

HUMANITARIAN HPN exchange

The magazine of the Humanitarian Practice Network

July 2002

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Many humanitarian aid workers have suffered the frustrating and depressing experience of having insufficient resources to be able to respond adequately to people's needs in the world's many 'silent' emergencies. Many have also dealt with the embarrassment of riches that are made available for a small number of 'noisy' emergencies. Each year one, perhaps two, crises dominate international humanitarian response: Hurricane Mitch and famine in Sudan in 1998, East Timor and Kosovo in 1999, floods in Mozambique in 2000, the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, then Afghanistan. These crises attract a storm of media attention, a high proportion of official donors' funds (and sometimes their militaries too), generous private donations, and a flood of aid agencies. They leave the forgotten crises, and the millions trying to survive them, in the shadows.

Following the special focus on silent crises in the last issue of *Humanitarian Exchange* (March 2002), the focus of this issue is on 'noisy' emergencies. Toby Porter analyses how the major donor governments favour particular emergencies with resources, determining major international humanitarian responses and linking them to the political and foreign policy considerations of the small number of powerful countries that finance the international relief system. The role of the media in galvanising international responses in Mozambique is described, while Nik Gowing explores its part in creating the story, taking recent events in the West Bank as an example. The transition from obscurity to the spotlight is examined by Janet Hunt in the case of East Timor, and by Penny Harrison in Tajikistan since the start of the crisis in neighbouring Afghanistan. And Gani Demolli reveals some of the difficulties that came along with the benefits of being in the Kosovo limelight. These cases have much to tell us about the way humanitarian actors – governmental, non-governmental and multilateral – make decisions about where, when and how they intervene. They can also teach us lessons about how those responses might be made more appropriate and effective in the future.

Lack of strategic interest keeps many crises out of the spotlight, but high levels of insecurity can also keep humanitarian actors away. In this issue, Mike Gent looks at the way aid workers handle the risk that often comes with the job, and Dennis King examines the evidence on lives lost in doing that job. The way data on the subject was assembled provides a model for how information might be managed in the humanitarian sector, an issue discussed here by Robin Schofield.

Other articles in this issue consider development in protracted crises, nutritional intervention approaches, the development of new humanitarian policy initiatives by the French government, and the place of humanitarian assistance in national legislation on international development. To end, Gerald Martone appeals to humanitarian organisations to uphold humanitarian values, stand up for human rights and close the protection gap.

An embarrassment of riches

*The rhetoric of humanitarianism fails to disguise a global system where media profile, geography and political considerations are more effective than need in attracting humanitarian assistance. Yet if humanitarian actors are to press for greater fairness with a clear conscience, argues **Toby Porter**, they need to look to their own shortcomings first*

Many reasons have been put forward to explain why some humanitarian crises remain out of the spotlight: the lack of strategic, political or commercial interest in a given country, high levels of insecurity or donor fatigue, to name just a few. But the main reason is that the funds and attention have simply gone elsewhere, to the high-profile or 'loud' humanitarian emergencies. 'Silent' emergencies and 'loud' crises are two sides of the same coin.

An analysis of eight years of global contributions to the UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) shows the extent to which resources are concentrated around a small number of humanitarian crises. Each year since 1994, one or two appeals have dominated the donor response; only on two occasions – 1998 and 2001 – have contributions to the largest CAP not exceeded the total given to all the other appeals put together. Up to the beginning of April, 79% of donor contributions to all CAPs worldwide in 2002 had gone to Afghanistan.

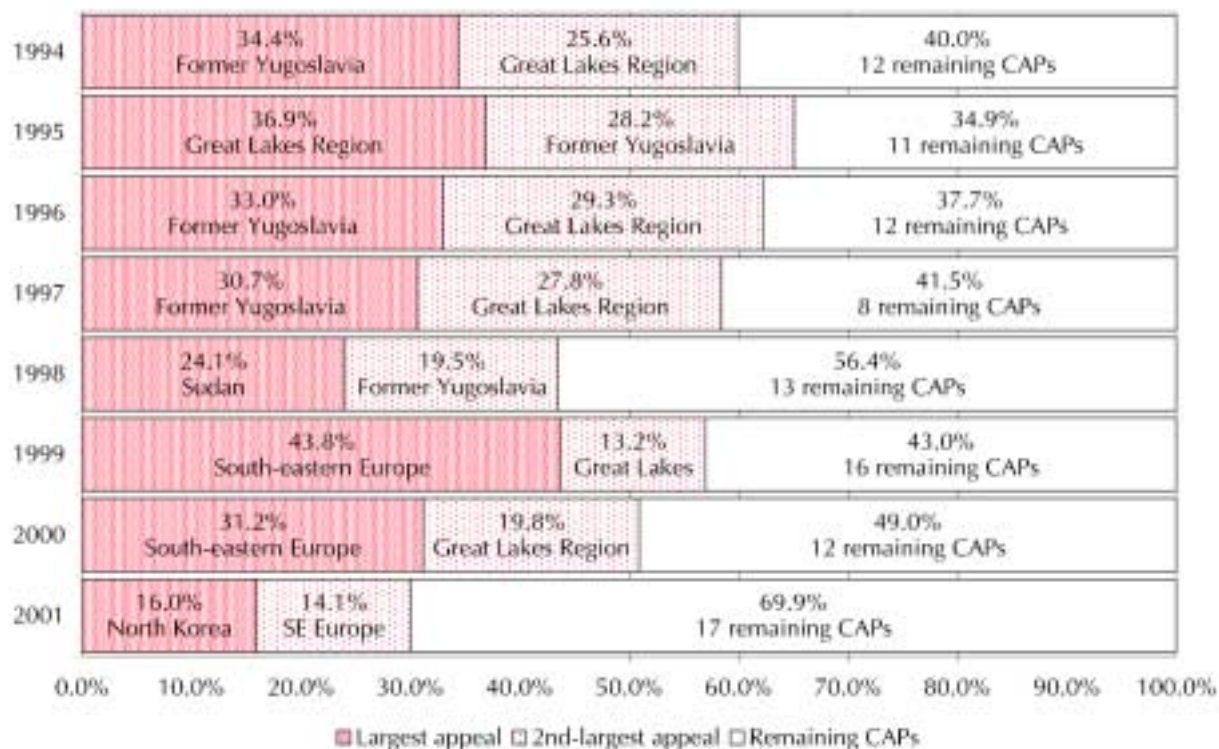
What makes an emergency 'loud'?

The international humanitarian agenda is inextricably linked to the political and foreign policy considerations

of the small number of powerful countries that finance the international relief system. France and Britain, for example, tend to concentrate their emergency funding for Africa on their former colonies. The US, with its influential Hispanic community, and Spain tend to be the most generous emergency donors in Latin America. Public response follows similar patterns. In January 2001, for example, donations from the British public in response to the Gujarat earthquake far outstripped what was given for the earthquake in El Salvador the week before. In Spain, it was the other way around, with banks, post offices and schools sustaining a high-profile appeal for El Salvador over several months.

Donors also tend to respond generously to crises nearby, as with the European response to the Balkans crisis, or the high levels of Australian government funding for humanitarian work in Indonesia and the Timors. Other responses may be politically motivated, such as the large donation of in-kind food assistance to North Korea, despite the unacceptable conditions attached to working in the country. Finally, donors may evince a particularly strong commitment to a particular group if they feel implicated in precipitating

CAP contributions, 1994–2001



the crisis. Arguably, this is what happened in Kosovo, and is at work in Afghanistan.

Aside from these questions, the level of media coverage is by far the most significant factor. Where there is sustained media interest, a large and well-funded humanitarian operation is virtually guaranteed. Massive population movements are almost always well covered by television networks, and so receive significant funds: the Great Lakes and the Balkans were the two largest CAP appeals for six out of the seven years between 1994 and 2000. Displacement in Colombia, however, tends to take place on an individual or family basis; it offers no story for the camera to tell, and aid agencies have long struggled to find funding for their programmes.

As for natural disasters, earthquakes tend to elicit huge media interest and public sympathy. Droughts that slowly erode livelihoods do not. Even similar events in different countries receive completely different levels of exposure. Within a few months in late 1999 and 2000, flooding hit Venezuela, Orissa and Mozambique. Many more people died in the first two emergencies than in the last, but it was the dramatic and compelling pictures from Mozambique that captured the world's imagination and inspired the huge donor and public response. Venezuela and Orissa received very little coverage, and very little aid.

Too much, or too little?

In most high-profile crises, most major donor governments as well as multilateral donors immediately make substantial emergency funds available, while media attention tends to mobilise a significant public response. As a rule, the bigger the emergency, the greater the amount of funds received from both sources. An over-abundance of funding is not, however, the most fertile environment for responsible programming. As the evaluation of the response to the Rwanda emergency observed: 'Donor organisations and implementing agencies should take greater care to ensure that during periods when resources are comparatively freely available, as was the case for the two months following the Goma influx, they continue to be used wisely and cost-effectively.'

The most visible characteristic of high-profile humanitarian emergencies is the presence of very many more aid agencies than the situation requires. Agencies without prior experience of a country or region rush to the area. In addition to the humanitarian imperative, there may be less altruistic reasons for their presence, such as media exposure, and the domestic fundraising opportunities afforded by being there. The term 'briefcase' NGO has been used in recent years to describe this phenomenon. Not only is their professionalism and ability to implement quality programmes often questionable, but such agencies tend to have little interest in or appreciation of the importance of participating in field coordination mechanisms, or in broader standard-setting initiatives

such as Sphere and the Humanitarian Accountability Project. As a result, the impact and reputation of the overall aid operation are damaged.

In high-profile crises, the conventional project cycle is often jettisoned. Whereas in standard situations, aid agencies usually try to secure donor funding in order to implement programmes that they have already assessed, in major emergencies this order can be reversed. A good proportion of NGOs start not with a project in search of resources, but with resources in search of a project. This is a recipe for poor programming, and partly explains some of the least savoury aspects of aid agency behaviour in major emergencies, such as competition and jostling for media profile. In Albania, for example, as new sites were developed for refugees from Kosovo, the competition between NGOs to be allocated a camp or sector to work in often seemed every bit as frantic and cut-throat as a commercial tender competition.

High-profile emergencies can also create unaccustomed dilemmas for more established and professional aid agencies. Even the largest and most experienced organisations have had well-publicised difficulties in scaling up their implementation capacity to match the increase in available funds. This glut of funding essentially makes the need to spend money within a specified period the primary driver in programme design, overshadowing a participatory or needs-based appraisal process, and therefore running contrary to efforts to improve the reputation and performance of the humanitarian sector as a whole.

In the UK, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)'s Kosovo appeal raised more than £50 million from the British public, easily the most generous public response of recent years. But before any of this money had been disbursed, the majority of DEC member agencies already had large contracts signed with institutional donors, often covering the running costs of their emergency programmes for several months. As a result, it was difficult or impossible for them to spend the money quickly, a problem further exacerbated by the sudden and unexpected return of the refugees to Kosovo following the end of the conflict.

Nor was this dilemma a one-off, solely attributable to the well-known excesses of that particular aid operation. In fact, the same problems have been associated with the two major DEC appeals since then, in Mozambique and Gujarat. In their study *Mozambique and the Great Flood of 2000*, Frances Christie and Joseph Hanlon note that 'British NGOs came under huge pressure to spend the money being donated through the Disasters Emergency Committee ... one agency representative told us, "Headquarters said to the Maputo Office, you have 48 hours to put together a proposal to spend £3 million"'. The evaluation of the DEC response to the Gujarat earthquake states that 'DEC members did not all strike a proper balance

between the availability of funds, their strategic role and their local capacities. Unable to match funds with capacity, the response of many of the DEC members became “fund-driven” rather than “need-driven”. Taking funds from many sources before proper plans had been drawn up, they became victims of their organisations’ fundraising success. Managers on the ground began to see their task as spending money within the DEC time-scale rather than planning good programmes’.

Towards a principled response

The beneficiaries of high-profile emergencies receive

The data gap

One of the major constraints on effective action around the forgotten emergencies issue is the lack of clear and reliable data to illustrate total global humanitarian spending, and its breakdown by country. The current system for donor reporting of their contributions to humanitarian assistance is inadequate, while there are also difficulties with financial transparency in the NGO sector. As a result, almost all those engaged in studies around ‘silent’ and ‘loud’ emergencies use responses to UN Consolidated Appeals (CAPs).

This data is inherently unreliable, for three main reasons.

1. Contributions to CAPs represent only about 30% of total global humanitarian assistance.
2. Many of the projects included in CAPs do not stand up to detailed donor scrutiny and therefore are not funded. Thus, there may be valid reasons why there is a gap between what has been requested in an appeal and what is actually received.
3. Figures on the average amount received per beneficiary are calculated by dividing the total amount received for all projects in a CAP by the highest estimated number of beneficiaries for one sector, even though the latter figure is considered very unreliable by most OCHA staff involved with CAPs.

Progress towards a more equitable distribution of humanitarian assistance will inevitably be limited until much more accurate data is available. Donors, host governments and NGOs must show greater willingness to declare all assistance provided, not just projects included in the CAP. As a first step, a review is required of the currently inadequate OECD system for reporting on humanitarian assistance, and its replacement with a new and all-encompassing global humanitarian information mechanism.

substantial humanitarian assistance, which their situation undoubtedly demands, but much of the aid effort is duplicated and wasted. Global aid budgets are finite and there never seems enough to go around, so money wasted in high-profile crises could and should have been better spent elsewhere. Yet those NGOs berating donors most loudly over forgotten emergencies are often those who most readily accept high volumes of funding in the high-profile situations, and have been criticised by independent evaluators for not being able to spend it. Much NGO advocacy around forgotten emergencies tends to talk about inequalities in donor funding patterns entirely in the abstract, as if the NGO sector was somehow not involved. The reality is, of course, that the bulk of this excessive donor funding in ‘loud’ emergencies is channelled through the NGO sector. To engage in principled advocacy around forgotten crises, two things need to happen. Firstly, the NGO sector has to greatly improve its performance in high-profile emergencies. And, as part of that process, some NGOs need to become as adept at turning funds down as they are at raising them. Until then, our sector protests too much.

Toby Porter worked for Oxfam GB between 1995 and 2002, spending time in all of the major emergencies mentioned in this article. He is now an independent consultant. Between February and April 2002, he carried out an External Review of the CAP for OCHA, which explores many of the points raised here. The report, published in April 2002, is available on ReliefWeb, www.reliefweb.int/library.

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'Noisy' emergencies and the media

*A large part of the momentum that propels a crisis onto the international agenda is generated by the media. But with new technology bringing wars, disasters and their humanitarian consequences to the attention of publics, governments and aid agencies more efficiently than ever, the question, says **Nik Gowing**, is not how much coverage there is, but what kind*

It is a self-perpetuating myth that increasingly there is less media coverage of humanitarian emergencies. The revolution in information technology and low-cost, lightweight means of recording and transmitting means there is now more reporting than ever from even the most remote and dangerous theatres of conflict and natural disaster. The question in today's 'noisy' emergencies is, who are the 'noise' generators? There are now many more than most assume.

The pressures of real-time reporting may mean the reporting created by the new technology is not always as accurate and objective as most would want. Coverage of such terrifying events as in East Timor after the 1999 referendum or Goma as the volcano erupted, showed how the impact of the media coverage can be immediate and profound, but it might be skewed in the rush to establish even basic facts at speed. More worryingly, the evidence is that in some emergencies it can polarise, radicalise and destabilise.

This helps contribute significantly to the impression that more emergencies have become 'noisy' – if bearing witness and recording unfolding events are the yardstick. They are noisier because more people and audiences around the world can now get to know about them. In the recent violence in Nepal, Kashmir, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, for example, we have seen much more reported in a timely way, even from remote locations, than we have ever seen before. These days, almost no crises go unreported in one way or another.

New technology and new players

How has this happened? The new low-cost, go-anywhere, real-time technology is central to the often breathtaking changes – especially the mobile phone and hand-portable satellite phones. So too is the presence of a new, often self-taught cadre of 'information doers' or 'bearers of witness'. They have shown that they create a whole new matrix of media in these emergencies. They don't have to be journalists accredited to known news organisations or professionally trained. But the power of what they record and feed to a growing proliferation of publication or broadcast platforms can be as great.

Think, for example, of the impact and power of the anonymous sat-phone reports by the East Timor resistance from the hills above Dili in September 1999 during the post-referendum campaign of violence by the Indonesian-backed militias. The messages transmitted back via an office in Darwin in Australia described bodies piled high in the police station and walls stained with blood. Television images in the first post-refer-

endum hours confirmed an appalling level of violence – a man was even hacked to pieces in front of a video camera. Noone now disputes there was a significant death toll, especially among East Timorese who disappeared while being forcibly shipped out. Yet for whatever reason, whether malicious or emotional, the claims about the bodies and the police station were exaggerated and the Australian-led UN forces who eventually entered Dili found no evidence to support them.

This was noise. And while it can help achieve a political purpose of mobilising international concern, it is also worrying. On the other hand, the presence of TV satellite uplinks in Dili for the first two days of the post-referendum violence had a disturbing but positive impact. The failure of the Indonesian and/or militia commanders to think of shutting down these uplinks as their reign of terror began allowed the world to watch the horror unfold in almost real time. Two BBC correspondents described live how they had escaped being murdered by militiamen wielding machetes. The risks taken by four women journalists to stay and report by sat phone from the besieged UN compound highlighted the dangers and threats to large numbers of terrified East Timorese. The stark images and reporting had a profound effect in mobilising the UN Security Council to action, and it did so in a few days. By contrast, months of pre-referendum warnings from UNMET about the likely violence failed to galvanise a response.

Since 1999, much has changed. Now bearers of witness do not have to be household personalities or brand names around the world to have an impact. But they too are media – the new, less recognised, but increasingly powerful media, even if some would class them more as advocates than journalists.

This new spectrum of 'information doers' is vastly different from the traditional, one-dimensional idea of media as prime-time TV newscast or story in a leading broadsheet newspaper. As the media business fragments into numerous niche audiences, with intense pressures on commercial revenues, new low-cost delivery platforms such as websites, e-mail, mobile phones and text messages have rapidly generated new challenges to the more establish media. Recent BBC News research has confirmed that the median age for traditional forms of news consumption is rising significantly: twenty years ago, the peak age was 25; ten years ago it was 35; it is now 45. The avid news-consuming generation is the same one, getting older and, if the trend continues, will soon be a dying breed. Meanwhile younger generations get the information they want (if they want it) from a proliferation of different media sources.

The tyranny of real time

What, then, is the new media challenge in humanitarian emergencies? Conflict zone websites such as the 'Electronic Intifada' in the Middle East are a new part of the media matrix, with new perspectives, insights and ways of delivering. As the E-Intifada states on its homepage, they will 'equip you to challenge myth, distortion and spin in the media in an informed way, enabling you to effect positive changes in media coverage of the Palestinians and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'.

The objectivity and balance of such sites may be challenged. At 'noisy' times in emergencies, such new media platforms can offer alternative perspectives but also sometimes inflammatory interpretations, challenging the coverage and perspectives of the traditional media organisations.

The power of this new, real-time information in emergencies is demonstrated in a terrible way. The International Press Institute (IPI) confirms that, more than ever, those who bear witness are being actively targeted by warring factions, guerrilla groups and national armies. Those who record images on their tiny digital cameras and send reports on mobile phones are considered an instant threat to operational security in a conflict zone. Warring parties try to neutralise and shut down the 'information doers' because of their power to observe and report. The price of pulling a digital camera from a pocket or rucksack can be very high, sometimes fatal. The murder by Israeli soldiers of Italian freelance picture journalist Raffaele Ciriello in Ramallah in March 2002 is just one example. He was shot dead as he stood in a street using a small camera to record a military operation. In conflict zones across the world there are many other examples, with fast-growing casualty numbers to prove it.

As I have often written and warned since the mid-1990s, the core issue for the media, the military, governments and humanitarians in these hyper-charged environments of instant, noisy crises remains the need for skill, self-discipline, caution and public restraint when handling information. The price of impetuous, emotive language and assumptions can be very high in terms of credibility and integrity.

In contrast, self-restraint means that rumour, innuendo, accusations and the worst assumptions will fail to germinate in the swirl of immediate noise in an emergency. But in the emotion and passion of terrible events and amid the tyranny of real time, self-restraint is usually in short supply.

West Bank, spring 2002

An example of the new swirl of real-time reporting was provided by events in Jenin, Ramallah and Bethlehem on the West Bank in March and April 2002 during the Israeli operation to neutralise the Palestinians who engineered the wave of suicide



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Jenin, 2002: why were perceptions distorted?

bombs against Israeli targets. The purpose of this article is explicitly not the rights and wrongs of Israeli or Palestinian policy and action concerning the violence and bombing. It is to highlight the way information, rumours and exaggeration swiftly emerged in a very noisy crisis, then created the widespread belief that Israeli forces had carried out a 'massacre'. The question is: why were perceptions distorted and all reasonable sense of reality destroyed.

Even as the chronology and scale of those events on the West Bank continue to be examined, there are profound lessons for all from the media noise in this emergency. By excluding radio, print and TV journalists using hostile means (including stun grenades, smoke and even targeted machine gun fire), the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) alienated both the media and humanitarian aid workers. This further encouraged journalists and humanitarians to assume the worst was taking place in the Israeli military operation.

When combined with an early IDF claim of 'hundreds' of Palestinians dead (a claim withdrawn within a few hours), the media felt justified in assuming that emotive claims from official Palestinian Authority voices of hundreds of casualties must be correct. There was no evidence and there were no independent reports, but almost no-one held back from assuming and reporting the worst.

Assumptions about the scale of violence inflicted by the IDF were further fuelled by the real-time stream

of vivid, often uncorroborated 'reporting' by e-mail and on websites. The sources, details and timing of the many 'reports' were often unclear, questionable or non-existent. There was no way of checking claims about the number of deaths, the stories of bulldozers and tanks running over bodies, or whole families murdered in their homes.

But hour by hour, an apparently terrifying picture emerged. Rumour and innuendo seized the information highground in ways that the IDF found themselves powerless to refute. Their task was made even more difficult by occasional streamed video and digital images of Palestinians apparently being murdered in cold blood by IDF soldiers. The impact was awful but, in the rush to provide information, the central question went unanswered: might these images and reporting be faked, or taken from another incident entirely?

In the supercharged atmosphere, the price for anyone attempting objective observation or cautious analysis was starkly illustrated by the experience of Terje Roed-Larsen, the UN's Norwegian special envoy to the Middle East. His cool, horrified impressions as he first walked around the destruction in the Jenin refugee camp created immediate and adverse media 'noise'. Israeli officials interpreted Larsen's humanitarian observations as political and responded swiftly with a virtual character assassination of the envoy. One even likened him to Quisling, the Norwegian Defence Minister under the Nazis.

A crisis of journalism?

As I write, we have a far more precise picture, though not complete understanding of events in Jenin. Human Rights Watch concluded that 52 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers died. There was no massacre, but the behaviour of some IDF soldiers raised the possibility that war crimes had been committed. HRW concluded that many of the 22 Palestinian civilians who died were killed 'wilfully or unlawfully'. Several Israeli soldiers have since been arrested.

Although casualties on both sides were significant, on balance it can hardly be said that the media noise during the Israeli operation in Jenin conveyed a considered and qualified reality. Many of the emotional claims reported at the time did not stand up to subsequent examination.

At the end of May, the Editor-in-Chief of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz described a 'real crisis of values for journalism', based on his experience covering 20 months of the intifada. At a media conference in Bruges in Belgium, he related the story of Abu Ali and his nine children who lived in the Jenin refugee camp. A few weeks earlier, Mr Ali had reportedly told a 'very distinguished and influential' European magazine: 'all my nine children are buried beneath the ruins.' His photograph was spread across a double page under the title: 'The survivors tell their story'.

But reality was different. As the conference was told: 'First, final numbers indicate that three children and four women were killed during the fighting in the Jenin refugee camp. Second, Abu Ali's children were not among them. And third, the magazine did not bother to tell its readers of this relatively happy end to its story.'

This example, far from unique, highlighted the tension between reality and real-time reporting. It can create a great deal of such media noise in a crisis, and can be responsible for drowning out more balanced, accurate reporting.

Those who expect better will have to dream on. Those of us lucky enough to work for a massive, well-resourced news machine like the BBC, which seeks at all times to report accurately, objectively and impartially by double-checking and not rushing to judgement, face a major challenge as other players rush to report, rather than check. Those who provide humanitarian responses also need to understand the new and increasingly imperfect real-time journalistic reality. The noise will get louder and ever more disturbing. The priority for all is to realise this is happening, and that new, uncomfortable dynamics are being created.

Nik Gowing is a main presenter for BBC World, the BBC's global news and information TV channel.

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Media coverage of the Mozambique floods: a double-edged sword

Between mid-January and March 2000, Mozambique was hit by a series of devastating floods. Spectacular images of heliborne rescues on live TV were beamed around the world. The subsequent influx of material and financial aid, culminating in pledges of \$470m to reconstruct Mozambique, were at least partly due to this international media coverage.

In 2001, Mozambique was affected by a further episode of flooding. During these floods, negative media coverage may have been partly responsible for a meaner international response. Floods hit the Zambeze valley – steeper-sided and less densely populated than the flat flood plain of the Limpopo which flooded in 2000. Along the Zambeze, many farmers live above – but farm fields below – the flood level. This led to the unexpected phenomenon of people declining to be rescued. Although their fields were under water, their houses were secure, they had brought their livestock near their homes and they had food stocks, so they chose to stay put.

The TV cameras came with the helicopters, but then went away when there were no dramatic rescues. The result was less TV coverage than during the previous year's floods, less donor interest and therefore fewer planes and less food. By late March, with the press long gone, people were running out of food – and the river was not falling. More than 500 people a day, on foot and in boats, were making their way to accommodation centres. The roads in the Zambeze valley had turned from dirt to mud. Airlifts were the only way to get food to people, but there were just 20 aircraft to do the job. By May, there were 220,000 people in 65 centres. With less foreign aid, and especially fewer planes, conditions in the centres were not as good as during the floods of 2000. The ministry of health reported 'severe nutritional problems' in some centres, and there were reports of cholera.

What can be learned from this experience of positive media coverage one year and negative coverage the next? Perhaps, as part of preparing for disaster, aid organisations could consider building closer relationships with journalists. Explaining to the media in advance the specific, unique contexts of each disaster could prove of positive benefit to both aid agencies and, more importantly, those at the receiving end of aid.

Source: *World Disasters Report 2002: Focusing on Reducing Risk* (Geneva: IFRC, 2002).

The East Timor emergency response

The crisis in East Timor following the pro-independence ballot there in August 1999 was swift and dramatic. Yet even so, the massive donor response surprised everyone. Janet Hunt explains why, after two decades of brutal Indonesian occupation, the international community was suddenly so willing to help

In January 1999, Indonesia surprised the world by announcing that the people of East Timor would be allowed to vote in a plebiscite to decide the territory's future. That May, Indonesia, the former colonial power Portugal and the UN signed the Tripartite Agreement, which made Jakarta responsible for peace and security in the run-up to the ballot at the end of August. Despite a poor security environment, persistent militia activity and the internal displacement of between 40,000 and 60,000 people, the plebiscite itself proceeded successfully.

The result, a 78% vote in favour of independence, sparked widespread violence by Indonesian forces and pro-Indonesia militia. Destruction, burning and looting left an unknown number of East Timorese dead, and forced more than 230,000 into Indonesian West Timor. The remaining population of around

600,000 fled to the hills and mountains. All but 11 UN staff, along with refugees who had sought UN protection, were evacuated to Darwin in northern Australia.

On 19 September, Jakarta ceded sovereignty over East Timor. The following day, an international military coalition, INTERFET, led by Australia and authorised by the UN, arrived in Dili and began the task of securing the territory. Humanitarian actors followed quickly behind. On 25 October, UN Security Council Resolution 1272 established UNTAET, a transitional administration initially responsible for establishing a civil government. This was the first time the UN had actually administered a country. On 23 February 2000, the UN took over responsibility for security from INTERFET. The international humanitarian response, coordinated by OCHA, had responsi-

bility for both East and West Timor. Whilst the devastation in East Timor was tremendous, the situation in West Timor was more complex, with very active militia and extremely poor security. The response to this aspect of the emergency was developed by the provincial government in West Timor itself, and by humanitarian agencies in Jakarta.

From a 'silent' crisis to a 'loud' emergency

The donor response to East Timor, a tiny nation of 800,000 people, was remarkably generous, and unusually rapid. At the donor conference in Tokyo in December 1999, \$522 million was pledged over three years, in addition to \$149m promised for emergency response. Several factors explain the speed and scale of the rapid international military and humanitarian response, but they can be summarised as intense political pressure, coupled with the capacity to respond.

The crisis was sudden and dramatic, and the destruction wholesale. Widespread media coverage showing Dili in flames stimulated a huge outpouring of public protest, especially in Australia. Thousands of people took to the streets of Sydney, Melbourne and other Australian cities to demand intervention, putting the Australian government in particular under intense pressure to do something. Above all, the Timorese people themselves enjoyed widespread international support, the result of an effective international solidarity and diplomatic network built over the previous 25 years. The Timorese leadership used all the diplomatic leverage they could muster as the crisis developed. A meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum leaders in New Zealand on 8 September was the focus of active lobbying by the Australian government, the Timorese and many NGOs. This led to the creation of the INTERFET coalition, with 20 countries committed by 18 September.

Part of the impetus for the response also undoubtedly stemmed from a feeling of culpability. The UN had agreed to the flawed May agreement, and the worst fears of its critics had come true, probably with greater ferocity than even they had imagined. Calls for the

early placement of UN peacekeepers had been consistently ignored, while the need to maintain good relations with the Indonesian government had inhibited contingency planning by the UN, despite the clear likelihood of violence should the plebiscite be in favour of independence.

In terms of response capacity, the Australian government had extensive military contingency plans, with troops already in place in the north of the country. It was later revealed that Canberra had detailed intelligence information about the impending events, and it certainly had the military capacity to respond quickly. Moreover, UN staff were keen to return to people they felt they had been forced to abandon, while Darwin provided an excellent base for humanitarian agencies to organise their logistics.

International response ...

In many respects, the East Timor response was very successful. Many lives were no doubt saved by the speed and professionalism with which humanitarian assistance was provided. Although there were problems with the shelter programme, food distributions were quickly targeted, NGOs met immediate health needs and many refugees were successfully reintegrated into their communities. The External Review of the period to May 2000 concluded that 'the overall achievements of the humanitarian response in East Timor have been very positive and timely'. The Review noted that, by April 2000, food distributions as well as maize and rice seed distributions had been extensive; 734 of 788 previously-existing schools had been re-opened, with a total primary school enrolment only 4,000 short of the previous figure of 167,000. Some 250,000 emergency shelter tarpaulins had been distributed, and 161,000 people had returned from West Timor, most with transport help from international agencies. OCHA established strong coordination with all humanitarian actors right from the start, and also coordinated well with the World Bank to identify areas of overlap and to rationalise funding requests, enabling longer-term rehabilitation to begin relatively quickly. Finally, relations between the humanitarian and military components of the response, although initially

Timeline: from colony to independent state

December 1975	Indonesia invades East Timor
12 November 1991	Indonesian troops kill about 200 protesters in Dili
May 1998	Indonesian President Suharto quits after massive pro-democracy protests
January 1999	Suharto's successor, B. J. Habibie, announces plan to hold East Timor referendum on self-determination under UN auspices
30 August 1999	Referendum passes off peacefully; 78% vote for independence
September 1999	Indonesian troops and pro-Jakarta militia kill hundreds and force 250,000 people into West Timor. International peacekeeping force arrives
October 1999	UN takes over administration of East Timor
30 August 2001	Pro-independence party Fretilin wins elections for 88-seat assembly
22 March 2002	Legislature adopts new constitution
14 April 2002	Former guerrilla leader Xanana Gusmao elected president
20 May 2002	East Timor becomes an independent state

difficult, were generally as good as in any previous high-profile emergency, testament to the professionalism and respect on both sides.

... local exclusion

In other respects, however, there were serious shortcomings. Many East Timorese felt overwhelmed and alienated by the massive international presence. They had just voted for independence – but suddenly found themselves totally dependent on foreign organisations. There was no agreed framework developed between the humanitarian actors and Timorese leaders and local institutions at the outset. There were constraints, especially at first, as the Timorese political leaders were not in Dili, and local NGO personnel were mostly still in hiding, or in West Timor. However, these problems persisted even as people began to emerge, and the leadership of the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) regrouped and returned to Dili.

There seem to have been several reasons for this. Humanitarian agencies appeared to have little knowledge of East Timor, and were nervous about engaging with the CNRT for fear of aligning themselves with a political organisation. Yet the CNRT was not a political party, but a broad grouping of Timorese interests which had led the campaign for independence. It had moral authority, if no legal standing, yet struggled for months to secure a building in Dili, to obtain transport and to get the basic resources to operate. The Catholic Church was a major institution in East Timor, but few outsiders recognised the significance of its role and its reach.

Language was another problem. Few Timorese spoke English, few humanitarian workers spoke Indonesian or Tetun, and interpreters were scarce. All meetings were conducted in English, and key documents were generally only available in English. The World Bank in particular was very slow to translate its monthly newsletter, and often failed to provide interpreters for meetings. Few Timorese had access to the humanitarian compound, and Timorese rarely participated in coordination meetings.

An early effort to restore local Timorese institutions was made by the NGO Information Centre, which obtained funds and equipment to enable some Timorese NGOs to start working. Yet a year later, local NGOs claimed that even where partnerships existed with international NGOs, they tended to be unequal – it was a 'donor-implementer' model, not a real partnership. It was months before structures were created to give Timorese a say at a governmental level. The Timorese felt, with some justification, that their expertise and knowledge of East Timor was not recognised and used by the international community.

Tensions over the lack of Timorese participation were exacerbated by severe resource imbalances. UN staff enjoyed a daily living allowance of over \$100. The average Timorese, even before the ravages of September 1999, earned between \$300 and \$400 *per year*. A floating



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In many respects, the East Timor response was very successful

hotel in Dili harbour, from which Timorese were barred, symbolises the disparities, and led to huge resentment, especially among young Timorese. Whilst accommodation was in short supply, this solution did nothing for the local economy. A dual economy quickly emerged, with hotels, cafes, restaurants and supermarkets catering for expatriate workers at prices at least equal to those charged in Darwin. For local people, these prices were exorbitant, and the display of affluence amid the poverty, destruction and unemployment which characterised the local economy was an affront. Other decisions, such as the World Bank's initial policy to buy school tables and chairs from outside the territory, rather than get local carpenters to make them, further angered the Timorese. Eventually, the Bank was forced to change tack, and have at least some school furniture produced locally.

Lessons

One of the key lessons emerging from the East Timor response is that we need to develop strategies that include and empower local people; in East Timor, as in other high-profile emergencies, it is very easy for local actors and institutions to be sidelined amid the overwhelming foreign presence that such crises tend to attract. Language and communication with the population about what is happening is very important. We need to allocate more resources for this purpose, especially for translators and interpreters, and to build availability of interpreters into contingency planning. Capacity-building should be part of the response, but it is a two-way process. Local actors may not be familiar with the processes and requirements of the humanitarian community, but the humanitarian community is not generally familiar with the local community, culture and systems. Collaborative learning is essential. We also need to acknowledge that a large-scale foreign presence will have an inflationary effect, and can distort the local economy in damaging ways. Every effort should be made to source supplies locally to stimulate the local economy. The UN needs to develop ways to rebuild economies without generating the kind of wide income disparities that caused such resentment in East Timor.

Within the response itself, more attention needs to be paid to coordination between military and humanitarian planning, and we should not allow political sensitivities to divert us from essential contingency planning. To make contingency planning effective, we need to do more homework on the politics of impending crises, know the players and the issues, and be ready to work in partnership with credible local leaders. This is the wider lesson: that we need to work harder at prevention. There were many warnings that

the Indonesian military would exact revenge if the vote in 1999 was for independence. That no prevention strategies were devised is the biggest tragedy of all.

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Tajikistan: the next-door neighbour

For years after the end of the civil war in 1992, Tajikistan attracted little outside attention, despite insecurity, economic collapse, ethnic strife and humanitarian need. This all changed with the US war against the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan. **Penny Harrison** describes what happened when the circus came to town

A year ago, Tajikistan faced another severe drought and food insecurity, the health system had collapsed and the economy was in ruins. Yet the country was deemed too insecure for many agencies to operate in, and there was no coherent regional strategy to tackle infectious disease outbreaks and the food deficit. Funding for humanitarian and development programmes fell short of needs, and consistently only a handful of committed donors funded international NGOs in the country. This all changed following the events of 11 September. For several months, between the arrival of foreign forces in neighbouring Afghanistan and the toppling of the Taliban regime, Tajikistan was catapulted into the limelight. Journalists from all corners of the world trooped in, looking for the scoop on refugees, pre-positioning themselves for the expected final battle for control of Afghanistan, seeking out stories of human disaster, demanding as a backdrop warehouses crammed with emergency supplies. With all eyes on Afghanistan, next-door Tajikistan was suddenly important.

From silent crisis to noisy emergency

Before 11 September and the Afghan conflict, even donors admitted that Tajikistan was a forgotten crisis. The country has limited natural resources, poor infrastructure, a fragile government system and, following the civil war in 1992–97, a history of ethnic violence and insecurity. On 8 September, just days before the attacks in the US, the minister of culture was assassinated. The previous April, the deputy interior minister was shot and killed in Dushanbe; two months later, a group of aid workers was kidnapped in Tavildara district by suspected militants apparently to force the release of his alleged killers. Only a handful of international organisations, donors and governments engaged with Tajikistan, and there was little donor support for humanitarian work. Needs were nonetheless great. Tajikistan, together with much of the region, faced another year of drought and food insecurity. The social structure and health systems were in collapse; poverty rates were

estimated by the World Bank at 80% of the largely-rural population. Isolated and marginalised areas of vulnerability, such as the Rasht/Karategin Valley, received very little direct help. Favourable official health figures hid a much grimmer reality; the World Health Organisation acknowledged that, by the end of 2001, there were half a million confirmed cases of malaria, for instance. Bureaucratic obstacles meant that accurate information was hard to obtain.

Overnight in September, Tajikistan suddenly became headline news. Journalists jostled on the steps of the foreign ministry, seeking papers and making requests, and thronged Dushanbe's bars and hotels, clutching satellite phones and waiting for up-links. The price of a seat for the ten-minute hop by military helicopter across the border into Afghanistan soared, and vehicles jammed Farkhor-Kokul, the principal unofficial crossing-point. Supermarkets emptied of water supplies, ketchup, beer and dried goods. Amid all this activity, humanitarian issues were sidelined. Our attempts to discuss the situation in Tajikistan with journalists looking for a scoop would often meet with yawns from young guns desperate to be on the front line in Afghanistan, asking 'is there an image of someone dying?'. Agencies found themselves at the end of the queue for visas and permits, behind journalists willing to pay whatever it took to speed up the paperwork. The population stranded in disputed territory on the Pyanj islands became a sought-after and accessible site for eager photographers and news organisations. Some 12,000 people were stranded in this area, which is disputed territory between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Yet important issues raised the previous year, that the sites were inappropriate and access difficult, were scarcely mentioned; instead, donors suddenly lavished on people more than generous food and other supplies. The British agency Merlin, which had been working with the displaced providing basic healthcare, had difficulty maintaining access amid this new-found attention.

Positives

Not all the effects of this massive attention were detrimental. Cynical though it may be, the latest crisis to inflict itself on the people of Afghanistan has prompted a recognition and understanding of the needs of people in Central Asia more widely, including in Tajikistan. Journalists who stayed beyond a week began to venture away from Dushanbe, and found stark images of civil war devastation, social collapse and need. More serious journalists did listen to what aid workers had to say, and some wrote excellent stories on the country. Kenzo Oshima, the UN's humanitarian coordinator, made a landmark visit to learn and review the context and situation in the country. The national nutritional survey conducted under the Action Against Hunger and CARE umbrella in October 2001 highlighted the food deficit, raised awareness of poor weaning practices and underscored a further deterioration in levels of chronic malnutrition. International organisations began to move in, some with the clear intention of



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Poor infrastructure poses serious problems for agencies

managing cross-border activity into Afghanistan, but others motivated by the needs in Tajikistan; health, food and non-food and media organisations have since taken root. Far from the Dushanbe hotel bar, rural people try to survive, suffering daily shortages of electricity, gas pressure so low that it is impossible to cook, harvests which have not enabled a family to feed itself for more than a few months. They were seen, and there was a response.

While we may resent the intensity of effort that was required to attract awareness of the situation in Tajikistan, the result is more coherent attention and acknowledgement of the crises facing the country. Earlier in 2001, following an outbreak of haemorrhagic fever in Khatlon region, the Ministry of Health refused to acknowledge the standing WHO protocols for communicable disease notification and response; these protocols are now fully endorsed. There is more interest and genuine concern for the needs that MSF has been responding to: in-patients of psychiatric institutions, where high rates of mortality previously existed, and the population of the Rasht/Karategin Valley, which is in need of basic healthcare, including access to essential drugs, reproductive healthcare and the capacity to respond to outbreaks of diseases of epidemic potential, including brucellosis, typhoid and malaria. Both populations remain excluded and vulnerable. While the social context has changed, and the need for psycho-social care has shifted away from war-related stresses and trauma, longer-term treatment for domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse needs more international support. The greatest threats to public health in the region – HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – are now the subject of regional forums and consultative processes led by NGOs, the UN agencies, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

The humanitarian challenge

What is needed now is funding for longer-term programme initiatives at the structural level. Short-term funding saturation will not relieve the more chronic issues, only the most acute humanitarian needs. If the food deficit is not addressed at the

central and regional levels, by changing policy to prioritise food crops over cotton, then it will persist, as will the risk of deteriorated health. There is also a need for institutional support to tackle corruption. While much has indeed changed, political stability is still not assured, and security concerns still prevent many organisations from establishing projects in the Rasht/Karategin Valley.

While increased attention and assistance to Tajikistan and the region is clearly needed, the way this is provided requires careful scrutiny. The immediate reaction of some donors, notably the US, to provide military and development assistance as pay-back for Tajikistan's support during the war in Afghanistan means that there is a risk that this tap will be turned off just as quickly should this support be withdrawn. Humanitarian agencies need to resist this, and to fight to ensure that humanitarian and development assistance is not confused with the politics of bilateral support and foreign policy concerns. Independent and impartial action, which has been critical in protecting agency presence in Tajikistan, must continue. Funding for humanitarian assistance should not be conditional on political support, but should be provided based on need in an impartial manner. This may be an old adage, but it has been called into question in this latest crisis.

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HPN Network Paper 39

Reconsidering the tools of war: small arms and humanitarian action by Robert Muggah. July 2002.

Civilians and humanitarian workers are regularly killed, maimed and threatened with small arms. The availability and misuse of these weapons is also closely associated with psychological and physical disability, forced displacement and civilians' declining access to basic needs in areas of conflict and social violence.

This paper provides a preliminary roadmap for humanitarian agencies to engage more proactively with the issue of small arms and light weapons. It reviews the dimensions of the problem, from both the disarmament and the humanitarian perspective, and presents a conceptual framework for understanding and measuring the humanitarian impacts of small-arms use. Its principal argument is that evidence of the magnitude and scale of the humanitarian impacts of small arms and light weapons is urgently required. Solid evidence is the bedrock of sound policy and intervention – and humanitarian agencies must lead the way.

Promising humanitarian responses to the threat of small arms are gradually emerging. These focus on mitigating the supply of weapons to human rights violating regimes, the enforcement of humanitarian law in violence-affected societies and operational reform to improve security in the field. A better understanding of the humanitarian impacts will contribute to generating awareness among stakeholders, and can serve to inform the evaluation of interventions to reduce armed violence.

Engaging with the humanitarian dimensions of small arms availability and use is both a moral and a practical imperative. A humanitarian perspective recalls the plight of the hundreds of thousands of people who are killed, injured and disabled by small arms, and the millions deprived of their homes and assets at gunpoint. A humanitarian perspective places the security and safety of people at the centre of a debate which has until now been dominated by a disarmament and arms control approach.

The Mother Teresa society and the war in Kosovo

Gani Demolli describes the impact of the aid influx

The Mother Teresa charitable society was founded in 1990 as part of the 'parallel society' established in Kosovo in response to the Serb repression of the province's Albanian majority. Albanians were dismissed from their jobs and evicted from their homes; their institutions were closed down in a thoroughgoing effort to expunge them from the province's social and political life. By 1998, the Mother Teresa organisation had over 7,000 volunteers and 1,700 doctors, with 92 clinics around the province. The society also operated a maternity clinic in Pristina, provided special services to the disabled and elderly and distributed food and clothing to over 30,000 needy families a year. Branches were established in Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and the US. In 1999, everything changed with NATO's bombing campaign and the removal of Serb forces from Kosovo. In the wake of the NATO action, international relief agencies flooded into Kosovo, bringing with them uncounted numbers of aid workers and massive amounts of funding. How many organisations came, and how much money flowed into Kosovo, will never be known.



Widespread destruction prompted a massive international response

We welcomed these organisations as our rescuers, heroes of humanity and charity, and we supported them as best we could. They have made an extraordinary contribution to life in Kosovo, and we will always be grateful to them, and to their countries. Yet at the same time, the presence of so many international agencies and aid workers has changed the way Kosovans think and act, and our feelings are inevitably mixed. In the chaos that followed the departure of Serb forces, someone somewhere decided that supplies of electricity, water and other public services would be free, and that everyone without exception would be supplied with food, clothes and domestic appliances. International aid workers distributed food, clothes and

other items in the street indiscriminately, without any evidence and criteria of need. Aid workers rented the best houses, forcing rents up, and bought expensive vehicles (even armoured vehicles, despite the end of hostilities). Agencies were competing in a race to see which could hire the most local staff, whether they needed them or not. Most staff were unqualified and inexperienced in the tasks they were asked to perform, yet they were paid between ten and 15 times more than university staff, doctors and engineers in Kosovan institutions. Through their efforts, local 'societies' were registered, many of them set up by relatives hoping to attract foreign funds, but with no intention of using this money for relief work.

Now that the emergency phase is over, the international humanitarian organisations have withdrawn from Kosovo, leaving the Mother Teresa society and other local NGOs without means and without premises. Levels of unemployment are high, up to 80%, and corruption, drug use and prostitution are widespread. The psychological damage is perhaps more far-reaching; the massive relief presence has left Kosovans passive and confused, with nostalgia for past abundance, but few plans or ideas for the future.

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Paying the ultimate price: an analysis of aid-worker fatalities

Increasing numbers of aid workers are losing their lives in the line of duty. Yet while this trend is of increasing concern to the aid community, much of the evidence is anecdotal, and there is little hard data on which to base policy. Dennis King describes a research project that has attempted to fill this gap

Statistics and documentation concerning fatalities among humanitarian workers are woefully incomplete. In addition to the efforts of individual researchers, the Office of the UN Security Coordinator keeps records and compiles statistics on casualties among UN civilian staff, and the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations tallies fatalities among UN peacekeepers, military observers and other personnel on UN peacekeeping missions. Likewise, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross maintain data on security incidents involving Red Cross delegates, volunteers and local staff. However, to analyse the trends and assess the security threats faced by aid workers, we need to track incidents involving *all* organisations providing some type of humanitarian assistance, not just UN agencies.

Chronology of incidents

The analysis in this article is derived primarily from reports in the ReliefWeb document database for the years 1997–2001. ReliefWeb collects and publishes documents from over 600 sources. Data follows the standard promoted by the Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting (SHARE) approach, under which data is presented with its source, the date of the information and the geographic area of the incident reported. The research resulted in the compilation of a detailed chronology of fatalities, which is on the ReliefWeb website at <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/NewChron1997-2001.html>.

To be included in the chronology, incidents had to adhere to a number of criteria:

- The incident took place in a country during an emergency or post-emergency transition period.
- Death was the result of intentional violence or a work-related transport accident in an aircraft or road vehicle.
- Recorded deaths were limited to individuals working for civilian humanitarian-related organisations, both local and expatriate, and all passengers/crew on a humanitarian assistance mission, for instance drivers, security personnel and pilots. Incidents involving peacekeeping personnel were included only if such personnel were killed while providing security assistance for a humanitarian mission or convoy.
- Deaths resulting from natural causes or suicide were not included.

Analysis

An analysis of the information collected in the chronology indicates that more civilian humanitarian aid workers were killed by acts of violence than died in vehicle and aircraft accidents. Almost half (47%) of the non-accidental deaths of aid workers were the result of ambushes on vehicles or convoys, carried out by bandits or rebel groups.

The research also produced a list of the ten countries where the greatest number of non-accidental deaths

Table 1: Number of security incidents per year

Year	Vehicle or convoy ambush	Stationary attack	Anti-aircraft fire	Aerial bombing	Landmine	Transport accident	Total
2001	10	8	1	4	4	12	39
2000	29	12	–	2	5	–	48
1999	15	12	9	1	–	27	64
1998	13	11	14	3	1	8	50
1997	14	12	–	–	–	22	48

occurred. Unsurprisingly, these countries are in conflict, or have recently been so.

Among the incidents of intentional violence, 74% of fatalities were local staff, and 26% expatriate. More than half (59%) of these victims worked for or on behalf of non-governmental organisations, while 41% were employed or under contract to UN agencies. The number of local and/or NGO fatalities is probably higher, since these incidents are less likely to be reported in public sources than the deaths of UN and/or expatriate personnel.

Deaths by country (top ten)	
Angola	46
Sudan	26
Rwanda	17
Afghanistan	17
Democratic Republic of Congo	11
Somalia	11
Burundi	6
Bosnia-Herzegovina	5
Indonesia and East Timor	5
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo	3

Enhancing the security of humanitarian aid workers

The data demonstrates that the dangers faced by civilian humanitarian aid workers are serious. The provision of better protection and security training is being addressed by the UN, as well as by many NGOs and NGO consortia. UN agencies and international organisations have improved staff security monitoring and response mechanisms, and have incorporated security awareness into their training programmes. Agencies, both UN and other, are employing more trained 'security officers'. Organisations such as InterAction, VOICE, RedR and the International Rescue Committee have developed training programmes and security coordination systems.

Reports in 1999 and 2001 from the UN Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the safety and security of UN personnel have recommended new procedures and coordination structures. The Secretary-General has proposed new measures to improve security, including appointing a Secretary Coordinator at the Assistant-Secretary-General level, allocating new resources for hiring field and headquarters security officers and more training and counselling for general staff. New ways have also been proposed to ensure consistent funding for the UN Security Coordinator. However, these mechanisms, such as the Trust Fund for the Security of UN Personnel and special staff security

programmes included in the annual UN Consolidated Emergency Appeals, are seriously under-funded.

International humanitarian law has also sought to address the security of humanitarian personnel. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court makes the murder of humanitarian personnel a war crime, but it is not yet in force and very few cases have been prosecuted at national level. In 1999, the UN enacted the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. However, the convention is not applicable to humanitarian NGOs that do not have implementing/partnership agreements with the UN and its specialised agencies; nor does it apply to locally-recruited personnel. In the March 2001 issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*, Randolph Martin, Senior Operations Director at the International Rescue Committee, looked at ways of strengthening the 1996 Memorandum of Understanding between the UN Security Coordinator and NGOs to provide a framework for a security relationship between UN organisations and their NGO implementing partners. One way of improving this relationship is to develop a system for tracking all security incidents and sharing this information among all the actors concerned.

Data and policy-making

The research on which this article is based was conducted to demonstrate how systematic, consolidated data collection and reporting can be used for analysis. The analysis provides representative statistics to determine how many humanitarian aid workers have been killed, where these incidents have taken place, and the causes of these fatalities. This information can then form the basis for policy-making and improved security awareness and procedures.

Dennis King is Chief of the US government's newly-established Humanitarian Information Unit. He has worked on several humanitarian information initiatives, including the UN's ReliefWeb project and the UNICEF Emergency Operations Centre, and was coordinator for the Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information, which took place in Geneva in February 2002. His email address is: KingD@pd.state.gov.

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Weighing up the risks in aid work

Aid work can be a dangerous occupation. Here, **Mike Gent** looks at how aid workers weigh the risks they face, and suggests how these judgements may be better made

Aid workers face a variety of hazards, including intentional violence, traffic accidents, disease and stress. Many humanitarian disasters involve conflict, and most conflicts occur against a backdrop of collapsed states, where treaties and UN Charters are not observed. Under these conditions, civilians and aid workers are afforded little protection. Some level of exposure to risks is inevitable, and may even be necessary to get the job done. But the imperative that drives most aid workers – to help people in need – may encourage them to put themselves into excessively dangerous situations.

Mortality rates among aid workers

In an article in the *British Medical Journal* in 2000, Mani Sheik and colleagues at the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health reported 375 deaths among civilian UN and NGO aid workers and UN peacekeepers in the 14 years from 1985. Their conclusions are presented in the table below.

The number of deaths rose from 1985, and peaked in 1994 at the time of the Rwandan crisis. The high number of intentional deaths compared to road accident fatalities reflects the increasingly violent conditions that aid workers face.

Against this background, this article describes research that looks at the risks aid workers are typically exposed to, and how they perceive them. It is based on interviews with experienced aid workers carried out in June last year.

What concerns aid workers?

Most of the aid workers interviewed were mainly concerned with two matters: the quality of aid they

were able to give, and their security. Their driving motive was to make 'real' contact with people and to help them. Security was a major problem – especially if provided by the military, since this could compromise their impartiality (and make them more of a target). Another problem sometimes encountered was hostility from the beneficiaries themselves. This hostility was particularly difficult for aid workers to deal with because, in part, it was due to their inability to provide beneficiaries with adequate relief supplies.

Judging risks

Among the first people to look into our perceptions of risk were the psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, in the 1970s. They suggested that, in order to manage information and simplify decision-making, we tend to use three basic 'rules of thumb' when we analyse risk.

Vivid memories and images

Our assessment of risk in a given situation may be greatly affected by personal memories. High-profile, dramatic events that we identify with are more easily available to us, and so we judge the associated risk to be higher. This operated in all the interviews I conducted with aid workers. Events that they or their colleagues had experienced conjured up powerful, easily-retrievable images. One interviewee explained how the memory of the death of his brothers had affected his behaviour towards the risk of HIV: 'I know the consequences. I come from a big family. We were 11 of us and three of my brothers died of AIDS'.

A vivid image can also affect the level of perceived risk. One woman explained why she would not wear

Number of fatalities, by cause

Organisation	Intentional violence	Unintentional violence	Motor vehicle accident	Other*	Total
UN programme	145	3	23	6	177
UN peacekeepers	45	13	24	6	88
Non-governmental organisation	23	6	10	19	58
Red Cross/Red Crescent	40	5	7	NA	52
Total	253	27	64	31	375

NA = not available

* Includes disease

a red T-shirt when on a field trip: 'I don't wear a red T-shirt if I go into the field because if I have to run from the car and there's nothing in the field, if I lie down I'm still a target'. She has never been involved in such an incident, but imagines it happening, and so has made contingency plans. Security briefings and training may have contributed to the vividness of such thinking.

Stereotyping

One interviewee classed herself as being at low risk of HIV infection: 'With HIV/AIDS I'm not in any high risk behaviour group'. This stereotyped image of herself leads her to ignore the fact that it is not the risk group she is in but what she does to avoid HIV that is important. Another interviewee working in a refugee camp saw the refugees as 'former combatants', and therefore felt that they represented a greater threat. So, even though the refugees were unarmed, they were still seen as more dangerous than ordinary citizens. This may be a sensible precaution – or it may be an over-estimate of the threat they pose.

Anchoring and adjustment

Once we make an initial judgement about a risk, we become anchored to it and may fail to make adequate adjustments later. Anchoring also involves an over-reliance on others' judgements. One interviewee described how they relied on the decisions of a security officer about which areas were safe to visit: 'He makes sure that he knows what is going on, where we can go, what time we can go in and what time we have to get out of that area. So that's been taken care of.' Security officers may be in the best position to judge risks, but becoming too reliant on their judgements may discourage people from questioning their decisions.

Other biases

Unrealistic optimism and over-confidence

Unrealistic optimism is a common bias: we tend to believe that positive things will happen to us, and negative things to other people. Another bias is over-confidence in our own judgements. One interviewee commented that 'now that I've lived there for two years, nothing has ever happened on my compound or in my neighbourhood. It's pretty safe'. This judgement may be over-confident and over-optimistic because the implication is that things only happen in other people's neighbourhoods.

Escalation

Escalation is when we plough on with a particular course of action despite poor results. We may do this because we feel we must justify our previous decisions and investment. For instance, my research unearthed one incident, where aid workers decided to continue with a visit to a dangerous region despite the fact that they could not find their bullet-proof vests and helmets, which they would normally wear when visiting the area. This may be because they had worked hard to prepare for the visit, and had invested

significant time and energy. Further exploration of the incident showed another reason for not turning back: 'we do recognise that if a person does not feel comfortable in going, that person should not have to be forced into going. Now obviously, it's a bit of a funny judgement to make because you don't want to be seen by the rest of your colleagues as the wimp'. So increased risk-taking may be an attempt to preserve one's reputation, or to save the investment made in building friendships and developing trust and respect. Many aid workers operate in small teams, where strong friendships and rivalries may be formed. This may be the ideal breeding-ground for escalation within the group.

Relying on incomplete data

In making a judgement about risk, an individual may have incomplete data, or may not consider all the data that is available. One interviewee only knew two people who had died of AIDS, and so doubted official mortality figures. This idea is based only on knowledge of a small number of people; moreover, many more of the interviewee's acquaintances, while not having died of AIDS, may well be HIV positive. Because of this error, the perceived risk of HIV is reduced.

Habit

Becoming inured to risk can sometimes desensitise us to potential dangers. Thus, our perception of risks changes over time as we become more familiar with them. For instance, if aid workers arrive safely at their destination despite passing through a dangerous area a number of times, they may become blasé.

Desensitisation can be used as a defence mechanism against worrying too much. In the interviews, many risks were referred to as 'one of those things'; 'something you accept'; something 'you have to live with'; risk becomes an 'integral part of life'. The danger of getting used to risks and of becoming 'a bit too relaxed about things' was also noted by interviewees. One person commented about being interrogated by the army: 'when it happens several times it becomes routine to you. It's like, I know what is going to happen, but I think it shouldn't be treated like that because at any stage they can decide otherwise. It can get more dangerous'. Another recognised the problem and sometimes deliberately stopped his team from visiting areas, just to try to keep them aware of the risks.

Conclusion

We can only speculate on the degree of error in these judgements about risks. Biases may cause people to be either over-cautious or reckless. In reality, decisions have to be made, and the question is: how can people make better decisions about the risks they face? Is it possible to arrive at a concept of 'optimal risk', where people's actions are neither over-cautious nor reckless?

Although assessing risk is a complex and personal matter, it may be possible to improve people's decision-making skills. One problem is that, in the field, the feedback we receive is usually either wrong, non-existent, delayed or open to interpretation. We need to examine the decision-making process to become aware of the biases and errors we are subject to.

Statistical models have been developed that can be used to analyse risks and predict outcomes. These models out-perform experts in their consistency of results. This is because people are better at collecting information than they are at processing it. Most models have been used in static situations, such as the decision to offer someone a bank loan; it remains to be seen if they can be adapted for field conditions.

While the individual perception of risk is important, the aid organisation and its risk-management strategy may also have an effect on the amount of risk their personnel expose themselves to. Organisations should reward good decisions even if the outcome was not what was intended. This may encourage better decision-making, a greater appreciation of risks and a reduction in risk exposure.

Risks can never be eliminated, but these are some things to think about when we are weighing up the risk:

- 1) Do I have the facts?
 - a) do I know enough to make a judgement?
 - b) do I need to rethink earlier decisions and adjust my estimate of the risk?
- 2) Am I exaggerating risk because of past experiences (mine or others)?
- 3) Am I under-estimating the risk?:

- a) because I've been lucky so far?
- b) because I've become too used to the situation?
- c) because I don't want to be seen as a wimp?
- d) because I think bad things won't happen to me?

- 4) Do I need to pull back despite the hard work that I've put in?

Aid workers should be made more aware of the biases that may affect decision-making, and encouraged to analyse their judgements. More information is needed about the risks aid workers face. Incidents could then be analysed to identify possible errors of judgement, and the lessons to be learned. Further research is necessary to establish whether training aid workers in risk perception leads to better decision-making, and whether statistical models could be developed to help decision-making in field situations.

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Accountability and quality: uncomfortable bedfellows?

'Accountability' and 'quality' have been the subject of a variety of initiatives within the humanitarian community, and there has been lively debate between proponents of the different approaches. Yet, argue **Laurent Larose** and **John Adams**, accountability can in fact hamper efforts to improve quality because of the way the humanitarian system operates

What are quality and accountability when applied to humanitarian action? Borrowing from the world of business, with its clients and suppliers, we might define quality as 'the conformity of the humanitarian service to the explicit and implicit needs of clients'. Therefore, the quality of programmes should be evaluated by qualitative and quantitative surveys of 'customer satisfaction', besides the technical indicators that measure elements of the service and the process. According to Professor Rob Gray, accountability is 'the duty to provide an account ... or reckoning of those actions

for which one is held responsible. Thus accountability involves ... the responsibility to undertake certain actions (or forbear from taking actions) and the responsibility to provide an account of those actions'. According to the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct, humanitarians working in disaster relief are accountable 'to both those we seek to assist and to those from whom we accept resources'.

So there are two clients: the 'payers' and the 'users'. The client-payers of the humanitarian service are the

private and institutional donors. The client-users – the *raison d'être* of the whole aid business – are the so-called 'beneficiaries'. This term implies passivity, and that people invariably benefit from the humanitarian services provided. However, the benefits of humanitarian action cannot be taken for granted, and should rather be demonstrated by monitoring results and evaluating impact. We could use the word 'rights-bearers', which conveys respect for human dignity, and acknowledges that populations suffering from natural or man-made disasters have the right to assistance to restore their coping capacities.

Kosovo 1999: constraints on quality

In most emergencies, the imperative to prevent epidemics may drive agencies to bypass good practice and codes of conduct, particularly regarding refugees' participation in needs assessment and programme design. In Albania in 1999, it quickly became clear that there was no short-term risk of epidemic, thanks to the good pre-crisis health of the refugee population, and the scale of the international response. This offered an opportunity to implement and field test the Sphere standards. Yet evaluations of the response note a general lack of professionalism, and suggest that standards were rarely met, including in crucial areas like sanitation. Why did the same organisations that worked hard to define standards and good practices then neglect these tools?

The UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)'s Kosovo evaluation states that 'the international attention on Kosovo meant that agencies were under enormous pressure to spend funds, leading to problems of quality control and wastage'.¹ Thus, we see the pernicious links between the media profile of an emergency and the availability of funds. Funding depends largely on the level of media attention to an emergency, and hence the amount of public interest it attracts. The negative consequences of this include less funding when the immediate emergency phase gives way to less dramatic rehabilitation work.

Humanitarian NGOs have developed fundraising coordination bodies like the DEC so that 'funds raised are used in an effective, timely and fully accountable way', and to 'raise standards in the implementation of humanitarian responses'. To be effective, DEC appeals are called only when there is 'sufficient public awareness of, and sympathy for, the humanitarian situation'. Thus, more public attention is drawn to situations that are *already* under the media spotlight, and we have over-funding of high-profile emergencies. Because, globally, resources are finite, this fund-raising mecha-

¹ The DEC is an umbrella organisation that launches and coordinates the UK's national appeal in response to major disasters overseas. Its current membership comprises ActionAid, the British Red Cross, CAFOD, CARE International UK, Children's Aid Direct, Christian Aid, Christian Children's Fund of GB, Concern, Help the Aged, Merlin, Oxfam, Save the Children, Tearfund and World Vision UK.

nism is prejudicial to the impartial response to emergencies, regardless of where they are, how large they are and how much attention they attract. This is one example of the antagonism that exists between humanitarian principles and objectives on the one hand, and the organisational logic of the humanitarian system on the other.

Another concerns the allocation of resources. The first phase of an emergency is characterised by a rapidly evolving situation. Because a quick response is required, life-saving programmes are implemented while assessments are still being completed. Programmes are planned according to the first rough assessment. Meanwhile, in order to be effective appeals are launched as soon as possible, before a clear picture of the situation is available. Funds are allocated according to assumed needs, and their assumed evolution. But what happens if the needs identified by a more in-depth assessment are less grave than estimated in the first stage? Because of the need to be accountable to donors, flexibility is limited, and funds raised for one emergency cannot be used for another. In Kosovo, for instance, funds were so plentiful that agencies supplied disposable razors in hygiene kits distributed to refugees. But money used to provide a little extra comfort in one disaster could well be used to save lives in another. This is how upward accountability (to donors) may prevent downward accountability (to the rights-bearers at a global level), and may ultimately challenge the fundamental principle of impartiality. Stating that the intention of donors is paramount confounds efforts at a fair allocation of global humanitarian resources. As Sphere does not define maximum standards in aid, it provides no safeguard against wasting money in programmes which are mainly resource-driven, rather than needs-driven. Thus, accountability may not give us quality.

What happens if an emergency manager addresses only the real needs, and does not use all the available money? Most funding systems are based on the NGO's capacity to respond to the 'disaster'. This is estimated according to the NGO's overseas expenditure in recent years. Thus, capacity is estimated according to the size of programmes implemented during previous emergencies. A manager implementing programmes that respond to actual need, rather than to available funds, may well lower expenditure, and thus reduce the apparent capacity of his or her organisation. In turn, this would reduce the amount of funds made available to the organisation for the next emergency. In short, being professional would adversely affect the organisation's 'humanitarian market share'. The institutional logic of the humanitarian funding system encourages big, high-profile programmes, and compels managers to spend the allocated budget regardless of the real level of need.

Addressing the constraints on quality

Some limitations could be reduced by reformulating policies. To reflect the reality of the process, the policy

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of bodies such as the DEC could be that appeals are driven by estimated needs, and are not solely a response to a media or fundraising opportunity. Appeals could be clear that, if excessive funds are raised, the surplus will be used for the post-emergency phase, or for alleviating other acute human suffering in other parts of the world. This would still capture the spirit in which funds were donated. The main concern of donors is that their donation will reach people in need, and not be wasted.

The constraints may also be reduced by informing and educating donors about the reality of the field and, above all, by training aid workers. If we really want to improve the quality of humanitarian action, we have first to convince humanitarian actors of the crucial importance of implementing good practices in the field, and monitoring and evaluating programmes with objective indicators. The main limitations of quality processes are that there are no links between funding and rights-bearers' satisfaction, and that the rights-bearers have no power over the service providers. Even independent evaluators are paid by the evaluated organisations, inevitably making objectivity difficult. This ambiguity may explain why the DEC evaluation of the Kosovo response expresses 'concerns about programme quality, particularly in areas such as assessment, monitoring and evaluation', while stating further that the assistance 'was broadly relevant and appropriate to people's needs'. One may question how it is possible to assess the relevance and appropriateness of programmes when monitoring and evaluation have been neglected.

All field workers should be trained in the techniques of qualitative and quantitative surveys used in sciences like sociology and marketing, so enabling them to evaluate their own work. Training would also help actors to internalise the quest for quality, which would be more efficient than a top-down approach, where the issue is the concern of headquarters and consultants, but not really of field staff. In most emergencies, the impulse to meet immediate needs on the ground may lead field workers to bypass precisely those codes and standards developed and advocated by headquarters.

Keeping our eyes on the ball

None of the limitations of quality processes stems from a lack of commitment to quality, at the individual or

the organisational level. Each system generates its own internal institutional logic, which may in some ways be at odds with its overall objective. This happens in all organisations, even in the commercial world. Fundraising bodies like the DEC are undoubtedly effective fund-raising mechanisms, and the efforts of the humanitarian sector to improve both the accountability and the quality of the service it provides are clearly sincere. But the limitations demonstrated here argue for more realistic objectives for the quality process. This realism will help us to avoid disappointment, and prevent humanitarian actors from wasting time, effort and resources on unproductive debate about quality approaches and evaluations.

Laurent Larose has worked for both MSF and Oxfam. He is now a consultant, researcher and trainer, and a founder member of Trinôme, a network of humanitarian workers sharing ideas and reviewing each other's work to improve performance. His e-mail address is: laurent.larose@trinome.org. **John Adams** is also a member of Trinôme. He works as a trainer and researcher at Bioforce in Lyon.

References and further reading

An evaluation of Sphere is currently under way, and we will report on it in *Humanitarian Exchange* later this year. In the meantime, see the September 2001 issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*, which has an article on the institutionalisation of Sphere and the Humanitarian Charter.

See also:

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Why a trust fund won't work in Afghanistan

The term 'reconstruction' is already replacing 'rehabilitation' in the lexicon of Afghan aid. Here, Valéry Ridde takes issue with proposals for a trust fund to manage reconstruction funds

The capture of Kabul by the Northern Alliance in November 2001 and the return of former king Zahir Shah in April 2002 have raised hopes that peace in Afghanistan may finally be within reach. Amid massive publicity and sudden international attention, pledges of funding for the country have reached more than \$4.5 billion for the first 30 months. This article looks at one mechanism for managing these resources – the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund – and assesses its suitability in the reconstruction of the decimated Afghan health system.

Afghanistan's aid deficit

For years before 11 September, NGOs struggled to keep Afghanistan's social services going, while finding it hard to secure the funding to do so. In 2000 and 2001, international appeals for Afghanistan raised just 50% of the amount requested. This despite severe levels of need: in 2001, the UN Development Programme ranked Afghanistan eighty-ninth out of 90 developing countries according to indicators of poverty. Between 1996 and 2000, levels of aid actually fell, from \$8 per capita to \$5.5.

The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund

The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) was launched in May 2002. A joint proposal of the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, the ARTF is designed to 'streamline' international support to Afghanistan by organising pledges within a single mechanism. Pledged contributions to the ARTF are, according to the World Bank, anticipated to total more than \$60 million in the first year, and \$380m over four years. These funds are intended to assist the Afghanistan Interim Administration in funding physical reconstruction projects, including in the health sector, as well as running expenses such as salaries for state employees, including health workers.

Why a trust fund?

The ARTF is a multi-donor fund, administered by the World Bank and the other financial institutions involved, with the UNDP as part of its management committee. According to World Bank President James Wolfensohn, a trust fund has many advantages:

- it enhances the coherence and accountability of international aid;
- it is easier for Afghans to understand and deal with an international aid programme delivered via a

single mechanism, rather than through many different programmes;

- it offsets the low tax-raising abilities of a state undergoing reconstruction, while at the same time strengthening the capabilities of the government of that state;
- it simplifies the procedures for NGOs to obtain funding; and
- it promotes national unity by ensuring that the needs of competing groups are addressed.

Arguments against a trust fund

There are three arguments against using a trust fund to manage funds for Afghanistan's reconstruction.

Sidelining NGOs

The first is the possibility that aid will be organised in such a way that the main actors – the NGOs – will be pushed aside. For example, of the many NGOs from France that have had a long-term presence in Afghanistan, only one was invited to a World Bank meeting on the reconstruction agenda held in November 2001. The tendency to sideline NGOs seems to be a constant of the UN system, according to a recent report prepared for the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). In East Timor, for instance, the World Health Organisation (WHO) did not welcome efforts by the British NGO Merlin to tackle malaria, claiming that the NGO lacked capability and was unable to provide the quality of service possible in a UN programme. Yet in an evaluation of its activities, WHO itself acknowledges that it 'has been more successful in extending the reach of systems of health care provision than in improving the quality and effectiveness of the services'.

It is only thanks to the presence of a few NGOs in Afghanistan that some basic services have been maintained. Some organisations have been there for over 20 years, they have an excellent understanding of the country's culture and customs, they have always given responsibility to local staff and they have developed a particular expertise. NGOs have built health facilities. In the early 1990s, for example, French NGO Aide Médicale Internationale (AMI) built a \$400,000 hospital. The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan is responsible for over 168 clinics in 18 provinces. Overall, 70% of healthcare provision in Afghanistan depends on international aid, and thus mainly on NGOs.

The reconstruction of Afghanistan can only be done with the help of NGOs. However, the World Bank

appears intent on relegating NGOs to the status of 'service providers'. Treating NGOs simply as contractors responding to calls to tender both compromises the values that inspire these organisations, and ignores the crucial contribution they can make to rebuilding Afghanistan. While the question of whether NGOs are more effective than UN agencies is a sensitive one, it is certainly the case that NGOs are less bureaucratic, and that their work is based more around community participation. These two characteristics alone should guarantee a certain level of effectiveness.

Complicating coordination

The second reason for arguing against the ARTF has to do with the coordination of aid by bureaucratic institutions. A coordination mechanism is, of course, necessary given the hundreds of organisations that are going to want to get involved in Afghanistan. It is less clear that the World Bank and the UN represent the best way of doing this. In East Timor, where the UN was in charge of reconstruction, NGOs were able to do almost nothing without the consent of the UN, and had to participate in interminable daily meetings. Meanwhile, East Timorese homes went unrepaired, while Dili swarmed with the UN's brand-new four-wheel-drives, leading some Timorese politicians to talk of a 'new colonialism'. An NGO scheme to train health workers to an intermediary level, so making some care available within months rather than years, was blocked by the UN. We know that UN agencies are resistant to change and that, according to the OCHA-commissioned report, 'governance structures, funding sources, weak management and institutional cultures all constitute obstacles to effective coordination'.

In Afghanistan, we need an effective and efficient coordination mechanism, where the views of Afghan men and women take precedence, and where experienced NGOs are allowed a significant role. In particular, the Agency Coordination Body for Afghanistan (ACBAR) and the Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau (ANCB), which coordinates international and local NGOs within Afghanistan, should be supported through financial and capacity-building support.

Privatising health

The third and last reason for opposing the ARTF is connected with the nature of the healthcare system which will be on offer to the population. Reconstruction of the health sector should be based on the principle that health is a right and not a commodity. Charging for health services is not fair, nor will it work: in summer 2001, I carried out a survey in Afghanistan that showed that income from charging corresponded to just 4% of the expenditure of a regional hospital, and around 10% of the expenditure of two rural clinics. Furthermore, in the province I looked at the proportion of household wealth spent on healthcare was four times higher for

the poorest households than for the richest: around 30%, compared to 7%. There is also much evidence that the introduction of direct payment reduces the amount that services are used. In Zaire between 1987 and 1991, use of health services declined by 40%, a fall mainly attributable to cost.

With the World Bank and other institutions in charge of managing the trust fund and coordinating programmes, there is a danger that Afghans will be forced into privatisation, since the state is thought to be bureaucratic and unaccountable. The World Bank has stated as much, saying that its approach to reconstruction is based on getting the private sector going again. In East Timor, despite the express wish of the Timorese for a health system freely accessible to all, the World Bank and WHO are considering moving rapidly towards setting up direct payment mechanisms for service users. In Afghanistan, we have an opportunity to organise a new healthcare system and to establish public funding methods based on sharing risk at the national and perhaps even regional level, through insurance or tax. Public funding is still the only effective and efficient means of providing universal and fair access to healthcare. Using public funding could also foster national reconciliation and restore a level of credibility to the state apparatus.

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Developmental programming in the midst of war: a case study from southern Sudan

*The debate over the relationship between development and relief approaches in emergencies continues. Yet, says **Mark Adams**, many of the dilemmas faced by NGOs working in conflict are simply more extreme versions of those confronted in many 'development' programmes, and can be tackled with many of the same techniques*

This article outlines the British NGO ACORD's use of participatory programming techniques and capacity-building in the context of the war in southern Sudan. ACORD has worked in Sudan since the mid-1970s, and currently has programmes in areas controlled by the government and both main rebel groups. In non-government areas, ACORD is part of the UN-coordinated Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Impartiality (treating people based on need and regardless of political, religious or ethnic status) and neutrality (refusing to support political groups or positions) have been at the core of ACORD's programming in southern Sudan. In the context of on-going war and contested political authority, this approach is crucial.

In south Sudan, ACORD has faced many difficult issues, such as identifying and reaching the poorest and most vulnerable people, gaining access to them and building space with local elites for such interventions. These issues can be seen as extreme versions of the dilemmas that most development programmes face. Development programmers also need to identify the poor and most vulnerable, gain access to them, and build agreement for pro-poor interventions from local elites, state structures and interest groups. Development work has pioneered a range of techniques aimed at tackling these issues, including participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and its offshoots, community dialogue and capacity-building.

While some development methodologies can offer a way to address the dilemmas that face relief agencies, even in conflict situations, there are ethical and practical dilemmas associated with pursuing capacity-building and similar strategies in southern Sudan. Not all agencies agree with such an approach and are uncomfortable with establishing relationships with the humanitarian organisations of the rebel movements. Efforts by these humanitarian 'wings' to develop policies in areas such as health have been resisted by some agencies on grounds of autonomy and neutrality. Some organisations have sought to keep matters on a more classical 'relief' footing, with interventions designed, implemented and reviewed by the implementing agency and its donors. Most dramatically, a number of NGOs were forced to stop working in areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in 2000 after refusing to sign the SPLM's Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). While there are dangers in legitimising and strength-

ening the control that unelected military forces exert over civilian populations in some areas, developmental approaches, though challenging, can make important contributions to the quality of humanitarian response.

The benefits of participation

Participatory methodologies offer the opportunity to canvass the opinions, priorities and concerns of different sections of communities in a structured way. They can be useful in finding out who the poor are, where they are, what their problems are, and how they can be best assisted. For example, ACORD's food security programme at Tali in Juba county was developed following a participatory assessment in 1998. This used PRA tools to ask men and women in all parts of the area about their priority needs and concerns. The assessment was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team of men and women. As a result of the assessment, ACORD began a food security programme focused on agriculture and water. There was an emphasis on training and support for local capacities.

At each stage, the humanitarian counterpart, the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA), was consulted on the design and implementation of activities. The local authorities and traditional chiefs were also regularly consulted about proposed activities, and how the programme could work with them. Through the local branch of the Women's Union, women's leaders were encouraged to form groups and represent themselves to the programme, and a Sudanese Community Development Officer was employed to encourage this process.

In late 2000, workshops were held with groups in the community to review the work to date, and propose future activities. The groups involved comprised women's leaders and women's group members; the traditional chiefs and their headmen; young people; and local authorities and counterparts. Information gained was documented and fed into a joint review and planning workshop that brought together all the programme staff, local SRRA officials, the ACORD field director and regional and national SRRA staff, as well as the district's overall political administrator.

This process was invaluable – and difficult. The individual workshops provided important feedback on the success and appropriateness of activities. They also gave feedback on failures in the programme, and their

causes. Criticism was directed at ACORD and the local authorities, counterparts and traditional leaders; all of us were found to be at fault.

Information about the diversion of relief materials such as seeds and tools came to light through the workshops, and members of the community complained of some villages being excluded from the distributions. Complaints were also made about what was seen as the biased siting of boreholes. Considerable detail about who had been involved in the diversion of goods and what they had done was forthcoming. The programme team already knew or suspected much of this, but the fact that this information came from local people in public meetings attended by ACORD and counterpart staff meant it was harder for the authorities to gloss over them, and they were flagged up as needing addressing. Action was taken by the authorities against some individuals, and working methods were changed. In addition, the information helped to identify marginalised groups and overlooked areas.

It was not possible to immediately address all the issues raised, and the feedback process was not an easy experience. Some of the divisions within the rebel movement became apparent, and ACORD was also challenged as to what it had and had not done. Hopefully, however, this initial step was important as the start of a process which builds greater transparency and accountability on all sides.

While being careful not to overstate the impact an individual NGO can have on issues of democratisation and governance, it was a concern to us that the 'classical' relief model, in which agencies delivered vertical, top-down interventions, threatened to leave the intended beneficiary populations disenfranchised, while perhaps, and ironically, allowing those with power in the area more chance to divert goods for their political, military or personal ends. The workshop aimed at starting a process whereby a wider group of local people and interest groups would be aware of and involved in the interventions than had hitherto been the case. In this way, opportunities for the misuse of humanitarian assistance might be reduced. Ideally, the review and planning workshop would have been carried out in the programme area, which would have allowed more community members to take part. However, renewed bombing by government forces meant that the workshop was held across the border in Uganda because of security concerns. An important future step would be to hold review meetings in the project area.

Capacity-building

Agencies working in south Sudan are increasingly discussing the pros and cons of capacity-building. Within ACORD, we felt that training and support to increase the capacities of local people to meet their basic needs was a valid way of addressing humanitarian needs. Capacity-building can be more cost-effective,

and seems a more sustainable approach than interventions implemented by international NGOs. And it seems particularly appropriate in a context where insecurity often means that NGO staff are unable to visit project locations; where funding is uncertain and short-term; where the creation of physical assets creates targets for bombing and attack; and where people are living in the midst of a chronic, long-term emergency which shows no sign of ending.

One clear example of capacity-building undertaken by ACORD was training of local water pump mechanics, and providing them with tools and equipment. Prior to the intervention in Tali, only two out of 11 existing hand pumps were functioning, serving a population of around 55,000 people. Most people relied on swamps and water holes, and water-borne diseases and guinea worm were endemic. Repairs were carried out by mechanics from other areas, which could take months because of the lack of transport and poor roads and communications.

ACORD set about training and equipping local mechanics to maintain existing boreholes, as well as developing new sources of water. After 18 months the change was dramatic: the 11 boreholes functioned almost constantly, and an additional seven had been drilled. The number of households to each borehole fell from nearly 4,578 to 504. Most of this improvement was due to building local capacity. Drilling new holes is difficult and expensive in southern Sudan – bombing meant that two of the new boreholes had to be drilled at night, for instance – and without local maintenance capacity they are likely to break down and not be repaired.

A similar approach has been used by the livestock programme in southern Sudan, which ACORD joined in 2000. The programme, implemented by a number of international and Sudanese NGOs, trains community-based animal health workers (CAHWs) to provide basic veterinary care. They are supervised by more highly trained animal health workers and by a local committee. The aim is that, eventually, the committee will manage a revolving drug fund, and fees charged for the drugs will provide wages for the workers involved. While financial sustainability is some way away, the methodology has already proved its ability to sustain the provision of veterinary care to livestock in an insecure environment, which often forces agencies to evacuate their staff. As livestock are central to the livelihoods of many of the tribes of southern Sudan, this plays an important role in helping people living in the midst of a chronic emergency to preserve their livelihoods and thus prevent famine. Capacity-building is not just about strengthening skills, but also about directly helping to meet basic humanitarian needs.

The importance of dialogue

Dialogue, presence, persistently seeking out those in the community who may have been excluded: these

can be valuable tools in helping to address humanitarian needs in a 'chronic emergency' such as in southern Sudan. Participatory techniques, which emerged in the development sector in order to deal with issues not dissimilar to those faced by humanitarian agencies in conflict areas, have proved valuable in the design and implementation of appropriate interventions, and for identifying the poor and marginalised. They have also been useful in exposing the diversion and misappropriation of relief items. Capacity-building has helped to meet emergency needs, and has perhaps challenged the mindsets and interests that help to keep chronic emergencies going. While the debate continues as to whether humanitarianism is and should be distinct from development work, and it is clear that decisions on the type of interventions to be pursued must be made alongside a political analysis, it seems clear that some of the tech-

niques of development are applicable in humanitarian programmes, and can be effective in addressing humanitarian needs.

Mark Adams was Field Director for ACORD in southern Sudan from July 1998 to February 2001. The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of ACORD.

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Nutritional interventions in 'open situations': lessons from north-western Sudan

Humanitarian organisations are increasingly confronting 'open' situations, where access to, and coverage of, beneficiary populations is complicated. Aranka Anema argues that such situations demand a more flexible approach

Humanitarian agencies have been progressively standardising the planning and management of emergency programmes and responses. In the field of nutrition, standardisation has contributed to advances in inter-organisational agreements on protocols for nutritional assessments, feeding, surveillance and monitoring. These standards have been invaluable to the implementation of nutritional programmes in traditional 'closed' emergency settings, where populations are located in centralised areas such as refugee camps. However, there are concerns about the efficacy and appropriateness of certain protocols in 'open' situations, where resident and displaced populations are geographically dispersed.

Dissatisfaction with standard procedures in unconventional settings has prompted humanitarian organisations to experiment with alternative approaches in the field. In January 2002, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) conducted a workshop to evaluate lessons learned from its 2001 nutritional intervention in West Darfur, Sudan. The goal of the evaluation was to determine which nutritional strategy was most effective and appropriate given the 'open' setting, and establish context-specific operational strategies for future interventions in north-western Sudan.

Choosing an appropriate nutritional strategy

One of the greatest challenges for humanitarian organisations in Sudan is to implement intervention

strategies that prevent nutritional deterioration, without affecting local coping mechanisms or the food economy of patients' families by instituting dependency. There is no universal approach to nutritional interventions. Determining an appropriate nutritional intervention requires consideration of context-specific factors, including:

- the stage of food insecurity;
- the nutritional and medical status of the population;
- the socio-political environment (war, population displacement, camps, the health environment, or presence of NGOs in the area);
- the size of the population and its access to the programme;
- the anticipated evolution of the crisis;
- the feasibility of implementation (human resources and logistics, for instance); and
- the potential side-effects of different interventions.

Since it is difficult to obtain an all-encompassing view of a nutritional situation (i.e., including an analysis of all of the above), humanitarian organisations also rely on previous field experience to determine appropriate strategies. MSF has been conducting health and food programmes in Sudan since 1978, when it responded to a refugee crises on the Ethiopian border. It has been working in Darfur intermittently since 1984. In recent years, widespread



A Weight-for-Height nutritional survey, Sudan

food insecurity and famine across north-western Sudan have called for the implementation of various programmes: general food distributions to entire populations; blanket feeding programmes targeted at vulnerable groups, such as women, children, the elderly and the socially marginalised; supplementary feeding programmes for moderately malnourished individuals; and therapeutic feeding programmes for the severely malnourished.

MSF's 2001 intervention in West Darfur

West Darfur has a population of 1.6 million, 90% of whom live in isolated rural areas. The region is affected by sporadic tribal conflict and poor rainfall, resulting in sudden market fluctuations, livelihood changes and displacement. The national health system is barely functional. Primary health care is limited and inaccessible; drug supply and vaccination coverage are low; and the number and level of training of medical staff are below what is required. The combination of geographic isolation, erratic rainfall, socio-political instability and an ineffective health system renders inhabitants particularly vulnerable to medical and nutritional problems.

In December 2000, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Save the Children (SC)-UK reported alarming food shortages in western Sudan. Livestock prices were plummeting and grain prices rising as a consequence of crop failure. Local populations were increasingly working for lower wages, selling productive assets and pursuing alternative income-generating activities. Humanitarian aid was deemed imperative to avoid wide-scale loss of life. The issue for MSF was to determine whether to initiate a general food distribution to cover the entire population, and a blanket feeding programme targeted at vulnerable groups, or to adopt an alternative approach. Theoretically, a general distribution would ensure that food becomes available to the

entire population. It would cover the population's immediate basic food needs, prevent deterioration of nutritional status, maintain and restore regular livelihoods, ensure food security and prevent mortality. A short-term blanket programme would ensure support to families by targeting children under five years of age, and support other vulnerable groups, for example pregnant and lactating women, the elderly and the disabled, in case of insufficient food accessibility or an incomplete food distribution.

In the end, it was established that a general food distribution would be too complicated for MSF to implement effectively in West Darfur's 'open' setting, because of restricted logistical and human resource capacity, lack of political support from the Sudanese government and difficult access to the rugged terrain. MSF had no pre-established food pipeline in the area, and few staff for the delivery of rations. Institutional links between MSF and other organisations in West Darfur were limited. The Sudanese government did not recognise the potential for crisis, and was therefore unwilling to support programme implementation. Logistic capacity was constrained due to complicated geography and a lack of roads in some areas; beneficiary populations could only be reached by camel during the rainy season.

These operational difficulties were compounded because the scope and severity of the nutritional crisis in Darfur was itself unclear. This was a consequence of differing inter-organisational assessment findings. Variations in methodology and cut-off points (Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) versus Weight-for-Height) and geographic differences in nutritional status (between North and West Darfur) caused SC-UK to report high malnutrition rates, while MSF reported only moderate ones. Based on the rationale that malnutrition causes reduced immunity and increased risk of infection, MSF-Holland carried out a measles vaccination campaign coupled with emergency preparedness measures, such as delivering foodstuffs and materials, before the rainy season. These initiatives were supported by a nutritional surveillance to verify the effectiveness of the campaign, and identify trends in nutritional status, internal displacement and coping capacity. MSF-H vaccinated 18,000 children, and by August 2001 determined that the situation was sufficiently stable to close the programme.

Lessons learned

The nutritional situation in West Darfur in 2001 proved relatively stable. However, given Darfur's ten-year history of food shortage and famine, there is a good chance that a similar or worse nutritional situation will occur in the future. Previous famines in Darfur reveal that mortality is caused more by the health consequences of displacement, for instance communicable disease, than by a lack of food alone. MSF-H agreed that a proactive or preventative

approach to nutritional interventions may be necessary in some areas of Sudan to prevent distress migration and deterioration of livelihoods, and thereby avert morbidity and mortality.

Participants at the MSF-H Darfur evaluation workshop agreed that future nutritional interventions in Darfur should include three preventative steps:

- 1) Nutritional interventions in Darfur will be accompanied by basic preventative and curative healthcare. MUAC assessments will be conducted in conjunction with the provision of vitamin A, measles vaccinations and a deworming campaign.
- 2) Once MUAC findings confirm early-warning information from reliable organisations such as WFP, FAO and SC-UK, Emergency Preparedness (EPREP) will be initiated. This may include the stocking of long-shelf-life therapeutic foods, such as BP100 and UNIMIX or BP5, and lobbying for food distribution by relevant institutions, such as WFP and the Sudanese government.
- 3) If the situation calls for an intervention, MSF-H will implement an 'Upgraded Supplementary Feeding Centre (SFC)'. An Upgraded SFC is a cross between a decentralised Therapeutic Feeding Centre (TFC) and a regular SFC. It provides the functions of a normal SFC, namely medical care and fortified food supplements to moderately malnourished individuals. In addition, it provides Phase 1 intensive medical and nutritional care (diagnosis, treatment, follow-up and monitoring) to severely malnourished individuals, and treats specific complications and diseases associated with severe malnutrition. After one week, once severely malnourished patients are clinically stable, the Upgraded SFC would coordinate a 'decentralised' take-home Phase 2 programme. This would include

the provision of small quantities of take-home rations, for instance plumpynut and ready-to-use therapeutic food, and weekly hospital follow-ups.

Conclusion

'Open situations' complicate access to, and coverage of, beneficiary populations. While formal standards and references are helpful in guiding humanitarian agencies, there is a need to expand beyond the knowledge we have acquired, and develop flexible strategies to complement standardised nutritional procedures and protocols. MSF-H's evaluation workshop offers an opportunity to reflect upon operational lessons learned, and develop effective context-specific strategies for future interventions.

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New technologies, new challenges: information management, coordination and agency independence

Robin Schofield argues that, as donors press for more centralised coordination models, field agencies ignore the ramifications of new technologies at their peril

Humanitarians still see information management as peripheral to relief activities. The OCHA symposium on 'Best Practice in Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange', held in Geneva in February 2002, typified this 'ghettoisation' of information management within the emergency aid sector. Despite ReliefWeb's best efforts to encourage wider participation, the four-day meeting was dominated by UN agencies and northern donors, with delegates almost exclusively technical specialists, with very few field workers, and little representation from the media or the military. While delegates debated expert resources, data standards and deployment challenges at length, they did not tackle the wider issues around information technology and management tabled by the organisers. As symposium coordinator Dennis King put it, 'I hope for a time when information management will be integrated into everybody's work, but at the moment it is still considered specialised'.

This marginalisation of information management in the humanitarian sector has important, yet poorly understood, implications. Information is not a neutral commodity, and discussion of its position and use within the humanitarian system should not be limited to purely technical questions to do with databases, the Internet or Geographical Information System (GIS) technologies. As donors become increasingly interested in information systems as a way of fostering inter-agency coordination, the way in which information is managed, exchanged and deployed will have important implications for the shape of the humanitarian system, and for the independence of individual agencies.

Conflicting models

However, discussions at the Symposium and elsewhere suggest that there are increasingly two very differing

The OCHA Symposium

Some 200 delegates from donor governments, the UN, NGOs and the private sector attended the symposium on 'Best Practice in Humanitarian Information Exchange' in Geneva on 4–8 February 2002, hosted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

During the first two days of the conference, delegates worked in four task teams to:

- share best practices in the development of field-based websites and make recommendations to strengthen field-based information exchange among humanitarian partners;
- investigate the use of new emerging technologies and approaches, such as portal search engines and knowledge management gateways, to enhance the exchange and retrieval of information;
- review lessons learned and evaluate database applications for field-based, cross-sectoral information coordination; and review lessons learned and evaluate field-based (regional and country) humanitarian information centres.

The findings of this work were presented in the last two days of the conference in plenary session, with additional panel-led discussions:

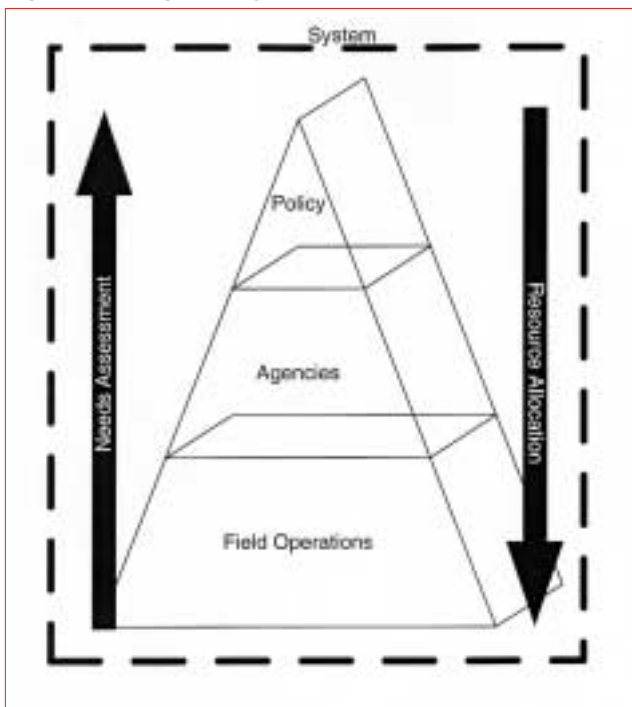
- What has been accomplished in the field of humanitarian information over the last five years, and what key challenges remain?
- What are the benefits and constraints for organisations to collect and share information in the field and what can be done to promote organisational buy-in to share this information?
- How can simple common standards and practices enhance inter-operability of systems and the sharing of information?
- How is information used for humanitarian coordination and strategic and operational decision-making?

For a full report of the symposium and the Statement on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange, see ReliefWeb's website, www.reliefweb.int/symposium.

'mental models' for the future development of humanitarian information systems which are being made possible by advances in UN capabilities.

The first model is highly structured, in which all agencies cooperate to achieve the common aim of effective humanitarian response. This 'systems' model derives from structures borrowed from governments and the military, where information is gathered at the base of a hierarchical pyramid structure, and passed to decision-makers at the top of the pyramid. In the humanitarian world, this equates to field agencies feeding a system with information at the local crisis level, desk officers distilling this information at a national, regional or headquarters level, and donor officials responding with policy decisions and funding at the international level, as in Figure 1. It is important to note that all actors are at least conceptually 'contained' within the system, and so have to subscribe or 'buy in' to the system rules.

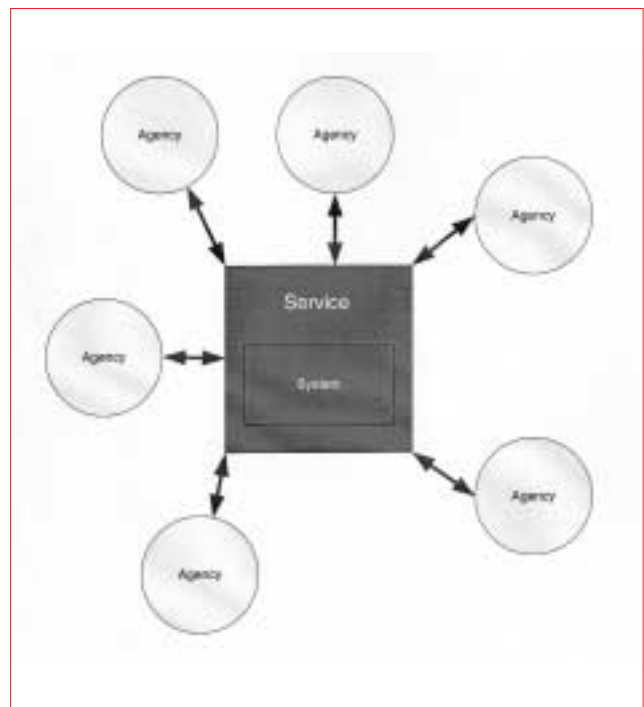
Figure 1: Integrated system model



The second model – the 'service' model – is a much more loosely coupled arrangement. Here, individual information services fill particular niches. Each agency or individual within an agency then chooses whether and how to use these services. Service providers are effectively competing to achieve the common aim of effective humanitarian response. This model, which derives from commercial news and market information services such as Reuters and Bloomberg, is closest to humanitarian information services currently operational, such as ReliefWeb and OCHA's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN). This model allows the high degree of operational independence favoured by many NGOs and larger UN agencies, which see themselves as reporting to a charter or boards of trustees, rather than national governments or the wider UN system directly. In this model, depicted in

Figure 2, the actors are not contained within the system boundary, and do not necessarily have to 'buy in' to the system in a specific way.

Figure 2: Independent service model



Coordination and independence

Different groups in the humanitarian system tend to favour one model over the other as right for the further development of improved humanitarian information systems. This may be attributable to differences in organisational culture between those organisations tending towards collective behaviour with a top-down structure, and those organisations with independent charters and a more bottom-up decision-making process. Thus, the military, donors and offices of the UN Secretariat tend towards an integrated systems model, and NGOs towards the service model.

This distinction was evident at the OCHA symposium. Many donor participants saw in maturing technologies an opportunity to develop better humanitarian information systems along governmental or military lines. This enthusiasm among donors, and among information professionals, may work against the interests of operational agencies, which to date have shown little enthusiasm for developments in information management. In particular, any embedding of a centralised model in common information systems risks formalising a hierarchy of relationships between national donors, the UN system and NGOs. Developments in this area could significantly affect the operational approach favoured by NGOs and UN agencies, and potentially lead to a further eroding of the separateness of the humanitarian agenda.

Quality and feasibility

There are also practical concerns with the systems approach. Experience in the commercial world casts

doubt on whether greater systems integration across such a fragmented industry as humanitarian assistance is feasible. One experienced OCHA information manager believes that a services model also does not necessarily mean less coordination: 'In fact, indirect facilitation has proved to be the most productive means by far to get agencies working together'.

The likely quality of the information delivered by a full systems model is another concern. This has already proved a significant problem, even for reasonably self-contained and long-standing information management projects, such as the country-level Humanitarian Information Centres (HICs) OCHA has deployed to Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. Initiatives which cause over-stretch will inevitably depend on the lowest common denominator of input, and so risk delivering a 'junk' system.

Conclusion

In the context of international humanitarian action, the services approach, with its multiple information sources and 'market-driven' character, is more likely than a systems approach to promote improved humanitarian response through providers competing on delivery and quality. For this to happen, however, operational agencies will have to actively engage in forums like the OCHA symposium in order to balance the enthusiasm information professionals and

the donor community share for greater systems integration. NGOs in particular will have to commit more resources to their own efforts to develop information systems, in order to avoid dependency on one centrally delivered vision.

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ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int

IRINNews: www.irinnews.org

Existing humanitarian information centre projects

Afghanistan Information Management System (AIMS): www.hic.org.pk

Occupied Palestinian Territories HIC: www.reliefweb.int/opt-hic

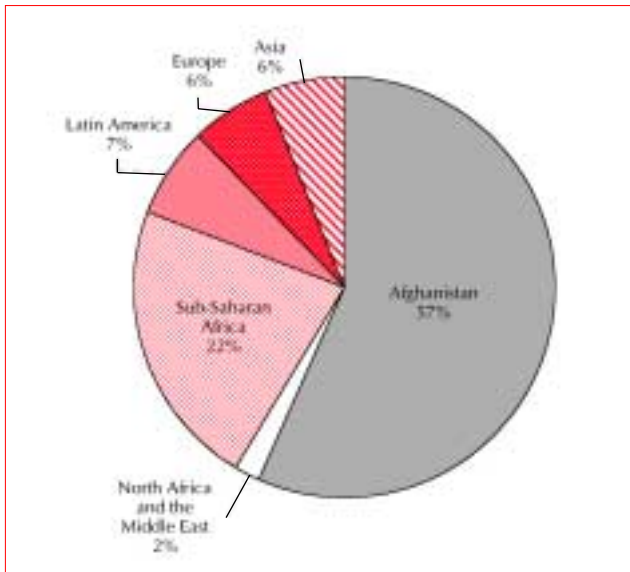
The French humanitarian system: reform, but how much real change?

French humanitarian assistance has undergone a series of reforms since the 1980s. François Grünewald asks whether these changes are more than skin deep

France is not a major donor of emergency assistance. In 2000, French bilateral humanitarian aid stood at less than \$200 million; the largest aid donor, the US, gave nearly \$1.2 billion, and the next two, the Netherlands and the UK, gave just below \$400m each. Emergency assistance also accounts for a relatively small portion of overall French aid: 6% in 2000. By comparison, 40% of development aid goes on education and health, and over 20% on debt relief. Overall aid allocation is heavily skewed towards French overseas possessions and former colonies; the largest recipients of development aid in 2000 were French Polynesia and New Caledonia. Other major recipients include Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Senegal, Cameroon and Mayotte. The only non-francophone countries in the top ten of aid recipients in 2000 were Poland and Egypt. However, the distribution of humanitarian aid was more opportunistic than anything else; in 1999, Kosovo got the lion's share, while in 2001 it was Afghanistan.

The relatively marginal position that emergency aid occupies in France's overall aid architecture is reflected in the haphazard way in which it has traditionally been organised within the government. In 1982, the Secretary of State for Human Rights, former president of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Claude Malhuret, was put in charge of some aspects of humanitarian aid, with an inter-ministerial mechanism called the Cellule d'Urgence (CELLUR) acting as the operational body. This system was later revised, and another ex-MSF man, Xavier Emanuelli, became Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs, attached to the Ministry of Health. The move was the first real sign of a willingness within the government to get involved in humanitarian action. Emanuelli's successor, MSF founder Bernard Kouchner, spent three years as Minister of State for Humanitarian Action, from 1988 until 1991, and proved himself a dynamic and high-profile figure. Yet he also created tensions within the administration, and with NGOs. These tensions

The allocation of French emergency aid by region, 2001



stemmed primarily from the increasing confusion between politics and humanitarian aid. Kouchner found himself in dispute with the key ministries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Cooperation.

In the late 1990s, the institutional position of humanitarian aid was reformed again. The Ministry of Cooperation was folded into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a Deputy Minister in charge of cooperation and relations with the francophone countries. Humanitarian affairs were brought back into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and a twin structure was created, comprising the low-profile Service de l'Action Humanitaire (SAH), and the still inter-ministry CELLUR. This meant that decision-making was essentially decentralised, and spread between departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other interested ministries, such as defence. There were also administrative difficulties, as standard procedures were not adapted to the particular demands of emergency situations; tenders were delayed, for instance, and lengthy recruitment procedures failed to fill vacant positions in time.

Post-Kosovo change

In the wake of the Kosovo crisis, the French government, like others, took a hard look at its emergency assistance architecture. An audit by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance was strongly critical of the current structure and, after lengthy debate, further reforms were introduced. These changes were announced at an international conference in June 2001, attended by representatives of development departments in European Union states, as well as by NGOs. By early 2002, the changes were in place. A new body, the Delegation à l'Action Humanitaire (DAH), was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which combined the functions of the SAH and CELLUR.

The administrative and financial system under which the DAH functions has by and large been made more efficient, although only time will tell what impact the change will really have. The DAH is currently headed by an experienced diplomat, Gildas Lelidec, who has worked in, among other countries, Cambodia and the Congo. For early warning, the DAH is supported by a body connected to the Ministry of Defence and the French intelligence network, the Secretariat Général à la Défense Nationale (SGDN). This arrangement is supposed to help in analysing developing crises. The SGDN is also in charge of coordinating the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and civil-military relations in the post-crisis reconstruction period. Civil-military relations are high on the policy agenda in the wake of Bosnia and Kosovo.

The reforms also overhauled the wider development architecture, establishing the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) as the core French agency for development aid, and the main actor in the post-crisis period. The AFD, which is co-managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance, has only lately become involved in post-crisis situations, most recently in Afghanistan, and has also been active in zones of instability, such as in Burundi and the Horn of Africa. It is still in the early stages of developing its strategy vis-à-vis these new contexts, and will need to grapple with some difficult questions around the relationship between humanitarian aid and rehabilitation. The will seems to be there, but whether these issues can be adequately resolved remains to be seen.

Progress, but could do better?

The 2002 reforms mark a real step forward in the organisation of official French aid. Some coherence has been brought to what was a messy arrangement, with little consistency between diplomacy and aid and very little input into the kind of theoretical and philosophical debate that characterises the Anglo-Saxon aid world.

However, the DAH is badly under-resourced, both financially and in terms of human resources. The regular budget is around 10m a year, equivalent to around \$9m, to be supplemented from other cooperation funds if required. Although the French contribution to humanitarian efforts is largely channelled through ECHO, NGOs and multilateral actors are nonetheless concerned at the extremely limited means available to the DAH, and it is unclear whether the reforms will signal a larger financial commitment to emergency aid from the French government.

How the DAH positions itself within the wider debate on state humanitarianism is also unclear, and its relations with the Ministry of Defence, the SGDN and the armed forces will be under close scrutiny from NGOs. While French NGOs recognise the importance of strong political support in establishing independent and impartial humanitarian space, they

also resent negative political interference in humanitarian action. There has also been no attempt to clarify where the DAH fits within the wider changes in humanitarianism under way within Europe, with the changing role of ECHO and the emergence of a European foreign policy, security and defence identity.

Whether the creation of the DAH marks real progress in French official aid remains to be seen, and its value will only become clear through its performance in real crises. The head of the DAH and his deputy have

welcomed debate and evaluations to improve their work, and have called for reinforced, more inclusive and regularised exchanges with NGOs, academics and other centres of excellence. They have also highlighted the importance of working closely with their European counterparts, and acknowledge that their best allies in the fight for resources are the NGOs and civil society. That is at least a good start.

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Legislating for humanitarian aid

Frances Stevenson and Joanna Macrae argue that humanitarian assistance needs to be defined in national law

In February 2002, the International Development Act passed into UK law. While the main aim of the legislation is to set out the purpose and principles of development assistance, it also covers humanitarian aid, as well as other activities such as conflict reduction and peacebuilding. However, the Act does not attempt to define the specific nature and principles of humanitarian action. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), 'any definition of humanitarian assistance in legislation would be unnecessary, and would furthermore constrain our ability to react quickly, to respond to need, to learn from the operation of humanitarian assistance programmes, and to reflect those lessons in future programmes'.

What is humanitarian aid?

There is no agreement internationally about what constitutes humanitarian assistance. Different donor governments allocate humanitarian aid funds to a wide range of different activities. In addition to life-saving activities in response to conflict and disaster, humanitarian assistance funding is used for conflict management and peacebuilding, for security, for democracy- and nation-building, for infrastructure rehabilitation, and for 'hearts and minds' activities in military operations. Some donors use it to support refugees on their own soil: in 2000, 38% of bilateral humanitarian assistance was spent in this way. The US government, for example, allocated \$451 million of its \$1.2 billion humanitarian aid budget in 2000 to supporting refugees in the US.

There is considerable unease within humanitarian organisations and agencies that official humanitarian assistance is becoming more politicised. 'Politicisation' in the humanitarian context is commonly understood as foreign policy objectives influencing the provision – or non-provision – of humanitarian assistance. The relationship between humanitarian assistance and

politics has always been complex. Providing aid in a conflict involves engaging with political actors, and can have an impact on the course of conflict. International responses have always varied according to national interests and the strategic significance of the country or region affected. There is, however, little evidence of direct foreign ministry involvement in the allocation and management of humanitarian assistance. Most humanitarian crises tend to be off the main diplomatic map, and responsibility for humanitarian policy lies with aid ministries, who may consult with, but are not normally directed by, foreign ministries.

During the 1990s, governments and donors tried to influence belligerents by withholding funding for humanitarian aid, and by providing assistance to particular groups. These experiments proved controversial within donor administrations, parliaments and the humanitarian community more broadly. By the end of the decade, there seemed to have been a move away from attempting to use humanitarian assistance to exert leverage over conflict. In the US, for example, the independence of humanitarian assistance from direct foreign policy influence has been affirmed, at least in the State Department and the Agency for International Development. In Europe, the evolution of the Common Foreign and Security Policy has led ECHO to downplay its role in conflict management, and to assert its political independence from the EU.

Over the past five years, the policy landscape has become more complex and confused, and humanitarian assistance has become politicised in a different way. The relationship between humanitarian and political and military responses to conflict has evolved and humanitarian assistance is now often closely associated with – in some cases integrated into – military and political intervention and the human security agenda.

Existing legislation

Very few countries have established a statutory basis for their humanitarian assistance. One of the few to do so, Switzerland, introduced a federal law in 1997 that set out clearly the country's commitment to, and principles for, providing humanitarian aid. According to the legislation:

Humanitarian aid is given namely in the case of natural disasters or armed conflict and in general in emergency situations that are of such dimensions that the area or country concerned cannot master them alone. The first aim of humanitarian aid is therefore to *save lives* and to *alleviate suffering* among the population affected by the consequences of the emergency.

The legislation goes on to stipulate that *'humanitarian aid is not to be used as a substitute for other instruments'*; the causes of an emergency, especially armed conflict, should therefore be tackled not with humanitarian aid, but with other foreign policy instruments. And humanitarian aid should be 'neutral, impartial and unconditional in its approach, in contrast to commitments in other fields. It is designed solely to *meet the needs of the victims of these situations*'. The legislation also stipulates that the provision of humanitarian aid is the responsibility of 'civil departments', with the military 'sometimes' being called upon to provide security in the field.

European Union countries also agreed clear assumptions about the principles and objectives of humanitarianism when they established the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). These are spelt out in the preamble of EC Council Regulation 1257/1996:

humanitarian aid, the sole aim of which is to prevent or relieve suffering, is accorded to victims without discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic group, religion, sex, age, nationality or political affiliation and must not be guided by, or subject to, political considerations ... humanitarian aid decisions must be taken impartially and solely according to the victims' needs and interests ... the independence and impartiality of non-governmental organisations and other humanitarian institutions in the implementation of humanitarian aid must be preserved, respected and encouraged.

In a recent audit of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Audit Office drew attention to the absence of a legal basis for Denmark's humanitarian assistance. It recommended that it is included in the law on international development, and the ministry has said it will consider the recommendation when the law is revised.

Governments use the term 'humanitarian' to describe and justify political and military interventions, and humanitarian assistance is seen by many as part of an integrated effort to manage or resolve conflicts and build peace.

The role of donor governments as players in international humanitarian response is also changing. While they used to rely primarily on UN and NGO partners to carry out humanitarian programmes, they are now more prominent actors in their own right. Donor governments – which are sometimes also parties to the conflicts in which they behave as humanitarian actors – are now much closer to humanitarian decision-making.

Lastly, humanitarian resources are being concentrated heavily on a small number of countries that are strategically significant to those donor governments. The current system of allocating multilateral and bilateral humanitarian resources does not correlate closely with need, and is far from impartial. In 1996–99, the top five recipient countries of bilateral humanitarian aid were all political hotspots of strategic importance to the main donors (Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro, the former Yugoslavia, Israel and Iraq). The next five (Rwanda, Sudan, Afghanistan, Angola and Indonesia) received half the total allocated to the top five (\$1,388m, compared to \$2,725m). In 2000, 21% of all

bilateral humanitarian assistance went to south-eastern Europe – the same proportion as went to all 24 other countries that were subjects of consolidated appeals.

Would legislation help?

The lack of a clear definition of what constitutes humanitarian aid leaves humanitarian activity open to manipulation for other objectives. In this context, there are a number of reasons why it would be useful (and logical) if domestic law on international development incorporated such a definition. It would establish in law a country's commitment to uphold international humanitarian law, and the principles of impartiality and humanity which are the cornerstones of international humanitarian law and human rights law. A legal commitment to principles of humanitarian assistance would complement an ethical foreign policy, help guarantee the independence of aid policy from national foreign policy and provide a legal base against which a government could be held accountable. It would also match the public understanding of what humanitarian aid is for, namely a tool for the relief of suffering, not a component in a political process.

The demands of working in very different conflict situations around the world mean that legally defining a single package of assistance is not feasible or desirable. Issues of context, objectives and prin-

principle are what are important. Concerning context, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) defines a humanitarian emergency as a situation where the capacity of government, other authorities and the community is overwhelmed, so that the population cannot meet its basic needs. The objective of humanitarian assistance as laid out in international humanitarian law is to prevent and alleviate suffering, protect life and ensure respect for the human being. Regarding principles, the legitimacy of intervention by humanitarian organisations depends on them being able to act independently of governments' interests, and this independence should be protected in law.

A clause in individual countries' legislation on international development spelling out a commitment to the values of impartiality, humanity and independence of humanitarian action would help to safeguard the place of the humanitarian mission amid the complex and competing demands of national and international politics, and ensure that the needs and rights of people in conflicts and natural disasters are better met.

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Write an article for *Humanitarian Exchange*

Like the Humanitarian Practice Network itself, *Humanitarian Exchange* provides an independent forum for people who work on humanitarian policy and programmes to share their knowledge and experience. By exchanging views on what is being learned in the practice of humanitarian action, that action will develop and, we hope, become more effective.

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We welcome submissions from anyone involved in some way in humanitarian action. If you have knowledge, analysis, ideas or experience that you would like to share with other humanitarian practitioners and policy-makers through an article in *Humanitarian Exchange*, please send your draft to the email address below. If you have an idea for an article you want to develop and would like to discuss it with us, do send us an email.

We are happy to consider drafts submitted at any time. If you would like your article to appear in a specific issue, we need the draft by the beginning of the previous month, so for the November issue we would need your submission by early October.

Articles should be about 2,000 words long. They are normally accepted in English, but in exceptional circumstances we can accept drafts in other languages.

Write to us at: hpn@odi.org.uk

The compartmentalisation of humanitarian action

Many of today's conflicts are characterised as 'protection crises', yet protecting human rights is somehow seen as at odds with providing humanitarian aid. Gerald Martone argues that this contrived categorisation is both dangerous and obsolete

The primary mandate of relief agencies operating in humanitarian emergencies is to provide urgent assistance to people in need. This typically involves providing food, shelter, water, medical care and other essential and life-saving services. The physical and legal protection of civilians is regarded as subordinate to these commitments. Yet suffering may frequently stem from the loss or denial of physical and legal protection, for which humanitarian aid offers no remedy. The traditional perspective of humanitarian motivation must expand beyond the conventional view of how people are dying, to embrace an enlightened appraisal of how people are living.

Human rights or humanitarian assistance?

The protection of human rights is somehow seen as at odds with the provision of humanitarian assistance. The consensus definition of protection, as given by the ICRC, is 'any activity which prevents or puts a stop to a specific pattern of abuse and/or alleviates its immediate effects'. Relief assistance tends to focus on the second aspect of protection, and does not address directly human rights violations at their source: 'We'll die with full stomachs', as the oft-quoted Bosnian refrain has it. There is thus a conspicuous compartmentalisation peculiar to the field of humanitarian action that distinguishes as entirely distinct guilds activities that are in fact interdependent and interrelated. These simultaneously coexisting spheres of activity sometimes perform in oblivious parallels. This contrived categorisation works against a holistic engagement to political crises; it is compassion without understanding, and means that the cumulative impact of these disparate actors is not realised.

Human rights organisations and humanitarian assistance agencies interact only accidentally or socially, despite the countless situations where both simultaneously operate. In the one unifying covenant governing humanitarian conduct, the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, none of the ten principles delineates a commitment to the protection of vulnerable civilian populations. The practical dimensions of political advocacy, community mobilisation and public protest are conspicuously absent. This critical lacuna in an otherwise practical code demonstrates how allergic aid agencies are to dealing with the root causes of abuse.

That said, relief organisations are beginning to consider the integration of human rights and protec-

tion issues. UNHCR, the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the ICRC have all published practical field guides for NGO staff, and initiatives such as the Reach Out refugee protection training project provide a useful base of protection parameters particularly relevant to aid workers. The International Rescue Committee and a few other NGOs have established departments with a mandate to address advocacy, public policy and protection.

Considering the frequency, duration and severity of human rights abuses, it should not be a question of *whether* relief agencies address the issue of human rights protection, but rather to what extent and how they do so. Responses range from the strict neutrality, discretion and non-disclosure of the ICRC to the public demarches and vocal advocacy of human rights organisations. Interventions responding to negligent or ruthless parties can be categorised into three types: persuasion in an attempt to convince and compel authorities; denunciation in order to pressure and shame authorities; and substitution to replace authorities that have failed to meet their responsibilities.

Neutrality: an obsolete principle

Relief organisations have pervasive concerns that the public denouncement of human rights abuses in a host country will result in their expulsion; put at risk the security of their staff; and incur bureaucratic penalties. In general, aid agencies deliberately avoid even institutional proximity to the public protest of human rights agencies.

This has not always been the case. Examples abound of organisations registering their outrage at government mistreatment of civilians and the restriction of humanitarian access, without punitive consequences. In some instances, as with MSF in Burundi, public protest has actually resulted in improved access to formerly inaccessible populations. In Angola, MSF held a series of press conferences and released a report in late 2000 that was very critical of government and rebel abuse of the civilian population; the move drew little official reaction. Indeed, it had unforeseen benefits, such as inviting more open expression of public opinion, and the use of the report's findings to advocate for improved conditions.

Exaggerated fears of expulsion and a tenacious adherence to the ideal of neutrality can become

alibis in a conspiracy of silence. The dilemma is reduced to an oversimplified choice: public denunciation at the risk of expulsion, or silence at the risk of passive complicity. It was this very point of divergence from the rigid neutrality of the ICRC that inspired the formation of MSF during the Biafran war in 1967. Opposed to the statutory neutrality and silent diplomacy of ICRC, MSF's founders spoke out about the atrocities they had witnessed. Without a vigorous campaign of advocacy, the mobilisation of public opinion, human rights monitoring and information sharing, relief assistance is merely palliative, and indistinguishable from the response to a natural disaster. Humanitarian neutrality – interpreted to mean not taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies – in no way justifies a neutral stance towards suffering or the abuse of basic human rights: 'Neutrality cannot be maintained when responding to complex emergencies; it is irresponsible to pretend otherwise ... in some instances it would be morally repugnant to remain neutral.'¹

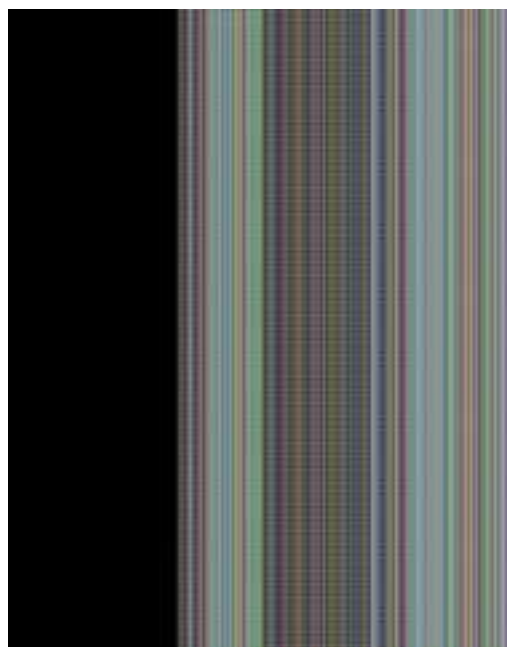
Agencies are beginning to promote a renewed emphasis on the principle of impartiality, which refers to an agency's *non-discriminatory* stature, where neutrality refers to its *non-political* stature. Impartiality may prove a more enduring guiding principle for humanitarian action. Impartial assistance is allocated in such a way that it does not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It is aid given in proportion to need, not as a factor of demographics. The slow death of the word neutrality from the lexicon of beleaguered relief agencies is a welcome evolution. This shameful and dispassionate notion connotes abstention not engagement, abandonment not involvement.

Protest: taking a stand against tyranny

'Silence cannot be a precondition for operational freedom'.² So-called 'rebellious humanitarianism' demands that agencies have a responsibility – and a capacity – to influence the political, military and economic context in which they operate. Neutrality can no longer be a silent deal, whereby assistance agencies agree not to interfere with the conflict in exchange for the combatants' agreement not to interfere with the aid effort. The cloak of neutral positioning masks the reluctance and tentative resolve of assistance agencies to stand up for populations in extremis. The hollow rhetoric of neutrality has become an alibi for the timid to shrink from protest. In this regard, it has been conveniently interpreted as a duty to abstain from any action that furthers or disadvantages the position of one side of a

¹ T. B. Seybolt, 'The Myth of Neutrality', *Peace Review*, vol.8, no. 4, 1996.

² Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, 'The Theory and Practice of "Rebellious Humanitarianism"', *Humanitarian Exchange* 19, September 2001.



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Protecting human rights is seen at odds with providing humanitarian assistance

conflict over the other. Hence, humanitarian neutrality becomes passive.

To withhold public outcry is heartless. Only an extraordinarily aloof perspective could justify the decision to turn one's back on human misery. This fickle and calculating gesture is an unforgivable act of feigned moral purity. As one aid worker sarcastically puts it, 'the modern relief agency has replaced the principle of neutrality with arrogance'.

When a humanitarian agency is outraged at a particular situation, a rationalised silence is a particularly cruel and uncreative way to react. What is needed instead is a relentless and tenacious engagement by aid agencies that exerts pressure on negligent governments. In the face of atrocious and unforgiving situations, we must force local authorities to contend with our irritating presence. Unaccompanied by action, the silence of international agencies in an abusive context conveys the wrong message, that violations will be tolerated or condoned. A passive, resigned presence not only fails to deter violations of civilians, but also inoculates perpetrators against the presence of international witnesses. Protests must be conspicuous, forceful and courageous.

A new amalgam

The challenge is to address the needs of war-affected people in a principled manner, that is to manage programme activities in a way that upholds humanitarian values, while simultaneously standing up for human rights. The 'protection gap' must be closed. Assistance agencies that conspire in this peculiar segregation of duties – relief versus protection – are failing to meet their moral burden to address the very conditions that demand their services. It is no longer acceptable

for the protection of human rights to be either an unwonted or an unwanted aspect of the work of assistance agencies.

As long as the provision of aid is construed as a humanitarian imperative, all other concerns are consigned an inferior status. This imperative becomes the non-negotiable moral absolute, and all other inalienable rights are regarded as secondary.

There are practical, proven and effective approaches that aid organisations can successfully include in their field programmes to protect the rights of populations they serve. These include establishing information centres and legal aid services, liaison and 'protective accompaniment' and capacity-building for national NGOs, justice workers and district authorities. Aid agencies can also pool resources to support technical advisers for protection, human rights focal points and refugee ombudsmen. We must also seek to involve the

people we intend to protect. By sensitising affected communities, publishing information bulletins in local dialects and raising awareness, war-affected people can participate in their own protection. A mobilised community is a potent deterrent to human rights violators.

Relief agencies work in settings where the scope and scale of human rights violations demand a deliberate response. Their workers are in direct contact with the effects of human rights abuses. The monitoring of human rights violations, alerting the public and media, training public officials in human rights principles and educating war-affected people about their rights must become a central element of relief assistance interventions.

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Assessing the impact of armed violence on civilians and relief personnel: a new study

One of the primary concerns of relief agencies is the security of their personnel, and the civilians they are seeking to assist. Against this background, Johns Hopkins University, the Small Arms Survey and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, in consultation with the World Health Organisation, are collaborating in a study to measure injury and mortality rates among humanitarian and development workers; estimate the volume of small arms in circulation in operational zones; and assess the threats posed to the safety and well-being of agency personnel and civilians.

The study team has developed a short, self-administered questionnaire to collect the perceptions and observations of field workers with experience of areas affected by armed violence. Responses will be kept strictly confidential, and respondents' names and organisational affiliations will be removed. The questionnaire is meant to solicit impressions and perceptions, and does not require specialist knowledge. Completing the form should take no more than 20 minutes.

If you would like to participate in this important project, contact Robert Muggah at the Small Arms Survey. Tel: (+41) 22 908 5782; e-mail muggah@hei.unige.ch. Your participation is truly appreciated, and will greatly contribute to our understanding of the role of small arms in humanitarian operations.

Trends in humanitarian action: new research from the Humanitarian Policy Group

The international humanitarian system has experienced a massive rate of change over the past decade. There have been significant shifts in the understanding of humanitarian need and of the context in which humanitarian assistance is provided. At the same time, international expectations of the role of humanitarian action have evolved. No longer seen as simply a palliative for the worst excesses of man and for the impact of natural hazards, many see humanitarian action as part of a wider agenda of conflict management and development. The very meaning of humanitarianism has become elusive, as a new set of actors has claimed it as part of a new, more interventionist international order. As the definition of humanitarianism has been stretched, so identifying the actors on the humanitarian stage has become more difficult. The cast of characters has changed significantly in recent years, to include new, often unfamiliar faces.

A new report from the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the ODI, entitled *The New Humanitarianisms: A Review of Trends in Global Humanitarian Action*, charts the key elements of change as they impinge on humanitarian policy and practice. A series of detailed studies describes and analyses:

- changes in the financing of humanitarian assistance;
- developments in the role and structure of UN humanitarian assistance;
- trends in US humanitarian policy; and
- developments in the European Union's approach to humanitarian action.

The report's key conclusions are:

- Events in Kosovo in 1999 cemented the association between humanitarianism and a new, and sometimes controversial, security agenda. The events of 11 September have reinforced this link between assistance and security issues. The humanitarian label is being used by Western governments to legitimise their military intervention. The use of this label, and the fact that these same governments are the financiers of the humanitarian system, risks compromising the independence of humanitarian action.
- International actors working in conflict-related crises are becoming increasingly diverse. A new generation of military, paramilitary and developmental actors have emerged to fill the gaps apparent in international crisis response. The inevitable confusion of humanitarian actors with these other groups compromises the actual and perceived neutrality of humanitarian action, and therefore endangers the access of humanitarian agencies to people in need.
- There is an increasing differentiation of response between countries. This is reflected in the uneven distribution of humanitarian aid resources, as well as different arrangements for the coordination and execution of humanitarian action. While the UN looks set to remain as the core of humanitarian coordination in most crises, in the more strategically significant areas a more bilateralised response is likely to prevail. This has implications for the impartiality of the humanitarian system as a whole, and for the ability of the UN to maintain a global role.
- The struggle continues to define consistently the purpose of humanitarian action, and the principles according to which it operates. While there is now greater caution regarding claims that humanitarian action can exert significant leverage over conflict, there remains uncertainty regarding whether and how it might contribute to conflict reduction, and to the legitimisation, domestically and internationally, of political and military strategies. The tendency towards greater diversity of principle is likely to continue as new frameworks to govern humanitarian action are explored, including rights-based approaches.
- Donors have introduced tighter procedures through which to monitor and evaluate the performance of their partners. However, despite many initiatives to improve accountability and performance, the most basic data regarding need and resource flows remain opaque. Addressing these statistical and management gaps will require not only investment, but also consensus between the different stakeholders regarding the definition of what constitutes humanitarian assistance, and even what constitutes humanitarian need.

The New Humanitarianisms is edited by HPG Coordinator Joanna Macrae. Copies are available from Alison Prescott (a.prescott@odi.org.uk).

Humanitarian Practice Network

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

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

HPN's activities include:

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

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

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

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

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

ISSN: 1472-4847

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