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* features articles on the role of the affected state in humanitarian action. Focusing on the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, articles on Indonesia and China explore the extent to which the willingness and capacity of these states to manage disaster response has developed in line with economic growth, political stability and experience. The surprisingly positive role the military has played in supporting state-led disaster response, particularly in China, is highlighted, and the perception that only international relief agencies can save lives and alleviate suffering challenged. Other articles explore the recent history of humanitarian governance in Ethiopia from the perspective of the Ethiopian government, academics and civil society, and a government-led cash-for-return programme in Timor-Leste. In different ways, both articles highlight the tensions that can emerge between sovereign states and the international community in the management and implementation of humanitarian response.

Articles looking at the role of the state in Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe illustrate how state action can impact negatively on people's circumstances and precipitate crisis. In Sri Lanka, fighting has constrained humanitarian aid and access, while in Zimbabwe government policies and political and economic turmoil have seen the collapse of basic services.

Humanitarian agencies have tried to respond, but face hostility and obstruction from the central government.

Articles in the policy and practice section question British policy and expectations in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of current funding mechanisms in the Central African Republic. A trio of articles on Darfur examine how to make advocacy approaches more effective, ask whether humanitarians are fuelling conflict in Chad and Darfur and question whether agencies are doing enough to build local capacities for protection. Other writers focus on the failure of humanitarian organisations adequately to support displaced people living with host families and not in camps in the Democratic Republic of Congo and how urban cash programming has supported people recovering from post-election violence in a Kenyan town.

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.

Aid and access in Sri Lanka

Nimmi Gowrinathan and Zachariah Mampilly

Since the beginning of the decade, Sri Lanka has undergone a number of traumatic events that make the country a particularly challenging environment for humanitarian workers. As the long civil war nears its end, what type of political environment are aid workers likely to encounter in their attempts to help affected civilian populations? What are the legacies of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 and three decades of war on civilian administrative structures? To answer these questions, it is essential to understand the convoluted relationship between the government and the Tamil rebellion in the conflict-affected regions of this long-suffering nation.

The structure of local government in the war zone

In Sri Lanka, the district-level Government Agent (GA) is the key local actor in a complicated bureaucracy through which local civil society and international organisations interact with the state. A legacy of colonial rule, every district is assigned a GA (officially referred to as the District Secretary), who is responsible for implementing directives promulgated by the central government. This remained true even in rebel areas during the worst fighting of the war, where a complex arrangement with the government was reached that ensured a relatively high degree of service provision in territories controlled by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). A hybrid administrative system that mixed rebel and government civil and political institutions came to control the lives of civilians living in Tamil-dominated areas. Thus, while security remained under the control of the insurgents, in health, education and other sectors the rebels worked alongside government personnel and institutions. Indeed, the insurgency modelled its own civil administration on the government's bureaucratic framework, creating a structure that could both control and fill gaps in government provision.

> the insurgency modelled its own civil administration on the government's bureaucratic framework

This relationship produced both positive and negative outcomes for the insurgency. On the one hand, it enabled the LTTE to take care of the Tamil population – a key demand among the Tamil diaspora, whose support for the LTTE has been crucial – without diverting resources from military operations. On the other hand, it left civilians in LTTE territory open to manipulation by government forces.

For government officials, even a tenuous link to the Tamil population was worth the effort. Had the government refused to provide services to Tamils, nothing would connect the people of the north-east with the state. Thus, both sides reached a compromise that allowed existing institutions to remain in place, while granting the rebels a say in the nature of service provision.

The impact of the tsunami

Following the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004, the Tsunami Affected Areas Program (TAAP) brought together LTTE aid distribution structures with their government counterparts in a reconstruction programme primarily supported by external funds. With more than half of the damage from the tsunami sustained by communities in the north-east (deaths were estimated at over 22,000 and the number displaced was over 500,000), getting aid to affected communities behind LTTE lines posed significant challenges to the international relief effort. Initially, a consortium was established comprising representatives from the government, the rebels and INGOs, designed to give all three a say in regulating the behaviour of aid organisations involved in the reconstruction effort. All sides viewed this as an opportunity to bring the LTTE into the mainstream, and the rebels initially earned plaudits for their effective reconstruction programmes.

Meanwhile, negotiations began between the government and the LTTE on establishing a joint mechanism to distribute the substantial financial resources flowing into the country (close to $3 billion was pledged by various donors). Agreement was reached on a Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (P-TOMS) in June 2005, but implementation was blocked by the High Court due to pressure from anti-LTTE forces, who began to voice their opposition to any settlement that further empowered the insurgents. Bowing to this pressure, the government reneged on the P-TOMS agreement, arguing that the international community should not legitimise a group it regarded as illegitimate. Agencies including the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations eventually came round to the government view.

Discontent with the joint mechanism helped to bring the radical nationalist government of Mahinda Rajapaksa to power following elections in November 2005. At the same time, the ceasefire that had come into effect in 2002 broke down, and within a year of the tsunami the two camps had polarised. The rise of Rajapaksa's regime further politicised the distribution of humanitarian aid. The effect was to undermine all cooperative efforts, compromising the efficacy and coordination of assistance programmes, most of which

were financed by foreign aid. For the government, the quality and effectiveness of foreign aid was less important than ensuring the primacy of the district-level GAs in relief and rehabilitation programmes. Thus, travelling through affected Tamil districts (Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Mullativu), one might encounter a group of Scientologists leading chants in an orphanage, or 50 newly constructed homes lying abandoned because the heat-absorbent material used to build them rendered them uninhabitable.

The return to war

The government's decision to pursue a final military solution to the conflict in 2008 again altered the situation in the north-east. By July 2008, the government had retaken much of the territory once under rebel control. As we have seen, throughout the conflict the government had maintained a skeletal administrative structure in LTTE-controlled territory, retaining some semblance of state control. But this structure was never capable of providing adequate services to the civilian population on its own. While the state re-establishes control over the north-east, the needs of the population have increased dramatically.

Civilians behind a barbed-wire fence at the Menikfam Vanni refugee camp, Chettekulam, northern Sri Lanka, April 2009

©REUTERS/Stringer

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Government military victories also changed the rhetoric towards foreign aid organisations. The Rajapaksa regime had become wary of the humanitarian community's growing involvement in Sri Lanka's internal affairs in the years following the tsunami. Recognising that foreign aid personnel could act both as monitors and critics of the military assault, the government continued to accept foreign aid but severely restricted the access of aid organisations. Classifying all INGO involvement as 'neo-colonial', operational NGOs were required to meet government administrators every few weeks for lectures on national sovereignty and to provide details of their programmes. Over

time, many INGOs became frustrated and left the country. In late 2008, the government attempted to eject remaining organisations from the conflict-affected areas of the north-east. Although a handful managed to retain a minimal presence with local staff, those who remained routinely faced harassment. While the situation in the north – the area referred to as the Vanni – was unclear because of the government's ban on humanitarian workers and journalists visiting the frontline, there were reports of curfews and heavy security measures, even in local schools.

The UN also has had to tread carefully. In late 2008, at the government's request the UN closed several branches in Killinochi, forcing foreign staff to leave local colleagues behind as they drove past lines of civilians begging them to stay. Since then, the activities of the operational UN agencies (UNHCR, Habitat, UNDP and UNICEF) have been directly linked to negotiations by senior officials on broader issues of access and 'humanitarian pause'. Special Representatives have been included on a growing 'no-entry' list after issuing statements of concern, and demands by local UN staff for greater access or increased food supplies are often rejected.

The government's reliance on foreign aid to fund reconstruction gives donor governments an opportunity to exert pressure for the protection of civilians in the war zone, but such calls have had little effect. Different donors have adopted different approaches. Thus, while the majority of OECD-DAC donors have preferred to attach conditions to their aid regarding international humanitarian norms and human rights, Japan, Russia and especially China (currently the largest single donor, contributing over $1 billion in 2008) have given both military and development aid without requiring assurances on what they deem to be 'internal matters'.

Meanwhile, the situation in the 'cleared areas' continues to deteriorate. Doctors and teachers face harassment on their way to work, and fears of abduction mean that far fewer students are attending school. A reported five abductions take place daily, often perpetrated by government-funded paramilitaries, many of whom were recruited by the Sri Lankan police. Reports also suggest

that the military escalation has resulted in a corresponding rise in sexual assaults at checkpoints. Humanitarian agencies can provide medical services, but no foreign groups are allowed to discuss sexual violence with the local population. Conditions in some of the overcrowded internment camps in which some 150,000–200,000 displaced Tamils are forced to live are described by UNHCR as at 'breaking-point'.

By exerting strong control over foreign aid organisations, the government claims to be correcting the 'mistakes' it made after the tsunami. In addition to imposing regulations on INGO activities, it has embarked on a campaign against groups perceived as 'terrorist sympathisers'. The heads of international aid organisations have been brought before parliament to account for relief operations in the conflict zone. Instead of building the capacity of local civil society organisations operating in the north-east, the government has harassed and threatened them. For example, in March 2009 a YMCA group in Trincomalee gathered clothes and other essential items to deliver to injured civilians at the local hospital. They were prevented from entering the hospital, told to leave the supplies with the military, followed home and questioned about their possible relationships with the injured.

Conclusion

Now that the government has declared a complete victory over the insurgency, it is likely that post-conflict reconstruction funds will flood the island. A strategic plan has been circulated by the government, bringing all INGO and UN interventions under the direct control of the president. Faced with rapidly dwindling cash reserves, the Ministry of Rehabilitation is actively searching out funds, which will have to come from the international community. Humanitarian actors will be expected to assume responsibility for components of the government-drafted reconstruction plan, with all activities and programmes administered and monitored by the state. The humanitarian community must now adapt its approach to relief and rehabilitation efforts in Sri Lanka, remaining mindful of the complex nature of administrative structures in the country. Only by understanding the broader political agenda in the service of which their resources are likely to be used can the international community carve out an autonomous position and contribute to improving the welfare of affected populations.

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When the affected state causes the crisis: the case of Zimbabwe

Christophe Fournier and Jonathan Whittall, MSF

Zimbabwe is facing an extraordinary and multi-dimensional crisis. An estimated three million Zimbabweans have crossed the Limpopo river into South Africa as a matter of survival; more than three-quarters of the remaining population of nine million face serious food shortages; maternal mortality has tripled since the mid-1990s; a cholera epidemic has infected over 90,000 people, killing over 4,000; one in five adults are HIV positive, and one person dies every four minutes from AIDS; 94% of the population is officially unemployed; and thousands were beaten and intimidated by government security and paramilitary forces during last year's elections.[1]

Political instability and mismanagement have led to economic crisis, with inflation exceeding a staggering 89 sextillion percent; in mid-November 2008, prices were doubling on average every 24 hours.[2] The economic collapse has brought industrial and agricultural production to a virtual standstill; there are severe shortages of essential goods, and basic infrastructure and public services have all but collapsed.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has been working in Zimbabwe since 2000 and has witnessed a continuous deterioration of the humanitarian situation.[3] The responsibility for this man-made crisis lies in the hands of the state.

A health system unable to cope

Zimbabwe once boasted one of the best health systems in Africa. Now, this system has collapsed. In a country where more than 500,000 people need antiretroviral therapy (ART) and more than 3,000 people die of AIDS-related diseases every week, the collapse of the healthcare system puts people living with HIV at huge risk. More than 100,000 patients were put on ART in 2008, just as health facilities were closing. Most of these patients are now on their own without proper follow-up and access to the drugs they need.

Meanwhile, the recent cholera epidemic, which started before the rainy season in August 2008, was unprecedented in scale for Zimbabwe. Cholera is endemic in some rural parts of Zimbabwe, but has been relatively rare in urban areas where most homes have – or used to

1 These figures are from World Food Programme, http://www.wfp.org/countries/zimbabwe; Human Rights Watch, *A Crisis without Limits*, 22 January 2009, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe0109web.pdf; WHO Cholera Update, 10 March 2009; UNAIDS, http://www.unaids.org.zw/zim_hivaidsdata.php; and 'Zim Unemployment Skyrockets', *Mail & Guardian*, 30 January 2009.
2 S. Hanke, *New Hyperinflation Index (HHIZ) Puts Zimbabwe Inflation at 89.7 Sextillion Percent*, CATO Institute, 2008, http://cato.org/zimbabwe.

3 MSF, 'Beyond Cholera: Zimbabwe's Worsening Crisis', February 2009.

A woman administers a sugar solution to her cholera-afflicted child at Budiriro Polyclinic, Harare, March 2009

have – treated, piped water and flush toilets. The recent outbreak hit Harare's high-density suburbs, rapidly spread to key border areas and subsequently travelled along major transport routes into rural areas. In all, 90% of Zimbabwe's districts were affected.[4]

The reasons for the scale of the outbreak are clear: lack of access to clean water, burst and blocked sewage systems and uncollected refuse overflowing in the streets, all symptoms of the breakdown in infrastructure resulting from Zimbabwe's political and economic collapse.

the responsibility for this man-made crisis lies in the hands of the state

The scale of the cholera epidemic and the health system's inability to cope compelled MSF to launch a massive response. Between August 2008 and March 2009, MSF treated more than 55,000 cholera patients. We have provided care by using government health structures and drawing on the support of government health personnel; by paying the salaries of Ministry of Health staff so that they can continue working; and through our own staff. At the peak of the cholera outbreak, more than 500 MSF staff members were working to identify new cholera cases and to treat patients. The focus of the outbreak shifted from cities to rural areas, where access to health care is particularly limited. However, cases in Harare are on the rise again and the epidemic is far from under control.

Zimbabwe's inability to cope with the health crisis is evident in the loss of key health staff, especially nurses. Astronomical inflation means that a nurse's salary is simply not

4 WHO, *Daily Cholera Updates*, 23 February 2009.

sufficient for survival.[5] Many health workers have turned to the informal sector or have fled to South Africa and other countries. There is also a widespread shortage of basic medical materials and drugs. Health facilities now accept only foreign currency fee payments – an impossible hurdle for the majority of Zimbabweans.

The international humanitarian response

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has focused on providing technical support to the Ministry of Health. However, given that the health system has collapsed, more proactive measures are needed to ensure that basic systems are in place. WHO acknowledged the need to change gear and respond to the cholera crisis in rural areas, but this realisation came months after MSF had already followed the cholera epidemic into rural areas – making it clear that reactivity has not been a strong point in the international response to date.

More broadly, the UN system in Zimbabwe has been slow to acknowledge and respond to the crisis in all its manifestations, not just cholera. Contingency planning has focused prematurely on early recovery – with very little attention on emergency response, at least until recently. The majority of NGOs in Zimbabwe have historically operated within a development-oriented framework. Although this may have been appropriate previously, this is clearly no longer the case.

Political and aid actors – including the UN and donors – need to shift their approach and strategy if they are to address the humanitarian issues facing Zimbabwe effectively and efficiently. Increased humanitarian aid is necessary, but so too is a move to a more proactive emergency approach based on a recognition of the severity of the crisis – in all its manifestations. Donor governments and UN agencies must ensure that the provision of humanitarian aid remains distinct from political processes. Their policies towards Zimbabwe must not be implemented at the expense of the humanitarian imperative to ensure that Zimbabweans have unhindered access to the assistance they need to survive.

Blurring the lines between political goals and humanitarian response will have dire consequences in an already highly politicised context. The government of Zimbabwe must give humanitarian agencies the space they need to function independently. Food aid is the clearest example of politicised humanitarian action. Although food distributions have resumed in some locations following the government's

5 Nurses' salaries may rise in 2009 as various UN agencies, donor bodies and NGOs look at paying incentives to Ministry of Health staff. However, even with this plan an average nurse would be paid just $60 a month, barely enough to cover the cost of travel to and from work.

ban on NGO activity during the elections in 2008, patients at MSF clinics tell us that distributions are manipulated for political purposes. In Epworth clinic, MSF patients were unable to get food aid for over six months after the June election, leading HIV/AIDS patients to default from treatment as they searched for food.

The responsibility of the state
Zimbabwe's response to the humanitarian crisis varies from one ministry to the next. MSF has had a positive working relationship with the Ministry of Health, treating many cholera patients in Ministry of Health structures alongside the ministry's own staff. At the other end of the scale, the authorities have blocked MSF's attempts to respond to the broader, less visible components of the health crisis. Despite glaring humanitarian needs, the government continues to exert rigid control over aid organisations.

MSF faces restrictions in implementing medical assessments and interventions. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that seven million Zimbabweans are in need of food aid, but, until recently, MSF had no quantitative assessment of the medical implications of this food shortage because we had been prevented from conducting nutritional assessments. Responding to the cholera epidemic has been easier, though still difficult.

MSF has also had to overcome state-imposed obstacles to bringing health staff into the country – despite the acknowledged shortage of these badly needed professionals. For example, MSF doctors are still required to undertake a three-month internship under the supervision of a senior doctor at a state hospital. This has been problematic since the major hospitals where these internships are performed have closed and have no staff. Work permits for international staff are difficult to obtain and renew. On average, it takes about three months to obtain a work permit. This obstructive approach suggests that the Zimbabwean government is unwilling to acknowledge the scale of the health crisis and facilitate the necessary humanitarian response.

The cross-border implications of Zimbabwe's crisis
The dire situation in Zimbabwe has led to a steady flow of Zimbabweans seeking refuge not only in South Africa, but also in Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia. An estimated three million Zimbabweans have sought refuge in South Africa alone, making this Africa's most extraordinary exodus from a country not in open conflict. Zimbabweans flee to South Africa as a matter of survival. On arrival in South Africa, they do not find refuge, but instead are faced with an unacceptable continuation of their suffering, without access to proper health care, shelter or safety.[6]

The South African government is failing to meet not only its international responsibilities but also those enshrined in the South African constitution. Even with the ongoing crisis in

Zimbabwe, the government of South Africa has characterised Zimbabweans in the country as 'voluntary economic migrants'. Between 2000 and March 2008, there were 66,578 new applications for asylum from Zimbabweans. Of these, 710 were granted refugee status and 4,040 were rejected. Over 62,000 cases remain pending. In the first quarter of 2008, there were more than 10,000 Zimbabwean asylum-seekers – more than had applied in the whole of 2005 – and only 19 approvals.

According to the South African History Archive (SAHA), 'the massive increases in 2005 to 2006 and in 2008 reflect repression related to Operation Murambatsvina and more recent violence associated with ongoing repression, and support the general human rights reporting and analysis coming from Zimbabwe that show the situation deteriorating'.[7] As a result, many Zimbabweans live in constant fear of deportation. Although the South African constitution guarantees access to healthcare and other essential services to all those who live in the country, this policy is not always respected. The risk of deportation – and more recently xenophobic violence – deters many Zimbabweans from seeking treatment.

Conclusion
MSF has called on the government of South Africa to stop deporting Zimbabweans and to allow for the provision of appropriate humanitarian assistance, including legal protection for Zimbabweans seeking refuge in South Africa. Although such assistance and protection in South Africa are urgently needed, it should be seen as a temporary solution. Zimbabweans' basic needs should be met inside their country, removing the need for them to flee to neighbouring states.

To achieve this, the government of Zimbabwe will have to accept responsibility for this state-formed crisis and take action to ensure that state structures serve the needs of the people of Zimbabwe. The crisis in Zimbabwe is bigger than the visible and widely reported cholera epidemic, which is just one of many manifestations of the political and resultant economic turmoil in the country. Cholera must be addressed within the broader health crisis – a complete lack of access to health care in a context of high prevalence of HIV and food shortages.

Now more than ever, an adequate humanitarian response in Zimbabwe will require an increase in 'humanitarian space' for independent aid organisations such as MSF and others to carry out our work. The Zimbabwean government must lift restrictions on bringing medical supplies and personnel into the country, allow independent assessments of need and guarantee that aid agencies can work wherever needs are identified.

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6 See *No Refuge, Access Denied: Medical and Humanitarian Needs of Zimbabweans in South Africa*, MSF, June 2009, http://www.msf.org.za/Docs/South_Africa/No_refuge_Zimbabweans_in_South_Africa_June_2009.pdf.

7 Email communication with Human Rights Watch from the South African History Archive and the University of Witwatersrand (WITS)'s Forced Migration Studies Programme, June 2008.

Humanitarian governance in Ethiopia

Sue Lautze, Angela Raven-Roberts and Teshome Erkineh

For decades, Ethiopia has been inextricably linked in the world's eyes with famine and disaster. The country is often characterised as dependent on foreigners, its people lazy, its government obstructionist. In fact, however, successive Ethiopian governments have actively engaged in disaster risk management (DRM). Political will is not lacking: disasters remain at the heart of Ethiopian politics.[1]

This article sketches out the history of Ethiopian governments' responses to disasters, charting the complex relationship between a strong state with a long, proud history of sovereignty and increasingly assertive donor and INGO communities. Ethiopia's assertive sovereignty lies in its historical self-consciousness as an independent state, and one which has often defended itself against external aggression. Successive rulers built relationships with foreign countries whilst outsiders tried to influence domestic politics. Discussions of governance issues, including disaster risk management, must acknowledge this balance and tension between Ethiopian and foreigner.[2]

A man examines his crop near Korom in northern Tigray province

©REUTERS/Radu Sigheti

Disaster management under the imperial regime

Ethiopia's first official DRM organisation, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), was established in 1974, six months before the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie.[3] The government failed to prevent the famine that affected much of the Sahel in the early 1970s. Although Selassie's government suppressed news of the desperate conditions in affected areas, assistance poured in from self-help organisations, professional and religious associations and other bodies. Opponents of the government exploited its attempts to block news of the famine to agitate for reform, and the crisis became a powerful agent of political change, ultimately dethroning Selassie and putting an end to his regime.

Disaster management under the Derg

With Selassie's downfall in 1974, power passed to the Provisional Military Administrative Council (the Derg). The Derg's leaders believed that Marxism-Leninism was the key to protecting Ethiopia's people from famine. Ethiopia became a socialist state: radical new policies were introduced, including collectivisation and villagisation, designed to address rural vulnerability. The socialism that followed feudalism was to be a political contract against famine – with a vengeance. Meanwhile, thousands were killed in the so-called 'red terror' purges of 1977–78, which crushed the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, killing or imprisoning its leaders and supporters. Others fled, finding refuge abroad to begin lives; now, these refugees from the Derg era are being courted as investors in Ethiopia.

The measures taken by the Derg to reduce rural vulnerability did not prevent another famine in 1983–85. Drought conditions were exacerbated by intensified conflict with opposition groups such as the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), splitting the country. INGOs were similarly divided

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between those who engaged in solidarity with rebel forces and those who remained neutral in order to work in Derg-controlled areas. The latter were suspected of serving as agents of Western interests, while the former channelled aid through the rebels' 'humanitarian wings', and did so, it was claimed, often with minimal oversight.[4]

The increased role of INGOs in Ethiopia coincided with wider changes in the way government sovereignty was understood, and a growing donor preference for privatised associations for service delivery. Contacts and contracts between donors and INGOs increased, with donors relying on INGOs to channel their resources and gather information about what was happening on the ground. Some INGO directors became self-appointed country experts, escorting emissaries and celebrities on well-publicised tours of famine areas and providing briefings to ambassadors and journalists.

INGO staff were perceived by Ethiopian officials, residents and academics as speaking to the world as if representing Ethiopia, portraying themselves as supplanting an intransigent state. Massive fundraising events for the Ethiopia famine presented INGOs with unprecedented opportunities for expansion. Meanwhile, government officials managed departments with a fraction of the budgets available to INGOs. At the same time, however, these organisations provided an opportunity for patronage and lucrative jobs as select and privileged officials secured temporary releases from government posts, while others sought to gain benefits for their own communities.

The UN supported government institutions and coordinated activities between the growing number of local and international actors and donors in Ethiopia. Its main government counterpart, the RRC, had to juggle the demands of the government, humanitarian organisations and disaster-affected communities, all under the critical eyes of the international media and government security staff. By 1985, the RRC was the largest relief institution of its kind in Africa, with over 17,000 field workers, a fleet of trucks and offices and warehouses throughout government-controlled areas. Through this network it distributed a massive amount of relief assistance. Some in the government felt that the RRC (and its successors, for that matter) was institutionalising a humiliating and permanent dependency on foreign aid, and believed that its relations with INGOs were excessively liberal. Meanwhile, although the RRC – widely recognised as a model for other developing countries – retained its autonomy and capacity, donors increasingly channelled resources through INGOs.

Thus, while humanitarian action mitigated some of the worst impacts of the famine, the 1980s saw a sharp increase in INGOs' efforts to reduce Ethiopian government oversight and supervision of their activities. While the government used registration procedures, project agreements and bureaucratic inaccessibility to retain control over reluctant organisations, INGOs themselves used their growing influence with donors to circumvent this supervision.

the irony of Band Aid's song 'Do They Know It's Christmas' was not lost on a people who followed one of the world's oldest forms of Christianity

The imbalance in power and resources between the government and aid agencies was reflected in attitudes towards the media, which many (in the government and in Ethiopian society more widely) felt portrayed the country unfairly.[5] The narrative of Ethiopian famines returning every ten years, only for the country to be 'salvaged' by international aid, began with the 1983–85 crisis. The international media paid little attention to Ethiopian efforts to raise funds for famine response, insinuating instead that neither the government nor the Ethiopian people had done enough to prevent the recurrence of famine ten years after the Sahelian crisis of the 1970s. The portrayal of Ethiopians as heartless and uncaring inhabitants of a country of emaciated children, with no history, culture or dignity, was galling in the extreme. The unintended irony of Band Aid's song 'Do They Know It's Christmas' was not lost on a people who followed one of the world's oldest forms of Christianity. The simplified construct – bad government, helpless people, gallant humanitarians – angered many. Local concerns over media depictions of the famine and the role of INGOs in generating these depictions was not directed against INGO services in themselves, but rather against the media road shows that served these organisations' budgets. Echoing the sentiments of many in Ethiopia, Mesfin Wolde-Mariam, a leading Ethiopian academic and human rights activist and one of the earliest writers on the history of famine in Ethiopia, asserted in 1988: 'We must pledge as a people never again to use the skeletal bodies of famine victims to elicit charity from Europe and America'.

Disaster management under the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE)

After defeating the Derg, the rebels established a transitional government in Addis Ababa. The Derg's economic policies had fared no better than the imperial regime's in overcoming Ethiopia's seemingly perpetual crises of poverty, economic underperformance and disaster. In response, the new Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) produced an array of policies designed to address the causes of disasters, including a National Policy on Disaster Prevention and Management (NPDPM), unveiled in 1993. The government also reformed the RRC, which was renamed the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC). The NPDPM was, and remains, an inspiring read. Its first principle – 'no human life shall perish for want of relief assistance in times of disaster' – substantially predates the Sphere Standards' declaration of the humanitarian imperative. Relations between the government and humanitarian actors improved after the policy was adopted because there was now a policy framework in place to guide humanitarian action, but the status of INGOs remained

problematic. Within the government, these organisations were seen as inefficient, perpetuating an unhealthy dependence on relief and undermining efforts to break the cycle of famine. The NPDPM contained 41 pages on NGO registration, financial reports and project authorisation. The TGE wanted to know what NGOs were up to, and how much money they were raising in Ethiopia's name.

Disaster management under the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Elections in 1995 brought the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) to power, and a new constitution established the current system of federalism. Due to generally favourable rains in the years between 1992 and 1998, harvests were good and many in the democratically-elected government believed that famine had been defeated, prompting calls for the DPPC to be abolished. Optimism was, however, short-lived as widespread floods and localised droughts returned in 1997. A two-year war with Eritrea made donors reluctant to respond to appeals for help, and the government was unable to contain the drought. The result was a major crisis in 1999–2000.

The government issued the largest appeal in Ethiopia's history in January 2003. At the same time, it organised a coalition of governmental ministries, donors, UN agencies, expert advisors and INGOs to reform assistance to the five million or so Ethiopians who regularly received 'emergency' food aid. This led to another reorganisation of DRM institutions. The Food Security Coordination Bureau was established to oversee the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), a primary strategy for linking relief and development that placed those in perpetual need of food assistance in a multi-year programme (as opposed to annual emergency aid); and the DPPC was downgraded to the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA), its responsibilities reduced, its access to the highest level of government constrained and the membership of its supervisory ministerial committee diluted.

In August 2008, the government disbanded the DPPA, and transferred its 'rights and obligations' to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, leaving 400 of 700 DPPA staff unemployed. Once an admired, studied and internationally acclaimed body, it faded without a whimper, its long-serving director ungraciously removed after clashing with senior officials over the role of humanitarian assistance in Ethiopia. Ministry officials now charged with DRM anticipate the increased decentralisation of DRM responsibilities. Commitment to a revised national DRM policy has been renewed, an initiative started by the DPPA. The policy, which mandates that disaster risk management be mainstreamed throughout government, calls for a greatly strengthened DRM management capacity at the highest levels of government. Debates continue within the government regarding the policy. It is unclear if or when it will be adopted.

Conclusion

The patterns of vulnerability are humbling to all who work in Ethiopia. The potential for catastrophic disasters is all too real, their realisation all too frequent. Even more radical approaches are needed to address vulnerable livelihood systems. The impetus for reform has come from an unexpected source: the state. An international community that appears to favour the status quo often greets such innovations cautiously, seeing the government as rash, disregarding lives at stake today in favour of uncertain outcomes in the future.

Managing famine and other disasters has been central to the ways in which Ethiopian regimes have seen their relations with their citizens, and continues to feature strongly in political discourse; external assistance and international aid organisations are frequently portrayed as reflecting a failure by the state to provide for its citizens. There is resistance to the persistent narrative that many INGOs present about their role in 'saving' Ethiopia. Within Africa, Ethiopia has one of the longest relationships of engagement with external actors for disaster management. In an attempt to drive famine from Ethiopia, successive regimes – imperial, dictatorial and democratic – have tried feudalism, socialism and capitalism, yet in every crisis the INGO calculus for generating foreign humanitarian aid resources appears to many as static and self-serving ('bad government, helpless people, gallant humanitarians'). In some circles in Ethiopia, it is believed that INGOs benefit from recurrent crises. Many INGOs are the size of major corporations. Their best-paid governmental counterparts, by contrast, earn less than $200 a month.

The government has dismantled the old RRC/DPPC structure and is building anew. This is in keeping with the practice of every modern Ethiopian government: forging ahead, often in the midst of major disasters, while disregarding the potential value of incremental adjustments to bureaucracies. This approach is grounded in a belief that the state will continue to function regardless, which it has proven able to do throughout every major regime transition and substantial policy shift to date. The national DRM policy is also being revised. Over the past two years, the international humanitarian community has been invited to participate in this process, but as yet no agency has put forward an alternative vision for DRM in Ethiopia. This would appear to be an opportunity best not missed. It seems clear that reform is needed in the relationships between external actors and the Ethiopian state and its citizens. A first step, we would suggest, would be for the humanitarian community to try to see its own aid policies, practices and institutions from the perspective of Ethiopia's government and people, through the prism of Ethiopian politics, culture and history.

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The silver lining of the tsunami?: disaster management in Indonesia

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The tsunami that struck Aceh, at the western tip of the Indonesian archipelago, in 2004 killed an estimated 167,700 people and displaced hundreds of thousands more. The human tragedy of this and other disasters in Indonesia was also a test of the Indonesian state's ability to respond. Compared to many countries affected by humanitarian crisis, Indonesia has significant state capacity for response and coordination, through civilian and military means. The impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami initially overwhelmed state capacity, while the 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta showed how a well-organised local government could mount an effective response. Both experiences gave momentum to changes intended to strengthen disaster management in the country. Specifically, they helped to galvanise support for new disaster management legislation, seen as progressive for the region in its focus on risk reduction and community involvement. These disasters also exposed the Indonesian state to the international humanitarian 'machinery' to an unprecedented degree – as well as vice-versa, in terms of aid agencies operating in an environment where a strong state is present.[1]

A new disaster management approach

Indonesia is prone to natural disasters of just about every description, from floods to drought. A lower-middle-income country, Indonesia has a strong government and bureaucracy, as well as the financial resources to implement successful disaster management. Although disaster man-

agement structures have been in place for over 30 years, in 2007 a new disaster management law (known as Law 24/2007) was passed. The law has three important aspects. First, instead of focusing just on emergency response, disaster management now represents all aspects of risk management, particularly prevention. Second, the government must provide protection against disaster threats as a basic human right. Third, responsibility for disaster management no longer lies just with the government, but is shared by all elements of society. The new law has overhauled disaster management structures, restructuring BAKORNAS, the poorly performing government body responsible for disaster manage ment, and giving it a stronger and more operational role in directing disaster response. The law also envisages the creation of provincial and district disaster management agencies with similar levels of authority.

> compared to many countries affected by humanitarian crisis, Indonesia has significant state capacity for response

If successfully implemented, the new law will make a real difference to disaster management, in Indonesia. The challenges involved, however, cannot be underestimated. The government agency set up to oversee recovery and rehabilitation after the tsunami has been effective, and the response to the Yogyakarta earthquake was well organised.

1 This article summarises the findings of research undertaken for a Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) project exploring the role of the affected state in disaster response. The findings of the research will be published by HPG later this year.

But government capacity in other provinces may not be as strong, and factors such as the size and diversity of the country (with 200 million people spread across 17,000 islands spanning 5,000km) and the complex nature of the bureaucracy all make for an uncertain future. Civil society was crucial in keeping up the momentum on Law 24/2007, and will continue to play an important role in influencing the government.

An ongoing process of decentralisation may also hamper implementation. In recent years, a set of key reforms has devolved government authority and finances to as local a level as possible. In principle, decentralisation offers an effective way to support community-based disaster risk reduction. Once again, though, the devil is in the detail of implementation. Until legislative inconsistencies are resolved between Law 24/2007 and the decentralisation law, regulations are set out saying how local bodies should function and financial management allows for the efficient flow of funds to where they are needed at local level, locally managed, responsive disaster management structures could remain elusive.

The role of the Indonesian armed forces (the TNI) is also evolving, including adapting from the context of autocratic rule to one of democratic civilian leadership. The TNI has the geographical reach and command structures to respond anywhere in the archipelago – its role in Aceh following the tsunami was crucial. However, there are potential conflicts of interest between its role in combating domestic insurgencies and assisting civilians affected by crises. For example, in Aceh there was an uncomfortable transition from the TNI intimidating local populations during emergency rule/martial law to providing them with assistance after the tsunami.

Indonesia retains important relationships with aid donors and agencies

National sovereignty and the independence of humanitarian action

While Indonesia regularly mounts responses to the myriad of smaller disasters it faces, for larger emergencies the international community has had a useful role to play. That said, there is a need to recognise that, in terms of state capacity, Indonesia is no Somalia. The government is becoming more sophisticated in its dealings with aid donors and agencies, building on its experience in recent years, and the field of disaster management is no exception. In 2007, the government disbanded the Consultative Group with international donors, reflecting its low dependence on aid flows. It nevertheless retains important relationships with aid donors and agencies, and these actors add value in a number of areas of disaster management, in particular by bringing in additional external capacity and funding, building local capacity and linking different actors, national and international. There are also a number of areas where the international community has been seen as a negative force, notably in the provision of assistance that is inappropriate (such as pork products or bibles to the Muslim province of Aceh) or where aid is delivered without cultural sensitivity (such as immodestly dressed aid workers).

Indonesia has increasingly asserted its sovereignty over humanitarian activities carried out on its territory. In particular, the Indonesian government wishes to see aid align with government priorities – as encouraged by the Paris principles on aid effectiveness. There is capacity in Indonesia for government authorities to play a coordination and operational role at national and local level. However, their contribution is neither consistent nor reliable. This argues for 'smart alignment', whereby agencies assess government capacity in advance of crises and develop strategies to build government capacity to coordinate and respond; work in line with government priorities; and substitute for or complement government capacity where required.

The other side of the coin of alignment is accepting that humanitarian action cannot operate independently of the context in which it takes place. Although in some situations the authorities present an obstacle to delivering assistance, the general assumption in Indonesia is that they are in charge and have the right intentions. There are, however, unresolved tensions between the principles of humanitarian action, specifically neutrality and independence, and the Paris principles of harmonisation and alignment. In particular, where the government is prosecuting military campaigns, as it is currently doing in West Papua, it cannot be neutral.

The other difficult issue is how to avoid substituting for state capacity, most damagingly by developing a parallel administrative structure based on international expertise. Substitution may be easier than developing relationships with the authorities, but it risks sacrificing important local knowledge and undermining efforts to strengthen government capacity in the longer term. In rapid-onset situations where capacity has been wiped out, or where it never existed in the first place, international expertise may be the only option – although in Indonesia the substantial national capacity that can be redeployed elsewhere in the country should not be underestimated.

Conclusions

Progress has been made in disaster management with the passage of the new disaster-management law, and attitudes to disasters are beginning to shift, from fatalistic acceptance to a proactive management approach. However, it is not certain that the momentum and energy currently evident in Indonesia will be sustained if other threats emerge, for example from a faltering economy, religious extremism or regional instability.

Particularly in such a large country, the opportunity for international agencies to have a useful impact comes through harnessing government systems and making them work better. No international agency has the scale to work in all of the country's 33 provinces. The analogy of helping the government to point the fire hose in the right direction

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is a valid one here. Questions remain over whether Indonesia or similar emerging middle-income countries are able to back up their assertions of sovereignty and leadership with the capacity to be effective.

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Land and displacement in Timor-Leste

Ibere Lopes

A familiar dilemma faced the Timorese government in developing a strategy to promote the return and resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs): should it determine property ownership before promoting return, or should it promote return first, and deal with property issues later? In the end, it chose to promote return and resettlement through a 'cash for return' programme, a decision that was heavily criticised by humanitarian agencies – including the UN – who argued that promoting return without first resolving property ownership issues would provoke further tensions and cause re-displacement.

Today, it is clear that the government's IDP reintegration programme has been largely successful. However, unresolved property disputes are still a source of tension in receiving communities, and addressing them remains a condition for the sustainable reintegration of IDPs. Based on recent monitoring reports, this article offers preliminary observations on the results of the government's approach to land and property issues within its IDP reintegration strategy.

Context

Timor-Leste's history is marked by numerous episodes of mass displacement. The first occurrences of forced internal resettlement were reported during the Portuguese colonial period, and again during the 1974–75 civil war. The Indonesian occupation, however, accounts for the most significant state-sponsored forced displacement programmes, with entire villages being resettled as part of Indonesian counter-insurgency strategy. Further displacement occurred around the independence referendum in 1998–99, when Indonesian troops and pro-Indonesian militias waged a campaign of violence, destruction and illegal mass deportations, causing thousands to seek refuge outside urban areas. In the latest wave of displacement, in 2006, approximately 100,000 people fled their homes.

> ## Timor-Leste's history is marked by numerous episodes of mass displacement

Displacement and its consequences are the main causes of the uncertainty over property rights Timor-Leste currently faces. In seeking refuge from violence or being physically forced to move, many displaced families abandoned their former homes, leaving them to be occupied by other displaced people or destroyed. In each episode of displacement, a similar pattern of displacement, resettlement and arbitrary occupation occurred, resulting in constant changes of occupancy. The lack of property records only aggravates this already chaotic picture, and unregistered transactions make it almost impossible to disentangle the chain of transfers and identify legitimate owners, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas.

'Cash for return' and the property dilemma following the 2006 crisis

In April 2006, 600 personnel were dismissed from the Timorese army after protests over alleged discrimination based on them being from the west of Timor-Leste. The dismissals sparked tensions that led to widespread violence and the torching of houses, primarily in the capital Dili. Frightened families, predominately from the east of the country, sought refuge in churches, schools, NGO offices and parks, on vacant land in and around Dili and at the international airport. In early 2008, some 30,000 people were living in camps in and around Dili, with another 70,000 staying with family or friends. While the causes underpinning the violence were many, there is consensus that unresolved land and property issues were an important element. Latent tensions between the *lorosae* (easterners) and *loromonu* (westerners), exacerbated by these communities' uneven access to land and property in Dili after 1999, played an important role in fuelling the violence.

The newly elected Timorese government made resolving the displacement crisis its main priority. A survey by the Ministry of Social Solidarity and UNDP found that more than 3,000 abandoned houses had been destroyed and another 2,000 damaged. Discussions between the government and international agencies on how to address the displacement crisis led to an inter-ministerial 'retreat', where the relevant ministries, UN agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders met to outline an action plan. The Ministry of Social Solidarity, the leading agency on IDP issues, commissioned a Technical Working Group (TWG) to develop a Recovery Strategy to address the consequences of the 2006 crisis, with a particular focus on promoting sustainable return and reintegration.[1]

The initial drafts of the Recovery Strategy concentrated on the most immediate impediment to return: the lack of habitable housing. According to the first version of the strategy, IDPs opting to return or resettle would be given a

1 Led by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the working group involved technical staff from the IOM, UNDP, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Belun (a local NGO) and OCHA.

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Displaced people wait for resettlement

'recovery package' of building materials tailored to their needs, from a two-bedroom shelter to a kit of building materials for minor repairs. Field surveys by the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the Ministry of Public Works identified the houses from which IDPs had been displaced, and assessed the level of damage.

After reviewing the draft recovery strategy, the government requested the inclusion of a 'cash for return' programme. The TWG had strong reservations regarding a cash-only approach, believing that giving large amounts of cash to IDPs would reinforce the existing ethnic divide (easterners would have the cash, while westerners would not), exacerbate social tensions in recipient communities and make building materials more expensive. Despite these reservations, a plan was developed under which IDPs opting to return or resettle would be entitled to different amounts according to the level of destruction of their homes. Entitlements were: $4,500 or a new two-bedroom shelter for houses deemed uninhabitable; $3,000 for severely damaged houses; $1,500 for partially damaged houses; and $500 for houses needing minor repairs.

With a history of repeated episodes of displacement, overlapping land rights, a lack of land registry and property records and insufficient legal frameworks to ascertain property ownership, it was extremely difficult to determine whether IDPs were entitled to the land on which they were supposed to build their new homes, and to which they would return. Would the government promote return and encourage construction on land with contested ownership? Would return to such land reignite tensions between returnees and recipient communities? If IDPs had been displaced because they were illegal occupants in the first place, why should they be allowed to return? Such fears and concerns prompted parts of the government and a number of international organisations to suggest that property rights needed to be clarified before IDP return began.

The government had to decide whether to concentrate its scarce resources on clarifying property rights first, promoting return only once such rights were determined, or promoting return first, and dealing with property rights later. On the advice of the TWG, the government chose the latter, for two reasons. First, outstanding property issues were not the only obstacle to return, and resolving them in isolation would not ensure the conditions for sustainable reintegration. Other factors which impeded return and resettlement included fear and insecurity (easterners were not comfortable with the idea of returning to predominately western communities, and vice versa); IDPs in general did not believe that law enforcement agencies had the capacity to prevent attacks after return. Meanwhile, even though conditions in the camps were far from good, the regular distribution of free rice and the delivery of some basic services made them a safer and more attractive alternative given conditions in areas of return. Second, clarifying land rights, even if only in Dili, would take years of complex work, legislative measures and additional resources not available at the time. Leaving IDPs waiting in camps would have been unacceptable. The few existing transitional shelters, built by the government and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), could not accommodate the larger IDP population and no suitable land was available on which to build extra units. Although suitable state land was identified, the government decided to allocate it for other purposes, such as the new Post Office headquarters. Clarifying land rights would require not only a lengthy and expensive cadastral survey, but also the passage of legislation, particularly of a Transitional Land Law,[2] in order to determine criteria for resolving conflicting claims, rights acquired through adverse possession, validation of previous titles and other sensitive issues. There was no chance that such a controversial piece of legislation could be debated and approved quickly, and resolving the displacement crisis was an urgent matter.

The Recovery Strategy

The government's Recovery Strategy was launched in December 2007, and is ongoing at the time of writing. It has adopted a holistic approach to IDP reintegration, treating each obstacle to return – including land and property issues – as part of a bundle of factors preventing resettlement, rather than as separate issues. The Ministry

2 A Transitional Land Law would provide the legal basis for first registration by recognising ownership rights in undisputed cases, establishing the criteria by which to resolve disputed cases where overlapping rights exist, converting previous property rights and long-term peaceful possession into ownership rights, according to established legal criteria, and establishing the administrative mechanisms and processes to the government to regularise property rights effectively and efficiently.

of Social Solidarity formed dialogue teams, which were dispatched to IDP camps and recipient communities to encourage IDPs to return and to facilitate their acceptance by recipient communities.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in cooperation with other organisations including UNDP, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CARE, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Belun, a local NGO that specialises in conflict resolution, assisted the government in implementing its Recovery Strategy and in monitoring return. By December 2008, the Ministry of Social Solidarity had distributed recovery packages to 11,700 IDP families. An IOM survey conducted with village chiefs shows that 64% of households have returned to their villages of origin. The re-displacement rate has remained remarkably low: only 1.03% of returning families were forced to move out of their communities after return. The same survey shows that there is little correlation between villages reporting re-displacement and villages reporting post-return problems, including outstanding land and property issues. According to the survey report, re-displacement seems to be linked with specific factors related to affected families.

Conclusion

Overall, the government's Recovery Strategy has succeeded in promoting IDP return and resettlement. The high return rate and the small number of re-displacements indicate that the cash-only packages have met the needs associated with return. However, at the time of writing no hard data is available on how returnees have used the money. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some returnees invested a large portion of their package in rebuilding their homes; others 'shared' part of their cash with members of the receiving community, made contributions to community peace-making ceremonies or invested in livelihoods, particularly replacing trading stalls lost during the violence. There were some reports of misuse, but this does not seem to have had a negative impact on return and reintegration. A survey by the Asia Foundation on perceptions of security among the population shows that only 2% consider IDP returns to be the most serious security issue in their neighbourhood, and only 5% of respondents in areas that have received returnees believe that social tensions have increased as a result.

Outstanding land and property issues, although still a potential source of future tension, have not been an impediment to sustainable return. Nonetheless, in villages reporting problems between community members and IDPs land issues are most often cited as the source, indicating that land and property issues remain contentious, and may contribute to further conflict. Clarifying land rights will not guarantee stability in neighbourhoods receiving IDPs, but it will play an important role in promoting peace and preventing future conflict.

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Lessons from the Sichuan earthquake

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At 2:28pm on 12 May 2008, a powerful earthquake struck China's Sichuan Province. Some 87,500 people were killed, 45.5m affected and 14.4m displaced.[1] Economic

[1] The fatality figure used here includes 18,500 missing people, which the government has not yet included in their official death toll of 69,200. This figure comes from the UNISDR Press Release, 'CRED Disaster Figures: Deaths and Economic Losses Jump in 2008', 22 January 2009. Other data from IFRC, 'China: Sichuan Earthquake', Operations Updates 8 and 19, 13 February 2009.

losses were estimated at $86 billion, with 21m buildings damaged. According to a recent DFID report, the earthquake drove an estimated 10m people below the poverty line, with overall poverty in badly affected areas increasing from 11% to 35% of the population.[2] Despite the extent of the devastation, this earthquake was not China's first experience with natural disaster. In fact, four

[2] House of Commons International Development Committee, 'DFID and China', Third Report of Session 2008-09 (HC 180-I), 12 March 2009.

Soldiers outside a destroyed school in Yingxiu Town, near the epicentre of the earthquake

soldiers and armed police had been mobilised.[3] Of the nine government working groups set up for the relief effort, six were supported by the military.[4]

One challenge to learning from the earthquake response is that data has not been made widely available by the government. For example, in the health sector Xinhua News reported that, as of late May, 45,000 medical workers were contributing to care following the earthquake, with 650 devoted to epidemic control.[5] A Health Ministry representative also announced that the relief effort had eliminated the risk of a disease outbreak, and had even brought about a decline in infectious disease incidence in the worst-hit areas, compared to previous years.[6] Unfortunately, evidence is not offered to support this statement, or similar statements in other sectors. Information from the few active organisations (including Médecins Sans Frontières, UNCEF, AmeriCares Foundation and Oxfam-Hong Kong) only capture the relatively small-scale activities of these agencies.

of the ten most destructive earthquakes on record have occurred in the country, giving China extensive experience in coping with such emergencies – experience that was put to good use in the response to the Sichuan earthquake.

The role of the state in the earthquake response

The response to the earthquake was dominated by the Chinese government. Although the government invited international humanitarian assistance, few international NGOs engaged directly in emergency response, for a number of reasons. First, Sichuan was probably not a priority for organisations already involved in responding to concurrent disasters including Cyclone Nargis, which made landfall in neighbouring Myanmar just ten days before the earthquake. Second, lack of access and local experience may have prevented some INGOs from initiating operations in Sichuan. Third, in the context of an economic boom with over 10% annual growth since 2002, it is possible that international actors believed that the Chinese government had the capacity to respond. Although full recovery remains a distant reality for many, the Chinese state-led response to the Sichuan earthquake has generally been characterised as efficient and comprehensive. According to the government, despite the extent of the devastation, disease outbreaks were avoided, populations in danger from subsequent flooding or landslides were safely relocated, medical services were generally restored rapidly and a return to the baseline mortality rate was achieved relatively quickly. The direct provision of aid by the Chinese military was a key element in the emergency response phase. Officials reported that, within 14 minutes of the earthquake, the central government had dispatched the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to the affected areas, and within days 113,000

> ## one challenge to learning from the earthquake response is that data has not been made widely available by the government

While working for a US-based organisation in two of the worst-affected counties in Sichuan directly following the earthquake, over the course of three months I encountered no other international NGO working on the ground. This is consistent with the general pattern of minimal INGO engagement in the emergency response. To accomplish our mission to re-establish referral care and provide urgently needed medical supplies, I coordinated all efforts in direct partnership with government agencies and the provincial and county-level Health Bureaus. In my day-to-day work, it became clear that the overall success of the government's response was made possible by its authoritarian position, its experience of managing large population movements and natural disasters and the rapid deployment of the military. These three elements

3 James Mulvenon, 'The Chinese Military's Earthquake Response Leadership Team', *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 25, Summer 2008.
4 *Ibid*.
5 Jonathan Watts, 'China's Health Challenges after the Earthquake', *The Lancet*, vol. 371, 31 May 2008.
6 Xinhua News, 'Health Ministry: No Epidemic Outbreaks in Quake Zone', 18 July 2008.

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enabled the government to avoid or minimise many of the problems common to disaster response.

Mitigation strategies included an immediate emphasis on controlling infectious disease through widespread medical care and surveillance, the provision of tents for shelter (albeit insufficient in number at the outset and eventually upgraded to temporary, prefabricated structures), maintenance of security and the rule of law through substantial police and military deployments, traffic and supply-chain management at the regional and local level, as well as the triage of patients, the deployment of qualified volunteers and the efficient management of in-kind donations. For instance, as large quantities of unsolicited foreign medicines and supplies accumulated in airport warehouses (donated primarily by organisations without a physical presence in Sichuan), the provincial health bureau coordinated with the government body in charge of volunteers to assign pharmacology students on holiday to sort, translate and test these donations. Additionally, the movement of people was strictly regulated in the affected areas. For months, police and military roadblocks prevented non-essential personnel from entering the disaster zone (personnel also sprayed traffic passing through with disinfectant in the belief that this would reduce the risk of disease). These authoritarian measures largely succeeded in saving lives and reducing the secondary disasters of disease, flooding and damage from strong aftershocks; however, these results came at the expense of personal liberties, access to affected areas and, in some cases, the unquestioned acceptance of sub-standard living conditions.

Although the Chinese and foreign press have reported outrage among some parents who lost children in collapsed schools, the overall reaction of direct beneficiaries as regards the government aid they received was outwardly positive. Affected populations worked to reconstruct markets and establish a home in their government-issued tents, while awaiting further instructions from the local authorities. This differs from my experience in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in Pakistan following the 2005 earthquake, where there was an elevated sense of anxiety, especially in remote rural areas. For example, in the Allai Valley of NWFP (population around 100,000), insufficient assistance saw virtually every family electing to migrate to camps at a lower elevation or moving to live with relatives elsewhere. Although some seasonal migration takes place annually in the region, post-earthquake migration occurred on a large scale, and was even encouraged by some NGOs. By contrast, the millions of people affected by the Sichuan earthquake, even those living in mountainous rural areas, stayed in close proximity to their destroyed homes.

In the days and months following the earthquake, many familiar disaster response tools and mechanisms were not utilised: there were no cluster meetings, and the Sphere Standards and other guidelines common in the humanitarian community were not in evidence. Instead, a coordinated response was achieved through the government's hierarchical approach, and decisions followed the chain of command from national to provincial and down to the prefecture and county levels. In terms of coordination, after working side-by-side with my health bureau counterparts daily for nearly three months, I did not observe a single complaint about unwarranted time spent meeting donors or international aid groups (though there were complaints about the unaccompanied relief material pouring into the provincial airport and bonded warehouses). Unlike the direction eventually chosen by the government of Pakistan following the 2005 earthquake, the Chinese authorities did not immediately establish a parallel relief agency. Instead, relief activities were partitioned along the lines of the cluster approach, with the formation of working groups roughly corresponding with government agencies – an important approach for ongoing coherence in policy and practice.[7]

the millions of people affected by the earthquake stayed in close proximity to their destroyed homes

Another partnership strategy used in the aftermath of the earthquake which may prove a model for long-term recovery was the 'twinning' of several badly affected counties and cities with other Chinese provinces and municipalities. These partnerships aimed to assist affected areas with resources, personnel and moral support for recovery. Teams of doctors, public health professionals and sanitation and disease control experts were immediately dispatched to the affected partner county; a reported 1–3% of the annual gross domestic product of sponsor provinces was pledged towards long-term recovery efforts in the affected county for at least three years. For example, Wenchuan County, the epicentre of the earthquake, was paired with wealthy Guangdong Province for long-term reconstruction assistance, including the provision of medical personnel to replace staff lost in the earthquake, and the training of Wenchuan-based staff in teaching hospitals in Guangdong.

The state-led response focused on efficiency in providing resources and services to the largest number of people possible. However, this came at a price; for instance, in order to get food to everyone who needed it nutritionally deficient instant noodles were provided for days on end in some locations. Shelter could not be manufactured quickly enough (despite temporary state seizure of suitable textile

7 Howard W. French, 'UN Leader Praises China's Quake Response', *New York Times*, 25 May 2008. These groups included the Emergency Management and Relief Provision Group, the Masses' Livelihood Group, the Seismic Monitoring Group, the Sanitation and Epidemic Prevention Group, the Propaganda Group, the Production Restoration Group, the Safeguarding Infrastructure and Post-Disaster Reconstruction Group, the Water Resources Group and the Public Order Group.

factories), resulting in up to 12 individuals sharing one family-size tent. The absence of water-borne diseases may actually be attributed to a culture of boiling water, rather than the government's pervasive disinfection campaign. It is clear that action to protect against a secondary disaster did not come from abroad but from within China. Although the state deserves praise for its handling of the response, there are areas for improvement.

Lessons for the future

In the aftermath of every major recent natural disaster, from the Indian Ocean tsunami to the Pakistan earthquake and even the cyclone in Myanmar, a deluge of assistance from international non-governmental organisations has had a significant impact. This was not the case in China, where very little international assistance was provided and the response was very largely state-led – a vast relief effort launched by the Chinese government and carried out by hundreds of thousands of soldiers, civil servants and civilian volunteers. The government's approach to the emergency response was effective in several respects; the setting of clear criteria and appropriate restrictions on unsolicited in-kind medical or other supplies, for instance, led to the more efficient use of resources and eased the supply-chain bottlenecks common in other disasters of similar magnitude, and overall the response was crucial in saving many lives. At the same time, however, greater efforts could have been made to enlist the support of specialised international agencies in specific areas, including emergency shelter, livelihoods and health. In the health sector, for instance, very little attention was paid to psychosocial and mental health programmes, especially among elderly people, who may well have benefited from specialised support from the humanitarian community. Finally, although the state deserves praise for its handling of the response, a lack of transparency in terms of specific data and details of the response have concealed many of these successes, as well as obscuring areas for improvement.

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

Tanya Boudreau

Network Paper 66

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We live in a world buffeted by hazards. Some 85% of the world's population resides in areas affected at least once in the past 30 years by a major earthquake, tropical cyclone, flood or drought. In the last 20 years, well over two million people have been killed by natural disasters. The total number of people affected each year has doubled over the last decade. For these people, it is not a question of *whether* major hazards will occur, but *when*. Depending on the vulnerability of the households affected, and the systems set up to protect these populations, these hazards can catapult them into new levels of destitution.

With so many of the world's people so close to the edge, an active disaster risk management system, capable of both corrective (current disasters) and prospective (future potential disasters) risk management is essential. In Ethiopia the system has to be especially sensitive, able to detect when even a small shock might result in catastrophe. A number of factors have contributed to the continued (and in some cases growing) impoverishment of rural households in Ethiopia. These include population growth, decreasing farm sizes, an inadequate road and market infrastructure, the knock-on effects of the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea and development policies that focus on crop production in areas that have long since lost their capacity for self-sufficiency.

This paper argues that the information and analysis system recently established within the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture represents a substantial new opportunity for people-centred disaster risk assessment. 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.

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

THE ROLE OF AFFECTED STATES

Britain and Afghanistan: policy and expectations

Jon Bennett, Oxford Development Consultants

Even a cursory reading of events in Afghanistan over the last 12 months would reveal an undeniable sense of confusion, even panic, in UK policy as each one of its primary objectives – legitimate government, stabilisation, counter-narcotics and development – is systematically challenged by events on the ground. Senior military officers are on record as saying that the war in the country is un-winnable in any conventional sense. Meanwhile, international aid organisations are caught in a quandary. On the one hand, Afghans say repeatedly that they want stability and security as a prerequisite to any sustainable recovery; on the other, the proximity of foreign armies compromises aid agencies' perceived neutrality, making the distinction between military and humanitarian intervention a matter solely of degree.

'Stabilisation'

The UK government has explicitly addressed the link between military and development strategy with a new paradigm – 'stabilisation'. The vision of the 'Comprehensive Approach' to Afghanistan is of a partnership between the Department for International Development (DFID), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Foreign Office to 'engage, stabilise and develop' the country in a seamless continuum ranging from 'kinetic' engagement (i.e., counter-insurgency) to Afghan-owned development.[1] This echoes an earlier military doctrine that recognised the inter-relationship between political, military and aid efforts and sought to 'improve joined-up approaches to civilian-military planning and training'.[2]

What is remarkable is how quickly this alliance between the sword and the ploughshare has evolved in UK government thinking. The international community moved from NATO-led peacekeeping to counter-insurgency in 2006, and the UK military deployed to Helmand in the south of Afghanistan. The chosen vehicle for a 'comprehensive approach' has been Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), piloted in Iraq. However, unlike the relatively peaceful north, where PRTs have had a degree of success, Helmand is a conflict zone. It has been difficult for aid agencies and DFID to focus on reconstruction and development when access to populations is largely determined by which areas are 'secured' by British and Afghan military forces. Development here requires longer timeframes and a more sophisticated form of interaction with target beneficiaries.

It is also difficult to find technical experts willing to stay on the ground for any length of time in a highly volatile and dangerous environment.

> ## it is difficult to find technical experts willing to stay on the ground for any length of time

The problem is complicated by the presence of two distinct foreign military forces: first, the Coalition Forces (CF) under Operation Enduring Freedom, which are on a war footing but occasionally involve themselves in humanitarian and reconstruction work, political reform, information gathering, psychological operations and special operations; and second, the NATO/ISAF operation, under a UN mandate. Both forces are in uniform and both are, irrespective of their mandates or functions, indistinguishable to the public, with the image portrayed by one inevitably affecting the degree of acceptance of the other. News spreads fast, and the bombing of civilians in the east understandably colours notions of 'security' offered by military forces in the south.

As a department of government, DFID is of course tied to UK foreign policy, which means that, if its role within the PRT in Helmand raises questions over 'humanitarian space', such a charge is misplaced. Nevertheless, the close civil–military nexus (the PRT is inside the British military camp) means that very few international NGOs are prepared to work with the PRT. At the NATO Summit in Strasbourg in April, 11 NGOs, including Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children, Care and Action Aid, called for aid delivery and military goals to be de-linked. These agencies claim that the PRTs' 'hearts-and-minds' approach to assistance, drawn from counter-insurgency doctrine, 'is not only unsustainable, it is highly unlikely to achieve its intended security objectives'.[3]

(Re)building the state

The PRT concept was originally devised as an element of international military engagement outside Kabul, in support of disarmament, demobilisation and nascent reconstruction efforts.[4] In practice, it has evolved to take

1 Speech by International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander, 'Afghanistan: From Stabilisation to State-building', International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 17 September 2008, http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/Speeches/sos-afghan-statebuilding.asp.
2 UK Ministry of Defence, 'The Comprehensive Approach', Joint Discussion Note 4/05, January 2006.

3 'Caught in the Conflict: Civilians and International Security Strategy in Afghanistan', briefing paper for the NATO Heads of State and Government Summit, Strasbourg, 3–4 April 2009.
4 There are currently 26 PRTs in Afghanistan. Until 2006, the UK led PRTs in Mazar-e-Sharif and Maymana, before handing these over to NATO partners. It now leads only the Helmand PRT.

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HUMANITARIAN **P**RACTICE **N**ETWORK

on a wider range of objectives related to post-war stabilisation.[5] Backed by a new government organisation, the inter-departmental Stabilisation Unit, the PRT in Helmand now adds state-building to its list of tasks, its mission being 'to assist the government of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and through military presence, enable SSR [security sector reform] and reconstruction efforts'.[6]

State-building – and by extension state legitimacy – have been central to DFID's strategy in Afghanistan since its office opened in Kabul in late 2001. Afghanistan is a 'fragile state', one of the poorest countries in the world, and the December 2001 Bonn Agreement saw a collective determination by donors to lend maximum support to the new interim government to enable it to build authority from the centre. The UK is the third-largest development aid donor to Afghanistan (after the US and the European Commission), giving just over £100 million per year since 2004–2005, 80% of which is channelled through the central government.

Along with most donors, the UK government has sometimes acted as though Afghan history started in 2001. This peculiarly ahistorical notion suggests a *tabula rasa* upon which a new vision of statehood can be written. The implicit assumption is that the historical evolution of statehood can be compressed. Thus, the UK's programme has been predicated on several assumptions:

1. That the formal political transition process would result in a stable political settlement for the country as a whole.
2. That building the state from the centre first would confer legitimacy upon it; this would then spread to provincial and local levels.
3. That the pillars of growth are the formal institutions of society (the judiciary, the legislature, banking, the private sector).[7]

Building the architecture of a viable state has meant a strong focus on technical assistance and the capacity development of formal state institutions, particularly in the executive branch of government. As a consequence, relatively little attention has been paid to accountability, including the monitoring and advocacy role of civil society and other accountability mechanisms.

After 2006 the fault lines of this approach became increasingly visible. Not only was there an intensified insurgency and regrouping of the Taliban, but also the assumed privileges enjoyed by the Pushtun ethnic majority came to the fore as discontent over the division of political spoils among other ethnic groups after 2001 intensified. Declining confidence in President Hamid Karzai's government has raised doubts about the viability of the state-building project. Kabul-based central institutions are perceived by many as predatory and corrupt; by backing them, international donors may have inadvertently become part of the problem. Some NGOs and analysts have argued for a more limited view of what is possible at this stage – investments in provincial or district programmes may have a more direct impact on poverty reduction.

A lack of shared vision

The UK government as a whole has not had a shared vision of the link between security and development. At least until mid-2007, various government departments pursued almost separate approaches towards counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, peace-building and development – each inherently a legitimate objective, but not necessarily mutually reinforcing. The picture is further complicated by the mismatch between the policies of Afghanistan's various donors; the UK cannot be immune from what the dominant donor in Afghanistan, the US, is doing elsewhere in the country. For example, the US military's use of the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) – an armed but ill-trained counter-insurgency proxy force – has been piloted in Wardak Province, and is likely to be expanded. However, APPF forces may reinforce and legitimise precisely those forms of behaviour that epitomise a lawless state. Local warlords, given a cloak of authority, may conduct activities in furtherance of their own objectives or interests – for instance the production and trafficking of narcotics or seeking to gain advantage in local, tribal or ethnic conflicts and rivalries.[8]

> the UK government has not had a shared vision of the link between security and development

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Perhaps the greatest omission by the major donors including the UK has been the absence of a concerted effort to gauge public opinion. Only recently has the Asia Foundation begun to conduct public opinion polls on issues ranging from the military occupation to government performance.[9] Local perceptions of peace operations suggest that, for some communities in Afghanistan, assistance is welcome regardless of the donor's military identity or political objective. This may provide some comfort to those who provide humanitarian assistance in the wake of military engagement (the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) in Helmand, for example). But in the country as a whole, the lack of good national or provincial data and security constraints on access to beneficiaries

5 'A PRT is a civil-military institution that is able to penetrate the more unstable and insecure areas because of its military component and is able to stabilize these areas because of the combined capabilities of its diplomacy, military, and economic components.' *PRT Handbook*, Edition 2, 31 October 2006.
6 PRT Steering Committee, January 2005, www.isaf6.eurocorps.org.
7 See, for example, Written Answers: Afghan DFID Assistance, 22 April 2004, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200304/ldhansrd/vo040422/text/40422w01.htm.

8 'Caught in the Conflict'.
9 Asia Foundation, *State Building, Security and Social Change in Afghanistan: Reflections on a Survey of the Afghan People*, 2008.

impede an accurate assessment of project progress. Moreover, as the Asia Foundation reports, the security of one's family is the primary determinant of Afghan loyalty, and Afghans know better than anyone how inherently precarious their position is if they are seen to be too closely aligned to NATO/ISAF forces.

The fact that the survival of the Afghan state relies almost entirely on external capital and the provision of military support continues to undermine its domestic legitimacy. The dialogue between central government and the periphery is characterised by shrewd political bargaining and patronage, rather than common purpose in the pursuit of durable solutions and lasting peace. There is no easy solution, but the more UK government departments talk solely to themselves about time-bound 'targets', models of statehood and 'integrated approaches', the more difficult it will be to achieve a peaceful settlement that matches the expectations of the Afghan people. One of the reasons Afghans can be 'hired but not bought' is that they have an acute sense of history and of the relatively brief presence of foreigners in their country. Reflecting on the ten-year Soviet occupation of the 1980s, many Afghans know that there is nothing unique about this latest attempt to bring 'peace and development' to their country.

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Are humanitarians fuelling conflicts? Evidence from eastern Chad and Darfur

Clea Kahn and Elena Lucchi, MSF

For aid organisations working in eastern Chad and Darfur, theft and banditry are among the greatest impediments to the effective implementation of programmes. Vehicle hijackings and attacks on compounds have led to enormous material losses and delays and reductions in services to conflict-affected populations. The issue has been widely discussed by the humanitarian community, and one study on advocacy in Darfur cited insecurity for aid workers as the third most common subject in press releases issued by humanitarian organisations.[1] However, despite solid evidence to show that stolen humanitarian vehicles, equipment and cash are being used to fuel the war economy, few have asked whether humanitarian principles are being challenged or even undermined.

This is not a new question. In 1995, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) made the very difficult decision to withdraw from the heavily militarised refugee camps in Goma in eastern DRC, rather than allow assistance to be manipulated. In other cases, notably Somalia, Liberia and South Sudan, the humanitarian community has been forced to confront its relationship with armed actors and war economies and take measures to mitigate the negative consequences of aid provision.

This article does not attempt to analyse the overall financial impact of humanitarian operations on the war economy in eastern Chad and Darfur. Instead, it examines some of the trends and, by looking at the financial indicators from one organisation, identify key issues which need to be addressed.

Principles at stake: 'do no harm' and neutrality
Do no harm
The 'do no harm' principle is derived from medical ethics. It requires humanitarian organisations to strive to 'minimize the harm they may inadvertently be doing by being present and providing assistance. Humanitarian actors need to be aware if aid is used as an instrument of war or if aid is an indirect part of the dynamics of the conflict'.[2] Such unintended negative consequences may be wide-ranging and extremely complex.

One of the crucial elements in assessing harm is looking at the extent to which humanitarian assistance contributes to the overall economy of the conflict. Prior to the expulsion of aid organisations, it was estimated that the cost of providing assistance in 2009 in Darfur alone was a billion dollars.[3] The complexity of the economic dynamics in eastern Chad and Darfur makes it impossible to see exactly how resources may have been diverted, manipulated or incorporated into the strategies of parties to the conflict. That said, this kind of investment is inevitably a catalyst for change, both positive and negative.

> the cost of providing assistance in 2009 in Darfur alone was a billion dollars

Over time, analysts have identified a number of ways in which assistance can be diverted or manipulated in conflict. What is particularly interesting in Darfur and eastern Chad is the extent to which these patterns have, in many respects, been reversed.

1 See *Humanitarian Advocacy in Darfur: The Challenge of Neutrality*, HPG Policy Brief 28, October 2007, p. 2.

2 OCHA, Glossary UN-CMCoord, September 2008, http://ochaonline.un.org.

3 AFP, 'Year of Failure in Darfur as ICC Spectre Looms over Sudan', 28 December 2008, . http://www.reliefweb.int.

Donkeys not trucks: piloting a low-tech response to asset theft

appear to be the norm. Certainly, in Chad or Darfur this kind of manipulation is not comparable to the wholesale control by rebel forces seen in Goma's camps, for example. Moreover, although theft and attacks have resulted in losses of food and other relief goods, the acquisition of these supplies rarely seems to have been the explicit intention.[5]

neutrality is not only ideological: it also has practical implications

However, aid has a greater economic value, and this can give considerable power to governments and armed actors that are able to influence where, how and to whom it is provided. Management by government or rebel groups of where aid can be delivered can reinforce locations of strategic military interest, for example, or can build support for one side or the other by giving rewards to allies, while denying them to enemies. Humanitarian access maps (available at http://www.unsudanig.org) graphically illustrate this trend.

Crime and the economy of war. One of the more frustrating aspects of working in Chad and Darfur is that it is virtually impossible to identify the perpetrators of crimes, including theft from humanitarian organisations. The fragmentation of armed groups and the tendency of parties to the conflict to use proxy militias or to form alliances with local or tribal groups make it very difficult to attribute responsibility. In addition to identifiable rebel groups, there is also a plethora of bandits and thieves, apparently operating independently. Criminality is also responsible for much of the looting experienced by humanitarian organisations in Chad and Darfur, and hence is part of the wider war economy. Criminality flourishes because of impunity: bandits are not apprehended and punished not only because this is difficult, but also – and perhaps especially – because there is no interest in doing so.

Neutrality
The commitment to neutrality is generally understood as a conscious choice not to take sides in a conflict. The principle of neutrality essentially imposes two obligations on neutral parties: (i) maintaining a distance from hostilities, that is abstaining from actions that would help or hinder one party or the other; and (ii) taking no part in political, racial, religious or ideological controversy.

Neutrality is not only ideological: it also has practical implications. Neutrality requires humanitarian organisations to work in such a way that their action does not provide support to either side of the conflict, or is perceived as doing so. Working in this way allows humanitarians to negotiate access to conflict-affected populations by assuring parties to the conflict that assistance will not be provided in a way that unfairly gives one side an advantage over another.

Humanitarian assistance confers legitimacy. For rebel groups or armed insurgents, when humanitarians negotiate with them for access to people living in their areas of control, this interaction can be used to demonstrate that they are legitimate, or 'recognised'. In eastern Chad and Darfur, this has been turned on its head: in both areas, power and legitimacy are derived not from fostering positive relationships with the humanitarian community, but through demonstrations of brute force. The result is a 'Toyota war', in which the seizure of vehicles by force from humanitarian organisations confers legitimacy. In Darfur this pattern is particularly clear, as the parties that are invited to the negotiating table are generally those with the greatest military strength, and asset targeting peaks just prior to peace talks. Theft increases as rebel groups with ever-decreasing accountability to the people they claim to represent aim for a seat at the table.

Humanitarian assistance as an asset in itself. The most common example of manipulation of assistance is its diversion – particularly in the form of food and non-food items – from the civilian population to armed groups. Although it is clear that, in at least some locations, rebels are using IDP and refugee camps as bases,[4] this does not

4 See, for example, UNHCR, 'Chad: Rebel Infiltration of Oure Cassoni Camp', 26 May 2006 (www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&id=4476dbd94); and Reuters, 'Rebel Recruitment, Banditry Threaten Chad Camps – UN', Reuters, 3 December 2008 (www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N03353080.htm) and 'Sudan Surrounds, Attacks Volatile Darfur Camp – Witnesses', 21 August 2007 (http://uk.reuters.com).
5 Interview with WFP representative, May 2007.

5 Interview with WFP representative, May 2007.

Table 1: Key data

	Chad (€)	Darfur (€)
2008 country budget (MSF OCA)	3,519,484	2,767,414
Value of looted assets and cash	79,918	71,507
% on budget	2.27 %	2.58%
Value of fees paid to the government[9]	20,235	52,485
% on budget	0.57%	1.89%
% looted assets and government fees	2.84%	4.47%

In order to assess the extent to which neutrality is affected by looting in eastern Chad and Darfur, a small sample of losses was examined. The figures that follow were calculated from lists of looted assets provided by MSF OCA6 in 2008. Their financial value was calculated using the MSF standard purchasing pricing list, and items that were looted and subsequently recovered are not included in the assessment. Additional costs, such as import taxes[7] and transport from the purchasing site to the final destination, were not included in the calculations. However, in order to provide a fair assessment, taxes and other fees paid to the government have been included. The governments are parties to the conflict and have access to funds received from humanitarians directly. While governments often waive fees and exempt humanitarian agencies from taxation to facilitate maximum support for populations in need, this is not the case in Sudan. The government has instead created additional administrative and bureaucratic obstacles to access, most of which have a financial value. Including government fees captures some of the financial impact of these impediments. The figures do not include charges that could not be directly attributed to the government – water and electricity, for example.[8]

The overall proportion of looted assets and fees paid was 2.84% in Chad, and 4.47% in Darfur. While neither the proportion nor the total sums are shocking, the contribution to the war economy is nonetheless substantial. It must also be considered that the total resources either looted or paid to the two governments in taxes, visas and fees by NGOs, UN agencies and the ICRC would be much larger, particularly given that many of these are resource-heavy operations, including food and non-food item delivery. It is also important to note that, although only the financial value of assets has been calculated here, vehicles and communications equipment have a value beyond their monetary worth for armed actors, increasing their capacity to wage war.

As it is usually impossible to identify the perpetrators of crimes or their allegiance, we are unable to determine whether our aid helps or hinders one or more parties to the conflict – or, by extension, if these involuntary contributions compromise our neutrality. However, it is clear that the losses – particularly looted assets – constitute a serious barrier to the efficient and effective provision of assistance, and can contribute to the war economy. This raises a serious challenge for the humanitarian community: can humanitarians be accused of fuelling or prolonging the conflict in these two countries?

Final thoughts

Although considerable emphasis has been placed in this article on the possible negative consequences of assistance, humanitarian aid in both Chad and Darfur has played a crucial role in the past five years in mitigating the negative impact of the conflict on the civilian population. Health indicators have stabilised in the region as a result of assistance, and the presence of international actors is believed to have had a positive impact on security for the population.

Given the limited information and analysis available, it is impossible to draw clear conclusions about the extent to which trends in eastern Chad and Darfur are pushing up against the limits of humanitarian principles. It is, however, possible to point to some serious concerns, and make recommendations for further study.

In financial terms, is there an acceptable threshold of loss which allows us to define whether the neutrality of a humanitarian organisation has been compromised? At what stage does the contribution of the humanitarian community to the war economy qualify as 'doing harm'? In attempting to avoid doing harm, humanitarians must take care not to allow parties to the conflict to dictate the terms of assistance, or penalise civilians by making the aid they need conditional on the good behaviour of armed actors.

The humanitarian community can take further action, in accordance with its obligations under international law, to minimise contributions to the war economy. Article 23 of Geneva Convention IV specifies that: 'A party shall allow

6 OCA is Operational Centre Amsterdam. This analysis is based solely on the Dutch section of MSF.
7 Custom clearance fees are included in the overall budget of the mission and are accounted as 'taxes'. Organisations working in Chad pay 25% in tax for every item they import, with the exception of medication, which carries a 2% levy. This tax was not included in this calculation. In Darfur, import fees are limited to pre-clearance fees (e.g. quality certificate, loading/offloading fees, delivery order fees, transport costs, clearance fees). These are impossible to quantify.
8 The government's recent expulsion of organisations and seizure of their assets would make for a very different picture for 2009. MSF's assets included medical stocks as well as vehicles, generators, telecommunications material and computers, worth ¤1,196,140.
9 Selected budget lines included entry visas, regularisation fees, stay and work permits, immigration, registration, medical registration, airport and exit fees and ID cards. Also included were taxes levied on housing and radio authorisations, as well as bank fees.

HUMANITARIAN exchange

free passage of certain goods through its territory … subject to the condition that this party is satisfied that there are no serious reasons for fearing that:

a) consignments might be diverted from their destinations
b) control might not be effective
c) a definite advantage may accrue to the military efforts or the economy of the party's enemy'.

It follows that, unless an organisation can guarantee the above, there is no corresponding obligation on the part of armed actors to provide access for humanitarians to the conflict-affected population. Each organisation thus has an obligation to ensure that it is in full control of its resources, including supervision of the distribution of relief items, verification of distribution reports and spot-checks of warehouses. Moreover, an organisation would have to carry out an analysis of the potential impact of its relief work on the local community. In Chad, MSF is taking increasingly strict steps to reduce exposure to banditry by reducing the use of resources most valued by armed groups: using donkeys and local trucks instead of vehicles, for example, and replacing valuable communications equipment with less attractive gear.

It is important as well that political actors, in seeking to achieve peace in the region, act conscientiously and responsibly. As mentioned above, the legitimacy of armed actors in Darfur in particular is gained through irresponsible behaviour, often at the expense of humanitarian operations. While political processes and humanitarian operations must remain separate, political actors engaged in peace processes should take note of this, and try to reverse the trend, making responsible behaviour towards the civilian population and humanitarians as much a prerequisite for a seat at the negotiating table as the capacity to wage war.

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Lessons from campaigning on Darfur

Jeremy Smith, independent consultant

The scale of the mobilisation of European and American NGOs in response to the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Darfur since 2003 is arguably unprecedented. Attracting public and media attention to the crisis has been an important part of this response.

This article argues that many campaigning groups have focused their energies on governments which have relatively little influence on the situation in Darfur. Yet the apparent success of campaigning on Darfur – in terms of media coverage and public and celebrity support – and the dominant, agenda-setting status of the main campaigning coalitions have made it difficult to identify alternative approaches focused on actors with more direct influence. The use of certain techniques and the adoption of a high-profile, 'aggressive' stance appear almost to have become ends in themselves, rather than a strategic choice determined by what is most likely to bring pressure to bear upon the most influential targets.

The origins of campaigning on Darfur
Darfur has been in a state of simmering conflict for decades, with peaks in the late 1980s and mid-to-late 1990s. Conflict escalated again in 2000–2003. Some NGOs, mostly Sudanese, attempted to sound the alarm, but their warnings were largely ignored until 2003.[1] Amnesty International, which reported specific human rights violations from 2002, made Darfur an organisational priority in April 2004, while in the United States the Save Darfur Coalition took shape out of a 'Darfur Emergency Summit' organised by the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the American Jewish World Service in July 2004. Subsequent years have seen a proliferation of initiatives and groups, including the Dream for Darfur and Justice for Darfur campaigns, the Darfur Consortium and the Globe for Darfur and TeamDarfur groupings.[2]

Of all these groups, only the Darfur Consortium, formed in September 2004, was created by NGOs based in Africa. An

1 Sharath Srinivasan, *Minority Rights, Early Warning and Conflict Prevention: Lessons from Darfur*, Minority Rights Group International, September 2006.
2 The term 'campaigning', taken to mean 'an operation energetically pursued to accomplish a purpose', is used in deliberate distinction to 'advocacy', 'the act of pleading or arguing in favour of a cause'.

Arab Coalition for Darfur was founded only in May 2008. Operating out of Western Europe and North America, the members of the various other coalitions have focused their efforts on actors situated outside, rather than within, Sudan, and emphasise sticks, rather than carrots: the US and European governments, it is supposed, can and should force the government of Sudan to stop its nefarious actions in Darfur.[3]

Missing the target

Focusing campaigning on Western governments presupposes that they have genuine influence on the behaviour and actions of the Sudanese government. NGOs have focused on 'easier' targets with whom they are more comfortable and with whom they have existing relationships, such as the European Union and the United Nations, rather than Arab governments or China.

Campaigning organisations have also employed familiar tactics. High-intensity media work has gone hand-in-hand with mobilising the public, coming together in the succession of 'Days for Darfur' organised across the world. Involving a huge amount of effort, these events have at best secured a reaffirmation from Western governments of positions already held; at worst, they have forced these governments into adopting 'tough' positions, to which the Sudanese government has responded with even greater intransigence. One respondent working within the media notes that the government of Sudan does not 'care about the international media any more, only the Arabic media and, fundamentally, internal opinion'.

Policy pitfalls

To keep Darfur on the agenda, campaigners have relied on simple messages and clear-cut solutions, which they believe appeal to their Western government audience. While capturing the complexity of the situation in Darfur and generating simple, 'campaignable' messages are not mutually exclusive ambitions, simple messages suggest that there are simple solutions. NGOs have repeatedly reverted to peacekeeping or some kind of 'humanitarian intervention' as their favoured option, forgoing possible alternatives which could emerge from a deeper and more nuanced analysis. The strong media and public engagement with Darfur campaigns has entrenched this effect. This is a problem with wider relevance: the risk, acknowledged by some campaigners, is that 'every time there is an armed conflict, the answer is "we want a UN force on the ground". We do that because we don't know what [else] to do'. Whether humanitarian NGOs are best placed to decide on

A displaced Sudanese woman at Al Salam camp, El Fasher, March 2009

©REUTERS/Zohra Bensemra

the appropriate political or military response to a crisis such as Darfur is, however, not clear, and many are apparently uncomfortable with this solution.[4]

Calling for peacekeepers where there is no peace to keep and no roadmap for peace that could form the basis of a more comprehensive campaigning agenda is not the only awkward policy position NGOs have manoeuvred themselves into. The issuance by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of an arrest warrant for President al-Bashir on 4 March fulfils one of the main aims of NGO campaigns: the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of human rights violations. Major human rights NGOs interpret the arrest warrant variously as 'a victory for Darfur's victims', 'a welcome and crucial step' and 'a landmark for international justice'.[5] However, whether the unintended consequences – the expulsion of international humanitarian NGOs, the apparent removal of any lingering equivocation on the part of African and Arab governments in their support for Bashir and the resultant emboldening of the government of Sudan – outweigh the long-term benefits and symbolic importance of the ICC process is an open question. The point is that it is impossible for NGOs to form a judgement as to the relative costs and benefits because a policy of demanding full compliance with ICC processes precludes them from formulating any other position relating to Darfur.

The message sent to other countries

Choosing to campaign on Darfur in certain ways and at a high intensity raises the question: 'if here, why not elsewhere?'. The parallel with Somalia in particular is striking. Both Somalia and Darfur are affected by complex conflicts which have had disastrous consequences in terms of numbers killed and displaced. But while Darfur has prompted five years' sustained international cam-

3 It was only in early 2006, for example, that 'it became clear [to the Save Darfur Coalition] that the engagement of the US government alone would not suffice to find a solution to the crisis in Darfur'. See http://savedarfur.org/pages/global_campaigns.

4 *Humanitarian Advocacy in Darfur: The Challenge of Neutrality*, HPG Policy Brief, October 2007.

5 Press releases from Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group and the International Federation for Human Rights, 4 March 2009.

paigning, mobilisation on Somalia has been slow and limited. It is difficult for NGOs to contend that doing less or operating in different ways in Darfur would be illegitimate, since this is what they have chosen to do in Somalia.

More serious perhaps than a 'sin of omission' in Somalia is a possible 'sin of commission' relating to Chad. In highlighting and condemning Chinese government support for Sudan, while staying relatively silent about French government support for Chad, Western NGOs risk being perceived as suggesting that their governments' foreign policies are legitimate, while others' are not. To label eastern Chad a 'second Darfur' and to support the deployment of an EU/UN force inadvertently bolsters Chadian President Idriss Déby. This is in effect to say that Darfur is more important than Chad.

Coalition dynamics – for or against?

The dynamics behind the two main NGO coalitions – the Save Darfur Coalition in the United States and Globe for Darfur in Europe – have evolved in such a way that it is difficult for NGOs to operate outside these groups. This is not to say that the messages and techniques they employ have gone uncontested. The Save Darfur Coalition has been criticised for failing to understand the realities on the ground and the consequences of its proposed actions, while MSF-France has publicly resisted the contention that the situation in Darfur amounts to genocide.[6] Some NGOs have chosen to opt out altogether, by deprioritising Darfur, or not engaging with it at all; the majority, however, are blown by the pre-

vailing winds, believing that criticising one's allies – privately, or ultimately publicly – is simply not the done thing.

Conclusion

The main campaigning coalitions working on Darfur have attempted to reconsider their position within a wider analysis of Sudan as a whole, and to search for political solutions broader than simply 'peacekeeping'. But their response to the arrest warrant for Bashir illustrates anew the problematic nature of campaigning on Darfur: the warrant has had immediate costs and may well hinder the pursuit of structural solutions. These costs may ultimately be outweighed by longer-term gains; the crux is whether the main campaigning coalitions have in mind a clear path by which their actions and strategies could bring about such long-term gains.

A more effective campaigning approach would involve focusing on targets with more direct influence on the situation; an investment in deeper and more nuanced political and situational analysis, including gauging the possible unintended consequences of policy demands and activities; and the adoption of messages and tactics most likely to resonate with, and induce action from, genuinely influential actors. Enabling this will require a shift in the primary purpose of campaigning coalitions away from the organisation of activities towards the development of a more sophisticated joint analysis.

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6 Sam Worthington, President and Chief Executive of InterAction, quoted in Stephanie Strom and Lydia Polgreen, 'Darfur Advocacy Group Undergoes a Shake-up', *New York Times*, 2 June 2007.

Supporting the capacity of beneficiaries, local staff and partners to face violence alone

Casey A. Barrs, Cuny Center

The mass expulsion of aid agencies from Sudan in March 2009 showed in a single stroke just how vital *and* vulnerable humanitarian capacity is. The incident offers an enormous chance to learn – and not repeat. To restore capacity in the same way is to risk leaving locals in harm's way all over again. Humanitarian policy has proven resistant to learning, at least in some respects. But now Darfur's 'situation has brought the *modus operandi* of international humanitarian assistance agencies into sharp focus'.[1] It is a time for serious stocktaking.

Failure to support the right local capacity

Public statements by agencies since the expulsion warn of threats to the survival of millions in Darfur. Are these claims exaggerated and perhaps self-serving – or accurate and self-incriminating? They may be self-incriminating if they reveal that little was done to support the capacity of beneficiaries, local staff and partners to face violence alone. This capacity exists, but there is little evidence that aid

1 Sara Pantuliano et al., *Where to Now? Agency Expulsions in Sudan: Consequences and Next Steps*, ALNAP/HPG, March 2009, p. 1.

agencies in Darfur tried to prepare for an uncertain future by augmenting such ability. Instead they focused on day-to-day humanitarian maintenance (and did that well given the pressures they faced). But, as has been said often since the Bosnian conflict, it is not enough to meet people's food and health needs as long as humanly possible. If they are still ill-prepared for violence when we are separated, then we have fundamentally failed: according to HPG, 'The expulsion has raised key questions about operating modalities and humanitarian assistance in Sudan', including 'the lack of local capacity to take over'.[2]

Clearly, humanitarian agencies support many kinds of local capacity – but seldom the kind that helps locals survive and serve others alone amid violence.

1. *Physical safety.* Which presence-based, programme-based, rights-based or camp-based 'protections' remain after agencies and their beneficiaries are separated? Which are portable, adaptable and applicable to the

2 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

locales and circumstances people will face next? Which programmes support local ability to either accommodate or avoid threats alone? Which boost local skills in information-gathering, communication, safe sites, safe movement or threat response, ahead of the day when there are no more camps or programmes? In Darfur, there is little evidence that this was tried beyond the limited efforts by peacekeepers to build community policing. Many reports have concluded that we must support the viable ways that civilians evade threats. But on the contrary, 'one disappointing characteristic of the protection response in Darfur has been the limited emphasis on understanding and supporting community self-protection tactics'. The focus instead was on 'external protective capacities' and 'action by third parties'.[3] These are ephemeral.

2. *Economic survival*. If beneficiaries are offered livelihood aid that needs peace to flourish, but agencies must quit mid-conflict, then they have essentially failed. Which programmes are designed for post-access scenarios in which civilians find it ever more dangerous to access markets or to work openly? Which not only help locals scale up their assets, while also helping to safeguard those assets from violence? Which support locals' own efforts to get their household economies onto a threat footing? It is increasingly recognised that the effect of external relief programmes is modest relative to the far greater impact of people's own efforts to ensure their economic survival. This may mean that, in some situations, agencies should support local adaptive efforts, such as commuting, family separation, non-market subsistence or relying on money networks and shadow/coping economies. It may mean that agencies should sometimes help locals to protect their assets through caching, dispersing, diversifying, dismantling, liquidating, redeeming or scorching them, and that they might be helped in pre-emptively stripping and transferring their assets. In Darfur, this suggests that agencies should have made more effort to get ahead of displacement by giving more attention to still-intact rural communities. But instead of trying to help locals to maintain some options in their home areas, or at the very least helping them to be wardens of their own calculated displacement, agencies largely waited in camps for them to arrive as *our* wards, stripped and destitute.

3. *Local service delivery*. Just after the expulsion, the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, John Holmes, observed (years too late) that it is 'particularly important to consider how to maximize the continuity of operations as well as the knowledge base and capacity of national staff members'.[4] Aside from nominal stockpiling and the formation of local committees to perform certain conventional aid activities, little more had been done to help prepare local service providers for dealing with violence alone and contingency plans reportedly did not exist. Planning with local staff and partners should cover, not just their ability to serve but more fundamentally

their ability to survive. Instead, as Holmes acknowledged, questions about the treatment of more than 7,000 remaining national staff were only now being addressed. This should have been anticipated years ago. Suppose, for instance, that from 2003 onwards attention had been given to what locally led service delivery in the face of violence would look like, and how it might be supported from a distance, if need be.

When expatriates are evacuated and local staff supported from a distance, risk may simply be 'outsourced' to those staff. This is partly because they are forced into our mould – even though our own highly evolved aid machinery, with all its administrative, logistical and financial surge capacity, is not designed to survive conflict. Despite efforts to build acceptance, protection and deterrence, agencies still bequeath these staff a vulnerable aid architecture which distance management does not alter. It does not necessarily overcome the operational dangers that cause us to evacuate in the first place. Facing danger alone, local providers thus often improvise tactics that mitigate threats to their work. One area of innovation has been to deinstitutionalise programmes, a way of coping that is counterintuitive to ingrained visions of institution-building. Local service providers have sometimes found that, by dissolving into society, they can stay in service longer. Unfortunately, we tend to give little thought to how local organisations cope.[5]

There are many ways that local capacity for safety, sustenance and services can be supported before agencies themselves become incapacitated. It is time for aid agencies and donors to do some deep reassessment. The dangerous transition being experienced in Darfur is not an anomaly: over the past three years programme suspensions globally have doubled each year due to insecurity.[6] Moreover, suspensions are only one of the several ways that aid work can be prematurely curtailed. Consider the lethal lapses when aid workers are unable to prevent conflict, continue programmes or transfer work to nationals safely, or guarantee asylum and safe havens, or offer protection for repatriation, or prevent the slide from 'post-conflict' back to conflict.

Building on strategies that locals often employ to escape violence, safeguard their assets and mitigate threats to service delivery can be painted by those causing the violence and threats as a violation of neutrality. That is the challenge to aid writ large amid internal conflicts. In the worst settings, efforts to 'project an image of neutrality' and 'gain accommodation … do not carry much weight'.[7] If, as Fred Cuny concluded years ago, 'humanitarian neutrality in a civil war is a distinctly western concept, not necessarily welcome in the third world',[8] then we need to be careful about what

3 Sara Pantuliano and Sorcha O'Callaghan, *The 'Protection Crisis': A Review of Field-Based Strategies for Humanitarian Protection in Darfur*, HPG Discussion Paper, December 2006, pp. 8, 11 and 19.

4 Press Conference by Emergency Relief Coordinator on Sudan, Sri Lanka, United Nations Department of Public Information, 9 March 2009, p. 2.
5 Ian Smillie (ed.), *Patronage or Partnership: Local Capacity Building in Humanitarian Crises* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2001).
6 Abby Stoddard et al., *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update*, HPG Policy Brief 34, April 2009, p. 10.

we avoid doing in the name of neutrality. If we do not support the ability of locals to endure future violence because it might get us forced out, then we in effect privilege our ability to stay today over their ability to survive tomorrow. That puts us in the business of giving civilians life-saving shots one day, without supporting their capacity to avoid being shot dead the next.

Conclusion

Many in the aid world have observed the limits of outsiders' access and influence amid violence and argue for the need to support local capacity for self-preservation. This approach is sensitive and should only be tried by relief or development agencies that have strong situational awareness on the ground, and that hire certain skill sets that they do not yet have. This is challenging but possible. As Mary Anderson asserts, local capacities can be supported even 'under conditions of social and political upheaval, and in countries where the regime in power imposes limits on NGO work. It is even possible … where the situation is extremely volatile and polarized'.[9] Indeed, agencies that work in areas

prone to strife and war bear a responsibility to anticipate people's vulnerabilities and support their capacities through their work.[10] It is contrary to all we stand for to knowingly leave beneficiaries, local staff and partners in harm's way.

Fortunately, as one prescient report concludes, 'there is much that aid organizations can do to build on the strategies that communities employ' in order to 'maintain their assets, escape violence, and mitigate threats'.[11] If we are to learn from the crisis in Darfur, then one thing we must do is consider where things might have stood now had aid there, from 2003 onwards, been more oriented towards our vulnerability and their capacity.

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

8 Frederick C. Cuny with Richard B. Hill, *Famine, Conflict and Response: A Basic Guide* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1999), p. 146.

9 Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising From the Ashes* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989), p. 41.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

11 Sorcha O'Callaghan and Sara Pantuliano, *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, HPG Report 26, December 2007, pp. 4 and 35.

Stuck in the 'recovery gap': the role of humanitarian aid in the Central African Republic

Kersten Jauer, UNDP

Over the past two years, humanitarian assistance has made a decisive contribution to the stabilisation of the Central African Republic while the country's condition was at its most critical. Back from the brink of collapse, the benefits of peace and stability now have to be spread much more widely across this desperately poor and conflict-ridden country if the patient is to recover successfully. However, while humanitarian assistance is levelling off and may well decrease in 2009, development support lags too far behind to pick up the baton. The looming recovery gap now jeopardises CAR's fragile progress.

Improving aid effectiveness

In November 2008, CAR and its partners launched a new aid management system. Widely used in Asia but still rare in Africa, the goal of this online database – in line with the Paris Declaration – is to make humanitarian and development aid more transparent, coordinated and effective. Previously, no central data source existed to help decision-makers understand who finances projects, who works in which sectors, in which locations, and where the gaps were. As in many other African states critically dependent on foreign support, the absence of reliable data undermined the effectiveness of the aid being provided. Within months of the system's launch, detailed information on more than 300 projects was available online.

At first sight, data on aid to CAR is encouraging. Between

CAR: key facts

Total population	4.3 million
Human Development Index rank	178 out of 179
Proportion of the population living on less than $1 a day	67%
GDP per capita	$402
Life expectancy at birth	43 years

Sources: UNFPA, IMF, World Economic Outlook, UNDP, CAR government

Figure 1: Humanitarian and development aid, 2002–2007
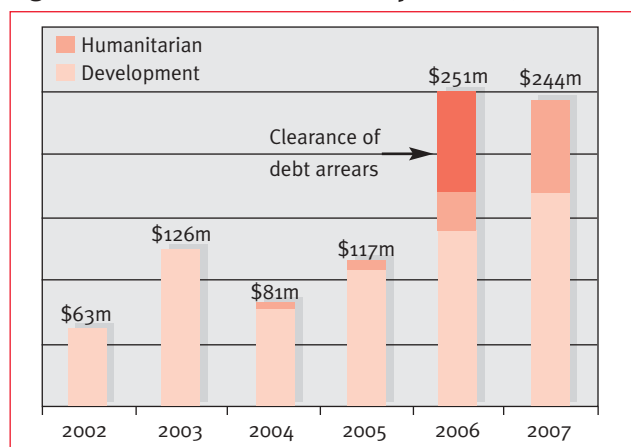
2005 and 2007, total foreign assistance more than doubled, from about $117 million to $244m. This increase is particularly significant given that CAR had long been a

'forgotten crisis'. While aid to Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole went up by more than 50% between 1985 and 2005, it fell by almost 60% for CAR. During this time, the country's development catastrophe slowly turned into a humanitarian emergency, directly affecting more than a million people and forcing up to 300,000 into displacement. After decades of coups, violence and international neglect, CAR now ranks 178 out of 179 on the UN's Human Development Index. More than two-thirds of the population live in poverty, and life expectancy is a paltry 43 years. Reaching the Millennium Development Goals has become a distant dream.

Kids in CAR: stuck between a violent past and a (hopefully) brighter future

An initial positive shift for aid to CAR came in late 2006, when the World Bank, the European Union and others helped to clear much of the country's crushing debt arrears, paving the way for multilateral development re-engagement via the World Bank, the IMF and the African Development Bank. Greater international attention to CAR's humanitarian crisis also led to a further increase in foreign assistance. Between 2005 and 2007, humanitarian funding jumped by almost 800%, from $10m to about $78m. New or returning donors provided most of these additional resources. Accounting for more than 30% of total assistance in 2007, humanitarian aid started to play a catalytic role in CAR's recovery.

Development aid: too little too late

Yet a closer analysis of aid, looking separately at development and humanitarian support, shows that catching up on lost decades may well take much longer than hoped. Frequently, development projects are constrained by protracted planning and implementation delays, particularly in low-capacity countries such as CAR. A significant share of the $166m disbursed for development activities in 2007 came years late, as many projects grappled with restructuring, recruitment and procurement delays, as well as a general failure to show satisfactory results.

More importantly, large parts of the development machine had come to a standstill when the country was at its most fragile. After a virtual halt to long-term aid during CAR's last civil war in 2002–2003, it took almost four years for development donors to return. In late 2007, they finally pledged some $600m over three years in support of the country's first poverty reduction strategy. Yet much of these resources are burdened with lead-times of up to two years. In addition, they only cover half of the country's basic needs, amounting to $1.3 billion for security sector reform, economic recovery, infrastructure, healthcare and education.

In 2007, the impact of increasing development funding still remained largely invisible in many parts of the country. More than three-quarters of the $158m spent on development addressed just four sectors: debt alleviation and refinancing (28%), peacekeeping and rehabilitation of government capacity (23%), health (14%) and non-specific budget support (9%).[1] More significantly, less than 20% of development aid was spent in projects outside the capital, Bangui. It is often said that insecurity in the north, which is now infested with rebel groups and bandits, severely limited the scope for development activity in the field. Yet it could equally be argued that this very fragility reinforces the case for aid: the experience of tangible development benefits may increase support for the government and thus enhance stability in long-neglected regions.

Humanitarians pick up (some) pieces

In 2007, humanitarian assistance (not development aid) made a concrete differ-

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1 Specific budget support went mostly to debt and salary payments, as well as government capacity rehabilitation.

Figure 2: Where the aid goes

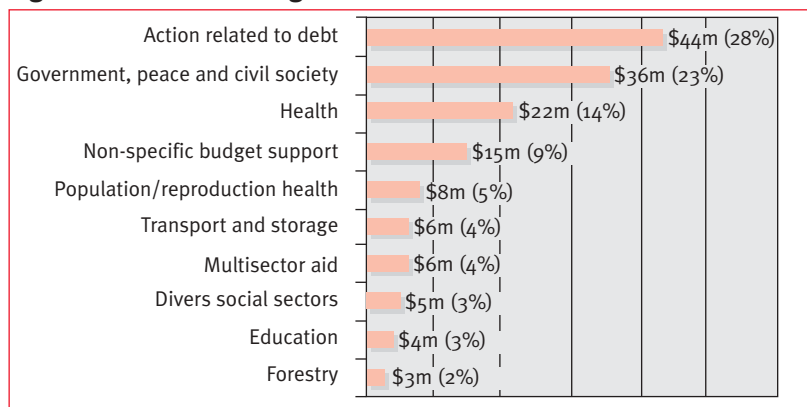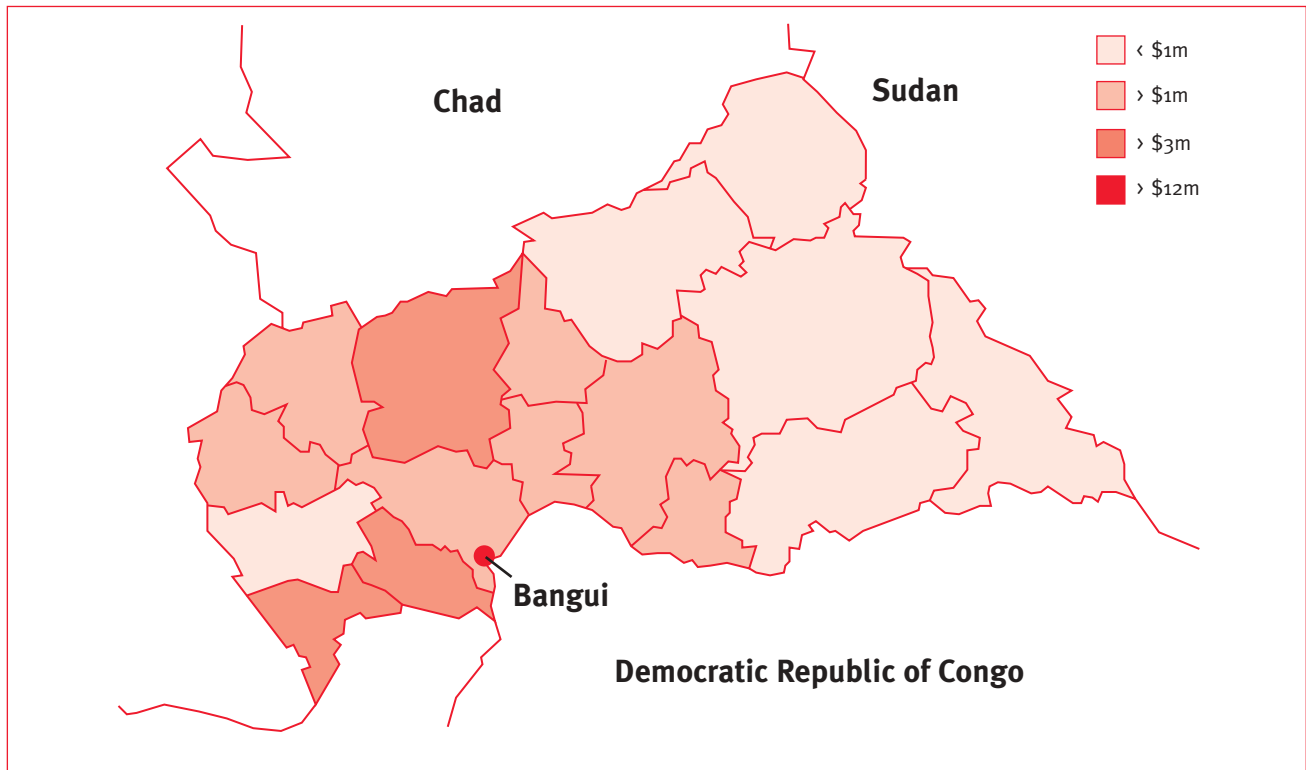| Sector	Amount
Action related to debt	$44m (28%)
Government, peace and civil society	$36m (23%)
Health	$22m (14%)
Non-specific budget support	$15m (9%)
Population/reproduction health	$8m (5%)
Transport and storage	$6m (4%)
Multisector aid	$6m (4%)
Divers social sectors	$5m (3%)
Education	$4m (3%)
Forestry	$3m (2%)

Figure 3: Little development outside the capital

ence in the fragile regions where development progress was most needed. Throughout the north, conflict and neglect had destroyed health posts, schools, water pumps, farms and infrastructure. Almost 90% of humanitarian funds were spent in the six northern prefectures, home to more than 1.2m people. All of these regions received more than $3m in direct humanitarian spending, and most benefited from more than $6m in concrete, visible project expenditure. During 2007, the number of international humanitarian NGOs working in CAR jumped from five to 20.

For a number of reasons, however, the impact of this work remained limited. Of the $78m donors disbursed in humanitarian aid in 2007, only around $54m could be spent before the end of the year, as significant amounts of funding only arrived in November and December. Most humanitarian organisations only started their operations in 2007, and had to devote considerable funds to start-up investments. More importantly, donors directed almost half of humanitarian aid to only one sector: food security (43%). A local pooled fund (the Emergency Response Fund) helped to redress this imbalance by serving under-funded priority projects. Overall, however, the resources available for health, education and water and sanitation projects were limited.

Nothing new in 2008

The situation did not change significantly in 2008. Total aid increased by about 20%, but much of the long-term development support remained heavily concentrated on very few sectors. Even more money stayed in the capital. Humanitarian funding picked up further (albeit some statistics overstate progress by double-counting donor

contributions), but food distributions accounted for an even higher share of humanitarian expenditure.

Meanwhile, economic conditions deteriorated as the global economic crisis hit the country. According to the government, diamond mining and timber production (the two most important economic sectors) fell by some 60% in 2008, leading to massive unemployment in the south. The country's first poverty reduction strategy and donor roundtable in late 2007 had raised enormous popular expectations. Yet, in the current year, humanitarian funding is likely to fall off significantly. The impact on field activity in the north could be drastic. At the same time, most development projects are still at the planning stage. Many basic social services may actually disappear in 2009.

Stuck in the recovery gap

Why is the transition from a catalytic humanitarian phase to effective development support so difficult in a country like CAR? Three reasons stand out. First, once foreign aid networks have broken down, it is very difficult to re-establish them. Second, fragile countries such as CAR do not fit well with traditional donor funding mechanisms. Third, appropriately qualified international staff are frequently lacking.

Over the last 20 years, as the political and economic situation became more fragile, CAR lost more and more of its support network: development donors increasingly disengaged, Western embassies closed, country representatives left and most desk officers stopped reporting. By 2007, probably only a handful of officials in Northern development ministries possessed anything

other than a rudimentary knowledge of CAR. Getting access to Northern decision-makers became increasingly difficult for government and aid agency officials from CAR. Once the development aid structure collapses, enormous amounts of time and resources are required to rebuild it. Re-establishing an effective field presence, regaining lost knowledge and reconnecting decision-makers takes years.

CAR has also been the victim of an unfortunate aid 'category mismatch'. Deemed unfit for long-term support, traditional development aid dried up. With massive internal displacement, CAR became a case for humanitarian donors – most of them eager to disengage as quickly as possible. Yet the country was not afflicted by a sudden-onset crisis, from which it could quickly 'recover'. CAR has been chronically sick for decades. Rather, the country is part of a group of about 50 states where, according to Oxford professor Paul Collier, the 'bottom billion' of the world's population seems irredeemably mired in poverty, and traditional donor instruments have failed.

Finally, CAR is a prime example of the frequent 'skill paradox' in humanitarian and development work. Rarely can one find highly-skilled international staff in hard-to-get-to, low-capacity countries such as CAR (or Southern Sudan), even though these are precisely the contexts where such personnel are needed most. While certainly not the root cause of CAR's problems, aid agencies' inability to recruit the right staff has certainly contributed to the country's disastrous development results. To give one example, the vital UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator post has been left vacant for almost a year.

What to do
Putting CAR (and countries like it) back on track requires more and better support. First, it is important to fight

organisational 'network loss'. A country that stands at the very bottom of all important development indicators should never be left without dedicated, specialised assistance. Research, field presence, headquarters support and bilateral relations are critical.

Second, new funding categories and mechanisms need to be created, to better address the problems of fragile or failing states such as CAR. These countries do not face sudden crises, requiring quick humanitarian action, with disengagement six months later. Likewise, they often do not have the ability to execute large development programmes themselves, making them unattractive to many development donors. Easy 'work-arounds', such as using humanitarian funds for quasi-development projects, are not the answer. Rather, these 'bottom billion' countries require new forms of funding, for long-term, hands-on support. Finally, it is time for donors to engage with humanitarian and development agencies, especially in the UN system, to improve recruitment systems. Where country offices lack the capacity to select appropriately qualified staff, headquarters must offer support.

The surge in humanitarian activity in CAR since 2007 has done much to raise the country's profile, and bring some help to those who need it most. Now is the time to do more to ensure that this progress is not lost in the looming recovery gap.

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Out of site, out of mind? Reflections on responding to displacement in DRC

Katherine Haver

In early November last year, television images showed the world thousands of people fleeing fighting between the government and rebels in eastern DRC. But these events were only a spike in what has been a long-running crisis. Every month, tens of thousands of people are forced to flee their homes due to fighting among and between armed militias and government forces, many for the third or fourth time. The journalists and visiting dignitaries who descended upon North Kivu late last year in response to the escalation in the violence focused their attention on large camps, especially those within easy striking distance of the provincial capital, Goma. With endless rows of huts covered in white plastic sheeting against a backdrop of black lava, the camps made for compelling viewing. Yet the vast majority of displaced people in DRC find refuge, not in camps, but with local families. In this way, the crisis in DRC

differs markedly from emergencies in other parts of Africa, such as Darfur and Northern Uganda, where most displaced people have gathered in camps. However, displaced people in host families are often invisible not only to journalists, but also to humanitarian organisations, which have yet to provide a truly adequate response to these dispersed and vulnerable populations.

We've been here before
A previous spike in the crisis, in mid-2007, saw increasing numbers of IDPs in DRC finding shelter in camps rather than with host families. The decrease in the overall percentage of IDPs in host families – from around 90% in early 2007 to around 70% in late 2007 – prompted serious debate among humanitarian agencies in the DRC. Had humanitarian organisations done enough to help IDPs in

host families? Had they somehow encouraged the drive to the camps, undermining local coping mechanisms? Donors and aid agencies began to realise for the first time that they had surprisingly few answers to basic questions about what life was like for people in host families.

In mid-2008, several reports examined these questions.[1] One, an Oxfam report by this author, argued that a much higher priority should be given to assistance to hosted IDPs and their host families. It was argued that this was necessary not simply because the needs of these vulnerable groups were being under-addressed, but also because displaced people usually preferred living with host families, a situation seen as 'physically, emotionally and spiritually' more secure.[2] Providing assistance mainly through camps can undermine traditional coping mechanisms and limit the choices available to displaced people. The basic principle is that people should be able to go where they feel safest and assistance should be provided in ways that support livelihoods and help to keep families together.

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Following a renewed focus on these issues, heading into 2009 the humanitarian community in DRC introduced measures designed to increase support for host families. The 2009 Humanitarian Action Plan included host families and host communities among targeted populations more explicitly, and one major donor, ECHO, placed a new emphasis on vulnerability rather than displacement status in its programme for 2009. In mid-2008, an inter-agency plan was drafted in North Kivu covering assistance to host families. OCHA even produced a compelling 30-minute documentary showing what life was like for people in host families.[3]

Steps have been taken to implement these plans. The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), which forms the backbone of first-line response to new displacement, has begun to revise its approach to target the most vulnerable people – including host families and returnees in unstable areas, as well those who have been recently displaced. Although the

need to respond to continuous displacement has slowed progress, it was hoped that the RRM would be operational by mid-2009. Several NGOs have also begun to experiment with cash vouchers for IDPs and host families, which had previously been tried in DRC only for returnees. The NGO Concern, for example, distributed emergency cash vouchers in January 2009 to over 3,000 households in North Kivu, including host families and IDPs, allowing them to purchase items including seeds, kitchen supplies and women's clothing, and to pay school fees.

On the whole, however, the rhetoric acknowledging the needs of people in host families has yet to be matched with large-scale implementation at the programme level. Plans for each cluster to develop a strategy to assist host families have not been followed up, due in part to the competing priorities facing busy cluster coordinators, most of whom have many duties on top of their cluster role. As a result, the development of good-quality tools to respond to the needs of host families at the household level is still in its infancy. At the system level, the basic information needed to be able to direct aid actors to the most vulnerable host communities is still not compiled and shared in ways that can effectively influence decision-making in real time, before hosting fatigue sets in or people are forced to seek shelter in camps.

What is hosting, and how can it be supported?[4]

Displaced people in DRC express a strong preference for living with host families rather than in camps. Indeed, the main reason cited by IDPs in their decision to stay in a host family is their negative perception of camps.[5] Camps are generally seen as crowded, insecure and unhealthy, and are often associated with the kind of violence and disease that plagued camps along the border with Rwanda following the 1994 genocide.

Hosting involves sharing the most basic elements of a home: a roof over one's head and food. It rarely involves paying for IDPs' medical costs or school fees. Although many IDPs in host families do not receive humanitarian assistance, when food aid is received by hosted IDPs it is almost always shared with the host family. This is not the case for non-food items, such as kitchen utensils, blankets and buckets, which are more difficult to share, and are items often already owned by the host family.

Displaced people are expected to contribute to the household in whatever ways they can. Although this can involve paying a cash contribution in the form of 'rent', more often they work in the fields with their hosts, collecting wood for small amounts of money to contribute to the household, fetching water, or doing other domestic chores. Sharing humanitarian assistance is also seen as a contribution. In most cases, however, IDPs acknowledge that they have virtually nothing to contribute, which is a

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1 These include Stephen McDowell, *Internal Displacement in North Kivu: Hosting, Camps, and Coping Mechanisms*, prepared for UNICEF DRC and CARE DRC, April 2008; Katherine Haver, *Out of Site: Building Better Responses to Displacement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo By Helping Host Families*, Oxfam, September 2008; and WFP, 'L'enquête de référence sur la capacité d'autosuffisance alimentaire dans les camps des personnes deplacées', DRC, 2008.
2 McDowell, *Internal Displacement in North Kivu*.
3 OCHA, 'Misère partagée/Shared Misery', film on compact disc, Kinshasa, DRC, December 2008.

4 See Katherine Haver, 'Study on Food Security, Livelihoods and Relations among Host Families and IDPs in South Lubero, Nord Kivu, DRC', Oxfam GB and CEPROSSAN, 28 May 2008; and McDowell, *Internal Displacement in North Kivu*, April 2008.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

source of frustration for them. At the same time, hosting can be a positive experience for both IDPs and hosts. The majority of people surveyed said that they would do it again. Nonetheless, obstacles can arise.[6] Because hosting involves sharing food, it can exacerbate an already precarious food-security situation. When hosting is of short duration and fighting is intermittent, allowing time for people to return and recover, it can be a good way to cope with a difficult situation. But when it lasts for a long time or is experienced repeatedly, hosting needs to be supported to prevent it from breaking down.

The two main problems experienced by displaced people and host families are linked: an inability to access sufficient food and a lack of income. Despite the fact that the biggest burden is felt at the household level, the kinds of assistance currently being provided at the household level are inadequate to meet these needs. Food and non-food items distributed to displaced people do not directly address the problems that many interviewees identified. Food is still largely available in markets for those with money to buy it, and most host families already own many of the non-food items distributed. This indicates the need for better assessments and responses that more directly support people's ability to make a living.

Some options for programme responses which NGOs, the UN and donors might consider to assist IDPs in host families, host families and host communities include:

- Cash transfers or vouchers. Unconditional cash-transfer schemes are often the easiest and most direct way to meet people's needs and achieve clear programmatic objectives. This method keeps money in local markets and can cost less than distributing the actual items. The flexibility of cash also allows it to be used in areas where access to food is difficult, and gives IDPs and host families direct means to pay for the goods or services they deem most important. UNICEF and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) plan to expand pilot project 'voucher fairs' to serve IDPs and host families, as well as returnees, in the Kivus.
- Cash for work. Cash for work enables people to choose how and where to spend their money, while channelling investment back into the community. Constructing roads, replanting trees and teaching are all possible work options. However, a basic level of security and stability is required to ensure that programmes are not interrupted, households must have surplus labour to participate and the risk of inflation must be low.[7] Complementary efforts are needed to help vulnerable people who do not have the capacity to work.
- Income-generating activities. These could include making or selling soap, carpets or fuel-efficient stoves. Market analysis is essential to ensure that markets are not distorted, and that there is sufficient demand for the products and services offered.
- Shelter needs. Until recently, shelter responses in DRC

have been limited to distributions of plastic sheeting. Providing other materials to create temporary walls in homes, building expanded cooking areas or additional rooms and providing household water catchments could help long-term hosts cope better.[8] Cash or vouchers could allow people to make their own shelter improvements. UNHCR and CARE, with the support of the Shelter Centre, have begun pilot projects providing shelter support for host families.

Although agencies tend not to consider emergency livelihoods responses, some forms of livelihoods programming may be appropriate for longer-term hosting situations, including income generation, micro-finance and sustained cash transfers for host families.

Ways forward

Emerging needs in DRC are rarely fully known. In part, this lack of knowledge is understandable given that displaced people are so dispersed, staying with families in villages scattered over a vast territory with few passable roads. But in a country where humanitarians have been responding to IDP crises for more than ten years, it is surprising that there are not better systems in place to monitor displacement. In other contexts with equally difficult access challenges, such as Darfur and Somalia, humanitarian actors have developed better information management systems. Reasonably accurate data on the numbers and location of IDPs is crucial in mobilising funds and delivering assistance. It is also crucial in order to mobilise responses to host-community populations before they are completely overwhelmed.

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The UN often feels that it needs to produce a consistent set of figures for the media on the numbers of IDPs, even though this kind of certainty does not reflect reality on the ground. Instead, it should adopt more transparently labelled and defined categories of 'verified', 'unverified' or even 'unknown', for areas where no information exists. Especially in accessible parts of North and South Kivu, there could be more regular monitoring of potential 'saturation' in host communities and surveys of the decision-making processes of IDPs. Displaced people can and should be consulted regarding the kinds of shelter and assistance arrangements they prefer. However, little tangible progress seems to have been made in this area. Agencies such as OCHA and UNHCR have begun to invest in improving ways to track basic statistics, mainly through revising the methodology used by provincial 'population movement committees'. These committees, which are poorly funded and supported, simply compile information from organisations on the ground to produce estimated numbers of IDPs and returnees. On the whole, efforts to date have been piecemeal and require much greater expertise and resources if they are to take root.

6 *Ibid*.

7 Simon Levine and Claire Chastre, *Missing the Point: An Analysis of Food Security Interventions in the Great Lakes*, HPN Network Paper 47, July 2004, pp. 13–14.

8 McDowell, *Internal Displacement in North Kivu*, p. 36.

More directly, humanitarian organisations in DRC should find a way to provide meaningful assistance to host families at the household level. The fact that rhetorical commitments have been slow to translate into action shows that innovation is needed at a deeper and more institutional level. If early results from pilot programmes in North Kivu are promising, these should be shared and debated. If humanitarian agencies are going to continue to rely on host families as a de facto, 'out of sight' response mechanism, they have an obligation to provide them with the support they need.

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Making cash work: a case study from Kenya

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Post-election violence in Kenya in December 2007 led to the large-scale destruction of property, disruption to transport and labour markets and the displacement of an estimated 250,000–300,000 people throughout the country. Houses were burned down or looted and livelihoods badly affected; families had to abandon their homes for police-protected camps and urban centres, or took refuge with family or friends. Although already vulnerable themselves, the host population accommodated and supported the displaced, increasing the pressure on their own resources and assets.

ACF-USA began working in Nakuru Town in Rift Valley Province immediately after the violence erupted, supporting the displaced population in major camps through emergency water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition programmes and non-food distributions. Following the initial emergency stage, a food security and livelihoods assessment was conducted in April 2008. The survey revealed the following key issues:

- The immediate needs (food, clothing, rent/housing) of IDPs in slums were not being met, and support for host communities was lacking.
- Income sources for IDPs in slum areas were less diverse than before. The biggest change was in the proportion of people engaged in informal/casual work, which rose from 8% to 68% for IDPs in slums and from 18% to 32% for host communities.
- Although host families/communities reported lower asset losses (53%) than IDPs in slums (81%), they faced increased pressure on their remaining resources due to the presence of IDPs.

- For IDPs residing in the slums, 55% of household income was spent on rented accommodation. Some 43% of households indicated that they were unable to pay their rent and thus faced possible eviction and relocation to IDP camps.
- There was significant demand for resources to support livelihoods in the longer term, with 84% of households planning to rehabilitate their livelihoods, some with grants (42%) and others with external support (24%).

Based on these findings, ACF decided to develop a cash-based intervention to support the immediate and longer-term livelihood needs of IDPs and host communities in Nakuru Town. The decision to use cash was based on the fact that functioning markets were easily accessible and credible, and needs were very diverse.

Cash transfer programmes have become increasingly popular in recent years. Evaluations of successful programmes have highlighted the benefits of cash over in-kind distributions. For example, cash gives beneficiaries dignity and the flexibility to decide their own purchasing priorities. Distributing cash is usually less costly and more efficient than handing out commodities and can have a beneficial impact on the local economy. Nevertheless, institutional donors are still hesitant to provide funds for direct cash transfers (unconditional and non-earmarked) to support emergency response programmes. Hence, opportunities for innovation need to be actively taken. After internal technical discussions of programming options, ACF-US opted to use direct cash transfers due to the concentration of beneficiaries in this urban setting, the

Table 1: Spending priorities

Immediate needs	Long term/livelihoods needs
Food	Productive assets
Clothes	Business establishment
Transport	Stock for business,
Healthcare	Farming
Household goods/NFI	Small livestock
Rent	Savings
Fuel	Rented land
Construction materials	
Debt repayments	

presence of easily accessible and functioning markets and the availability of credible financial institutions as potential collaborators.

The cash programme

The ECHO-funded programme was implemented between June and December 2008. It targeted 1,000 IDP and host community households in the slum areas of Nakuru Town. Implementation was facilitated through close collaboration with local community institutions and organisations, as well as the Ministry of Youth and Sport. Programme participants benefited individually or as pre-existing groups; others took the opportunity to organise new groups and open group accounts. A baseline survey was conducted after the targeting process was completed to assess the economic situation of targeted households, enabling later data comparisons. Beneficiary and community mobilisation ensured transparency and understanding of the programme and its conditions.

The programme team discussed plans for implementing the cash transfer component with Equity Bank of Kenya (EB), a local finance institution. Although different transfer systems were considered, including direct distribution by ACF, Equity Bank was chosen because of the ease and accuracy of monitoring through the bank's system, its transparency and accountability and the potential sustainability and longer-term impact encouraged by its micro-finance and savings policy. The security of agency staff was also a consideration. A joint ACF-US and Equity Bank team visited the slum programme areas to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for the 80% of targeted households that did not have them.

The money – €100 per beneficiary household – was transferred in two instalments: 20% for immediate needs and 80% intended to support livelihood recovery and investment. The bank, using a simple list of beneficiary names and matching bank account numbers, transferred the money within three hours. After the first disbursement, in October 2008, post-distribution monitoring assessed the extent of any misuse (spending on alcohol, drugs or prostitution, for instance), or failure to respect the programme's rules and procedures. Based on the results, 114 households were expelled from the programme and replaced with new beneficiaries. All households, including the new ones, received the second disbursement, which was transferred in November 2008, four to five weeks after the first distribution. Meanwhile, beneficiaries were trained in business management, book-keeping and investment. A second round of post-distribution monitoring was conducted in December 2008 to determine household expenditure patterns and priorities, along with an internal evaluation of the programme as a whole.

Promising results

The two rounds of post-distribution monitoring revealed interesting and encouraging results, with the programme achieving all four of the objectives set out in the project proposal.[1] Eighty percent of the beneficiaries were women. Spending priorities for both immediate and longer-term livelihood needs are detailed in Table 1.

According to the post-distribution monitoring, 25% of households said that they spent the first instalment only on immediate needs, while nearly half (47%) used the cash for both immediate and longer-term needs. After the second distribution, all but 1% of households spent their cash on longer-term livelihoods investments; 3% of households saved some of the cash from the first distribution, and it is likely that the first round's saving contributed to the second-round spending, hence the initial saving might be reflected in the later longer-term investment.

even people emerging from crisis are not simply interested in meeting immediate needs

Overall, 54% of households reported that they saved a portion of the transferred cash, with an average of €24 (2,412 KSh) saved per household. Around €12,000 of the €100,000 disbursed in total was saved. Reasons for saving included provision to meet future needs and investment and fear that the security situation could

1 The objectives were: 'at least 50% of the 1,000 targeted households report improved livelihoods conditions as measured against post-election violence levels; the percentage of cash spent on short-term needs compared with percentage invested or used on longer term needs; the cash is used appropriately by three-quarters of targeted households; and different utilisation of cash for each of the target households'.

deteriorate again. It appears that having bank accounts – and thus a secure place to put money – encouraged people to save money. Sixty-seven per cent of saving households chose to put money into future provisions: 52% for future businesses, 11% for future spending and 4% for future investment. The high percentage of cash saved or allocated to longer-term investment suggests that even people emerging from crisis are not simply interested in meeting immediate needs, but are also planning for and willing to invest in the future. Albeit on a small scale, this cash transfer programme operated as a safety net in meeting needs as well as enabling people to prepare themselves in the event of future shocks.

All participants felt pleased that the programme had enabled them to participate in, and be recognised by, the formal banking system. The transparency of the programme modalities was appreciated, especially given the high levels of mistrust that persisted in the host community after the election violence. Despite the inherent security risks associated with working in urban slum areas, the programme succeeded in reaching its target households through the Equity Bank, whereas the direct distribution of cash or vouchers would have posed a much greater security risk to the ACF-USA programme team and to beneficiaries, who would have had to keep the cash in their homes or shelters. Using cash – and a bank to transfer it – instead of having to purchase, transport, store and distribute goods also increased the cost-efficiency of the programme significantly.

Total programme costs per beneficiary amounted to €145.43 per participant, of which 68.76% (€100) was the cash transfer itself, and 31.24% support costs. The relatively high support costs (mainly on human resources) were necessary to ensure adequate mobilisation, monitoring and analysis of this first attempt at urban cash programming.

What did we learn?
The importance of mobilisation and monitoring in cash transfer programmes should be recognised, and sufficient human, logistical and financial resources should be allocated to ensure that these functions are done well. Getting to know the affected communities and interacting with them is essential to ensure that the intervention is appropriate, and that sufficient capacity is available to allow the programme to adapt to changing needs. Intensive monitoring has provided timely and accurate information on programme outcomes. Implementing this programme within a short time-frame (six months) was a challenge, as there was limited time for monitoring and training. More time should be allocated after the last distribution (at least six months) to ensure follow-up and support, as well as a return calculation and impact evaluation.

When a programme is implemented is as important as what the programme does. It was initially thought that the programme had started too late (six months after the initial violence) to respond to immediate needs and facilitate rehabilitation and the rapid recovery of livelihoods. However, the majority of programme participants confirmed that, had the programme started earlier than it did, they would have been unable to take full advantage of the opportunity it presented: many were still reeling from the initial shock of the violence and were not ready to think about and plan for the future. By August, when the targeting process started, people were ready to begin rebuilding their lives.

Conclusion: should there be a next time?
The Nakuru cash programme clearly demonstrates that it is possible to implement emergency cash transfer programmes even in densely populated and insecure urban areas. Working closely with local structures, in this case the Ministry of Youth and Sport and local CBOs, facilitated access to the host community and the affected population, and supported targeting and follow-up work. Close collaboration with Equity Bank could enhance the sustainability and continuity of activities through the provision of future access to micro-finance and credit, even after the ACF emergency programme finishes. The positive psychosocial impact of direct cash transfers, whereby families and individuals are able to decide their own priorities for spending and investment, should not be under-estimated. Although the timeliness of livelihood rehabilitation responses by NGOs and donors is important, sooner is not always better. Allowing communities to identify the right point at which specific interventions should begin will improve effectiveness as well as sustainability. At the time of writing, ACF-USA was planning a follow-up evaluation after six months (in June 2009) to look at the economic return rate and the longer-term impact of the programme on targeted households.

The positive experience from Nakuru can be replicated in other contexts and could potentially make humanitarian assistance more participatory, empowering, cost-efficient and sustainable. The wider application of direct cash transfer programmes will need changes in donor policies and in the capacities of NGOs and local financial institutions. ACF-USA is implementing a similar direct cash transfer programme in rural areas of Northern Uganda, supporting the return of internally displaced people. Lessons learned from this programme will also be shared with the wider food security and livelihoods community in due course.

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PRACTICE AND POLICY NOTES

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