with the idea that, even in the immediate aftermath of an emergency, there is sufficient time to develop a ‘good enough’ understanding of market-systems. EMMA tools are adaptable, rough-and-ready, speed-oriented processes designed to reflect the information constraints and urgency of decision-making required in the first few weeks of a sudden-onset emergency. EMMA enables emergency practitioners with no economic background to do a quick analysis of the markets most critical to the emergency-affected population. Most importantly, EMMA provides outputs that have a strong visual impact, making it easy for decision-makers to quickly understand the recommendations of the analysis.

Added value: a view from IRC in Pakistan

During the Pakistan pilot, the EMMA Toolkit was used to assess the effect of the IDP crisis on local markets in Peshawar, to inform programming with market-oriented data. Based on the EMMA findings, the IRC developed a livelihood project that sought to reduce household expenditure on firewood, which was later funded by OFDA.

According to the IRC team, EMMA added value to the analysis and design of the livelihood project in several ways:

- EMMA includes simple tools that non-technical staff can easily use to collect relevant market information. Before being introduced to EMMA, teams had very little experience with collecting this type of economic/ livelihood information from the field. This data presented a baseline for programming, making the project more data-driven.
- EMMA broadens approaches to recovery work. Through the use of the market maps it helped the team to better visualise multiple points of entry, when the natural tendency is to go to the end-user/beneficiary.
- Going through the EMMA steps requires staff to put beneficiaries within the context of a market. By not exclusively looking at the need, the team understood much more about a product or critical market, and its constraints.
- EMMA can define market-related indicators, which can then be included in the logframe (programme strategy) and monitored using the EMMA tools.
- When used with the household income and expenditure profile, which shows how much people spent on household items before and after the emergency, EMMA can define indicators that characterise the relationship between markets and households.
- Humanitarian responses to crises have become more inventive and nuanced, allowing NGOs to break away from the simple dichotomy of in-kind or cash distributions. EMMA provides tools to support the development of innovative responses based on market realities.
- The ‘income’ market exercise presented more challenges to the team as compared to ‘supply’, demanding a shift from focusing on the material needs of IDPs to how best to support them to generate income. The development team finally selected interventions that would both address a need and also lead to savings and therefore income generation. The inter-relationship between markets, supply and income guided the intervention selection process.

Building on this experience, IRC Pakistan conducted additional EMMA analyses for the livestock and daily labour markets in IDP camps, to help inform future programming.

Programming decisions: how EMMA can help

Avoiding harm

- After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, humanitarian agencies became involved in purchasing and distributing fishing boats on a huge scale. In many locations there was inadequate analysis of the complex social relations linking fishing households, boat ownership and the fish market-system. As a result, too many boats, or the wrong type of boats, were distributed. This led to over-fishing and increased social tensions. In such situations, EMMA can provide insight into the risks, and help agencies avoid the worst mistakes.

Comparing different direct response options: cash versus in-kind distributions

- A major flood event destroys the standing crops and food stocks of half a million people in a region that is not accustomed to such disasters. Humanitarian agencies begin distributions of standard food rations, such as rice, lentils, oil and sugar. Local traders appear to be quite resilient, however, and staple food, including some local produce, is soon on sale. It is not clear to what extent this market-based supply can meet the target population's needs. EMMA can help agencies decide whether and when it is safe to switch to cash-based assistance.

- A severe earthquake in a mountainous region destroys the homes and possessions of two million people. Winter is approaching, and many lack adequate clothing and blankets. Donated garments are easily available from some donors, but most are culturally inappropriate. Meanwhile, on the plains below clothing factories, part of a well-functioning garments market-system, are undamaged. EMMA can explore the relative advantages of local procurement or cash to meet people's needs.

Exploring opportunities for complementary 'indirect' actions: market-system support

- Coastal paddy-fields have been wrecked by salt-water intrusion following a hurricane. Rehabilitation will require extensive deep ploughing of the soil, at a time when the local population is struggling to reconstruct homes and infrastructure. An agency considers buying and distributing power-tillers to farmers, but is concerned about the cost, sustainability and social impact of this action. EMMA can investigate the sector and reveal any opportunities for strengthening the local rental market for agri-machines, for example by giving vouchers to farmers and making loans to rental-service providers.

Table 1: Why do market-systems matter in emergencies?

Ensuring survival	Protecting livelihoods	
May provide target groups with food, essential household items, fuel and other forms of relief to meet basic needs	May provide target groups with tools, agricultural inputs and services, fodder and fuel, or replace livelihood assets	May provide target groups with jobs and opportunities for wage labour, or link them to buyers for their produce

What do we mean when we talk about a 'market-system'? In essence, a market-system is any network of producers, suppliers, processors, traders and buyers involved in producing, exchanging and consuming a particular item or service. Such networks depend to some degree on supporting infrastructure, on input providers and auxiliary services. They also operate within a particular environment determined by the laws, rules and behavioural norms of the specific situation. The market-system includes all three components.

While humanitarian practitioners often focus attention exclusively on their intended beneficiaries, those beneficiaries are invariably engaged with, and depend on, market-systems, either to supply goods or to provide income. Most importantly, the health or performance of critical market-systems can be essential to emergency response and recovery efforts.

The rationale for EMMA is that a better understanding of critical market-systems in an emergency enables humanitarian agencies to consider a broader range of responses. The results of using EMMA therefore are:

- humanitarian resources are used more efficiently;
- there is less risk of prolonged dependency on outside assistance; and
- economic recovery is encouraged.

How it works

Although the EMMA Toolkit does not provide a rigid blueprint for undertaking market analysis, it can be broken down into ten logical and broadly sequential steps, as shown in Table 2 on page 42.

These steps gradually enable the user to weave together three different strands: gap analysis, which looks at people's needs; market analysis, which looks at market-system capabilities; and response analysis, which looks at options for humanitarian action. Recognising the challenges of working in complex and multilingual environments, the Toolkit guides the user in developing and using visual tools such as market maps, seasonal calendars and response matrices that can help programme staff, managers and donors to quickly process information and inform decision-making.

Table 2: EMMA's ten steps

1. Essential preparation	Background research; arrival; consultation with colleagues; agency mandate, target population needs and profiles
2. Select markets	Selection of critical market-systems; identification of key analytical questions for each system
3. Preliminary analysis	Production of initial profiles, seasonal calendars, maps of the market-system; identification of key informants or leads
4. Fieldwork preparation	Setting the fieldwork agenda; devising interview structures and questionnaires, data-sheets and recording formats
5. Fieldwork activities	Conducting the fieldwork – who, where, when; section includes guidance on interview methods and tips
6. Mapping the market	Finalising baseline and emergency maps, seasonal calendars; description of key features, bottlenecks, constraints
7. Gap analysis	Comparison of household income and expenditure profile, analysis of priority needs, access and gaps
8. Market analysis	Analysing impact on availability, conduct, performance, supply and demand, capacity of market-system to react
9. Response analysis	Exploration of response options, feasibility of cash and other interventions; response recommendations and their logic
10. Communicate results	Consultation with colleagues; presenting conclusions to wider audiences (donors, agencies)

Challenges

Advocates of market analysis in emergency situations still face a number of challenges:

- *Winning the argument* – Providing an analysis of critical market-systems in emergencies is only the first step. How can we ensure that the findings and recommendations have some influence over operational decision-making? EMMA encourages the use of highly visual ‘market maps’ to represent and convey the results of analysis to busy decision-makers, managers and donors.
- *Coping with complexity* – For some organisations, realigning limited resources to include market-systems analysis in emergency assessments will be challenging. How can this additional facet of programme design be included in the analysis of very diverse and often complex situations?
- *Building capacity for EMMA* – As the analysis of complex systems cannot be reduced to checklists and step-by-step processes, the team developing EMMA is following a strategy of cultivating EMMA Leaders: people with the capacity to develop and share the ‘art’ of doing EMMA throughout the humanitarian community. Plans are being developed for training courses and online resources, to be available in 2010–2011.
- *Coordination among agencies* – EMMA will be most valuable if agencies work together in the field to coordinate and share market-systems analysis. Without this, there is a risk that good programmes will be undermined by poorly designed ones. NGOs must take on the responsibility of designing market-sensitive programmes that support recovery.



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A woman sits on sacks of aid during a food distribution in Wolayita region in southern Ethiopia. Many agencies worry that the relief they provide distorts local economies

Conclusion

EMMA is a powerful new tool for incorporating a markets and economic perspective into emergency programming. It is designed so that non-economic specialists can use it in emergency situations, and therefore is a rough-and-ready, speed-oriented tool, designed to complement other emergency assessments. Its scope is broad – EMMA may be relevant to food security, emergency needs and income and livelihoods recovery, but it encourages emergency response planners to think beyond the crisis, and make the most of the opportunities and issues identified in the emergency phase to ensure that the right precedents are set in the early stages of the response.

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Recent reports from the Humanitarian Policy Group

Diversity in donorship: field lessons

HPG Report 30, December 2009

Edited by Adele Harmer and Ellen Martin

In 2005, a study by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), entitled *Diversity in Donorship: The Changing Landscape of Official Humanitarian Aid*, documented the growing diversity of donors responding to humanitarian crises. This second, follow-up study explores the implications of these changes in the field: how non-DAC donors work with affected states, their implementing partners and the rest of the international community, how their engagement is coordinated and how decisions are made regarding the nature of their support, and the means to measure its impact. The study examines three emergency responses: the South Asian earthquake of 2005 and floods in June 2007 in Balochistan and Sindh provinces in Pakistan; the response to the Israeli offensive in Lebanon in 2006; and the ongoing response to the protracted conflict in Darfur, Sudan.

Towards good humanitarian government: the role of the affected state in disaster response

HPG Report 29, October 2009

Paul Harvey

This report highlights the need for international humanitarian actors to encourage and support states to fulfill their responsibilities to assist and protect their own citizens in times of disaster. Too often, aid agencies have neglected the central role of the state, using principles of neutrality and independence to effectively disengage from state structures, rather than engage with them. The report also looks at how states should invest their own resources in assisting and protecting their citizens in disasters. Finally, the report challenges the accepted idea within the international system that disasters inevitably overwhelm the capacity of states to act. Disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami may well be overwhelming in their impacts, and may call for substantial outside assistance, but this does not mean that states struck by disaster do not have the capacity to mount effective responses.

Realising protection: the uncertain benefits of civilian, refugee and IDP status

HPG Report 28, September 2009

Edited by Sarah Collinson, James Darcy, Nicholas Waddell and Anna Schmidt

This report considers the meaning and implications of three categories of protected status for non-combatants – ‘civilian’, ‘refugee’ and ‘internally displaced’ – and the changing forms of protection associated with them. It contends that, while international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law provide a strong normative protection framework, in practice policy and agenda-setting is made against a backdrop of shifting political priorities and engagement by governments and regional and international actors. In the final analysis, it is the observance or otherwise of basic protection rules and norms by national and international duty-bearers that has the greatest impact on people’s safety, security and wellbeing. This report is principally concerned with highlighting the importance of the application and observance of established protection norms by belligerents, governments and international actors – a crucial part of the broader protection picture which calls for far closer scrutiny within civilian security and protection agendas.

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: *Humanitarian Exchange* magazine, Network Papers and Good Practice Reviews.
- A resource website at www.odihpn.org.
- Occasional seminars and workshops bringing together practitioners, policymakers and analysts.

HPN's members and audience comprise individuals and organisations 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.

HPN's institutional location is the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), an independent think tank on humanitarian and development policy. HPN's publications are researched and written by a wide range of individuals and organisations, and are published by HPN in order to encourage and facilitate knowledge-sharing within the sector. *The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or the Overseas Development Institute.*

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