

# HUMANITARIAN HPN exchange

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Shared humanity and the principle of impartiality are the foundations of humanitarianism. Evolving global policy trends are, however, moving away from the impartial allocation of public humanitarian assistance, and eroding the universality of humanitarian action.

Over the last decade, major political and military interventions have taken place under a humanitarian banner, and the total volume of humanitarian aid has steadily increased. These trends would seem to auger well for people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. But in reality, international engagement and resources are being deployed very selectively; depending on where they live, there are very significant differences in people's ability to access international humanitarian assistance. In the majority of cases, international engagement in crisis areas is notable by its absence.

For these silent, forgotten emergencies, humanitarian assistance remains the last, often very small international contribution to protecting some of the most vulnerable populations on earth. The near-abandonment of these people is increasingly obvious as humanitarian resources are being concentrated in countries, or parts of countries, of greatest strategic significance to the main actors. This is a violation of the principle of impartiality at a global level.

Yet it is surprisingly difficult to match humanitarian assistance with need globally. The impact of under-resourcing and the lack of response to silent, forgotten emergencies is not documented systematically, and there are no internationally-accepted figures which allow easy comparison between countries of the extent of need for protection and assistance. There is, however, plenty of evidence from around the world concerning people's lack of access to food, shelter, medical care and other basic prerequisites for survival in conflicts and disasters.

Many agencies and organisations concentrate their assistance in line with globally-available resources, and the implications of global trends on the impartiality of assistance seem to have drawn relatively little comment. It remains to be seen whether humanitarian actors manage a concerted riposte to broader changes in international response, and ensure that humanitarian aid really does address need without discrimination and irrespective of race, religion, political affiliation and other considerations.

Silent emergencies are the special focus of this issue of *Humanitarian Exchange*. Anna Jefferys of Save the Children (UK) examines the concept of the silent emergency, and suggests ways to assess and address this silence. We also look at six of the world's most silent emergencies: Shabunda in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the Casamance in Senegal; Uganda; Chechnya; north-east India; and North Korea.

Following up our special feature on Afghanistan in the last issue, we have two articles which draw on previous evaluations of humanitarian response to political crisis, and on the review of the Strategic Framework, to identify lessons for the international response in Afghanistan. Articles on a wide range of humanitarian practice, institutional initiatives and policy developments around the world complete the issue.

## Giving voice to silent emergencies

Humanitarian agencies have developed mechanisms to gauge a society's vulnerability to conflict and natural disaster. But, says **Anna Jefferys**, little attention has been paid to analysing the forces that shape the international humanitarian system's response

Since 1989, more than four million people have been killed in conflicts, most of them internal, and many of them chronic, localised and long-running. Natural disasters too are costing more lives and causing more damage, particularly in the developing world. In the last ten years, 300 natural disasters have been recorded, affecting people in 108 countries and killing up to 150,000 annually. While some of these emergencies attract significant amounts of publicity and political attention, others fester outside of the public eye. How many people know, for instance, that famines are occurring right now in Malawi, Angola, Sudan and Somalia, and that famine conditions are currently unfolding in Zimbabwe? These emergencies are effectively silent: marginalised in donors' funding decisions; the object of little if any political interest in the West; rarely if ever covered in the media; and all too often neglected by humanitarian organisations themselves.

### Funding patterns

Aid is apportioned in highly unbalanced and partial ways. While responses to UN consolidated appeals (CAPs) do not paint a complete picture, they are indicative of wider aid trends. In 1999, the donor response to CAPs for the former Yugoslavia was \$207 per person; for Sierra Leone, it was \$16, and \$8 for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Between 1993 and 1997, Africa as a whole received on average just half of the requested CAP funding. While these funding commitments reflect the different costs of doing business in Africa and Europe, the differential is nevertheless significant. The consistent under-funding of particular CAPs reflects a wider funding cycle, whereby low media attention leads to low donor interest, leading to low aid commitments, and low estimates of the

Save the Children (UK) uses the following definition of a silent emergency:

A crisis situation that overwhelms the capacity of a society to cope by using its resources alone, where the level of response, including political, humanitarian, multilateral and press, is insufficient to meet the level of immediate humanitarian need.

funding that may be available, thus reducing levels of proposed programming for the next round of funding. Even lower down the scale are those long-running emergencies – the separatist war in the Western Sahara, the ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the insurgency in the southern Philippines, for instance – that do not merit a CAP appeal at all.

Moreover, although the international donor commitment to humanitarian crises has risen in recent years, committed funds are often extracted from overall – and dwindling – aid budgets. During the 1990s, as the number of active wars increased, foreign aid budgets stagnated; OECD humanitarian aid decreased from 0.03% to 0.022% of total gross national product (GNP), and only five of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)'s 22 donors reached the UN target for aid spending of 0.7% in 1999. Thus, aid from DAC donors in 1999 was 12% lower in real terms than it was in 1992. Over the last ten years, aid to Sub-Saharan Africa fell by 29%, from \$37 to \$21 per head.

### International interest and political will

These patterns of funding are linked to the level of outside political interest and media attention that

The ten countries/areas receiving most humanitarian assistance

Country/area	Assistance (US\$m)
FRY (Serbia & Montenegro)	237.24
Europe (unallocated)	177.64
Ex-Yugoslav states (unspecified)	141.79
Ethiopia	102.39
Mozambique	94.59
East Timor	91.56
Iraq	75.77
Sudan	51.91
Angola	48.27
Bosnia	43.06

Notes: Bilateral allocations only; data refer to 2000

Source: Development Assistance Committee

The ten countries/areas with the most people in need of assistance

Country/area	People in need
North Korea	8,044,000
Somalia	4,000,000
South-Eastern Europe	3,500,000
Sudan	2,367,200
Angola	2,000,000
Afghanistan	2,000,000
Tajikistan	1,300,000
Burundi	860,000
Sierra Leone	760,000
Uganda	585,000

Note: Data refer to 1999

Source: OCHA Consolidated Appeal data

## Donors and forgotten emergencies: DFID and ECHO

In 2001, DFID stated its commitment to 'seek to promote a more universal approach to addressing humanitarian needs. People in need, wherever they are, should have equal status and rights to assistance'. DFID is also interested in developing some form of indicators by which to measure humanitarian need. However, in the same year the former Yugoslavia was still the top recipient of DFID humanitarian aid, with £32 million committed. This was more than double the amount committed to the second-largest recipient, Ethiopia. While Africa received 35% of DFID bilateral humanitarian assistance, Europe was close behind with 29%.

ECHO has also emphasised its commitment to addressing forgotten emergencies, and it has developed a methodology to help pinpoint them. Each emergency is monitored for such things as media coverage and donor presence, and then grouped into one of three categories:

- high (the upper 25% of countries that are mentioned least in the media, with lowest donor support and highest needs);
- middle (the middle 50%); and
- low (the bottom 25%).

After an initial assessment, ECHO listed the following as priority emergency countries: Angola, Chechnya, Burma, Uganda, Tanzania and Yemen; those where media coverage was particularly lacking, either through lack of interest or lack of access, were identified as Burma, Equatorial Guinea, North Korea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Western Sahara and Uganda. However, while ECHO aid to selected 'forgotten' countries – Tajikistan and Western Sahara, for instance – did indeed increase in 2001, the former Yugoslavia was again the recipient of the largest tranche of ECHO humanitarian aid.

particular emergencies attract. In turn, this depends greatly on how important these countries are to the interests of the relevant major states and regional organisations. Thus, the provision of assistance is decided more on the geo-strategic priorities of the main donors than on the objective existence of need. As many key donors increasingly channel their funding bilaterally, rather than through multilateral agencies like the UN (bilateral funding for humanitarian assistance was on average four times higher than in the previous decade), this linkage will probably become all the more prominent because it will become easier for individual donors to earmark their funds for particular countries. In the wake of 11 September, it appears that we may be returning to a world where aid is used to reward allies and punish or

starve enemies within a wider security agenda. In December 2001, for instance, the US pledged Pakistan over \$1 billion in debt forgiveness, investment, trade and refugee relief as a reward for its part in the 'war on terrorism'. In the same month, sanctions against Iraq were extended by another six months, despite their clear humanitarian impact.

Donor, recipient and non-recipient countries can be seen to sit in interconnected spheres of influence, encompassing the geopolitical (political, economic, cultural and historical), as well as the geographic. The response to Hurricane Mitch, for instance, was strongest in the US, Canada and Spain; Australia, New Zealand and Japan tend to respond more to emergencies in Asia and the Pacific. In 1999, ECHO funding for the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo was four times that for all 70 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries combined. Between 1990 and 1994, Germany, Austria and Italy all increased their humanitarian assistance to respond to need in the Balkans. As Oxfam puts it: 'donors are more likely to help people who look like them, and whose history or plight they can relate to or understand'.

The media also plays an instrumental role in determining whether, and how, an emergency is communicated to the world. Editorial choices govern what constitutes a story, and what does not; in the US, for instance, the conflict in Bosnia received 25 times more press coverage than the Rwandan genocide. In the 1990s, evening news bulletins on US television devoted 82% of the airtime given to foreign coverage to just 14 countries, or 7% of the world's total. Europe received more coverage than all of Africa, Central and South America combined. Even where particular crises do attract media attention, coverage tends to be short-lived; within a week of the volcanic eruption in the DRC in 2002, for instance, British news channels had by and large stopped reporting on it.

This creates the misleading impression that these crises too are short-lived, with a finite beginning and a conclusive end. When the story is dropped, the crisis is perceived by the public to be over. In this way, emergencies are depicted as being a break from the norm, when in fact they may themselves be the normal condition for many affected people. Thus, while the eye-catching and sudden disaster – the earthquake, flood or eruption – grabs the headlines and attracts the lion's share of assistance, less dramatic yet equally severe catastrophes languish unnoticed, and under-funded. Each year between 1992 and 1998, an earthquake, flood, volcanic eruption or hurricane attracted the largest proportion of humanitarian aid devoted to natural disasters. Slow-onset disasters like drought are low on the list; in 2001, the drought in the Horn of Africa, for instance, received just 13% of requested funding.

### **Silent emergencies and humanitarian principles**

Using a principled, needs-based approach would go some way to addressing the inequities that shape the

international response to emergencies. While aid agencies cannot claim that a government does not have the right to defend itself in the face of civil war, they can press for the rights of civilians to life, food, shelter, clean water, and security to be respected in line with humanitarian principles. Save the Children (UK) and CARE Australia are among the few agencies so far to have produced guidelines in this area. Save has identified a series of quantitative indicators that could be used to judge the relative 'silence' of a given emergency in terms of:

#### Donor interest

- how much aid is received per capita?;
- what do DAC statistics reveal?;
- what percentage of CAP appeals is raised and allocated to a particular emergency?

#### Wider political interest

- how many times is a particular emergency raised in government and parliamentary fora, such as House of Commons debates or parliamentary questions in the UK (as listed in *Hansard*); in Congress in the US (as listed in the *Congressional Record*); in questions tabled by European Parliament members; or in the UN Security Council?;
- how much diplomatic activity is associated with a particular emergency, such as resolutions and démarches?;
- is there a Western military presence? If so, of what type, and whose?

#### Media interest

- how much coverage over time does an emergency receive in key outlets – the BBC, the UK's main broadsheets, continental European newspapers like *Figaro* and *Die Welt*, US television news programmes on ABC, NBC, CBS and CNN?

#### NGO capacity and response

- how did key NGOs respond to a particular emergency? What level of effort and resources did they expend, as described in their annual reports?

SC-UK has also outlined a series of key areas for action:

- *Information-gathering and analysis*

A centralised information resource should be set up to capture existing research relating to silent emergencies, drawn from humanitarian agencies, NGOs, governments and academic bodies. A 'watch group' should be formed to analyse this data, so as to elaborate a contextual analysis of the real risks and difficulties facing populations; to standardise relative levels of humanitarian need; and to monitor how and why certain emergencies are silent.

- *Public exposure*

Linked into the above process, the humanitarian community should adopt a more transparent, coordinated advocacy strategy towards the media and donors so as to promote a more in-depth awareness and analysis of emergencies occurring around the world.

While advocacy alone cannot compensate for the lack of political will to resolve crises, it can at least raise the level and scope of debate.

- *Influencing international funding choices*

A more rigorous, equitable and needs-based international funding structure should be developed, whereby governments live up to their rhetoric and their obligations under international law to allow need, rather than their interests, to guide their humanitarian response. As a corollary, donors will develop more needs-based financial planning so that CAPs become more reflective of international realities; and will share the burden of meeting CAP requirements across the board in a needs-based fashion. Finally, governments, multilaterals and NGOs will increase the flexibility of their humanitarian response by bolstering their commitment to emergency preparedness in their humanitarian aid budgets.

NGOs aim to live up to a humanitarian ethic broadly articulated in the Red Cross and Red Crescent code of conduct. This means responding to all emergencies impartially, irrespective of their type, size or location. However, it is difficult to maintain these standards in silent emergencies because of the dependence on donor decision-making for institutional funding, and on the media to mobilise private fundraising. NGOs cannot hold 'special' appeals all the time, and must pick and choose their crises carefully in order to reap the requisite funds. To ensure that humanitarian principles are protected, that emergencies do not get sidelined, and that media pressures, donor interest, international profile and influencing opportunities do not cloud the emergency response, humanitarian agencies need to think through the criteria they apply in deciding whether, and how, to respond to a particular crisis.

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# The Casamance conflict: out of sight, out of mind?

*The separatist rebellion in the Casamance in southern Senegal is West Africa's longest-running civil conflict. Yet, compared with wars elsewhere in West Africa, it is virtually unknown in the outside world. Martin Evans describes the humanitarian impact of one of the world's forgotten wars*

Since 1982, the separatist Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) has been fighting for an independent Casamance, first through popular protest, then since 1990 through a guerrilla war. Despite ceasefires and accords throughout the 1990s and improved security conditions, durable peace remains elusive. The death toll directly due to the conflict is probably around 1,000, either killed in armed attacks, by landmines or as a result of human rights abuse. Many more have been displaced, either within the Casamance or into neighbouring countries. Patterns of displacement are complex, and reliable figures are difficult to obtain. A 1998 Caritas census gave a figure of 62,638, out of a total Casamance population of around 1.1 million. Ziguinchor, the capital of the western region of the Casamance, has received some 14,000, with a further 6,000 in other Casamance towns. UNHCR figures indicate that a further 10,000 people are refugees in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia.

Denied access to their land, the livelihoods of many IDPs have been severely affected. Even for populations who have remained in place, the use of productive resources is restricted or prevented by fear of rebel attacks and landmines. For the Casamance population as a whole, the climate of insecurity, principally the danger of armed robbery on roads or in villages by rebels or bandits, together with failing infrastructure, stifle much normal economic activity, particularly the sale of agricultural produce and tourism. Instead,

combatants on both sides, together with actors in neighbouring countries, are exploiting the Casamance's natural resources, though with no benefit to most of the civilian population.

Various agencies have been active in the Casamance. At times of significant displacement, assistance has included food and healthcare for IDPs by the Senegalese Red Cross, Caritas, the Agence des Musulmans d'Afrique and UNICEF. With most IDPs taken in or otherwise assisted with accommodation by their families, housing them in camps has not featured beyond the Red Cross reception centre on the outskirts of Ziguinchor, although UNHCR partners in The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau run camps housing some Casamance refugees. The psychological impact of the conflict is also starting to be addressed, with UNICEF training community leaders in psychosocial support for people traumatised by violence. Landmine awareness and rehabilitation of mine victims also form relatively small but significant aspects of relief in the Casamance, implemented by Handicap International and local NGOs. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1982, human rights abuses have been the subject of advocacy by Amnesty International and the Senegalese NGO RADDHO (Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme).

## International neglect

The Casamance rebellion is much less well known internationally than other civil conflicts in West Africa, notably in Liberia and Sierra Leone. There are a number of reasons for this. First, it is on a relatively small scale. In Sierra Leone, for example, numbers of combatants, casualties and displaced people have all been an order of magnitude greater. Also, while brutal enough the conflict has not involved the same systematic mutilation of civilians, nor the forced recruitment of child soldiers – both attention-grabbers in the reporting of contemporary conflicts.

The second reason is the paucity of international, particularly multilateral, intervention. While The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau have both been involved in the Casamance peace process, the Casamance has not seen the concerted political and military efforts that have been made in Sierra Leone by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the UN; the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone is the largest UN operation in the world. Its specialist agencies aside, UN action on the Casamance has been limited to occasional statements encouraging dialogue. Political involvement by the former colonial power, France, has also been limited,

## The Casamance

The Casamance is the southern limb of Senegal. It is largely separated from the rest of the country by The Gambia. This sense of separation is enhanced by marked geographical differences: the Casamance is the wettest part of an otherwise mostly semi-arid country, with high rainfall promoting the growth of forests containing commercially important timber species, and orchards of cashews, mangoes, citrus fruit and oil palms. There is a strong tradition of rice-growing, and other cereals, groundnuts and vegetables are also widely cultivated. Ethnic differences are also evident, principally the Diola majority in Ziguinchor region (the western part of the Casamance and the area most touched by the conflict), together with the presence of other groups with little affinity for northern Senegal and its hegemony of Wolof and other Sahelian peoples. The area also has a separate colonial history.



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*The impact of conflict: an abandoned house in Camaracounda, near the border with Guinea-Bissau*

with Paris seemingly regarding the conflict as an embarrassment in its relations with Senegal, an otherwise stable ally hosting a substantial French population and military presence. The MFDC has sought French and UN mediation and is keen to make its case to the outside world, but the Casamance's isolation from the main centres of power and international communications in northern Senegal means that the Mouvement has had only limited success in attracting outside interest.

Third, there are obstacles to disseminating information about the conflict. This is perhaps surprising, since the conflict is probably less difficult to investigate than most. Senegal has no particular habit of suppressing undesirable information, and the country has a vigorous, largely free press. Senegal also has a strong academic tradition, with good links to Western academia. The Casamance itself has been largely accessible during the conflict. However, the area is a long road journey from Dakar, where most media are based, and the trip involves a troublesome crossing of The Gambia. Ferry services are unreliable, and flights are too expensive for most Senegalese. Reporters in the Casamance risk falling foul of one side or the other in the conflict; journalists have in the past been arrested for their reporting on the conflict, and legal proceedings have been initiated by the government against Dakar newspapermen. At an international level, Amnesty's reports have helped to keep the human rights dimensions of the Casamance conflict visible, but most journalistic and academic coverage is in French, keeping the crisis out of sight of much of the English-speaking world. Senegal is a popular holiday destination for the French, but most tourists will have little or no contact with the Casamance crisis.

Fourth, the record of donor commitment to the Casamance, and hence the need and ability to bring the conflict to the attention of the wider world, has been mixed. The start of widespread seeding of landmines by the MFDC in 1997 provoked the withdrawal of a number of key donors from the Casamance, including the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the African Development Fund and, most importantly,

USAID. Their departure abruptly ended a number of large projects, especially in agricultural development, and resentment is still evident among NGOs in Ziguinchor. However, donors have started to return in response to the improved security situation; in 2000, USAID began a three-year \$10m programme in support of peace and reconstruction. Multilateral donors and agencies, including the World Bank, the European Union, the UN Development Programme and UNHCR, are also supporting the peace process financially, or are present as observers.

### **The need for a regional approach**

The relative obscurity of the Casamance conflict is the result of a combination of political, geopolitical and geographical factors. The physical separation of the Casamance from the centres of Senegalese power is critical. Together with most of the country's policy-makers, media workers and intelligentsia, the national (and sub-regional) headquarters of foreign donors and agencies are in Dakar; all may thus suffer from a degree of 'Casamance-blindness'. Whether accidental or instrumental, the resulting poor outward flow of information about the conflict, while it may suit some Senegalese political interests, is not to the benefit of most Casamançais.

How might this forgotten war be brought to greater prominence and – hopefully – swifter resolution? One way may be to integrate it into a wider, sub-regional approach to addressing conflicts and their effects. Conflict in West Africa tends to be equated with the Liberia/Sierra Leone/Guinea nexus, but these conflicts have wider linkages, including with the Casamance, particularly through arms- and drug-trafficking networks. The need for an integrated approach to West Africa's conflicts was stressed to the UN Security Council in December 2001. This is part of the mandate of a UN office to be set up in Dakar, which will collaborate with other regional and sub-regional organisations, including ECOWAS. Such integration could be mirrored by the three countries whose former colonies are implicated in the conflict – France, Britain (The Gambia) and Portugal (Guinea-Bissau). In recognising its transnational dimensions, these countries may better coordinate their bilateral political efforts in supporting the Casamance peace process. This may involve a politically tough stance in highlighting the destabilising tendencies and predatory elements in the Casamance's neighbours.

A greater sub-regional overview in aid agency activities could also be helpful, and in this respect it is regrettable that UNHCR is to close its offices in Senegal, The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, even if its local partners will continue their refugee-related activities. More damaging, though, was the flight of donors in 1997, which stymied development in the Casamance and weakened the credibility of aid activity. Now that the situation is calmer and a political peace process (however troubled) in place, sustained donor commitment to the Casamance is needed.

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during 2000 and 2001. Thanks to the numerous Casamançais who agreed to be interviewed, including many agency and NGO staff, and the SOAS Scholarships Fund for a Research Student Fellowship and Additional Fieldwork Award in support of doctoral research.

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## The humanitarian impact of neglect: Uganda's emergencies

*Uganda is widely regarded as one of Africa's few success stories. But, says Mark Adams, this rosy picture masks continuing natural crises, civil conflict and political emergencies*

When it is in the news at all, Uganda is often associated with progressive policies of democratisation and poverty reduction, and successes achieved in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Yet this image hides a more complex reality that includes displacement, natural disaster and conflict. Long-running insurgencies in the north (Acholiland) and west (Rwenzoris), along with raiding by Karamojong in the north-east, have left more than 500,000 people displaced. Organisations such as Amnesty International regularly report systematic rape and mutilation of civilians by rebel groups; according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), an estimated 6,600 children are

missing, abducted by rebels. In early 2001, an additional 190,000 people in the Karamoja region in the north-east were classified as drought-affected. Uganda is also host to almost 176,000 refugees, principally from Sudan.

Despite their heavy human cost, these emergencies seem to have been largely forgotten by the international community. Last year, funding for the UN's annual Consolidated Appeal for Uganda was expected to reach just 40% of needs, with \$14,680,300 committed. In 1999, internally-displaced people (IDPs) in Uganda received around \$2-worth of assistance per head, compared with \$23 in Afghanistan, and \$21 in Liberia. NGOs, on which the Ugandan government has generally relied for assistance to IDPs, have also struggled to raise funds. In September 2000, a joint position paper issued by ten international NGOs calling on the EU to increase funding for emergency response activities met with only a limited response.

The reasons for this neglect are complex, to do with government competence and commitment within Uganda, and the political and strategic priorities of donor states. As OCHA puts it: 'The perception of Uganda as a strategically located and favoured nation discouraged some potential donors from acknowledging the various crises and the need to restore basic services and rights. There was a tendency to "close one eye" in order to maintain relations'.

### Capacity and governance failings

The internal nature of Uganda's emergencies – in particular the IDP problem – means that responding

### Uganda: key indicators

Population	24 million
GNP per capita (1999)	\$1,160
Life expectancy	male 45; female 47
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	94
Percentage of population over 15 illiterate	male 22; female 42
Percentage of population with access to safe water	50

Source: UN Population Fund, [www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)

to them is seen by large donors as principally the government's responsibility. There are instances of funding being channelled through state structures to finance programmes jointly implemented by NGOs and the government, but in such cases NGOs are largely sub-contractors, and there is little funding available for NGO-defined interventions.

Placing a government at the centre of an emergency response is correct in many ways. Legally, governments are responsible for assisting and protecting their own citizens. However, many NGOs believe that this reliance on the state and government for emergency response as part of a long-term development process has ignored the needs and rights of the victims of these emergencies. Experience suggests that, while resources are made available at a national level, and government commitments are made to respond to the needs of displaced and emergency-affected populations, this does not necessarily translate into effective emergency response by local government structures. Government institutions and local authorities have struggled to come to terms with the changes that have taken place in the relationship between NGOs, donors and the authorities. They continue to look on NGOs, rather than themselves, as providers of resources and services. In western Uganda, for example, district authorities are calling on NGOs to provide support for resettling IDPs.

The reasons for government failure include decentralisation, poor capacity and corruption. As a result of the process of decentralisation, which began in 1992, poorly-resourced districts with little human capacity are required to design and implement emergency interventions. Many have struggled to do this, hampered by the often poor civil service staffing that exists in peripheral, isolated and conflict-affected areas. In addition, revenues have decreased in these areas because displacement has reduced local tax-raising capacity. Often, district and national authorities call on international NGOs to assist them but, lacking resources, there is relatively little that NGOs can do. Corruption is also a major problem; Transparency International (TI) ranks Uganda as the third most corrupt nation in the world, and has estimated that 54% of all government money is lost through graft.

### Strategic and political factors

The response of donor governments to the emergencies in Uganda is influenced by strategic and political factors. To Western donor governments, Uganda is popular not only because of its efforts to pursue a democratic, economically liberal and pro-poor model of development after decades of war and decline, but also because it occupies a strategic position in the Great Lakes region. The conflict in Acholiland is linked to Uganda's support for the insurgency in southern Sudan waged by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which has bases in northern Uganda. While Uganda has its own historical and political reasons for this support, it is also useful to other countries that wish to contain and punish the regime in Khartoum, particularly the US.

External perceptions of Uganda as a stable and progressive state have meant that, over the past 15 years, assistance to the country has been predominantly developmental, rather than humanitarian. Donor nations and multilateral donor institutions have increasingly focused on working with the government to implement programmes of democratisation, economic development and poverty eradication and to assist with efforts to counter HIV/AIDS, using programme-based rather than project-based instruments such as sector-wide approaches (SWAps) and general budget support. However, humanitarian action in conflict-related emergencies is typified by a project-based response to identified needs, delivered impartially by organisations that jealously guard their neutrality. Development assistance has very different features, including a much bigger scale, the abandonment of neutrality and conscious efforts to legitimise and strengthen government and state structures. Having made the switch to a developmental approach, reverting to emergency relief would represent a political, as much as a technical, decision, implying a reduction in political and practical support to the government. Given the general international political support for the Ugandan government, governmental and multilateral donors may well be reluctant to take such a decision.

On the ground, many NGOs have used humanitarian, not developmental, models. Emergency interventions are planned and implemented on a project basis. The security of personnel demands that agencies do not associate themselves too closely with the government or its representatives. In most parts of the country, however, security is good, the government is relatively popular and such operating procedures seem inappropriate. Nor do they reflect the relationship between donors and the authorities. Balancing these different ways of working and the response to these different situations is not easy. Trying to run emergency-type interventions within a broader 'development' context has given rise to considerable problems and tensions.

International NGOs and agencies are coming to terms with this in a number of different ways. Some feel that the only course of action is to 'hunker down' and see out this situation, remaining ready to provide assistance to conflict- and emergency-affected populations when the political context changes and donors are more willing to fund international agencies directly. Others are investigating other ways of advancing their work, such as information-gathering and sharing; joint planning and project implementation and advocacy, between NGOs and with UN agencies; building local government capacity for emergency response; and encouraging the development of national policies and capacity. OCHA, for instance, is encouraging the government to develop a clear policy on IDPs in an effort to give substance to its legal responsibilities of protection and care.

Whether these alternative ways of working will prove effective is unclear. They do nonetheless seek to



address the pressing needs of emergency-affected populations within the constraints that exist. However, funding remains limited even for initiatives such as these. ECHO has claimed that it is unable to respond to emergency project proposals from international NGOs in Uganda because different agencies have given the office inconsistent and therefore unreliable information. Yet an attempt by Oxfam to carry out a comprehensive survey of IDP needs in the west of the country has indicated that there is also inconsistent interest in funding assessments and surveys. In November last year, Oxfam reported that the study was only 50% funded.

At the same time, donors themselves seem unwilling or unable to clarify the criteria they use to decide whether or not a particular situation is a humanitarian emergency or not. This is obviously functional – donors do not wish to be constrained by ‘technical’ criteria into responding or not responding to emergencies when decisions are probably made as much, if not more, on the basis of resources and political considerations. However, without such clarity, good-quality information is not necessarily the key to prompting action that the donors sometimes suggest. Efforts by NGOs generally to establish minimum standards for emergency response through the Sphere Project and the Quality Platform, and recent efforts by CARE Australia to develop independent criteria for emergencies, are important initiatives to address these inconsistencies in emergency response. In this context, however, they may be doomed.

### The human cost of neglect

Uganda does not fit into the neat boxes we have constructed for managing aid programmes. The country is peaceful and stable in some places, but in others is in the midst of long-term and often extremely violent conflicts, in which civilians are the principal target. The support of most bilateral and multilateral donors for the present government is

important in promoting long-term development for much of the country, but it has failed to address the needs of emergency-affected people. Moreover, the political commitment to development, rather than humanitarian assistance, appears to have contributed to the downplaying of these needs. Efforts to encourage minimum standards, professionalisation and consistency of emergency response in the humanitarian sector underline the fact that this is no reason for neglect, but rather for a proportional response. When a country has more than 550,000 IDPs, surely the response should be substantial.

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## Shabunda: the ‘forgotten Kosovo’

*For the international relief community, the DRC’s complex and brutal four-year war has become another of the world’s neglected emergencies. Humanitarian need is desperate, but insecurity and distance mean that large areas of the conflict are isolated from any relief. Charles Mampasu describes the effect that this neglect has had in Shabunda*

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is in the grip of some nine individual conflicts – internal, international and internationalised – among six national armies and 21 irregular groups. More than 2.5 million people have died, and this only in areas where NGOs are based. Isolated and cut-off regions are forgotten, and the poverty and fear in which their people live have not been addressed by donors and most relief agencies alike. Currently, only one international NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), is active in Shabunda.

### The extent of the crisis in Shabunda

The Shabunda region is particularly isolated. It is the largest territory in South Kivu province, covering more than 25,000 square kilometres, and home to over a million people. It is in the extreme east of DRC; the administrative centre, Shabunda, is nearly 3,000km from the capital, Kinshasa. This isolation is compounded by the lack of communications. There are no telephones, no postal services and no radio. Only landing strips keep the territory from being completely cut off. Conflict in Shabunda is

widespread, and depredation by armed groups common. Hundreds of people have been killed, and many exist in a climate of fear and acute insecurity. Many have taken refuge in jungle areas, or in towns where relief agencies have a presence, like Bukavu, Kalima and Kindu. Others have resigned themselves to these conditions, and joined armed bands.

Once the granary of Kivu, Shabunda today faces hunger and widespread malnutrition. Traditional subsistence agriculture is at a standstill, livestock rearing has been decimated and fisheries have been destroyed. People are living off tubers and manioc leaves, which grow wild along the roads. Signs of marasmus and Kwashiorkor are everywhere, and malnourished women are unable to breastfeed their children properly. Facilities for processing agricultural products, such as palm nuts and rice, have been destroyed, and jobs are largely non-existent. Although Shabunda is extremely rich in mineral resources, their exploitation is monopolised by the Great Lakes Mining Company, an operation set up by one of the area's rebel groups.

Rates of morbidity and mortality have rapidly increased; four out of five children die before they reach five years of age. There is very limited access to primary health care. The only referral hospital in Shabunda is in ruins. A health centre, run by Catholic nuns, serves a population of some 35,000, and cannot hope to meet demand. Five or six patients share treatment courses meant for one, and the single doctor is the only one in the territory. The territory's 50 or so dispensaries cater for a population of 1.5m – one for every 30,000 or so people. Only the Shabunda facility has anything like adequate supplies. Illnesses that had been eradicated, such as smallpox, chickenpox and measles, have reappeared. Meanwhile, widespread rape of women and young children by armed groups has led to high rates of HIV infection. What schools exist are without equipment, and have little prospect of getting any. Over 95% of children no longer have access to any education at all. In the face of this disaster, new local groups have proliferated: associations of young Christians, women, widows, parents of school-age children, small planters, fish farmers and brick-makers.

### Why has Shabunda been forgotten?

Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis in Shabunda, how has it remained unknown to international relief agencies? The answer lies partly in the fact that those who wield power in the territory wish it to remain unknown because this allows them to continue to exploit the territory's mineral wealth in secret. Second, high levels of insecurity make any relief work dangerous; ASCDES, for instance, has moved its coordinating office out of the territory. Insecurity has also reportedly reduced access for MSF. Third, unlike Kosovo, the DRC in general is regarded by many Western governments and donors as an overwhelmingly big and complicated crisis, of little direct strategic interest or threat.



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*Six armies and 21 irregular groups are fighting in Shabunda*

### What needs to be done

In the face of this disaster, well-planned emergency aid could play a triple role. It could provide a space for people to commit themselves to a range of peace initiatives; supply the means for local and international aid agencies to set up a forum for cooperation; and be a catalyst for raising financial and material resources to provide immediate relief and promote sustainable development. Given the depth of need, this work would need to proceed in stages.

#### First stage:

- strengthen the capacity of local civil society to publicise humanitarian disasters, through technical training and technical, financial and logistical support;
- organise an inclusive awareness-raising meeting for the benefit of both the authorities and the beneficiaries;
- focus on the most vulnerable; and
- make the beneficiaries aware of the need to repair the roads and landing strips to allow access to relief supplies.

#### Second stage:

- draw up the best possible inclusive intervention policy, together with beneficiaries, local organisations and local authorities; and
- set priorities together.

#### Third stage:

- identify and set up centres where humanitarian interventions can be based.

Any intervention will also need to identify main spheres of activity.

Restoration of the infrastructure (roads and landing strips, health centres and schools):

- identify village groups of rehabilitation volunteers;
- distribute equipment and materials: spades, wheelbarrows, pickaxes, saws, axes and machetes;
- provide metal sheeting, nails, saws, planes and masonry tools; and
- train education staff in setting up income-generating projects to pay teachers and help in the running of schools.

Health and nutrition:

- supply essential drugs and medical materials;
- provide the logistics for dispatching these products to existing services;
- set up feeding centres, and aid-distribution centres;
- train staff in resource management;
- set up community village pharmacies;
- distribute agricultural tools to farming and fish-breeding groups;

- rebuild livestock; and
- provide technical training to farming groups.

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## Russia, Chechnya and the international community

*When the outside world looks at Chechnya at all, it sees a hotbed of extremism and terrorism. Yet, says **Dmitry Furman**, the more the Chechen 'problem' becomes just another forgotten crisis or one more target of US anger after 11 September, the more forcefully it will impose itself later*

The current Chechen crisis began either in 1991, when the Chechens declared their independence from Russia, or in 1994, when Russian President Boris Yeltsin decided to put the separatists down. The roots of the conflict are deep. In the nineteenth century, Chechen opposition to Russian imperial expansion led to a series of wars and uprisings, which were brutally suppressed; where an estimated 1,500,000 Chechens lived in Chechnya at the start of the nineteenth century, the 1926 Soviet census listed just 400,000. This sequence of revolt and repression continued into the 'second' Russian empire, the Soviet Union. During the civil war that followed the Revolution, the Chechens fought against 'White' forces. The Bolsheviks initially promised the Chechens self-government according to Islamic law, and promoted Chechen culture and the development of the nation. However, the bureaucratic and totalitarian character of the Soviet state was at odds with Chechen values and traditions, and uprisings continued during the Soviet period. Under Stalin in 1944, Chechens were deported en masse to Kazakstan and Central Asia and Chechnya ceased to exist as an entity within the Soviet Union. Up to a quarter died during resettlement, or were murdered. Under Khrushchev, Chechnya was reconstituted as an 'autonomous republic' within the Russian Federation, and surviving deportees returned. For the Chechens, the deportation represents not only an episode of great suffering, but also a humiliation – a trauma which has made it impossible for Chechens to live within Russia as a national minority.

### Post-Soviet Chechnya

As the Soviet Union broke up in 1991, Chechnya declared independence from the Russian Federation. However, unlike the Union republics such as Georgia and Moldova, Chechnya's status as an autonomous republic within Russia placed it in a different position under international law. The Union republics, whatever their position in practice, were legally considered to be sovereign states within the Soviet Union. Chechnya, by contrast, did not have sovereign status, and its declaration of independence has not been recognised internationally. Perversely, this has meant that Union republics that never attempted secession, such as Belarus, were in effect forced into independence, while a region like Chechnya, that the Russian and then Soviet state had striven to wipe out, was compelled to remain within a political framework that it rejected.

Post-Soviet Russia is the third incarnation of Russian statehood with which the Chechens have had to deal. The experience has turned out to be no better than the previous two. Immediately after the Soviet collapse, when democracy and anti-imperialism was in the air, the Russian authorities came close to recognising Chechen independence; on their side, Chechens were prepared to accept a compromise formula such as 'associate membership' of the Russian Federation. However, as Russians became disenchanted with economic reform and increasingly nostalgic for the certainties of the Soviet Union, and presidential elections approached,

Yeltsin seized upon the Chechen issue as a useful distraction. Positions hardened, and conflict began. Following his victory in elections in 1996, Yeltsin had no further political use for the war. Under the Khasavyurt agreements, Russian troops withdrew from Chechnya, but the issue of Chechnya's status was deferred.

After three years of relative calm, the second phase in the Chechen conflict began in late 1999, and is linked with the emergence of Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, who became acting president when Yeltsin stepped down in December. Following incursions by Chechen fighters into the neighbouring republic of Dagestan, and a series of bomb blasts in Moscow and other Russian cities which left almost 300 dead and which have never been fully explained, Russian troops re-entered Chechnya in September 1999. As with the earlier episode, some commentators have suggested that the latest round of fighting may have more to do with the political objectives of Moscow's élite than with Chechen separatism; certainly, there is suspicion that the bombings in Moscow and elsewhere may have been the work of provocateurs, rather than Chechen militants.

The two wars have devastated Chechnya. The capital, Grozny, is as ruined as Stalingrad after the great battles of the Second World War. No one knows how many people now live in Chechnya, but it is clear that the majority of the pre-conflict population are now refugees in Russia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. As was the case with the first conflict, the authorities no longer have much need of it, and ordinary Russians are beginning to weary of it. However, achieving an agreement along the lines of Khasavyurt will be much more difficult than it was in 1996. Public opinion is much less important today than it was then, given the stronger control Putin is exerting over the media and the electoral process. Moreover, Putin has staked more on the conflict than did Yeltsin, and would find it more difficult than his predecessor to step down. Conversely, the Chechens have not been able to grasp why, given the end of the Soviet Union and the supposed emergence of democratic politics in Russia, they have not been accorded the same rights as other nations. In fact, independence *per se* is not the aim; rather, Chechens see independence as the best way of protecting their nation against a second deportation, and to secure themselves against the vicissitudes of Russian history. While the Chechens do not have the forces to defeat Russia militarily, by reason of their history they will also never consent to Chechnya remaining part of the Federation. Even if the fighters, exhausted and depleted, surrender, a new generation of Chechens will eventually emerge to take up the struggle again, and perhaps in more virulent form. Thus, for Russia victory in the short term may in the long term be worse than defeat.

### The impact of international neglect

The Chechens' sense of injustice lies, not only in their treatment at the hands of successive Russian regimes, but also in the attitude of the outside world to what is an extremely bloody and amoral conflict. In Kosovo,



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*Grozny: a new Stalingrad?*

Serb suppression of Kosovar Albanian separatism, which was much less cruel than Russian suppression of Chechen opposition, prompted a full-scale military response and significant Western action. Even though no one has been prepared to grant Kosovo legal independence or condone its integration into Albania, Kosovo is *de facto* independent from Belgrade, and under NATO protection. Macedonian Albanians have also achieved the most that they could in a unified Macedonian state. By contrast, pressure on Russia from the world community during the Chechen conflict has always been exceptionally weak.

Why is the international attitude to the Chechen conflict so strikingly different from the attitude to the Kosovan war? First, the Kosovan conflict is in Europe, and directly affects the major European powers. The Chechen conflict, on the other hand, is taking place in the world's backyard; refugees from Chechnya are not heading for Germany, but Georgia and Ingushetia. Second, Russia is still a nuclear power, and remains a large and powerful nation despite the changes that have taken place since the Soviet collapse. To offend it by, for instance, raising the issue of human rights abuse against Chechens by Russian forces, would be dangerous. And third, Russia has successfully presented the conflict, not as a political contest for power, but as a fight against extreme Islam and the forces of 'global terrorism'. Russia's position has become virtually unchallengeable in the wake of 11 September, and Moscow's support for the US-led 'campaign against terror'. However, the picture is more complex. At the start, Chechen separatism was modelled on the independence movements in the Baltic states around the collapse of the Soviet Union. The conflict became 'Islamised' only later, not least because Islamic extremism is the only force to have shown any sympathy with the Chechen cause.

It is unrealistic to expect that Russia will grant Chechnya independence in the near future; international law and current global conditions militate strongly against this, even if, eventually, independence



is the only workable outcome. Nevertheless, the international community can help to devise some formula, even if it is only partially acceptable to the parties, which would allow Russia to save face, while giving Chechens real guarantees for self-government. The Khasavyurt formula of 'deferred status' is not entirely a bad thing. However, international guarantees for the agreement are crucial (and were missing in the Khasavyurt agreements, which meant that they were dead from the start), with international monitoring of their implementation. Securing Russia's consent to such guarantees and monitoring will be extremely difficult, though not impossible. However, this requires immense, single-minded effort. To achieve any degree of success, what is needed above all is a real concern for the problem.

### The future

Even before 11 September, the Chechen conflict was no more than a minor embarrassment to Western leaders. Now, the West has stopped thinking about it altogether except as a cauldron of extremism. If continued Western indifference to the realities of the conflict confirms the Chechens in their sense of isolation and injustice, the war will only become bloodier

and more gruesome. Even Russian victory will prove short-lived unless steps towards real self-government are taken. For the international community, helping both Russia and Chechnya to find a way out of their present deadlock is not only a moral obligation, but an act of self-interest.

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## Manipulating humanitarian crisis in North Korea

*An estimated 3.5 million North Koreans may have died from starvation and related illnesses between 1995 and 1998, and more than 8m – over a third of the population – are in need of food aid. According to Jean-Fabrice Piétri, this is not so much a hidden crisis as a masked and manipulated one*

North Korea is in the midst of acute humanitarian crisis. Even with one of the largest allocations of food aid in the world – almost a million tonnes annually – famine will persist; many North Koreans subsist on roots and edible grasses. This crisis is unfolding within one of the world's most secretive, closed and inaccessible states, with a regime that appears impervious to the terrible conditions in which the bulk of North Koreans live. In the face of complete economic collapse and virtually total international isolation, the regime continues to proclaim socialism's imminent victory over the West, and to eulogise the near-mythical figure of its Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il.

Outsiders who manage to work in the country – for the most part humanitarians, UN employees and, exceptionally, a few journalists – are extremely discreet about what they see. For aid organisations, this silence is perhaps understandable: given the nature of the regime, keeping quiet is crucial if aid work is to continue. Yet this silence masks a deeper manipulation of the conditions in the country, whereby human need is used to conceal political agendas, both by the regime in Pyongyang and by the key outside powers with an interest in maintaining it.



*Famine will persist in North Korea*

### Collusion and shadow plays

This manipulation is first of all North Korean. There is no doubt that the humanitarian crisis in the country is severe, and that the country has suffered a number of natural disasters in the shape of droughts and floods. Yet it is also clear that the regime has used these events as an excuse for the wider failings of the economy. The fundamental North Korean principle of *juche*, roughly translated as 'self-sufficiency', sits uneasily with the tonnes of rice sacks, stamped 'Gift of the

USA', that are heaped on the dockside at the port of Nampo. This shadow play follows the same logic as another: imminent war. For half a century, the North has been on a war-footing for fear of imminent 'capitalist' attack. Thus, the regime justifies its paranoia, its obsession with security and its development of strategic weaponry, even while its people starve.

The international community has played its own part in these games. For the UN, for instance, it is far easier to convince donors to respond to an emergency caused by a natural catastrophe than to have to argue on the basis of real causes. Year after year, every hydrographic deficit is called an unprecedented drought, and every river that overflows causes exceptional flooding. After eight years of this little game, these statements no longer fool anyone, but everyone plays the game in order to allow the various actors to avoid the real issue, namely that the regime has failed. Everyone fully understands that the economic catastrophe suffocating this country has little to do with the climate and everything to do with the absurdity of the system; but everybody pretends that this is not the case.

So too the North's apparent 'security threat'. Why does the West sustain one of the world's largest food aid operations in a country recently declared by President Bush to be part of an 'axis of evil'? Why is the West propping up a 'rogue' regime, supposedly developing nuclear weapons and missiles that can reach Japan? Is it really fear that leads the West to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on North Korea? Some Russian diplomats slyly suggest that this situation mainly allows the US military to maintain an important presence in this key strategic zone, and also to keep its main allies in the area under pressure in the face of a potential enemy – China – whose military capacities are far more worrisome.

But there is also a more positive logic that leads the West to feed North Korea: a logic based on what has been called the 'soft landing' concept. The key idea is that maximising the country's opening to 'Western' inputs can only favour a progressive metamorphosis of the system, an insidious corrosion of this iron regime, and thus help prevent a brutal and painful political collapse. Humanitarian organisations have no business judging such a political choice. But all the same, they must not allow themselves to be used to conceal the fact that such a choice is being made. It seems that there is no longer any political action in and of itself, and that political action can no longer produce its own legitimacy: it has to justify itself by donning the mask of humanitarian aid.

### What of the UN?

The international community, in order to implement this strategy, has found a perfect tool in the UN system. If we believe that the aid brought to North Korea does not correspond to a clear humanitarian strategy, inasmuch as the most fragile populations cannot be clearly identified, what is left of the human-

itarian mandate of agencies such as the WFP or UNICEF? Let us be clear: we are not arguing the political decision to engage the UN in North Korea. This engagement proceeds from a political analysis of the situation and aims to produce political effects: only later, when results are known, will it appear whether these political choices were pertinent or not. But questions need to be asked about the instrumentalisation of UN agencies, and about the confusion between political and humanitarian ideals that this instrumentalisation causes.

A concrete example of this gap between a humanitarian analysis of the North Korean crisis and a political approach can be seen in the methodology of the implementation of aid to North Korea. The UN agencies conduct massive food aid distributions, and claim that they are certain that the food they donate reaches the most vulnerable populations, because they can control the presence of this aid in the public structures tasked with distributing it. Even if we accept that thus far they are correct – though they have never been able to produce any proof of this – this still leaves the key point, and one that the UN has so far refused to engage with: that a large part of the population, by definition its most vulnerable members, are excluded from these state structures. In North Korea, access to public institutions in no way means access to the hungry. Some time ago, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) noted the astonishing gap between overall levels of severe malnutrition, which stood at 15%, and the 1% level found in the nurseries and kindergartens of North Hamgyong, the most stricken province we worked in. There are children dying of malnutrition in North Korea, but they are not in the institutions where all the international aid goes. This is why food aid programmes in North Korea are not highly publicised, and why the UN agencies do not seem keen to seek media attention.

### Silence and morality

Between 1998 and 2000, ACF, like other agencies, limited its public declarations concerning the conditions under which humanitarian aid was being delivered in North Korea. As long as we could hope that, by sacrificing our role as witnesses, we could assist North Koreans where lives were at risk, we maintained this position. But such a silence becomes morally unjustifiable if it does not, in return, guarantee genuine access to these people. It is this realisation of failure that led a number of NGOs – MSF, MDM, CARE, Oxfam and ACF – to take the painful decision to withdraw from North Korea. For ACF, such a difficult decision necessarily had to go hand in hand with a public debate with the international community; we therefore launched discussions both with the UN and the NGOs that have remained in North Korea, without, we have to admit, seeing any tangible results as far as the logic of international aid programmes in North Korea is concerned. Those organisations still working in North Korea have decided to remain silent, a decision based on a belief in the regime's willingness

to change and on a perception of significant progress in the way agencies are allowed to work. A genuine debate must take place on this subject, but the UN agencies in particular have avoided this for far too long. Everyone benefits from the silence imposed on the crisis in North Korea – except the North Korean people. At a time when the UN is apologising for its ‘failure’ during the Rwandan genocide, its ‘inaction’ in Bosnia and its ‘lack of foresight’ in East Timor, is it already formulating expressions of regret for its ‘blindness’ in North Korea?

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## India's volatile north-east

*India's north-east has seen more violence in the last 50 years than any other part of the country. Yet, reports Siddharth Deva, the outside world knows virtually nothing about the crisis there*

More than half of all Indians killed in political violence in the 1980s and 1990s died in the north-east. The region is bedevilled with armed insurgencies or secessionist movements from over 50 groups. Thousands of people have died, and hundreds of thousands more are internally displaced, living in unhygienic, makeshift camps; every year, hundreds die from disease. Yet little is known about conditions in a region the size of the UK. ‘Quasi-martial’ law makes it difficult for journalists – Indian and foreign – to work in the region, while security concerns, government obstruction and the highly sensitive political situation hamper aid and protection efforts.

Seven states (also known as the Seven Sisters) constitute the Indian north-east: Assam (the largest and most important), Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Together, they cover a total of 255,000 square kilometres, with a combined population of over 30 million. The region is connected to the rest of India only by a narrow neck of land, the 21km-wide Siliguri corridor. It borders China, Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh. With the exception of Assam, this is a region of huge mountains and fierce rivers. It is home to over 200 tribal groups and sub-groups. Christianity is the majority religion in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, and there are substantial Christian minorities in the rest of the region.

### The roots of the insurgencies

Although each of the region's many and complex conflicts has its own roots and history, together they raise common issues to do with language and ethnicity, human rights, tribal rivalry and ethnic resentment, migration, under-development, control over local resources, access to markets, the decay of political institutions and a widespread feeling of exploitation and alienation from the Indian state.

There is little industry in the north-east, and agriculture is backward. Although the north-east has substantial reserves of oil, natural gas, limestone-dolomite and coal, political violence means that much of these resources go unexploited. There is also huge potential for hydroelectric power, but harnessing this raises environmental and political issues. In 2001, the Indian prime minister announced a \$2 billion development package for the area, but in the short term insurgency and the trade in small arms and narcotics will remain attractive options for the region's young people.

The oldest insurgency is in Nagaland. The main Naga militant group, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaak-Muivah), claims a territory six times the size of present-day Nagaland, including most of Manipur, as well as parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma. Assamese nationalism emerged in the late 1970s as a protest against immigration from West Bengal and the influx of ‘foreigners’ from Bangladesh. The most prominent Assamese insurgent group is the secessionist United Liberation Front for Asom (ULFA). While the ULFA has lost some of its mass appeal, it is still a major source of violence and instability. The Bodos, the largest plains tribe of Assam with an estimated population of 1.1m, are fighting for indigenous rights and tribal empowerment in a majority non-tribal state. They mobilised in 1987 to demand the creation of a separate state, Bodoland, and have since been driving away non-Bodos, especially the Santhals, to make their strongholds into exclusively Bodo areas. The Bodos have a pattern of ethnic cleansing that is missing from the ULFA, and India's response to their insurgency has been predominantly military.

### The Indian response

The Indian government's political and military efforts to deal with these various insurgencies have met with

mixed results. In the mid-1980s, the government signed a peace deal ending the 20-year insurgency in Mizoram, and making the Mizo leader chief minister in the newly-pacified state. Mizoram has since benefited from significant funds from the centre as part of a 'development package'.

Mizoram is often viewed as the model of a successful anti-insurgency policy, and its positive outcomes are attributed to the Indian government's willingness to allow an insurgent leader to emerge as an officially recognised figure within the political system. The Indian government appears to be trying the same approach in Nagaland, where it has accepted the NSCN (I-M) as its exclusive negotiating partner. The territorial ambitions of the Nagas have, however, complicated the picture because they infringe on territory belonging to other states. Moreover, the NSCN (I-M) does not represent all the Naga tribes. Although a ceasefire is in place, New Delhi's intensive counter-insurgency operations and the militarisation of daily life in the region have only compounded the problem. The local population is trapped between a repressive government and intolerant militants, against the backdrop of a shambolic democratic process. Delhi-appointed governors in the north-east play a dominant and meddling role in local political life, much to the irritation of local leaders.

The insurgencies also have a complicating regional aspect. Dissident groups have sought refuge in Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Burma, and have received training in Pakistan and China. New Delhi views the insurgencies in the north-east not as expressions of local discontent but as part of wider efforts at destabilisation by China and Pakistan. For New Delhi, the north-east is a hotbed of Pakistani intelligence activity.

### A more stable future?

The key to a safer future for the north-east lies in a

better mix of Indian policies, the principal ingredients of which are: economic development, focusing especially on the needs of the poor and socially neglected; greater tolerance of local control; a willingness to work with local leaders; a strengthened democratic process and stronger civil society institutions; and more intensive efforts at reconciliation.

Ultimately, the humanitarian situation in this region will only improve if peace is realised. As with Afghanistan today, peace must be 'bought' in India's north-east with the promise of genuine development that meets the aspirations of poor people and does not discriminate against any group or locality. This may be the only way to address the humanitarian impact of decades of violence in the region, which has caused so much human misery and devastation. Only then will the people of India's north-east be noticed by the international community, and given the attention they deserve.

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## HPN Network Paper 37

### A bridge too far: aid agencies and the military in humanitarian response by Jane Barry with Anna Jefferys. January 2002

Since the early 1990s, military forces have become increasingly involved in humanitarian assistance. This encroachment into what has traditionally been seen as 'humanitarian space' raises significant issues of principle, as well as policy and operational questions not only for humanitarian agencies, but also for the international community as a whole. These questions have only become more urgent in the wake of the war in Afghanistan following the attacks of 11 September, and the increasingly explicit linkage of military, political and humanitarian aims that it has engendered.

Some analysts consider this merging of humanitarian, political and military roles and goals inevitable, practical and desirable. Others believe that, in the attempt to bring political, military and humanitarian objectives within the same framework, there is a danger that humanitarian objectives and principles will be compromised; as a result, the capacity to alleviate suffering will be diminished. Still others take a pragmatic approach to civil-military cooperation, establishing policy and negotiating the more contentious 'grey areas' on a case-by-case basis.

Detailed analysis is lacking, and few guidelines for policy or practice have been developed. This paper clarifies the key issues of debate, and puts forward recommendations to further dialogue, and to guide policy and practice.



## Aid responses to Afghanistan: learning from previous evaluations

This article distils nine key lessons from previous evaluations that have direct – or potential – relevance to Afghanistan today. More than 50 formal evaluation reports were drawn on, supplemented by key evaluative studies. While there are unique aspects to the current situation in Afghanistan, many elements, and their likely evolution, stand comparison with previous crises and international responses. If aid actors learn the lessons of the past, there is a real opportunity to get relief and rehabilitation right.

### Lesson 1: develop a coherent policy framework that recognises ‘humanitarian space’

Aid cannot be a substitute for political action. In the absence of a just and sustainable political settlement, the potential achievements of aid will be modest. International responses are most effective when the full range of tools and forms of influence (political/diplomatic, military, economic, administrative, legal, social, rule of law and human rights instruments) are employed in a complementary manner. At the same time, policy coherence should not lead to the integration of all these tools into one monolithic management framework. They should be seen as complementary but different, sometimes uncomfortable, bedfellows. Humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality and the provision of aid on the basis of need have to be respected in relation to humanitarian work; overriding or disregarding such principles is likely to lead to reduced access to at-risk populations, and endanger the lives of humanitarian aid personnel.

As a result of the UN-led Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (SFA) process launched in 1997, the international community has significant experience of attempting to achieve policy coherence in Afghanistan (see Chris Johnson’s article on the SFA, page 19). However, the SFA did not realise its full potential as an aid coordination mechanism. The lessons of this experience, including both the importance and the difficulty of putting into place a functioning SFA, should be heeded. Particular attention should be given to the need for a clearer conception of the role of aid in relation to politics; agreement is needed on the appropriate role of aid, and structures and programmes designed accordingly.

### Lesson 2: international engagement must be long-term and inclusive

High levels of international engagement need to be sustained for many years in order to create the ‘space’ and necessary framework of incentives and disincentives to enable all parties to learn to live and work



*Will we get relief right this time?*

together and to achieve meaningful changes. Where these conditions are not met, as at key points in Somalia, Rwanda, Angola and Sierra Leone, the situation can rapidly deteriorate, and conflicts resume and deepen. Inclusiveness and ‘local ownership’ should be seen to embrace not only the leadership of different factions, but also key elements of civil society. In Somalia, early efforts to establish a centralised, internationally-recognisable form of government played into the hands of factional ‘warlords’. Later strategies undercutting the power-base of such factional leaders by strengthening the standing of elders, traditional leaders and women’s organisations have been broadly effective. However, the potential and procedures for transferring and scaling-up such initiatives are unclear.

### Lesson 3: approach and manage the situation as a regional crisis

During the crises in Rwanda, Somalia and Kosovo, the international response initially failed to take into account the regional nature of these emergencies, and the need to coordinate approaches inside the affected country with approaches in neighbouring states. This requires some form of regional political framework and the involvement of regional and sub-regional organisations. The so-called ‘6+2 Group’ of interested states (Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and China, plus the US and Russia), together with the UN, would seem to offer a key element of such a framework.

At the operational level, a regional approach requires:

- appropriate arrangements within organisations where two or even three separate departments may be responsible for Afghanistan and its six neighbours;

- good communication and regular face-to-face contact between key personnel working in Afghanistan and neighbouring states;
- a cross-border communication/media strategy so that all actors are informed about the goals and how aid and other forms of intervention are structured to realise them; and
- clear accountabilities framed according to the agreed division of labour among organisations.

#### **Lesson 4: coordination requires clarity of structure and leadership**

Coordination is vital in sensitive, potentially volatile contexts, where disjointed aid is less than fully effective, sending unintended 'signals' and affecting local perceptions of the role of external assistance. Large-scale responses generate multiple, overlapping coordination mechanisms, where lines of authority are unclear. Many organisations and agencies tend to disregard coordination mechanisms when they do not suit their interests. The initial relief response in Kosovo was markedly bilateral, with wide discrepancies in the level of provision for beneficiaries served by different national agencies. Coordination has been good in some places, such as East Timor and in Rwandan refugee camps in Tanzania, where strong leadership by agency personnel was reinforced by an ability to exercise control over physical access by agencies and their ability to access financial resources. Bilateral and multilateral donor organisations have a critical role to play in supporting international, national and local coordination mechanisms through their own behaviour, in vesting greater responsibility in the principal coordination mechanisms, and in their selection of operational agencies and sector activities. Donor organisations should collectively take the lead in developing criteria and benchmarks for assessing the performance of coordination mechanisms and the behaviour of those being coordinated.

#### **Lesson 5: the primary role of external military forces should be the provision of security and protection rather than aid delivery**

External military and peacekeeping forces have assumed varying degrees of 'humanitarian' aid delivery roles in many of the large-scale emergency operations since 1990, for instance in northern Iraq, Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Haiti, Kosovo and East Timor. What evidence there is suggests that they are several times more expensive per unit of aid delivered than humanitarian or commercial suppliers. In contexts where fighting has just ended and where the capacity of those channels is not sufficient, the military may play a useful role in the immediate restoration of vital infrastructure. Where external military forces undertake security roles, and particularly in those situations where they are belligerents in the conflict, a clear separation has to be maintained between such forces and any humanitarian and other aid delivery. Confusion of roles and of local perceptions of humanitarian and aid agencies can endanger the activities of agency personnel.

#### **Lesson 6: the relief–rehabilitation–development transition requires delegation of authority, flexibility and strengthened monitoring**

Evaluations of relief–rehabilitation–development transitions reveal continuing disjunctions between initial relief provision and the delivery of rehabilitation and longer-term development assistance. Current assessments of best practice point to the need for:

- a vision of the end-goals which is shared by the donor community and key local actors;
- a joint needs assessment that prioritises the essential elements of basic needs and peace-building efforts;
- early support for the rule of law (judiciary, security/policing) and land tenure institutions;
- rapid dispersal of funds for recovery needs, preferably through a common fund;
- delegation of spending authority to the field, and no tying of funds to particular projects, functions or donor-country nationals;
- the establishment of a tracking system for aid flows and benchmark measures in order to enable mid-course corrections, inform communication strategies and ensure accountability;
- clear schedules and assigned responsibilities for hand-over from emergency personnel and agencies to their successors undertaking rehabilitation and development programmes; and
- debt relief and the underwriting of recurrent costs for civil administration are often important elements of recovery giving local populations a sense of confidence that there are structures in place to deliver goods, services and protection.

#### **Lesson 7: strengthen, use and support local institutional capacity**

After such a long period of conflict and instability, the notion of what constitutes 'normality' may not be altogether clear in Afghanistan. However, evaluation evidence points to the critical role of normal daily activities and functioning local institutions, particularly those concerned with the rule of law, in creating a sense of progress, security and routine. In Rwanda, the level of destruction and disruption was so great that it took a considerable time to build up the implementation capacity of central and local government – a delay that increased local suspicions about the sincerity of the international community's commitment to the country. Institutions and organisations need sufficient resources to rebuild local confidence in them, while at the same time care needs to be taken to prevent the growth of corruption and identify legitimate local partners that are not associated with violence.

Unmanaged influxes of aid agencies are an increasing feature of high-profile international interventions. In Rwanda, approximately 200 organisations were present, in Kosovo some 300. Such influxes drive up office and housing rents, draw good local staff away from their normal roles and jobs, spur 'bidding competition' among organisations, and create the perception that agencies and their personnel are bene-

fitting more than the local population. The heightened cultural and religious sensitivities in Afghanistan reinforce the need to limit the number of international agencies and personnel and ensure the quality and training of staff. The most efficient way to contain the problems of expatriate dominance and disruption is to prioritise the identification and engagement of local and national emergency and rehabilitation actors, even where national and governmental structures remain weak or not fully legitimate. The significant skills and capacities within Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora should be recognised and harnessed; this will require leadership and action by donor organisations.

### Lesson 8: understand and control the 'war economy'

Semi-legal and illegal activities can be an important motivation for factional conflict and for sustaining faction leaders in power. In Afghanistan, the key illegal commodity is narcotics. Early efforts to rehabilitate irrigation systems and re-establish production of food and other legal crops will be required, together with efforts to regulate and reduce the role of illicit trade. Drastic narcotic-substitution programmes will require safety nets for people made destitute. After such a long period of conflict, Afghanistan faces the very real prospect of entrenched chronic violence. Evaluative evidence points to the need for demobilisation and the regulation and reduction of war economies. Experiences from Ethiopia, Namibia and Uganda suggest three phases for effective demobilisation:

- i) demobilisation *per se* (including disarming and discharge);
- ii) reinsertion into civilian life; and
- iii) reintegration into the economy and society.

### Lesson 9: accountability and learning mechanisms need strengthening

Weaknesses in the accountability structures of aid organisations have been recurrent findings of many evaluations. Donors have a particular responsibility to provide leadership in promulgating consistent standards of accountability to beneficiaries of their assistance, as well as to taxpayers. Codes of conduct that have been developed in, for instance, South Sudan, Sierra Leone,

the Great Lakes and Somalia, could be adapted for use in Afghanistan. Mechanisms for ensuring that lessons from previous operations are incorporated into new and on-going operations are insufficiently developed in many organisations, and in the aid system generally. A potential mechanism at the field level is the Learning Support Office concept developed by ALNAP.

This article is drawn from a paper submitted to a Senior Level meeting of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD by Niels Dabelstein, the Chair of the DAC Working Party for Aid Evaluation, in December 2001. The paper was based on contributions from John Borton (ALNAP); Ian Christoplos (Collegium for Development Studies, Uppsala University); John Eriksson (Operations Evaluation Department, IBRD); Shepard Forman (Center on International Cooperation, NYU); Hans Lundgren (OECD/DAC); Larry Minear (Humanitarianism and War Project, Tufts University); and Joanna Macrae (Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI). The full paper is available at the ALNAP website at [www.alnap.org](http://www.alnap.org).

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## The Strategic Framework Review: lessons for post-Taliban Afghanistan

*The Strategic Framework for Afghanistan was designed to promote greater coherence between the assistance and political wings of the UN. Three years later, the Strategic Framework Review concluded that it has failed. Chris Johnson summarises the findings of the Review*

Afghans look to the future with a mixture of hope and fear. Hope that, after more than two decades of war, something good will finally happen; fear that the

country will return to the chaos of the early 1990s. The Afghan Interim Authority, agreed in Bonn in December 2001, and plans for holding a *Loya Jirga* and

eventual elections constitute a beginning. But a political transition will have to take place if Afghanistan is to see lasting peace. How the political, assistance and human rights objectives of the UN interconnect will significantly affect the chances of that transition being made successfully.

### Background to the Strategic Framework

By the time the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (SFA) came into being in 1998, the *Taliban* had consolidated their position in Afghanistan. The UN's work, meanwhile, was in a state of crisis, with the political and aid missions failing to make any significant impact, and often pursuing conflicting courses with scant regard for each other. Externally, two other developments were under way:

- the role of international assistance in conflict situations generally was subject to growing criticism and calls for reform; and
- reflecting this climate, the UN was thinking through its role and organisational structure.

The changing relationship between aid and politics had also led to a rethinking of the concepts of peace and security. Since international insecurity is now seen as threatened by forces associated with under-development and exclusion, the promotion of development and inclusion becomes a *strategic* act that contributes to global security. Thus, aid takes on a security role insofar as its activities are thought to promote peace and stability through contributing to such things as conflict resolution and social reconstruction.

The SFA was an example of the significant change in the way that aid in conflict situations is organised, coordinated and managed. It set out a new role for the UN that involved greater coherence between the political and aid missions in order to maximise the opportunities for peace. Human rights were always integral to the SFA, but it was not until later that they were distinguished as its third institutional pillar. The SFA did not require these three pillars to merge or be brought under common management. Rather, it advocated that political, assistance and human rights actors should 'inform and be informed by each other'.

The notion of the 'failed state' underpinned the SFA. In a failed state, the aid programme is transformed into a series of technologies that promise to rejoin what has been fragmented and rebuild what has collapsed. At the same time, the diplomatic mediation and alliance strategies of the UN Special Mission for Afghanistan (UNSMAs) were seen as problematic. For the purposes of peace-making, a failed and criminalised state does not provide acceptable political interlocutors; the only legitimate activity is to build a non-élite politics from below. The failed state notion also justifies the idea of the UN system acting as a 'surrogate government' – despite having to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the rulers of this 'failed state'.

Rather than a 'failed state', the review team felt that Afghanistan was better seen as an 'emerging political complex', an adaptive system that relied on links to local and global networks and in which new, if often illiberal, forms of economic development and political control and legitimacy were evolving. This posed a series of problems – humanitarian, economic and political – for regional and Western governments that had few obvious solutions.

### The SFA in practice

The workings of the SFA in practice suffered from a number of problems and contradictions.

In the field, the relationship between politics and aid was characterised by division and animosity, not unity. The workings of UNSMA and the aid agencies differed in many ways. UNSMA saw Afghanistan under the *Taliban* more as a rogue state than a failed state, and so wanted to restrict development aid, not increase it. It regarded much of the information it collected as confidential, and had no pretensions to transparency; it was not 'project funded', and reported to the Security Council. The *Taliban* themselves distinguished between aid and politics, and showed themselves adept at manipulation. By closing the UNSMA offices in February 2001, they penalised the latter, though this did not seem to concern many aid actors. The international community too was divided on key questions, such as isolation versus engagement. These are differences that cannot just be coordinated away.

The Strategic Framework also failed to overcome institutional obstacles that worked against a viable strategy for promoting human rights. The problem was not so much with individuals or objectives – human rights were accepted by most to be an integral part of the SFA – but with efforts to implement human rights principles in a culture ill-equipped to deal with competing priorities. Efforts to advance human rights protection in the field were also undermined by the fact that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) was left out of the original SFA, and had little involvement in Afghanistan.

Another key problem that the SFA was unable to address was the culture of impunity, an issue neither the Security Council nor the OHCHR tackled with the seriousness it deserved. In the absence of meaningful political attention, and very little commitment to protection concerns both inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan, assistance actors were alone in trying to address political/civil rights concerns along with economic and social rights. The UN tended to pursue an incomplete agenda that favoured economic and social rights above others, and addressing human rights in a more coherent manner was not helped by the poor relations between the UN Coordinator's Office and the Civil Affairs Unit. In the event, changing the *Taliban's* approach to rights issues proved almost impossible for agencies. Another concern was the lack of attention to refugee protection, an issue not explicitly addressed in the SFA.



In the assistance community more generally, the diverse political, assistance and institutional agendas of agencies and donors prevented the level of policy coherence that the SFA required. This could be seen in the way that agency agendas dominated the evolution of the elements that made up the architecture of the SFA, and in the resilience of the local, short-term, project-level interventions that characterise most work in Afghanistan. It could also be seen in the resistance of both donors and agencies to coordination over issues of engagement. UN agencies have been notably resistant, yet the UN can hardly expect to lead a coordinated effort if UN agencies cannot coordinate among themselves. While much of the reason for this lies in the institutional agendas of agencies, donors bear perhaps the ultimate responsibility as they simultaneously delegated responsibility for making the *Taliban* more respectable to the aid system, and undermined the chances of this happening by their funding practices and by insisting on engagement at the project level.

The SFA was also plagued by institutional rivalries and jealousies that did much to discredit what was an imaginative and bold initiative. However, the reasons for its failure were not seen primarily as managerial or organisational in nature. Rather, the relationship between aid and politics represented a major unresolved and inadequately analysed issue between donor governments.

### Implications for the current situation

The key lessons of the Strategic Framework Review were that:

- the international community needed to resolve the conflict between politics and aid – and having decided which course it wanted to take, back it accordingly;
- the UN system needed to develop ways to reconcile, or judge between, competing priorities;
- the political mission needed to develop a better understanding of the political and economic networks operating in Afghanistan and their

regional and global links, and to adapt its activities to take account of non-state actors;

- key political problems could not be resolved by delegating responsibility to the aid system: aid cannot fill a broader policy vacuum;
- the ability of aid to play a strategic role, especially in relation to security concerns, was limited;
- serious attention needed to be given to addressing the prevailing culture of impunity; and
- there needed to be a commitment to protection concerns, both inside Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries.

The Review revealed systemic problems and analytical contradictions, both in the SFA itself and among the agencies involved. Rather than a technical problem of coordination, intrinsic and unresolved differences remained over the nature and role of politics, assistance and rights. While the events of 11 September have rendered some of the specifics redundant, the question of how the international community engages with Afghanistan is more important than ever. The Review's conclusions argue for the continued need to give serious political attention to Afghanistan; for a recognition that there will be no long-term stability unless a proper attempt is made to end the climate of impunity and address human rights issues; and for an assistance community that can put shared goals for a country ahead of agency mandate and the desire for profile. Afghans have suffered much; they deserve no less than that the international community rises to these challenges.

**Chris Johnson** was the Director of the Strategic Monitoring Unit at the time the Strategic Framework Review was undertaken. She is now a freelance consultant. *The Review of the Strategic Framework for Afghanistan*, by Mark Duffield, Patricia Gossman and Nicholas Leader, was published in September 2001. See the Afghanistan Assistance website: [www.pcpafg.org](http://www.pcpafg.org). For more analysis of the Strategic Framework and a description of its principles, see Penny Harrison, 'The Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming: A Challenge to Humanitarian Assistance', *Humanitarian Exchange* 19, September 2001.

## Was international emergency relief aid in Kosovo 'humanitarian'?

**Raymond Apthorpe** on learning the lessons of the Kosovo crisis

There are at least a dozen agency-commissioned evaluations of the international aid response in Kosovo, together with another three dozen essays and articles similarly evaluative in intent. Although their quality, credibility and coverage vary greatly, taken together they give a broad view of an aid response. This article assesses the key messages emerging from these evaluations, and

asks whether the aid community can succeed in learning from them.

### Key messages

The principal message of these evaluations is that the international community – NATO included – lacked the capacity to respond rapidly to large-scale emergency

needs. These evaluations also note a significant lack of professionalism. Even where they existed, training and guidelines were bypassed. Professional codes of conduct for behaviour in a complex emergency were either unknown, neglected or denied in the field. Instead, a sort of ‘institutional amateurism’ ruled.

This lack of due professionalism extended to at best an ambiguous conceptualisation – for operational purposes – of what exactly a ‘crisis’ (and different types of ‘crisis’) would and should connote for the organisations concerned. By some standards, no assistance emergency, as classically defined, actually occurred. The refugees were relatively better nourished, healthier and with better access to good resources (including remittances) than those in other emergencies. Furthermore, the quality of sanitation and environmental health interventions would probably not have been sufficient to prevent large-scale epidemics if the conflict had occurred in a more typical emergency context. Rather than emergency assistance, what was actually at stake was protection. Yet the emphasis on emergency assistance meant that no framework was in place in which even the ICRC could carry out its protection activities from March to June 1999. No provision for protection was available for civilians, either on the ground or from the air.

The evaluations of the aid response generally accept that NATO’s contributions, for example in the form of the refugee camps soldiers built, were of great logistical importance. However, there was doubt as to whether they were built efficiently, as well as rapidly. Even members of the military accept that good construction guidelines were lacking. The Americans’ Camp Hope was quickly nicknamed ‘Camp – hope it doesn’t rain’ (it did).

### Weaker or contested messages

In addition to the messages that ring loud and clear, there are other signals which are weaker or more contested. All the evaluations comment on the large amounts of bilateral aid ‘thrown’ at relief, not – this time – at development. Some see this as having created problems for a population that was already fully employed in reconstruction when the international community intervened. For a decade, Albanians in Kosovo had been forced to create their own parallel civil society, from kindergartens to health clinics, architecture schools and a vibrant independent media. Thus, interventions can be seen as peremptory, non-consultative and over-dependent on ‘in-and-out’ commercial contractors; in a word, these interventions were debilitatingly dispossessing, rather than constructively supportive.

Conclusions about issues to do with human resources among the aid agencies were also less clear-cut. Where there is some evaluation of human resource management, little positive is said; one Kosovar employed by an international NGO reported to me that the organisation behaved ‘just like the communist party,



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*Large-scale need: within two weeks, over 100,000 people fled Kosovo for Macedonia*

powerful, rich with resources, coming in from afar, and knowing only how to look after their own – in this case foreign – staff’. Unprofessional personnel management appears to have been the norm, as in other emergencies, with a familiar pattern of short-term assignments, lack of appropriate training, lack of briefing on arrival and departure – and, as ever, gender issues were reportedly ‘forgotten again’.

As in virtually all evaluations of all international emergencies, ‘poor coordination’ is blamed for a lot. Also like most evaluations, analysis does not go much farther than that. Yet where serious comment is offered, some interesting questions are raised. Higher-level and strategic coordination was lacking, but did this in and of itself account for much in the pattern of the response overall, where good coordination was forthcoming at lower, more operational, levels? One or two of these evaluations suggest that this was not the case. None of these evaluations addresses the question of whether the high-level coordination role should have been assigned to UNHCR. UNHCR was heavily criticised from all angles. Arguably, a different division of responsibility, between the OSCE, WFP and OCHA, may have worked better.

### Absences: the politics of the Kosovo crisis

Despite their merits, much is missing in these evaluations, and much is treated anecdotally or erroneously. Fundamentally, these evaluations generally failed to take into account the social and political dynamics of the conflict. This results in the ‘humanitarianising’ of a crisis that is essentially political in nature. Even the word ‘conflict’ is practically absent; instead, these evaluations tend to refer simply to the ‘crises’ that the agencies in question perceived through the lens of their own mandates. On the rare occasions when these evaluations do speak about the conflict, this is labelled simply as ‘ethnic’. This kind of phoney analysis as to ‘ethnicity’ in effect serves as a substitute for meaningful political analysis, or allows evaluations to evade politics altogether. Thus, these evaluations oversimplify the complexities of Serbo-Albanian tensions,

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while the politics of Western intervention and the role of NATO bombing in *creating* a regional humanitarian crisis are insufficiently analysed.

### **Was the aid intervention in Kosovo humanitarian?**

The prejudiced use of the label 'humanitarian organisation' in these management evaluations does not in itself help answer the question whether what these agencies actually did qualifies as humanitarian. Among other things, this depends on what this key term is taken to mean. By and large, however, these evaluations did not define the term. All of these 'independent' evaluations treat supply-side agendas as if these pertain to donors only, and as if international NGOs did not have such organisation-driven agendas of their own, be they religious, social or even for that matter geopolitical.

If, in its narrowest meaning, to be humanitarian means to save threatened lives, did the international community's intervention in Kosovo on balance save more lives than were threatened, jeopardised or extinguished? What is the brute arithmetic of the human lives lost and saved in this conflict? Unfortunately, this calculation is not available. NATO's decision to launch the air campaign and rule out the use of ground forces lifted a key constraint on Milosovic and saved NATO lives. But it failed to deter an even bloodier offensive against civilians in Kosovo. As for the distribution of emergency relief assistance, emergency aid for the most part failed to reach those not in the refugee camps, that is around two-thirds of the total refugee population in Macedonia, and an additional proportion in Albania. Moreover, two or three of the most convincing evaluations suggest that this crisis, as with others, was absorbed and managed largely by the refugees themselves.

### **Epilogue: and now Afghanistan**

Will the international emergency response in Afghanistan turn out to be 'humanitarian'? All these Kosovo questions are pertinent here. Once again, there is significant military involvement in the emergency, raising questions

as to whether it is deserving of the label 'humanitarian'. Any number of international NGOs are also involved. However, the problems for evaluations to address in Afghanistan are even more complex, given the unstable regional situation and the interplay of interests in the US. To what extent, and how effectively, will the victims of the war be reached, by the relief service agencies or units concerned, as well as by evaluators? Will the nature of the conflict be taken into account by agencies in their programmes? Will institutionalised amateurism rule again? Will human rights issues again be translated just into emergency assistance issues? Will the analysis that is brought to bear be sufficiently historically, socially, economically and ethically informed to be credible – and useful? There will also of course once again be the gruesome arithmetic of lives and deaths to be done. Compared with how many lives are lost, how many were saved, and whose? And why did things have to turn out this way again?

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## Humanitarian action and private security companies

**Koenraad Van Brabant** assesses the vexed relationship between humanitarian agencies and security providers

Governments, commercial corporations, aid agencies and private citizens in many countries are using 'private security companies'. The growth of the private security sector has been rapid, but it has also by and large escaped public scrutiny and debate. Yet there are problematic aspects to it. Some governments, under pressure from armed insurgencies, have used private armies to bolster

their own weak national security and defence functions.<sup>1</sup> Other governments have used (or allowed) private security companies to provide proxy services to beleaguered regimes, where direct official assistance is deemed politically undesirable.<sup>2</sup> The growing interest in war economies, and the links between some types of private security company and resources like diamonds, oil and

<sup>1</sup> 'Private armies' are a form of private security company. They stand out because they engage in combat operations, either directly or through the provision of strategic and tactical advice. Most private security companies do not do this, instead limiting themselves to risk analysis, security audits and advice, security training, the provision of guards, hostage negotiation, the management of security provisions on behalf of a client and fraud investigation. Admittedly, though, the distinction is not always clear: there may be business ties between both categories. Moreover, several private security companies act as arms

brokers, a 'service' that is very much in the 'grey zone' of legality, and sometimes in outright breach of it.

<sup>2</sup> The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, an inter-parliamentary group in the UK that monitors how the British government conducts its foreign policy, has shown how vague and inconsistent communications between British government officials provided Sandline, the private security company concerned, with the scope for 'plausible denial', preventing further judicial action. See [www.publications.parliament...9899/cmselect/cmfa/116/11603.htm](http://www.publications.parliament...9899/cmselect/cmfa/116/11603.htm).



hardwoods, have drawn renewed attention to the dubious motives of some private security firms. Legal frameworks and oversight mechanisms tend to be inadequate, even in functioning states like the UK, while international arrangements are widely seen as toothless.

### **Aid agencies and private security companies**

These problems aside, aid agencies are using national and international private security companies, most commonly for risk analysis, staff training and professional advice on managing a particular crisis, such as a kidnap. Such companies have also been called upon to do 'security audits', and to provide guards for site protection. (Whereas in the past aid agencies have directly hired personnel from a private security company to serve as a security officer, this is nowadays rare.) Security firms are active in the field of demining, but have also offered their services in other areas, including advising on the protection of displaced populations. In doing so, they become contractors for the humanitarian departments of governmental donors, thereby benefiting from official humanitarian aid money.

#### **Agency policies**

Agencies tend not to have policies governing their use of private security firms, nor is consolidated information and experience available to guide agencies in formulating such a policy. Yet fundamental ethical, political and management issues are at stake. Is it unacceptable for humanitarian agencies to use security companies under any circumstances? Are there situations when this should be considered, for instance if doing so is the only available option for the protection of vulnerable and threatened populations? If an agency does engage a private security company, for instance to advise on site security or train staff, how can it ensure that the firm is reputable? Confidentiality means that companies will refuse to disclose the identities of their other clients, or the full range of their activities. Even if they do reveal this information, it is very difficult to ascertain whether the firm in question is linked to other, more dubious concerns; corporate relationships in this industry are notoriously and deliberately complex and obscure. More widely, by using private companies rather than relying on government forces, are agencies contributing to the 'privatisation of security', whereby security becomes, not a public good, but a privilege available only to those who can afford it? In organisational terms, is it really preferable to rely on outside expertise, rather than building up capacity internally?

#### **Agency attitudes**

Agencies are unlikely to stop using private security firms in the near future, and these ethical, legal and organisational questions will not disappear. Yet there is a widespread refusal to square up to the subject. Some agency staff simply deny that their organisation has ever used a private security firm, even when it patently has done so. They may argue that this is a false discussion, and that the focus should be on the failure

of politicians to provide secure conditions in which aid agencies can do their work. Some agency staff state that it is donors who are putting pressure on them to use private security companies, to get the aid through irrespective of principles.

### **Ways forward**

The questions that concern us here are not simple, and require action from the aid agencies, the regulatory authorities and the private security firms themselves.

#### **The aid organisations**

First and foremost, aid organisations operating in conflict situations need to work on their political analysis, notably with regard to the wider political and humanitarian environment. This includes the changing nature of conflict; the changing role and capacity of the state; and the increasing privatisation of traditional domains of the state and new roles for non-state actors. Agencies also need a more sophisticated understanding of the variety of organisations currently lumped together under the heading 'private security company'. Such firms encompass a wide range, from companies that engage in active combat to ones offering pure risk analysis and advice.

Agencies also need to look at their organisational response. Are principles and ethical positions well-defined? Are they adequate to guide the agency in its dealings with the private security sector? How does the use of private security companies fit with agencies' responsible management of the safety and security of their staff and assets, and the need to develop in-house competence in this regard? Within the humanitarian community as a whole, there is a real need to properly discuss the use of private security companies. This should not be done in theoretical terms, but on the basis of case material and experiences from aid agencies that have used private firms. This is not possible in the current climate of official 'denial', because acknowledging the facts may taint an agency's reputation.

#### **The regulatory authorities**

The legal and regulatory vacuum surrounding the private security sector has already been noted. Progress on this front will be difficult, not least because international legislation, and hence international consensus, is required. Nonetheless, there is scope for governments to develop or enhance national legislation covering the creation, registration and activities of private security companies within their purview. Now may be the time to revisit existing instruments, such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa, which is more than two decades old. It may also be possible for states to share information on the nature and activities of private security companies registered in their jurisdiction, making international efforts to monitor the sector more effective.

#### **The private security companies**

If private security companies want to be perceived as

legitimate and respectable enterprises, they must prove their integrity and credentials. They will therefore have to develop a code of ethics that is convincing both in principle and in its application, and demonstrate sufficient transparency and accountability to convince sceptical observers and potential clients that they are not hiding 'compromising' facts that would contradict the image that they portray.

**Koenraad Van Brabant** is Co-Director of the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP), Geneva, Switzerland. He is author of *Mainstreaming the Organisational Management of Safety and Security: A Review of Aid Agency Practices and a Guide for Management*, HPG Report 9 (London: Humanitarian Policy Group, 2001); and the HPN Good Practice Review *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments*, published in June 2000.

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## Mainstreaming disaster mitigation: findings of recent research

So-called 'natural' disasters are generally recognised as a major threat to social and economic development. Here, **John Twigg** outlines some recent research with important lessons for the NGO community

Each year since the 1970s, natural disasters have, on average, caused more than 80,000 deaths and affected the lives of some 144 million people, the great majority of them in developing countries. During the 1990s, the economic cost averaged some \$54 billion a year. Risk management therefore ought to be everyone's business, and measures to protect against future disasters are widely acknowledged to be not only necessary but also cost-effective. The poor and socially-disadvantaged are usually those most vulnerable to and affected by natural hazards. This is the result of the social, economic, cultural and political environment in which they live – the so-called 'vulnerability' context. This is most apparent in the economic pressures forcing people to live in dangerous locations, but other underlying causes include population growth, political structures, national and international economic systems, the unsustainable management of natural resources and rapid urbanisation.

Between October 1998 and March 2001, I and other researchers undertook a project to investigate the extent and nature of current NGO work in this area, and examine the factors that encouraged or hindered their involvement in mitigation and preparedness.

Through semi-structured interviews with over 200 people and the collection of internal and published documents, we studied 22 international relief and development NGOs based in the UK, and 40 NGOs in four developing countries: Bangladesh, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Zimbabwe. This article summarises some of the key findings.

### Institutionalising policy change

Mitigation and preparedness appear to be moving up the policy agenda in a number of NGOs, largely as the result of a recent series of major 'natural' disasters. Many people in British NGOs spoke to us of the influence of Hurricane Mitch (October 1998), which, because of its massive impact on Central America's long-term development, had forced them to reconsider their approach to natural hazards. The old view of disasters as one-off events is gradually being replaced by awareness of the connections between development processes and vulnerability. NGOs in Central America, for instance, argued that the root causes of the Mitch disaster lay in the vulnerabilities created by the region's wider political economy. VOICE's position paper for the Stockholm meeting on post-Mitch reconstruction



*In 2000, natural disasters claimed 20,000 lives worldwide*

in May 1999 argued that ‘the transition to sustainable development necessarily has to take into account prevention and mitigation as key concepts for reducing vulnerability’.

Shifts in thinking at the policy level have not been translated into regular operational guidelines and procedures for analysing and reducing risk and vulnerability. Before mitigation and preparedness activities can become embedded, institutions will have to overcome the substantial barriers imposed by organisational structures and ways of working. Within some larger NGOs, tensions between emergency and development teams are a particular constraint. Mitigation and preparedness have traditionally been discussed among emergencies specialists rather than development teams. More generally, pressures of work inhibit consideration of innovative ideas. This appears to be a systemic weakness in NGOs. In one UK agency, a project officer was handling 40 local partners in two countries; in another, one was covering 52 projects in six countries.

Nevertheless, committed and well-placed individuals can ‘work’ the institutional system to promote mitigation and preparedness, even in large and highly-structured NGOs. This view was confirmed by several interviewees, by our observations and by discussions with others who have worked in NGOs. In one medium-sized international NGO, a combination of a decentralisation policy, relatively relaxed head-office management, and a country director with a commitment to disaster work and a good sense of institutional politics meant that disaster mitigation was established as an integral part of the international portfolio, even though it sat oddly with the organisation’s other, sectoral, programmes.

### **Mitigation in practice**

In addition to a series of reports, the research project produced 19 case studies of NGO initiatives in risk reduction. Activities covered included the creation of an emergency loan fund by a Bangladeshi NGO providing savings and credit to tribal people; the construction of earthquake-resistant housing in Peru and Yemen; the promotion of soil and water conservation and indige-

nous drought-resistant crops in Zimbabwe; identifying and preparing safe areas for Cambodian villagers to escape floods; the coordination of disaster preparedness and response in the Philippines; research into different farming systems’ resilience to Hurricane Mitch; cyclone early warning in Bangladesh; and training of trainers in West and East Africa.

Some important cross-cutting issues emerged. First, the overall quality of information was disappointing. NGO experiences are rarely written up and disseminated, while internal documentation was patchy. Second, monitoring and evaluation were poor, and focused on performance rather than impact. Admittedly, there are problems in assessing work whose result is that a disaster does not happen. Nevertheless, the considerable efforts to improve monitoring and evaluation in development and humanitarian circles were not reflected in the initiatives that we studied. Third, many of the projects endeavoured to reach the most vulnerable groups, but in many cases the information available could not prove that the NGOs were supporting such groups effectively. Until NGOs can make a convincing case that they are reaching the most vulnerable, they may find it difficult to obtain funding from donors for disaster mitigation. There was also a tendency for projects to address the immediate causes of vulnerability – for instance, living in unsafe locations or housing – rather than deeper socio-economic causes. Gender-related vulnerability was commonly recognised, but measures to tackle it were rare. There was some indication of a shift by NGOs towards community-based mitigation and preparedness projects, but in many cases it appeared that ‘participation’ was confined to involvement in carrying out tasks, rather than in planning.

### **Disaster terminology**

The formal language of disaster management contains a lot of technical terminology. How helpful is such language to NGO workers? We explored this by discussing the key terms ‘mitigation’ (which, interpreted broadly, means any action to minimise the impact of a disaster); and ‘preparedness’ (specific measures taken before disaster strikes, usually forecasting and warning, taking precautions such as stockpiling supplies and arranging for the appropriate emergency response).

Interviews revealed that these two terms have little resonance with NGO workers, especially those in development. The majority of interviewees did not use either on a regular basis. Those working in food security tend to use a completely different terminology. The fact that ‘mitigation’ has no equivalent in many languages is also a significant obstacle to its wider use. Nevertheless, interviewees demonstrated a good appreciation of disaster and vulnerability issues. They were much more comfortable with concrete examples than formal definitions: mitigation, for example, was illustrated as strengthening houses to withstand floods and earthquakes, crop diversification and reforestation. We concluded that some elements of conventional disaster terminology are unhelpful, and it

may be time to discard the words 'preparedness' and 'mitigation', at least outside very specialist circles.

### External influences

The research team looked at a number of external influences on NGO activity, notably availability of funds and relations with government. Regarding funding, the picture was mixed. There is little dedicated funding for mitigation and preparedness, but many NGOs have been able to raise funds for such work from development donors and budget lines. Two dedicated budget lines opened in the 1990s by the Department for International Development's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department and the European Community Humanitarian Office were key in stimulating NGO work in this area.

Governments can play a major role in determining the scope and nature of NGO activities. Many NGOs work with governments on disaster planning, and there were signs that such engagement may be increasing. This was particularly true at local level. We found governments working with NGOs on risk mapping, NGOs providing training to government staff, and NGO participation in government disaster committees. However, in many countries relations between government and NGOs are strained, even hostile. Even where they are not, government disaster-management plans typically focus on issues relating to disaster preparedness in its narrowest sense. A wider focus to embrace mitigation might encourage greater NGO participation.

Finally, the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction in the 1990s had almost no impact on NGOs in any of the countries studied. The initiative was dominated for much of the decade by scientists and engineers, failing to engage with field-level practitioners or the wider needs of vulnerable communities.

### New directions

These findings add up to a major challenge for those trying to move disaster mitigation and preparedness into the mainstream of NGO work. Nevertheless, many of these barriers can be broken down. The following steps would help this process:

- Generate more, and better, evidence of how mitigation and preparedness works in practice – and ensure that it is shared. Better evaluation and case studies are needed.
- Replace some of the formal terminology of disaster management with more comprehensible, everyday terms such as 'risk reduction'.

- Find ways of fitting disaster issues into conceptual frameworks used in development thinking. The growing interest in development circles in sustainable livelihoods may be opening up space here.
- Devise simple operational guidelines for assessing and addressing natural hazards and risk that can be grafted onto existing NGO procedures.
- Improve networking between NGO staff. The enthusiastic response to our research project's feedback workshops and the inauguration of an informal mitigation and preparedness network among UK NGOs are encouraging signs of interest; this needs to be maintained.
- Staff in NGOs committed to mitigation and preparedness need to lobby much more forcefully, both within their own organisations, and with other agencies, especially donors.

NGOs are beginning to take risk reduction more seriously. Mitigation is still on the margins, but it may be moving towards the mainstream at last.

**John Twigg** is an Honorary Research Fellow at the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre, University College London. The research project described in this article was funded by the Department for International Development's ESCOR programme and managed by the British Red Cross. It was carried out by a team of independent researchers who are solely responsible for the views contained in the research reports. The reports are available online at [www.redcross.org.uk/dmp](http://www.redcross.org.uk/dmp); the 19 case-studies of NGO initiatives are at [www.redcross.org.uk/riskreduction](http://www.redcross.org.uk/riskreduction). Papers based on four of the research reports were published in *Disasters*, vol. 25, no. 3, September 2001.

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## Benefits–harms analysis: a rights-based tool developed by CARE International

*With the help of a host of prolific critics, our profession is coming to terms with the fact that, even while doing good, humanitarian action can and often does hurt people seriously. Paul O'Brien describes how CARE International is exploring one possible response: the use of 'benefits–harms' tools*

Understanding the impact of our work, let alone taking responsibility for it, is not easy. The 'ripple effects' of interventions affect human lives and livelihoods in many different ways. Most emergency relief workers know, for example, that introducing resources into a conflict zone can intensify tensions or promote peace; create revolving cycles of need or move people away from aid dependency; and marginalise the most disadvantaged or promote equity and social justice across groups and communities.

Benefits–harms analysis aims to help relief and development organisations hold themselves responsible for the overall impact of their programmes on people's human rights. In November 2001, after three years of development and field-testing in East Africa, CARE published a limited edition of the Benefits–Harms Package, containing an introductory Handbook and Facilitation Manual. In 2002, we plan to share these tools with like-minded organisations.

### Background to the benefits–harms approach

A series of crises in the late 1980s and 1990s left humanitarian organisations like CARE asking serious questions about their overall impact in complex crises. In September 1998, CARE policy-makers, reviewing the agency's work in Sudan, committed the organisation to undertaking regular 'benefit-harms assessments' so as to better understand the humanitarian, political and security impacts of all CARE's Sudan projects. For the next three years, the approach was developed, refined and tested in projects around Africa.

Benefits–harms borrows heavily from the human rights field, which provided both the moral mandate – that we must take responsibility for our actions – and the substantive areas of analysis. It also learned much from Mary Anderson's 'Do No Harm' work, which gave us practical, usable tools for reflection on the impact of our work in conflict settings. Finally, it borrowed broadly from CARE's Household Livelihood Security approach which, among other things, promotes holistic thinking across sectors of intended impact, and multi-sectoral programming where appropriate.

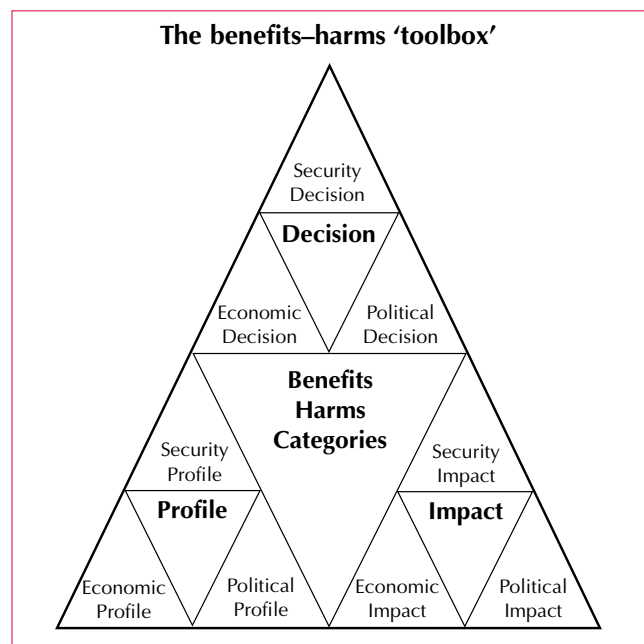
### The benefits–harms toolbox

The benefits–harms approach offers a set of nine tools that can be used in the field to help identify and address the overall human rights impacts of any inter-

vention, both positive and negative. Our review of humanitarian interventions in East Africa, both by CARE and by others, revealed three key causes for most unintended impacts:

- (1) insufficient knowledge about the contexts in which interventions occur;
- (2) a lack of analysis of the unintended impact of interventions; and
- (3) a failure to take action to mitigate unintended harms, or to capitalise on unforeseen potential benefits.

To address these three challenges, the benefits–harms approach developed 'Profile', 'Impact' and 'Decision' tools. These tools are organised around three categories of rights: political rights, security rights and economic and social rights. This gives us a nine-part 'toolbox', as shown in the figure below.



### How the tools work

The tools contain simple questions, designed for flexible use by programmers with different needs, resources, time and experience. They rely on the capacity of programmers to think, to take the time to ask questions and to act upon the conclusions they reach. By framing straightforward questions across the human rights spectrum, the tools aim to highlight both the moral necessity and practical feasibility of

thinking about the overall impact of our work on people's human rights.

What follows is an overview of three of the nine tools: the political profile tool, the security impact tool and the economic, social and cultural decision tool.

**The political profile tool**

Traditionally, relief agencies have used political agnosticism to avoid the stigma of 'political partisanship'. In recent years, however, we have been forced to abandon this sanctuary. As political and military opportunists, in both donor and host countries, have increasingly appropriated humanitarian action for political ends, so we have become aware of the need to become more politically aware ourselves. Today, agencies increasingly recognise that, when their aim is to reallocate resources or decision-making power to marginalised populations, their work is profoundly political. As a consequence, political 'impacts' are moving from the unintentional and misunderstood, to the deliberate and clearly recognised.

The political profile tool aims to help programmers think through and discuss political rights in any given setting. It asks users to consider the political and social groupings in the community, particularly where marginalisation or discrimination may be at issue. The tool then provokes thinking about power dynamics in the community: which groups have power, which groups do not, and why? Finally, it asks users to think about rights of political identity, protection, freedom and participation.

CARE has found that using this tool to discuss groupings based on ethnicity, physical disability, religious affiliation or sexual orientation has changed the nature of our thinking. For example, in our discussions with staff in Rwanda over ethnic relations and power dynamics, the tool was particularly useful, providing a structured and principle-based lens for looking at sensitive issues.

**The security impact tool**

In complex emergency work, there is a risk that relief may unintentionally endanger peoples' lives, liberty or personal security. The security impact tool asks relief workers to think about how interventions can either weaken or strengthen people's physical security. It looks at four separate areas: (1) external threats to community security; (2) internal patterns of violence within the community; (3) the underlying causes of violence; and (4) community-based conflict resolution and rights protection processes.

Decision tools aim to strengthen our ability and willingness to respond when we are the problem, and they aim to push us towards rights-based action when others are responsible, either for causing human rights problems or for addressing them. In using these tools, we have found that CARE programmers will allow themselves to discuss difficult and sensitive subjects: in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, for example, we used this tool to evaluate whether our project was putting

**The Benefits-Harms Package**

With the support of the US Institute for Peace, CARE has produced 1,000 copies of the Benefits-Harms Package, and will be sharing these on a demand basis with like-minded organisations and individuals. The package contains two documents: a 20-page introductory Handbook, followed by the tools and instructions for use; and a Facilitation Manual with guidelines for a three-day orientation workshop on the use of benefits-harms tools.

If there is sufficient demand, we plan to publish and charge for additional copies. If you work in a development or humanitarian organisation and you would like to receive a complementary copy (if available) or purchase additional copies, please contact [pobrien@care.org](mailto:pobrien@care.org), or write to the CARE International East Africa Regional Management Unit, PO Box 43864, Nairobi, Kenya.

vulnerable people at risk by its mere presence. We found that there was a significant risk that we were creating a 'magnet for harm', and for several years refused funding to expand programming in this area. In Somalia, we used the tool to consider whether we were missing opportunities to build bridges between adversaries. As a result, reconciliation components were incorporated into our programming. While simple remedies to problems have not always presented themselves, naming these issues has helped to promote a culture of honest and constructive critique in our programming discussions. And, sometimes, these discussions have led to profound changes in our programming.

**The economic, social and cultural decision tool**

Humanitarian interventions almost always aim to promote economic, social and cultural rights. Yet our work may actually undermine enjoyment of these same rights; injecting resources may affect markets and earning potential; a health project may clash with local norms around cultural respect and integrity. When a programmer uncovers an unforeseen harm or benefit to an economic, social or cultural right, this decision tool helps them to think through what must be done.

The tool adapts the 'Seven S' model from the world of corporate management (shared values and vision, style, systems, strategies, staff interests and well-being, staff skills and a shortage of time, resources or data) to promote thinking and discussion of internal and external constraints to change. In using this tool, we have found that staff will take the opportunity to speak more frankly than they otherwise might about organisational priorities and values. Sometimes, these discussions have led to change; at other times, they have led to a much better shared understanding of the rationale behind a chosen course of action. If a project is damaging the economic rights of a particular

community, the tool helps a user consider why a donor or local authority may resist a change in project design, or who might support an appropriate change.

## Conclusion

Many programmers understand well the potential for unintended impacts. In the real world, however, much benefits–harms analysis goes on organically or intuitively. The core purpose of the benefits–harms tools is to help programmers share their experience and knowledge with each other. Like most matrix-based tools, they aim to ensure that our communication is efficient (avoiding going over the same territory), creative (ensuring that we at least consider an appropriate array of possibilities) and transparent (helping to flesh out what may be key unspoken assumptions).

These tools are no panacea; humanitarian action and its effects are complex, and no one can fathom every impact of any given project. The tools will not yield new truths, or turn uncommitted amateurs into competent professionals. Ironically, CARE has found that our more experienced programmers who already affirm the need for intuitive benefits–harms analysis have got the most

out of these tools, using them to encourage honest learning and constructive self-critique in their country offices. Benefits–harms analysis recognises that we will always need to learn more, think more and make better decisions in our work. That is the unavoidable consequence of taking genuine responsibility for the impact we have on people's ability to live with dignity.

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# The refugee experience: a resource for aid workers

**Carola Eyber** on a training and information initiative that seeks to clarify some of the confusion surrounding psychosocial interventions for refugees and the displaced

Over the last two decades, attention has increasingly been paid to the psychosocial well-being of people affected by war. Humanitarian agencies have argued that the effects of violent conflict result not only in material and physical suffering, but also in emotional, spiritual and psychological distress. The interest in providing psychosocial assistance has led to a rapidly expanding 'trauma industry'. A large variety of programmes are instituted in war-affected areas, all of which claim to be alleviating psychosocial distress or trauma in one form or the other. According to a European Community Task Force review, in the former Yugoslavia in 1995 there were 185 such projects, being implemented by 117 organisations. This proliferation of psychosocial programmes has gone hand in hand with the popularisation of the notion in the West of 'trauma' and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD was first identified in US Vietnam veterans, who experienced social-adjustment problems and psychological 'symptoms', such as flash-backs, withdrawal and restlessness. It has since come to dominate the way in which researchers and agency workers talk about the effects of war.

## Critiques

This conceptualisation of distress and the emphasis placed on the traumatisation of entire populations has been criticised in recent years. It has been argued that the trauma model is inappropriate in non-Western cultures, and that psychosocial programmes do not reflect the expressed

needs of war-affected people themselves. Critics maintain that psychosocial programmes largely ignore the role that culture plays in issues of distress and mental health, and that 'treatment' and intervention practices tend to use uniform approaches, implemented regardless of the differing social, political and cultural context. In Mozambique and Angola, for example, people use traditional healers and diviners to help them with problems caused by the vengeful spirits of those unjustly killed. In such a context, some critics argue, it is inappropriate to use 'Western' psychological methods based on ideas about 'talking through' one's emotions and memories.

Among aid workers, there is confusion as to what type of psychosocial programme may be appropriate in particular situations, and whether emphasis should be placed on therapeutic or community-focused interventions. Some agencies set up counselling centres, and train staff members in counselling techniques and other forms of therapeutic activities, where drama, drawing and play are used to help survivors confront and cope with their experiences of war and displacement. Other agencies argue that it is most important to help communities rebuild the structures that are central to their social networks, such as places of worship, communal meeting areas and schools. Psychosocial well-being, these organisations argue, is enhanced and facilitated through the social support members of a community offer one another.

## 'The Refugee Experience'

In the light of these complex issues, the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford and the Centre for International Health Studies at Queen Margaret University College in Edinburgh have produced a training module for humanitarian workers, entitled *The Refugee Experience*. Editors Maryanne Loughry and Alastair Ager invited a number of authors in the field of forced migration to reflect on a psychosocial understanding of the refugee experience. The resulting module, first issued in 1999 and revised last year, is designed for humanitarian workers and refugee policy-makers who do not necessarily have a professional background in the social sciences, but who wish to gain insight into the psychosocial dimensions of working with conflict-affected refugees.

The two-volume module provides an overview of the current debates and issues in the field of psychosocial assistance to war-affected populations, as well as training materials, such as notes for facilitators, additional references, ideas for an interactive cross-cultural game and a glossary of relevant terms. It introduces the dominant psychological explanations for the experiences and behaviour of refugees and forced migrants and, as a way of explaining many of the issues confronting refugees, presents a case example of a Rwandan refugee seeking asylum in Canada. The example is statistically untypical of the majority of refugees, who seek asylum in neighbouring countries rather than in countries of the industrialised world. It does, however, demonstrate some of the common challenges and problems of adjustment, adaptation, fear, identity and belonging that form part of the refugee experience.

The main volume consists of a series of discussion guides that focus on various aspects of psychosocial work. Derek Summerfield analyses the nature of modern warfare and its implications for psychosocial responses. Mary Diaz, the Executive Director of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, investigates issues pertaining to gender and displacement, discussing topics such as the situation of girls affected by armed conflict, mental health, reproductive health concerns, income generation and the empowerment of displaced women. The psychosocial needs of refugee children and adolescents are examined by Margaret McCallin, who stresses the need to contextualise discussions within a child-rights framework. McCallin also addresses critical issues such as separation, education, exploitation and under-age soldiers.

Non-Western concepts of mental health are discussed by Alcinda Honwana, who looks at how mental health and illness are understood in cultures that do not primarily use biomedical explanations for making sense of these illnesses. She examines how mental health is understood by local people; how it relates to war and other social crises; and how people deal with the social and emotional problems caused by armed conflict. Inger Agger's chapter focuses on how aid workers can help protect the sense of sanity and

dignity of the people they assist. Agger presents a case example of a psychosocial project in Croatia, outlining the reasoning behind decisions made to constitute a therapeutic group. She discusses the approaches currently used, based on rights, trauma, culture and gender, and argues that there are no universal right or wrong methods for providing psychosocial assistance.

The module also raises concerns about the evaluation of psychosocial programmes. It has frequently been pointed out that evaluation in this area is scarce or non-existent, as many agencies rely mainly on anecdotal evidence to substantiate their claims of successful interventions. Alastair Ager identifies two main questions that programmes need to pose: what are we appropriately seeking to achieve?; and what is the best way of going about this?

He suggests that evaluation should be built into the programme planning and implementation phases of a project, rather than added as an after-thought, or avoided altogether.

The second volume also includes a section on developing communication and helping skills with participants. The development of these skills assists humanitarians to work effectively in conflict and post-conflict situations by improving the quality of their working relationships. Emphasis is placed on a community-participation approach; Eva Segerstroem, who has worked with organisations such as Rädde Barnen (Swedish Save The Children), describes some of the skills and processes involved in applying the principles of community participation in practice. Community participation is primarily seen as aimed at meeting the right to self-determination, and as a basis for strengthening the community's own resources, thus enabling refugees to develop structures for identifying and responding to the needs of individuals, families and the wider community.

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The Refugee Experience can be accessed at [www.forcedmigration.org/rfgexp](http://www.forcedmigration.org/rfgexp). For further information, please contact: Carola Eyber ([carola.eyber@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:carola.eyber@qeh.ox.ac.uk));

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# Reproductive health during conflict and displacement

*Reproductive health has only recently been recognised as an essential service for refugees. Although resources have been developed, Samantha Guy argues that much more needs to be done*

In conflict-affected settings, the impact of displacement, violence and poor social and demographic indicators all contribute to poor health outcomes for displaced people, as well as, often, for host communities. A report by Physicians for Human Rights, for instance, indicates that over 50% of Sierra Leonean women experienced sexual violence during the conflict there. In Colombia, violence and displacement are leading to an increase in unsafe abortions, while in IDP camps in Sri Lanka, births are less well-spaced and with worse outcomes than they were before displacement.

In the early 1990s, a number of factors focused global attention on the reproductive health status of refugees and displaced populations. The crises in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda heightened awareness of the specific reproductive health needs of refugee women. In 1994, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children published *Refugee Women and Reproductive Health Care: Reassessing Priorities*, which highlighted the increased health risks women face in refugee settings. The report concluded that many aspects of reproductive health care were seriously neglected, including family planning information and services, AIDS education and prevention, the diagnosis and treatment of sexually-transmitted diseases and treatment of unsafe abortion. The report called for increased international attention to the provision of full reproductive health services. Shortly after its publication, the International Conference on Population and Development convened in Cairo.

## A huge unmet need

The Cairo conference was the first held by the UN to officially recognise the reproductive health needs of refugees. According to the Programme of Action adopted at the conference, 'In planning and implementing refugee assistance activities, special attention should be given to the specific needs of refugee women and refugee children. Refugees should be provided with access to adequate accommodation, education, health services, including family planning'. A central achievement of the conference was its promotion of a comprehensive approach to meeting people's reproductive health needs. The Programme of Action calls for comprehensive reproductive health services, designed with the involvement of women, to serve women's needs and advance women's rights:

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so.



*Reproductive health: an essential service for displaced people*

As a result of the conference, the Inter-Agency Symposium on Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations, comprising representatives of NGOs, academia and the UN, was convened by UNHCR and UNFPA. In preparation for the symposium, which took place in June 1995, three preparatory meetings were convened. During these meetings, participants identified what they considered to be the essential technical components of reproductive health in refugee situations:

- safe motherhood;
- family planning;
- measures to combat sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS;
- initiatives to tackle sexual and gender-based violence; and
- abortion services.

To accomplish its overall objective of institutionalising reproductive health in refugee situations, participants decided that drafting a refugee-specific field manual, covering the technical components they had identified, should be the primary objective of the June meeting. By the time the symposium was held, working groups had produced a draft manual for discussion.

At the symposium, which was attended by representatives from more than 50 organisations, encompassing UN agencies, governments and NGOs, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations (IAWG) was formed, with over 30 members from UN agencies, NGOs, research organisations and governments.

## The inter-agency field manual

One of the key roles of the IAWG was to develop a draft field manual. Extensive discussion and field-testing ensued, with the final version produced in 1999. Building on the Cairo Programme of Action, the manual establishes reproductive health within essential primary

health care services to be delivered during an emergency. The manual is a key technical document, intended to support the delivery of quality reproductive health services. Aimed primarily at health managers, it provides technical guidance on undertaking all aspects of reproductive health care in refugee settings.

One of the key purposes of the manual is to advocate a multi-sectoral approach to providing services, and to foster coordination between all partners. It also describes the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP), which comprises those services that are needed in the first phase of an emergency. Separate, detailed chapters cover the technical areas of reproductive health for refugees: safe motherhood; sexual and gender-based violence; sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; and family planning. The manual also covers reproductive health and young people, surveillance and monitoring, information, education and communication (IEC) and legal considerations.

In 1998, UNFPA produced the Reproductive Health Kit for Emergency Situations to facilitate the implementation of the MISP described in the manual. This was based upon kits created by Marie Stopes International in 1994 for use in Bosnia. The reproductive health kit comprises 12 'sub-kits' for use at different health care levels, among them condoms, oral and injectable contraceptives, and drugs for the treatment of STDs. There are also sub-kits with emergency contraception for women who have been raped, and manual vacuum aspiration equipment for the treatment of post-abortion complications. The kits have been used extensively in crisis situations, including in Afghanistan, Albania, Eritrea, India, Mozambique and Sudan. Following an evaluation, they have been revised.

### **Reproductive health during conflict and displacement: a guide for programme managers**

To complement the inter-agency field manual, WHO has designed a management guide, *Reproductive Health during Conflict and Displacement: A Guide for Programme Managers*. Following field-testing in a variety of refugee settings, the first edition was produced in 2000. The guide provides management tools to assess, plan, implement and evaluate reproductive health programmes. The guide positions the technical areas of reproductive health within the broader context of conflict and displacement, and includes discussion of the phases of conflict, emergency preparedness, guiding principles including a gender approach, the stabilisation phase and post-conflict rehabilitation. The guide does not aim to provide detailed clinical guidance on the technical areas of reproductive health for refugees, since this is provided in the inter-agency field manual.

The WHO guide also endorses a Core Package of reproductive health interventions; the MISP by another name. It expands on the concepts behind the MISP, and gives more detail on the implementation and actual delivery of the package of services. One clear function for the WHO guide, in contrast to the

inter-agency manual, is as an orientation, awareness-raising and training tool for health care providers unfamiliar not only with emergency settings, but also with reproductive health care.

### **The challenge ahead**

Although resources are available, including guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions, guidelines on sexual and gender-based violence, assessment tools and training modules, as well as the two manuals described here, the challenge remains to ensure that reproductive health becomes an integral component of any humanitarian response. Currently, few agencies are consistently providing more than maternal child health services, particularly in the early stages of a crisis. There is little coordination between agencies to ensure that the complete package of reproductive health services is provided, and agencies are not held accountable for the provision of reproductive health services. A concerted drive is required to translate progress at the international level into on-the-ground services for communities affected by conflict. This will involve much more than rebuilding infrastructure and deploying medical teams. An integrated response includes training and technical assistance to build institutional capacity and leadership among NGOs, governments and other players; developing and disseminating new materials for programming and advocacy; and developing, evaluating and disseminating replicable service delivery models.

Humanitarian agencies need to ensure that comprehensive reproductive health care is integrated into their service delivery. To achieve this, targeted training is required for humanitarian workers and medical staff; reproductive health supplies need to be accessible and available from the earliest stage of the response; and funding priorities need to incorporate reproductive health services.

**Samantha Guy** runs Marie Stopes International's Reproductive Health for Refugees Initiative.

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# Supporting livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability

Kate Longley and Karim Hussein on new work from the ODI on livelihoods and chronic conflict

The idea of a linear progression from saving lives to sustainable livelihoods, often termed the relief–development continuum, has been challenged for its inadequacy in analysing and responding to contemporary humanitarian crises. The continuum approach has proved particularly problematic in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, where violence and under-development have become entrenched features of the political economy, and where livelihoods are persistently or purposefully threatened and undermined. Current relief instruments are not well-equipped to respond to situations such as this. Relief aid is designed to save lives, yet it often becomes the principal form of aid intervention when conflicts are protracted. However, there is often a desperate need not only to save lives, but also to support livelihoods.

While the conceptual and practical frameworks that guide aid and humanitarian programming are not well-equipped to meet these challenges, a small number of agencies have started to develop livelihood approaches suitable for chronic situations. Other agencies have developed methodologies for assessing vulnerability and needs that are similar to a livelihoods approach. Such methodologies are increasingly being

used in monitoring food aid requirements, and there is considerable interest in their further development for assessing broader livelihood requirements. However, examples of the use of livelihoods approaches in situations of chronic conflict or instability have yet to be documented and made available to a wider audience for useful lessons to be learnt.

To date, livelihoods approaches have predominantly been developed and used in academic analysis and NGO practice for rural development in peaceful settings. Understanding the livelihood strategies of people in diverse local contexts is taken as the starting point, in order to identify local people's livelihood needs and goals. When working in situations of chronic political instability, however, it is essential that practical interventions to support people in achieving their livelihood goals must be designed with an awareness of the potential impact of interventions on the complex structures of power, conflict and inequality that exist in such situations. It is also important that the design and delivery of such support by operational agencies should, as far as possible, follow humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

## Supporting livelihoods in chronic conflict: practical examples sought for inclusion in forthcoming ODI review

This year, the ODI will produce a series of ten Working Papers reviewing the range of ways in which livelihoods approaches are used by operational agencies and researchers working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. The papers will be published by August, and seminars to launch them will be held in London and Nairobi in September.

The Working Paper series forms part of a wider programme for the testing and development of appropriate conceptual and practical approaches to inform policy-making, assessment strategies and aid programming for principled support to livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. Case studies will include the impact of chronic conflict on rural livelihoods in Sierra Leone and Nepal; Household Food Economy Assessments in Kenya and Zimbabwe; the development of livelihoods monitoring tools in Afghanistan; participatory methods for livelihoods assessments in Kosovo; an expanded Vulnerability Assessment Mapping methodology used to assess IDP needs in Colombia; and livelihoods interventions in the Nuba Mountains of South Sudan.

The Working Paper editors would like to hear about further examples of assessing, supporting and/or monitoring livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability; please contact Kate Longley (k.longley@odi.org.uk) or Karim Hussein (k.hussein@odi.org.uk).

## The German humanitarian system

*Germany is one of the world's largest donors of international development aid. Yet, says Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, humanitarian issues have failed to capture the political or public imagination*

In the past three decades, Germany's humanitarian actors, both governmental and non-governmental, have undergone two distinct phases of change. The first, in the 1960s and 1970s, was a function of changes in the type and frequency of disasters. The second was a consequence of German unification and the collapse of communism, which compelled policy-makers to redefine Germany's international role, including in the humanitarian sphere.

In contrast to most other Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, official emergency relief has been kept institutionally separate from development aid. Since the late 1970s, the Foreign Office, in the form of the Department of the United Nations, Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, has had exclusive responsibility for international emergency relief and its coordination. The department has a Working Staff of 22 and a budget of 30–35 million euros (\$26–30m), and finances projects in about 70 states per year. For specific emergencies that exceed available resources, such as the Kurdish refugee crisis or the wars in the Balkans, additional resources come from a general budget line, which the Finance Minister controls. In major emergencies, the Working Staff has set up bureaux abroad to facilitate coordination on the 'frontline'. The Foreign Office representative for human rights and humanitarian affairs is located at the executive level. This means that he or she can define the role of humanitarian aid in German foreign policy. Since 1998, this position has been filled by Gerd Poppe, a one-time East German dissident and member of parliament.

### Subsidiarity and independence

The process of institutional adjustment in the German political system has involved a series of incremental decisions in the search for policy coherence. Thus, as elsewhere in the West there has been a tendency to regard aid as one element of foreign policy, and linked to activities such as conflict prevention. At the same time, the core principle of the government's 'humanitarian philosophy' is subsidiarity. This means that the government respects – in theory at least – the impartiality and neutrality of the non-governmental actors responsible for providing emergency relief. The government should only become directly involved when NGOs are unable to handle an emergency.

The subsidiarity principle has found its institutional counterpart in the Coordination Committee for Humanitarian Aid. The Committee has 26 members, including federal ministries, federal states, specialists and major NGOs. It meets every two months, although in specific emergencies a sub-group

convenes on an *ad hoc* basis. The Committee also comes together for thematic workshops, usually once a year. The Coordination Committee has streamlined the allocation of funds when emergencies occur. Funding is provided rapidly, and administrative procedures are simple. Committee members have also been active in setting standards for their own work. They have agreed to a 12-point voluntary code of conduct for humanitarian action, strongly influenced by the Code of Conduct issued by the ICRC, as well as rules for the delivery of drugs. In principle, the Committee is open to every professional humanitarian agency. It has developed criteria for the admission of new members, among them that the applicant must be a professional humanitarian agency, and must have been active in the field for at least five years.

### The expansion of the military role

The role of the military in humanitarian affairs has become a central issue since the war in Kosovo, which was the first out-of-area mission for the German military. There is strong advocacy on this, especially in the army's civil-military branch, located at Koblenz. The issue is also controversial among humanitarian agencies, and there has been heated debate over the delimitation of humanitarian and military spheres. A special commission has been set up to formulate rules defining the proper roles of both actors, but has yet to come to a workable compromise. On the military side, the argument is focused on the technical performance of the military; for the humanitarians, the argument is based on humanitarian principles. Politically, a humanitarian role for the military seems desirable as it enhances the visibility of Germany's humanitarian engagement. At this point, however, it seems that the military is reconsidering its initial position, and is perhaps playing down its potential humanitarian role.

### Funding patterns

Although the Foreign Office has exclusive institutional competence for emergency relief, funding is split between the Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The regular budget figures for both ministries vary between a low of roughly DM100,000m in 1976, and a maximum of around DM265,000m in 1990. In 1999, the figure was DM175,000m. The percentage available to the Foreign Office for emergency relief has been steadily growing since the mid-1970s, from a low of around 17% to 29% by 2000. Following the overall international pattern, federal funding tends to emphasise bilateral projects. In addition, the federal states (the *Länder*) spent an estimated DM14m between 1994 and



1997 (which is the most recent year for which figures are available). This has probably a very limited impact, and tends to be more a kind of *ad hoc* support for specific local constituencies.

### **Conceptual weaknesses and public apathy**

In formal and institutional terms, the German humanitarian system is relatively well-developed. Structures are in place at the administrative, executive and parliamentary levels, and the major NGOs have formalised channels of access to the political system. Even if in practice the tendency is towards the instrumentalisation of aid as an element of German foreign policy and conflict prevention, continuous reference is nonetheless made to the principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality, both in relation to humanitarian agencies, and to guide donor policy.

In practice, however, things are different. The government has never really bothered to develop a coherent policy on humanitarian aid, and officials and the general public have generally had little interest in the subject. Gerd Poppe, for instance, is virtually unknown to the public. The German parliament's Committee for Humanitarian Aid and Human Rights, established in 1992, has from the outset been predominantly preoccupied with human rights, and specifically humanitarian matters have not been considered worthy of a session or a special hearing. The Committee's political impact is limited because it cannot take binding decisions. The representatives of the different government agencies always operate under the prerogative of the political directives of their superiors. Basic problems related to humanitarian aid therefore cannot be decided at this level; to give one example of what this means in practice, 18 months' effort to try to agree general principles guiding the relationship between the military and humanitarian NGOs have so far failed.

While issues to do with development, human rights and conflict attract political and wider attention, the humanitarian constituency in Germany is virtually non-existent. There is no intellectual community and informed public debate is absent. The association of German development NGOs, VENRO, is probably the only place where humanitarian issues are discussed in a more-or-less systematic fashion. Apart

from a handful of PhD students scattered around the country, the Science Centre for Social Research in Berlin is the only place where systematic research on humanitarian problems takes place. Humanitarian NGOs have likewise shown scant interest in debating issues around aid. Their ability to cooperate and reach consensus is limited given their differing political, ideological, philosophical or religious backgrounds. This also explains why they differ conceptually, in particular with respect to the linkage between rehabilitation and development.

As elsewhere in the West, humanitarian issues gain prominence only in exceptional circumstances, when major crises erupt and attract media attention. This is high noon for charity, when the public and politicians alike discover humanitarian action. According to Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, media pressure 'forced' the German government to send helicopters to Mozambique following floods there in early 2000. This expensive action came too late and was, according to specialists, superfluous. Another case in point is the delivery of frozen beef to North Korea in 2001. Again, this costly decision was taken against the advice of specialists. Conversely, media attention seems to do little to help most NGOs raise funds; Germany's church organisations and the Red Cross enjoy an almost exclusive monopoly on access to the two official television stations, while other agencies rarely feature.

### **Conclusion**

Although structurally distinct, Germany's humanitarian system by and large suffers from the same kinds of problems as those in other countries. The military is increasingly intruding into what has traditionally been humanitarian space, the public and politicians generally appear disinterested in humanitarian issues until they grab headlines and television time, and there is very little effective thinking about humanitarianism and what it means today.

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## **HPN Network Paper 38**

### **HIV/AIDS and emergencies: analysis and recommendations for practice by Ann Smith, February 2002**

This paper argues that emergency practitioners need a better understanding of the links between emergencies and vulnerability to HIV. It illustrates how HIV-related considerations need to be taken into account from the earliest point of response to an emergency and through every stage of involvement. The paper stresses that HIV-related considerations need to go beyond a narrowly medical or even general health-care focus, and calls for a concerted multi-sectoral approach to ensure that the diverse and complex issues raised by HIV in emergency situations are addressed. The paper identifies key considerations that need to be taken into account, and invites humanitarian agencies to review their policies and practices, and implement any changes needed in the light of the issues identified.

# Medair and the ISO 9001 quality standard

There is growing interest in the humanitarian sector in techniques and approaches aimed at ensuring the quality of products, services and organisations – a process characterised by some as the ‘quality revolution’. **David Verboom** describes Medair’s experience with the ISO 9001 quality standard

The NGO Medair applied for and was recently awarded the ISO 9001 Certificate for its humanitarian work. The ISO 9001 is part of a family of quality management standards and guidelines. It looks at the overall learning process within an organisation, rather than the rigid and specific implementation of certain guidelines or procedures. In Medair’s case, the ISO 9001 standard required the following main steps:

- setting up a quality policy in line with the organisation’s humanitarian mandate;
- drafting and maintaining manuals describing the way the organisation works; and
- setting up and maintaining a feedback and improvement cycle to involve beneficiaries, national and expatriate staff, donors, authorities and other stakeholders in the quality improvement process.

## Why apply ISO 9001?

Medair sees ISO 9001 as an additional tool, rather than as the answer to all our problems. The main reasons for us to apply for the ISO 9001 standard were:

- *Accountability.* We feel that we are accountable to the people we serve, our donors, our supporters, our national and expatriate staff and host and supporting governments. We have been entrusted with financial and human resources to achieve certain objectives in accordance with certain quality standards. We want to take this responsibility seriously by inviting external auditors to evaluate our work against internationally respected ISO 9001 quality standards.
- *Learning.* Because the environment of humanitarian aid is enormously complex and constantly changing, humanitarian organisations have to change and improve to remain relevant, effective and appropriate. Because the ISO 9001 standard places emphasis on the improvement cycle, it has helped Medair to strengthen its capacity as a learning organisation.
- *Efficiency and effectiveness.* ISO 9001 not only evaluates whether activities are in line with the main organisational objectives, it also evaluates the effectiveness of the organisation in achieving its goals. Because this evaluation uses the organisational manuals as a reference, ISO 9001 basically assesses if the organisation practices what it preaches.
- *The involvement and participation of beneficiaries.*



ISO 9001 evaluates ‘customer satisfaction’ – in humanitarian terms, whether the needs of the beneficiaries are being met. In its operations, Medair emphasises ‘downward’ accountability (to the people we serve), rather than ‘upward’ accountability (to donors, for instance). This is exactly what the ISO 9001 standard will assess.

- *Standardisation.* Medair as an organisation found itself in the mid-1990s moving from the pioneering to the expansion phase. In order to improve structures, procedures and standards, it started to define all of its operational and administrative processes. ISO 9001 helped to draft a Quality Manual that is lean, simple, to the point, easily accessible and user-friendly for all Medair staff.
- *Institutional knowledge.* Due to the high turnover of staff and the need to constantly adapt to new emergencies, gaining and maintaining institutional knowledge is critically important to relief agencies. ISO 9001 has helped Medair to improve its institutional knowledge-base in the form of the Quality Manual. This manual has also greatly improved the induction of new staff into the organisation.

Because the advantages of ISO 9001 apply to field as well as head office operations, we found that, despite the initial reservations of our staff, they all started to embrace the ISO 9001 change process. They became supporters when they saw the benefits materialising before their very eyes. Involving all staff also helped us to strip the change process of any hidden agendas or motives. We had to collectively re-emphasise that the only goal of the ISO 9001 process is to improve our performance and quality; it is not to be used as a marketing tool or to raise more funding, and it is definitely not to be used as a top-down control mechanism for management.

## Medair’s quality system

Medair’s quality system is set up around three major improvement cycles at three levels. Starting with the improvement cycle that is as close as possible to the beneficiary, we can differentiate between the following cycles:

1. Project Cycle at field level.
2. Country Strategy Cycle at country level.
3. Three-year Strategy Cycle at organisational level.

The Project Cycle describes Medair’s core process, namely the implementation of relief and rehabilitation projects at field level. This cycle consists of six project

phases (research, survey, proposal, implementation, evaluation, exit), linked together by six decisions (research, survey, Go/No Go, implementation, evaluation and exit). Medair has chosen the Project Cycle method to increase transparency, efficiency and coordination when initiating, implementing and tracking our projects. Every time a project moves from one phase to the next, a transparent, collective and coordinated decision is taken with the involvement of key field and headquarters staff. Each project in each country incorporates beneficiary involvement and participation, so as to receive regular feedback and input from the communities we are serving. This feedback is taken into account in the evaluation phase, and helps us to design and implement the next project or phase in a more appropriate manner. An example of the Project Cycle at work can be taken from our country programme in south Sudan. A non-food distribution project was thought by some staff to be very successful. But when talking to the families during household visits we found that the impregnated mosquito nets that were distributed were used for clothing and blankets. In response, we used the Project Cycle to design a new project phase focusing on preventive health education and clothing distribution.

The Country Strategy Cycle operates at country programme level, and normally encompasses a number of different projects. The Country Cycle helps Medair to improve its work in a given country, taking into account long-term impact and sustainability. This is especially useful in countries like Afghanistan, Congo, Angola and Sudan, where complex crises have raged for decades. Only by focusing on rehabilitation and training, not just relief, can people develop self-determination, self-reliance and mitigation.

The organisation-wide Three-year Strategy Cycle helps Medair to be a learning organisation in all its

departments, sectors, countries and programmes. It sets out strategies to address organisational weaknesses and exploit organisational strengths. On a three-year basis, feedback and evaluation is incorporated in the Strategy so as to work on major improvement processes for the organisation. In fact, it was at one of these Strategy evaluations, with all key field leaders present, that Medair decided to launch the ISO 9001 change process.

When talking about the 'how' of quality improvement, we should not forget the importance of the Quality Manual. This describes the quality system and all Medair's operations. It explains all aspects of Medair's work, both in the field and at headquarters, from the overall Three-Year Strategy to detailed radio operating instructions. The Manual is available to all staff in the form of an internet-based resource centre, installed on all Medair computers. By using state-of-the-art internet technology, the Manual is made extremely user-friendly, quick and accessible. The result is a manual that provides easy access to frequently required information, is used as a training resource for new staff, increases efficiency by saving time and sharing knowledge, and improves transparency.

The ISO 9001 quality improvement process has been very beneficial for Medair, for its programmes, for its staff and most importantly for its beneficiaries. It has not solved all our problems at field level, nor has it solved all our performance problems, but it has helped us to improve our internal quality, reinforce our accountability to our stakeholders, increase our efficiency and effectiveness and, most importantly, increase our impact for the people we are serving.

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### Some quality systems

- *The EFQM Excellence Model* ([www.efqm.org](http://www.efqm.org))  
An over-arching framework for self-assessment and improvement, drawing on other quality initiatives. Not based on external accreditation.
- *Investors in People* ([www.iipuk.co.uk](http://www.iipuk.co.uk))  
UK standard that aims to improve organisations' performance through improving the performance of individuals. Externally accredited; currently the most commonly used standard in the UK voluntary sector.
- *Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO)* (<http://www.pqasso.org.uk/pqasso.htm>)  
This system allows small voluntary organisations to assess and improve their work across 12 areas, from financial management to networking and partnerships.
- *Social Auditing* ([www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org))  
This system is designed to help organisations measure and improve their social performance and ethical behaviour, and to strengthen their accountability.

### Related websites

- ISO 9001:2000 ([www.iso.ch](http://www.iso.ch))
- Groupe URD's Quality Project ([www.urd.org](http://www.urd.org))

# Understanding conflict and evolving rights-based responses: CARE International in Sierra Leone

*The illicit diamond trade often features prominently in discussions of the 'causes' of the conflict in Sierra Leone. Steve Archibald and Paul Richards argue that this preoccupation with political economy misses valuable opportunities to break the cycle of violence*

The most recent conflict in Sierra Leone is merely the latest episode in a cycle of violence stretching back more than a century. CARE is developing a clearer understanding of the issues that people believe have fed and maintained the conflict. In April 2000, we began research examining whether a human rights framework would be useful in helping us better understand the 'root causes' of the conflict, and to explore what the practical implications of this might be for our activities. CARE's Rights-Based Approach to Food Security Project is the first practical output of the research. The emerging picture is one of disenfranchisement, discontent and impending social disorder, against a background of deep distrust of 'traditional' authority and governance structures.

## Aspects of inequality

Initial analysis of the research data is feeding into an assessment of the impact of CARE's work. As is common NGO practice in Sierra Leone, CARE has operational links with local Village Development Committees (VDCs) and other authority structures. These operational arrangements were discussed during the community consultations. Respondents repeatedly alleged that local hierarchies had systematically manipulated NGO systems and misappropriated project inputs on a significant scale. A review of reports on chieftom consultations conducted for the Paramount Chiefs Restoration Unit (the PRU, situated within the government's Governance Reform Secretariat) found similar allegations in other geographical areas.

In the project areas, the allegations appear justified. Some recipient groups prioritised by the previous food security projects did not receive assistance. Respondents said that intended project participants, including internally displaced people and recent returnees, were unlikely to have 'friends' in positions of authority, and were therefore less likely to receive assistance. Interviews and checks of registration and distribution lists confirmed that many intended recipients were excluded. In virtually every case assessed, actual recipients included VDC members, village chiefs, local authorities and their families. While everyone in the project areas could readily be regarded as 'in need', those in positions of authority generally have stronger assets and support networks. Access to NGO resources represents just such an asset and opportunity. Respondents frequently alleged that NGO field staff were either involved in, or aware of, graft. In this instance, field staff are often working in their 'home areas', where friends and family still reside; there are many opportunities for those in positions of power and authority to apply pressure on those distributing resources. The misappropriation of inputs

and consequent exclusion from aid of 'less powerful' groups suggests that the humanitarian effort may be channelling resources through a system that creates grievance, division and disorder, thereby compounding the problems that have contributed to violence.

Misappropriation of aid is one of the issues most frequently raised during the community consultations. Others relate to past and present problems of governance and basic rights that, if not resolved, will generate further conflict. They include:

- lack of awareness of the law: 'chiefs make up the law';
- maladministration of justice, including the arbitrary imposition of disproportionately high fines, mainly on young people, for minor infractions;
- lack of accountability or transparency within local governance and justice structures;
- little popular participation in the political process;
- exclusion of social groups (including women and young people) from decision-making;
- no education facilities and 'no opportunities'; and
- very limited awareness of human rights.

The research consultations revealed an eagerness to address fundamental issues of rights and justice, and to do so openly in order to mitigate further conflict. Respondents said that what they lacked, or had been denied, was a recognised, structured forum for debate. Because of this, grievances were suppressed and never resolved, resulting in an environment of rumour and suspicion that was always susceptible to manipulation and conflict.

Dr Dennis Bright of the Commission for the Consolidation of Peace in Freetown helped in the search for a suitable forum by suggesting that CARE might propose supporting the re-institution of traditional feast days. Once widespread in Sierra Leone, these events provided fora for the resolution of family and community quarrels. In early 2001, a CARE-funded pilot project began in ten villages in a chieftom 'section' in central Sierra Leone. It was agreed that these events should be called 'Peace and Rights Days'. The pilot supported a series of such days at village level for a year. CARE provides food and facilitation. Communities construct meeting places, contribute food and accommodate attendees from neighbouring villages. Every individual in the section is invited. The day provides a forum for the open discussion of issues identified by the community. The starting-point for the discussions is that every person has the right to adequate food for his or her family and that, within the CARE project, every person has the right to an equal amount of seed. In the



weeks leading up to a Peace and Rights Day, every individual with the will and ability to farm is registered, and the day itself culminates with the public distribution of 5kg 'starter packs' of seed to each recipient, along with a discussion of any deficiencies in the system.

The debate about equitable access to NGO inputs is the catalyst for a discussion of broader issues related to community-level development, rights and governance. Discussions are facilitated and recorded by villagers, local conciliators and CARE staff. Plenary groups and focus groups of women, young people, chiefs and elders focus attention on specific problems, and propose practical measures to resolve them. Thus, at village level the primary objective of the project is to encourage more inclusive, transparent and accountable community-based governance structures. Discussing equitable access to CARE's project inputs prompts discussion about the broader development process, and how the definition and representation of priorities can be made more inclusive. Steps to achieve the objectives are agreed and follow-up meetings with CARE staff and local facilitators are scheduled for the intervening period between Peace Days (about six months).

### Linking local initiatives with national structures

The local resolution of rights and governance problems has only limited utility if this is not 'connected' to the appropriate authorities. Ultimately, local processes should be able to make reference to the relevant governance, legal and human rights frameworks at chiefdom, district and national levels. Within this proposition lies the critical issue of social membership – being recognised as a citizen. Amongst the prerequisites for this are: awareness of the governance framework, the law and citizens' rights; effective representation; and responsive, transparent and accountable governance.

The government of Sierra Leone is working on the reinstitution of local governance structures. A vibrant human rights community is also emerging. Each 'project' will be more likely to achieve its ultimate goals if it is connected with, and responding to, initiatives voicing 'grassroots' issues. However, there are many practical constraints, not least the remoteness of many locations, and the lack of transport and communications. Democratic structures and processes may not exist in rural areas.

The aim of the Peace Days is to get functioning, democratic community representation in place and ready to engage with the agencies of governance reform, the human rights community and government or non-governmental development agencies. To this end, the Peace Day communities are electing committees of women, young people and elders which they hope, eventually, will act as mechanisms for representation, regulation and enforcement at local level, and also to represent their respective issues at 'higher' levels within the chiefdom and district structures.

These mechanisms will take time to evolve to a point where the majority regard them as representative.

Ultimately, they are long-term goals that require commitment from CARE and its partner communities. The recent acquisition of funding for a three-year period enables CARE to lay the foundations on which the project will be built. Other encouraging progress has been made during the pilot project, with local human rights organisations and a representative from the PRU involved in the fieldwork.

Establishing links with relevant organisations is essential at this early stage, and will become still more important as the project progresses. As rights organisations and governance structures materialise from the 'centre', it becomes increasingly important that they are connected with emergent democratic processes and structures in rural areas. In addition to technical support on food security issues, the role of CARE's Rights-Based Approach to Food Security Project is to identify and facilitate useful linkages between village- and section-level groups, and the appropriate governmental or non-governmental entities at chiefdom, district and national levels. Ultimately, the project aims to re-establish food security in CARE's operational areas; support fora for the democratic resolution of community-identified problems; increase awareness of rights and governance codes; and facilitate connections between the resultant rural capacities and their urban counterparts.

In Sierra Leone, many of the tensions that fed and maintained violence persist, their effects felt most by the poor and disenfranchised. CARE Sierra Leone will continue to develop and apply rights-based approaches to its other sectoral activities, and will disseminate the findings of the research to relevant departments of the government, as well as to donors and other NGOs.

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## The current challenges to humanitarian action

*As humanitarian action grapples with its unprecedented popularity and an increasingly schizophrenic identity, Austen Davis makes a plea for clarity about who we are and what we do, and for the separation of our political hopes and aspirations from our personal morality*

The challenges to humanitarian action depend in part on how you define humanitarian action. There is no single definition, and no one owns the concept. Humanitarian action is clearly to do with notions of ‘man’, and the value of humanity. If you define humanitarian action as mobilisation by human beings in response to the needless suffering of other human beings for the sake of a common humanity, then humanitarian action becomes a small and limited ideology. It must be action oriented; it must be non-coercive; it must be provided solely for the benefit of those we seek to assist. But in addition, humanitarian action must demonstrate an ethic of restraint. Humanitarian action cannot be subordinated to political interests, military rationales or even socially progressive moves towards peace and democracy. These are different ideologies and actions. Humanitarian action is smaller, more precise, self-limiting – but no less idealistic or important for that.

If humanitarian action is a small idea, it should be easily achieved through reaffirming the oneness and value of a shared humanity. The challenges that face humanitarian action are not in constantly renewing the ideology or vision to reflect changing times (communism, globalisation, or technological change, for instance). Rather, the challenges result from the dilemma that authorities with interests have to fund, allow for and encourage radical humanitarian action – even if action on behalf of ‘man’ seems to waste opportunities for the development of society, or even to act in contradiction to social interests.

The challenges that face humanitarian action therefore result from: the attempt to institutionalise the concepts and drives of humanitarian action; the fact that much human suffering is often intentionally created as a political act (so attempts to alleviate that suffering are contrary to the political interest); the corruption arising from the mobilisation of considerable resources in poor settings; and the co-opting of the ‘good’ act by politicians to bolster their legitimacy and popularity or shroud their lack of political action. People try to divert aid for military reasons, to help their side win or harm the other. People try to divert aid to get rich. People try to block aid to punish the enemy. People try to direct aid to reward those who support them, and show others that they should do the same. People try to control aid to show that they are a legitimate and caring authority, and that their actions are good and true and just.

The realism behind the ideology of humanitarian action is that if it is to be allowed, it must have very low political significance. It should not challenge authority by offering hopes of democracy, peace or freedom – because the form of peace or democracy or freedom is an intensely political question. It should be given to those who need it most, not those who will help the authorities most. In order to have the credibility to be allowed to work, it must be perceived as independent of any political agenda.

### What are the challenges to humanitarian action?

The concepts underlying humanitarian action are universal and do not change over time. There is therefore no challenge to humanitarian concepts. The challenges and dilemmas come in implementation. This is why humanitarian action has to be small, precise, realistic and reactionary, as opposed to most ideological causes, which are utopian, broad and progressive. Humanitarian action is a moral philosophy rather than a political philosophy – it does not require political positioning. The main challenges to this ideal are as follows.

Anything that undermines a common understanding of humanity

Humanitarian action rests on a belief that there are shared needs for food, shelter and conditions for dignity (freedom from fear). If political forces polarise humanity and reduce this acceptance of an important commonality – if we have different standards, if we have lower tolerance and if we dehumanise others – then there is the possibility to commit great and inhumane acts. An appreciation of our common humanity involves a willingness to accept shared responsibilities for all human beings, even in the face of adversity and violent opposition. The theory of a ‘clash of civilisations’ purposefully creates ideas of racial or cultural separation and superiority. The conflict is no longer between competing social systems with opposing political and economic interests; it becomes a fight between different groups of people, where one civilisation must defeat another. There is no room for shared human responsibility in such a conflict (communism versus freedom, Islam versus Western secularism).

Anything that undermines public support for humanitarian action

If our giving public does not understand the reality of war and crisis, and only gives money to stop wars, create peace and develop justice and democracy, then they do not understand what we do, and the humani-

tarian mission becomes confused. Givers give to the wrong cause and become disappointed because peace, democracy or universal respect for human rights is not forthcoming. The support base for humanitarian action will evaporate.

Anything that mixes humanitarian action with other goods

Many different actions can be good or not so good, done well or badly. Humanitarian action is not an act of 'doing good for people'. People with a political opinion that someone else's society should be more equal, or their stupid war should stop, will see this as a humanitarian goal; but then the smallness and the realism of the humanitarian ideology becomes confused with other aspirations, and loses its power to do the small thing it can do. It becomes something you can have a position on. It becomes political rather than moral. Politics can be moral, but humanitarian action focuses on a morality beyond politics. You can be right wing or left wing, and still have a shared commitment to human dignity and the alleviation of acute suffering.

Anything that limits the capacity of humanity to accept and contribute to humanitarian action

If all of humanity were in acute crisis, there would be no humanitarian action. There must be some societies in relative comfort, so that they can empathise with the suffering of others and mobilise assistance. This implies that some societies need to be in relative peace and have spare resources, but it also implies a social ethos that they have a shared responsibility to do something for other societies in crisis. Humanitarian action cannot function under conditions of a global total war. But also, for example, the existence of Médecins Sans Frontières depends on the wealth and largesse of the Western public, and on the vocational commitment of the medical profession to social ends and equitable and ethical treatment. As society increasingly commercialises medicine, medical professionals are forced to focus on the professional requirements of their careers. Society has not structured the incentives in the medical profession to encourage, recognise and reward socially positive behaviour. This undermines the quality of service of the medical profession (including within humanitarian endeavours). We may have better technical intervention, but we have less care and less in-built resistance to decision-making that does not prioritise patients' needs.

Anything that places institutional interests over the mission to assist those in need of help

The current popularity of humanitarian action has led to a proliferation of agencies, all of which claim to be humanitarian, and compete for money, media coverage and influence. This perverts the simple, precise requirement of humanitarian action – to remain fully committed to helping people in need. The public become confused, and governments try and define a coordination structure. Trying to create a

single efficient machine out of the international 'community' of donor governments, UN agencies and NGOs – without recognising their considerable differences – and enforcing institutional behaviour and interests over personal moral commitment undermines the entire humanitarian endeavour.

Anything that reduces the capacity of humanitarian actors to see, understand and react to political co-optation

There is a debate around whether speaking out undermines the neutrality of humanitarian actors. Humanitarian actors are forced to speak out when political actors deny access or try and pervert simple, precise, impartial humanitarian action. Humanitarian actors are small players among large forces. We need to stand apart from governments, the military and corporate interests, not because they are bad but because they are interested. We need to interpret their betrayal of humanitarian responsibilities – not judge if they are good or bad – and counter these failings. Humanitarian actors do not have the sophistication, resources, force or alliances that these large actors have. We only have the obvious moral principle; popular support; access to the media to inform; and international humanitarian law. We must use what little we have to react to the forces trying to avoid or manipulate humanitarian responsibility.

Anything that reduces the sustained commitment to act

Humanitarianism is an action-oriented philosophy. If it is morally right to go and help, then you commit to act first and use the lessons of history to try and minimise the challenges to humanitarian action. Every individual will have a personal political opinion. If aid workers are unable to separate their political personality from their moral personality and see how humanitarian action needs to be distinct, then there is the danger of fatigue and loss of motivation. If people are inspired by a duty to preserve notions of humanity, then it is inspiring to go to Sudan in 1988 to feed starving children in a famine, and to return in 1993, and 1994, and 1996, and 1998. If a doctor believes in the redemptive power of healing and the human responsibility to offer such a possibility, then it is not a failing to operate on a boy in Chechnya in 1995, and on the same young man in 1999. If, on the other hand, the expectations are that we fail if the same person is injured twice, and we need to change our actions to make sure our patients are never starved or injured again, then we will lose the battle. Our patients do not have the choice to end the war, to prevent their children from starving, to prevent their spouse from stepping on a land mine. If we are motivated to reach out and do something for them, we do not have the choice to be motivated in 1992, and disillusioned in 2002.

**Austen Davis** is General Director of MSF-Holland.

## Humanitarian Practice Network

The **Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)** was launched in 1994 in response to research that indicated substantial gaps between practitioners and policy-makers in the humanitarian field, as well as serious weaknesses in the ability of the sector to learn and become more 'knowledge-based'.

### Purpose

To stimulate critical analysis, advance the professional learning and development of those engaged in and around humanitarian action, and improve practice.

### Objectives

To provide relevant and useable analysis and guidance for humanitarian practice, as well as summary information on relevant policy and institutional developments in the humanitarian sector.

### Activities

- Publishing in three formats: Good Practice Reviews, Network Papers and the HPN magazine Humanitarian Exchange. All materials are produced in English and French.
- Operating a resource website: this is one of the key reference sites for humanitarian actors.
- Collaborating with international 'partner' networks: this increases the reach of the HPN, and brings mutual benefit to the participating networks.
- Holding occasional seminars on topical issues: these bring together practitioners, policy makers and analysts.

### HPN target audience

Individuals and organisations actively engaged in humanitarian action. Also those involved in the improvement of performance at international, national and local level – in particular mid-level operational managers, staff in policy departments, and trainers.

The HPN exists within the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute. This not only ensures extended networking and dissemination opportunities, but also positions the HPN in a wider 'centre of excellence' which enhances the impact of the HPN's work.

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