Humanitarian Exchange

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This issue of *Humanitarian Exchange* features articles on the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The persisting humanitarian crisis in the DRC continues to exact its toll on the civilian population. Over a million Congolese are still displaced due to continuing violence in the east, healthcare across much of the country is virtually non-existent, infrastructure and other basic services are lacking, and insecurity and frequent attacks on civilians persist. The most recent mortality survey by IRC estimates that 5.4m excess deaths have occurred between August 1998 and April 2007, 2.1m of them since the formal end of the war in 2002. Despite some progress on security, political and humanitarian indicators, and substantial increases in funding in recent years, the challenges facing aid organisations and communities remain vast. Articles in this feature examine the tools in place to respond to these challenges, in the form of rapid response mechanisms to emerging crises, community-based recovery strategies

and best practice in protection programming.

Articles in the policy and practice section examine key issues and lessons learned for humanitarian practitioners. In this issue we focus on the relationship between advocacy and action, civil–military relations, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and the links between conflict and environmental degradation in Darfur. Other articles explore issues around surge capacity within operational agencies, the virtues and values of accountability to affected communities and the impact of humanitarian reforms from a field perspective.

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Ensuring the predictability of emergency response: the DRC Rapid Response Mechanism

Silvia Danailov and Steven Michel, UNICEF/DRC

For over a decade, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has moved in and out of the headlines as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, rivalling only Darfur and natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake. Despite the official end to civil war and democratic transition, culminating in the first nationwide democratic elections in over 40 years in 2006, the era of conflict-related emergencies and the need for massive humanitarian response is sadly far from over. One has only to look at such situations as the current crisis in North Kivu, where hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes, to recognise how far parts of the DRC are from emerging beyond the emergency phase.

Within this context, a unique partnership and emergency response capacity arrangement called the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) was launched in late 2004. The RRM is designed to provide critical multi-sectoral assistance to victims of complex emergencies, natural disasters and epidemics in the DRC. To date, the RRM has assisted more than 2 million victims of rapid-onset emergencies, the majority of them internally displaced persons. Managed jointly by UNICEF and OCHA, and implemented together with three international NGOs – Solidarités, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) – the RRM is recognised by humanitarian actors, donors and external evaluators as the most effective multi-organisation, multi-sector, emergency response mechanism in the country. This article briefly presents the RRM's operational modalities and institutional set-up, and the opportunities and challenges the mechanism offers in the context of the cluster leadership approach. We also highlight key lessons learned, drawing on past experience and an external evaluation of the RRM completed in early 2007.[1]

How the RRM works

Since the mid-1990s, humanitarian emergencies in the DRC have been concentrated in the east of the country, where conflict between and among a dizzying mix of armed groups threatens the lives and livelihoods of Congolese people living there. The crisis has been characterised by large-scale population displacement, abuses and lack of access to basic social services. Conflict and the effects of displacement aggravate already alarming rates of morbidity, mortality and malnutrition. Despite the recurrent and almost predictable nature, location and scope of the DRC's emergencies and their impact on civilians, the capacity for a predictable, systematic or rapid

1 Ed Rackley, 'External Evaluation of the Rapid Response Mechanism in the DRC', March 2007.

> the RRM is designed to provide critical multi-sectoral assistance to victims of complex emergencies

response has been limited. In response, in late 2004, UNICEF and OCHA, with the initial support of donors such as DFID and OFDA, established a pilot initiative – the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) – with the endorsement of the DRC Humanitarian Coordinator. The RRM aims to guarantee standby capacity for four key activities:

1. Rapid multi-sectoral assessments within 72 hours of news of a crisis, security and access permitting.
2. Multi-sectoral response in three primary sectors (household family relief, water, sanitation and hygiene assistance and primary education). Two secondary areas are also covered: the provision of basic medicines and health supplies to partner organisations and health facilities, and the punctual distribution of BP-5 high-protein biscuits.
3. Advocacy and coordination with other actors to promote complementary emergency activities in the fields of food security, health and protection.
4. Systematic monitoring of activities and interventions.

RRM partners evaluate needs and provide assistance to vulnerable populations who have been internally displaced for less than three months, or who are newly accessible, as well as victims of natural disasters or epidemics (mostly cholera). The three-month criteria has been flexible. While the RRM's geographic focus is eastern DRC, the response is triggered whenever and wherever there is limited capacity to address the needs of emergency-affected communities. RRM interventions with ad hoc partners have been carried out in every province of the country, in response to emergencies ranging from flooding and torrential storms to isolated population movements and ethnic violence.

In the four provinces most plagued by recurrent humanitarian crisis, long-term partnerships have been developed with the NGO focal points (IRC in South Kivu, Solidarités in North Kivu, CESVI and, since 2006, Solidarités in Ituri, and since early 2006 CRS in Katanga). Beginning in 2004, UNICEF has entered into agreements with these NGOs providing them with financial and material resources to

meet the four core RRM activities. Each NGO partner has established operational bases within their zone of operation, with sufficient staffing and logistical capacity to fulfill their mandate.

UNICEF's role is to provide technical programmatic guidance, ensure overall coordination, procure and dispatch all relief supplies to the partner's provincial warehouses, monitor and document the interventions and negotiate with donors. OCHA helps coordinate the RRM interventions with other key actors to ensure a complementary response in other non-RRM sectors, as well as managing the complementary Rapid Response Fund (RRF), which enables other organisations to respond to emergency needs in non-RRM sectors, or to complement the standard RRM partners' interventions when needed. In Ituri in mid-2006, for instance, the crisis was on such a scale that support from water and sanitation specialists, particularly Oxfam, was required.

In addition to daily interactions amongst the RRM actors, OCHA, UNICEF and the NGO focal points have weekly meetings in each of the four regions. The outcomes of these meetings are systematically shared with the Provincial Inter-Agency Committees attended by all UN agencies and key NGO humanitarian partners.

UNICEF received $17.6 million in 2006 to manage the RRM, and about $11m for the period January–September 2007. On average, RRM partners assisted an average of 100,000 people per month in 2006, and about 70,000 a month in 2007. The cost-effectiveness, quality and scope of interventions, and the rapidity of the RRM response, have been acknowledged by numerous organisations in the DRC and beyond, including the donors which continue to fund the RRM. An external evaluation of the RRM finalised in early 2007 highlighted the simplicity of the model and the economy of scale it provides.

The RRM and the cluster approach

Since early 2006, the DRC has been one of the pilot countries for the introduction of the IASC cluster leadership initiative. UNICEF has been given the lead in five out of ten clusters established in the DRC – water and sanitation, nutrition, education, non-food items/emergency shelter and emergency tele/data-communications (as co-chair with WFP). As the cluster approach aims to ensure a predictable and effective humanitarian response, the RRM and the operational partnerships with stand-by NGOs are at the heart of UNICEF's approach to cluster leadership in the DRC. Indeed, the RRM can be considered as the operational arm of UNICEF as the cluster lead and provider of last resort in the sectors of watsan, NFI/emergency shelter and education. UNICEF has established provincial clusters and sub-clusters in the emergency-affected provinces, most of which are co-chaired and convened by key international NGO partners. In effect, UNICEF retains the cluster accountability at the national level, with NGOs sharing the convener and facilitator role for clusters at provincial level. In all four provinces where RRM has a stand-by partner agreement, the NGO focal point shares cluster leadership as co-chair of the provincial NFI/emer-

gency shelter cluster and, in some provinces, also as co-chair of the watsan and education clusters.

Lessons learned

Although both the RRM and the cluster approach are relatively new, UNICEF and its partners have been able to draw out some key lessons from the experience so far.

1. Non-RRM sectors. While the RRM has been relatively successful in ensuring coverage in its three core areas of response – NFI, watsan and education – the lack of a parallel or complementary mechanism to meet immediate and acute needs in non-RRM sectors – particularly food security, health and protection – has meant that needs in these areas have not always been adequately addressed. The external evaluation highlighted this as a primary concern. The punctual assistance the RRM can provide in the fields of health (with pre-positioned medicines and medical supplies) and BP-5 high-protein biscuits has not been able to compensate for this shortcoming. RRM partners have neither the capacity nor the mandate to implement the whole spectrum of emergency interventions in any given crisis.

> ## the RRM has been successful in ensuring coverage in its three core areas of response – NFI, watsan and education

A central recommendation from the external RRM evaluation was that the RRM concept of stand-by partnerships, staff and supplies should be adopted by the cluster lead agencies in the food, health and protection sectors. As an example, UNICEF – as the cluster lead for nutrition – has established, together with the NGO ACF-USA, a form of rapid response mechanism for nutrition in under-served provinces, called the RPN (Strengthened Nutrition Programme), to provide last-resort capacity assistance. While there have been significant improvements in complementary responses with other humanitarian actors, particularly in food assistance, significant work remains to ensure better coverage across all sectors of the humanitarian response in the DRC.

2. Intervention criteria and triggers. The RRM has tried to maintain its focus on rapid-onset emergencies, with response within three months of displacement or disaster (and in most instances much, much quicker). The challenge has been in considering response in three areas: a) vulnerable communities who have been displaced, but with minimal assistance, for significantly longer periods of time; b) chronic health emergencies such as cholera in endemic zones of South Kivu and Katanga; and c) situations of protracted displacement in host family settings or collective sites, where displaced populations remain for several months and more, and where other more medium-term assistance mechanisms have not yet kicked in.

For the most part, the answer has been to be flexible, but to try to avoid being 'all things to all emergencies'. The

first situation has been the subject of considerable discussion among UNICEF, OCHA and the RRM partners. Over the course of the RRM, we have become increasingly aware that the temporal criteria of assistance (those displaced for less than three months) is not always an appropriate indicator of vulnerability. While the assumption that coping mechanisms have started for people who have been displaced for more than three months is valid, this is not always a sound reason in itself for according such communities a lower priority for assistance. In certain situations, the opposite has been true. Displaced families from the western shores of Lac Albert lived relatively comfortably with host families during the first months of displacement in the village of Lisasa in northern North Kivu province. As the welcome wore thin, however, these families became more vulnerable and more in need of RRM assistance. The assistance they received, in the form of non-food items, allowed these families to vacate host homes and establish makeshift settlements on land made available by local leaders. With operational partners on the ground able to examine the particularities of each situation, the RRM has been able to be flexible in its approach, while not being compelled to assist all vulnerable populations all the time.

3. Information management. As highlighted in the external evaluation, one of the short-comings of the RRM programme has been a lack of comprehensive and comprehensible information. Robust information management has been a casualty of limited resources, and of the focus by partners on response over information-sharing and reporting. While operational partners produce numerous reports detailing their evaluation missions, interventions and post-intervention monitoring visits, UNICEF and OCHA have not been able to compile information on the range of activities undertaken in forms that are easy to aggregate and analyse. Nor has much emphasis been placed on providing guidance or leadership to partners in this area. Important steps have been made to remedy this, but in retrospect it was acknowledged that much more attention should have been given to information management from the beginning of the RRM.

4. Impact monitoring. Another area highlighted by the external evaluation was impact monitoring. Emphasis has been placed on process and output – numbers of IDP families reached with NFI kits, numbers of people using water facilities rehabilitated by RRM partners, number of displaced school children attending class in classrooms rehabilitated by RRM partners. Partners also invest in post-intervention monitoring, and this has been useful in adapting the content of NFI kits. Nevertheless, until recently there was little attempt to understand – let alone measure – the impact of RRM interventions. As with information management this has not necessarily been an oversight, but a programmatic choice given limited human and financial resources. Although UNICEF acknowledges this as an area for improvement, and with its partners has started to study ways of looking at impact monitoring, time and resources must continue to be devoted to strengthening capacity.

5. Evidence-based advocacy. RRM focal point teams have often been the first, and in some cases the only, humanitarian actors to assess and assist certain disaster-affected communities. The question has been asked: are we losing an opportunity for advocacy on displacement and civilian protection? While partner reports systematically include background and contextual information on the origins of disasters and population displacements, it was acknowledged that more effort needs to be invested to leverage this information in advocacy or dialogue on protection issues with combatants, governments and the wider international community. Efforts to address this are being made, including additional RRM staffing capacity on protection advocacy and systematic linkages with the protection cluster with regard to information-sharing and follow-up.

The key role played by UNICEF in the implementation of the RRM and the cluster approach for the emergency response in the DRC has enabled the organisation to fulfill its main humanitarian commitments on behalf of the most vulnerable conflict-affected populations, in particular children and women, who account for the vast majority of the RRM beneficiaries.

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Community-driven reconstruction: a new strategy for recovery

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As humanitarian actors increasingly engage in environments where transitional governments are in play, recovery is unfolding yet the situation remains fragile, questions arise as to what strategies should be employed. Clearly, the days of direct service delivery are over: enough literature has been produced to understand that creating parallel structures or undermining local capacity is just bad practice. But what comes in its place if we are to help communities recover and lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development? One strategy that is gaining ground within the international community is community-driven reconstruction, or community-driven recovery (CDR).

This article provides an overview of the background, methods and intended outcomes of CDR; the International Rescue Committee (IRC)'s efforts to systematically build

capacity and knowledge around CDR as a strategy for recovery settings; and the realisation of that effort through a sophisticated new programme now underway in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Community-driven reconstruction as a programme genre

CDR has its origins in Community Driven Development (CDD), an approach pioneered by the World Bank and others for use in developmental settings. It is premised on the belief that populations have the right, and are best placed, to drive their own development. CDD can be implemented in specific sectors or more widely in support of a decentralised governance system. According to the World Bank:

> *Broadly defined, CDD ... gives control over planning decisions and investment resources to community groups and local governments ... Experience has shown that given clear rules of the game, access to information and appropriate capacity and financial support, poor men and women can effectively organize in order to identify community priorities and address local problems, by working in partnership with local governments and other supportive institutions.*[1]

CDR applies this same logic, recognising that communities have the right to direct their own recovery. But CDR adapts to reflect the specificities of a context where:

- local institutions may be weak or non-existent;
- experience with good governance is often absent;
- communities may be less willing to work together;
- there is a need for rapid recovery via a tangible 'peace dividend'; and
- there are particular vulnerabilities related to war, such as return and reintegration, the situation of ex-combatants and the particular needs of widows.

Application of a methodology

To fully appreciate what CDR can achieve, an abbreviated description of a generalised methodology is outlined here. It focuses not on sector-specific work, but rather on building the community-level institutions and systems that allow recovery to take place.

CDR focuses on areas that are impacted by conflict, and where high returns are expected

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A soundly designed CDR programme focuses on areas that are impacted by conflict, rural or remote, and where high returns are expected. An adequate level of security must be present, although recent experiences in Afghanistan indicate that implementation can occur in less stable environments.

1 The World Bank, 'Community Driven Development', http://go.world-bank.org/24K8IHVVS0.

In terms of process, a series of steps are conducted with local populations to analyse the context, including the power relations within the community, the conflict itself and general community needs. The population then elects, through a secret ballot, representative committees at one or multiple levels (e.g. village, larger community, region). The elected representatives consult with their constituents, review context analyses and decide on community recovery plans that outline priority projects against pre-defined budgets. (In the early days of recovery, infrastructure is generally the number-one request.)

Committee representatives must defend the plans to the wider community. Once endorsed, local officials are brought into the process to add technical and/or resource support, as well as to ensure that recurrent costs can be met. Thereafter, an open tendering process is conducted and overseen by the committees. Contractors are selected and money is transferred – sometimes directly to the contractors, at other times to committees, where banking systems exist. Project implementation is monitored by separate user groups or community-based organisations, such as water or health committees and parent-teacher groups.

Processes are designed to ensure that the views of women and vulnerable groups are addressed throughout the programme. The NGO's role is to provide all technical and capacity-building support.

Outcomes of an applied methodology

The key to CDR versus some other participatory approaches is that: 1) it is comprehensive, attempting to address some of the root cause issues in conflict countries (poor governance and poverty); and 2) it aims for rapid outcomes while providing true ownership in decision-making and management of the processes and funds. If well designed, connected to the larger reconstruction and governance agenda and implemented by experienced staff (the latter being absolutely key to success), it can achieve results in the categories of governance, social cohesion and socio-economic recovery as follows:

Governance: In most relief to post-conflict countries, governance programmes are targeted towards the realisation of national elections, or building the capacity of civil society groups. However, if it is the base that sustains any democracy, the more good governance is mainstreamed the more likely it is that any emerging governance system will take root. CDR targets grass roots populations through its intensive processes, democratic elections, representative committee structures and accountability systems. Moreover, the processes often create the first bridging mechanism for new local authorities and citizens to work together, and to understand their mutually reinforcing roles and responsibilities.

Social cohesion: In many recovery settings, the question of how to systematically restore the trust and confidence of populations amongst themselves and with their institutions remains a challenge. CDR may redress some of this, not by addressing conflict head on, although this does occur in implementation. Rather, it brings once-divided

communities together using a sophisticated, conflict-sensitive approach to planning, project development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Through work on jointly identified and negotiated needs, community members build collective ownership of both the product and the processes, creating a vested interest in maintaining public goods and fostering a local governance system.

Socio-economic recovery: Providing money in the form of block grants directly to local communities, with attendant training and systems to support their efforts, is believed to be a far more efficient practice for local socio-economic recovery than direct service delivery. Communities that own the money will, in general, take care to select the most sensible projects at reasonable prices, will choose the more honest contractors and oversee their work, will stretch their resources further through increased contributions, and will be encouraged to seek outside sources for co-funding.

Lastly, CDR can offer emerging transitional governments, donors and NGOs key learning opportunities in a rapidly evolving context. Through ongoing documentation and study, it can provide information on community attitudes, reconstruction needs and possibilities for local or community governance structures and systems, all of which could inform any future decentralisation effort.

Impact evaluation on an applied methodology

IRC has been implementing CDR programmes for the last ten years, with its longest-running in Rwanda and its largest in Afghanistan. In the former, we worked for almost eight years implementing across one-third of the country's villages, helping to shape policy and practice on governance and eventually feeding into a full-scale decentralisation process. In Afghanistan, through the World Bank-sponsored and government-operated National Solidarity Program (NSP), we are now in our fifth year of programming, supporting 1,039 communities in two southern provinces to administer $33 million in block grants.

Through an intensive study of these and other similar programmes, we have confirmed that CDR seems to be a stabilising force in the community, that it promotes economic recovery and that it furthers the understanding and practice of governance in reconstruction settings.[2] But these results are not conclusive. CDR (as with most aid delivery systems) presents a significant challenge for programme evaluation. Programmes were initiated in chaotic relief or nascent post-conflict environments, characterised by high demands and expectations for results from communities, international NGOs, donors and governments alike. Need was great, it was understood that a window of opportunity to demonstrate a 'peace dividend' existed and situations were often considered too fluid for sophisticated programme evaluations. As a result, the collection of rigorous data that would allow demonstrable evidence-based impact was often sacrificed (rightly or wrongly).

2 See Kimberly A. Maynard, 'The Role of Culture, Islam and Tradition in Community Driven Reconstruction: The International Rescue Committee's Approach to Afghanistan's National Solidarity Program', IRC, May 2007; and International Rescue Committee, 'Initial Lessons Learned on Community Driven Reconstruction', revised 2007.

> **CDR seems to be a stabilising force in the community, promotes economic recovery and furthers the understanding and practice of governance in reconstruction settings**

To overcome this challenge, in our next programme, in Liberia, IRC piloted one of the first randomised evaluations in a post-conflict setting, with academics from Stanford University. The aim was not only to understand impact, but also to determine if it was even possible to work with control and treatment groups in a conflict-affected environment. The answer was a qualified yes, and consequently we initiated plans for scaling up these programming and learning efforts, using randomised impact evaluation in a new programme in the DRC.

A case study in the DRC

Recent national elections and a democratic government offer the DRC the best chance for years to move from war to sustainable peace and development. Within this context, IRC piloted two small CDR-type programmes (funded by USAID). The aim was not exclusively programme implementation, but also to determine the contextual adaptations required to our own established best practices in anticipation of a much larger intervention. The pilots eventually led to the development of a large, sophisticated CDR programme for three eastern provinces, amongst the hardest hit by war.

The programme is entitled TUUNGANE, which means 'let's come together' in Kiswahili. It is implemented by three international agencies (IRC, CARE and IFESH), and is funded by DFID for three years. It targets approximately 1.78 million people or around 1,400 villages for small projects, and 280 larger communities for public works schemes. It provides approximately £12 million in direct community funds to local populations who, through their representative committees and councils, will own and manage the money, with the technical support of consortium staff.

The scale and size of the programme renders it capable of having an immediate and significant impact. Equally, it provides an opportunity for insights, lesson learning and the development of appropriate methodologies to help governments, civil society and communities in the DRC particularly, but other countries as well, better understand and respond to their transitional contexts. As a result, the project is undertaking a large-scale randomised impact evaluation, in collaboration with leading academics. Using a 3,000-person household survey in both control and treatment areas as one of several tools, it will aim to assess with confidence the three primary aims of CDR:

- Whether, and to what extent, participation in the programme instills social cohesion.
- Whether, and to what extent, participation in the programme promotes better understanding of democratic governance.
- Whether, and to what extent, participation improves the socio-economic situation of the population.

Due to the use of a randomised survey, the programme is selecting participating communities through an open lottery. Experience in Liberia demonstrated that communities were far happier with this process than those generally employed in direct service delivery, i.e. INGO- or elite-dominated decision-making. Communities felt that the open lottery was more transparent, and readily accepted non-selection through this mechanism. Moreover, it reinforced the transparency the programme espoused, and created an interest from non-selected communities in the project process and outcomes.

Conclusion

With CDR gaining increased recognition and becoming increasingly used, the new DRC programme offers tremendous opportunities. First, its size and scale allow for direct impact in the DRC, providing a possible stabilising mechanism in regions long affected by war. Second, the methodology will be studied rigorously, providing new lessons to improve CDR practice both within the DRC and in other transitional environments. Third, outcomes will be studied to inform or influence any new governance systems planned for the future. Lastly, the evaluation strategy will not only certify with confidence programme impact, but also provide insights into conducting randomised impact studies in fragile environments.

To further this learning, a TUUNGANE website will be posted within the coming months, providing updates, lessons learned and programme results. For additional information in the interim, please contact us at Tuungane@DRCongo.theIRC.org.

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Reclaiming mainstreaming: Oxfam GB's protection approach in DRC

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In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), civilians are often the first victims and the deliberate targets of violence and abuse. They are therefore not only in need of humanitarian assistance, but also of safety. As one woman in Ituri put it: 'We want safety – because once we have safety we can have everything else'. Protection work means addressing people's need for safety in the context of a humanitarian response – understanding patterns of fears, threats and abuses, and working with others to identify solutions and take action. Humanitarian organisations like Oxfam GB, which do not have a specific protection mandate, can take steps to help protect civilians. Our community-based programmes mean that we are often well-placed to understand threats and contribute to solutions. One

A woman flees fighting near the town of Sake in North Kivu province, September 2007

©Reuters/James Akena, courtesy www.alertnet.org

of the biggest challenges is that 'protection' and 'mainstreaming' are two of the most over-used and imprecisely defined words in the humanitarian lexicon. We need to make them meaningful and manageable in practice. This article looks at Oxfam GB's experience in Eastern DRC as it begins to do exactly that.

Oxfam GB's approach to humanitarian protection

Oxfam does not have a formal protection mandate like UNHCR or ICRC, and is not a specialist protection organisation like the Norwegian Refugee Council. For us, protection means improving the safety of civilians in our humanitarian programming. In practice, it means trying to reduce the threats of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation to civilians, and reducing their vulnerability to these threats.

This simplified approach is the result of a decade's engagement by Oxfam GB in humanitarian protection. Since 2002, we have actively been 'doing' protection in a range of humanitarian settings, linked to our core public health, food security and livelihoods responses. There is no single model of what an Oxfam GB protection programme looks like. It does and must vary according to needs and context. For example, in order to reduce exposure to sexual violence in Darfur we distributed firewood and fuel-efficient stoves, whereas in Colombia we supported indigenous communities to lobby central government on issues affecting their safety. However, what has emerged from a review of our experience is a three-level model of engagement. This draws distinctions between mainstreaming protection, integrating protection and protection programming:

- Mainstreaming protection means putting people's safety at the heart of all of Oxfam GB's humanitarian work. Our aim is that humanitarian responses should routinely assess, analyse and monitor the risks to civilian safety, and take appropriate action to improve it.
- Integrating protection, which builds on the base of mainstreamed protection, and means incorporating protection activities or 'mini-projects' into a larger humanitarian programme to sit alongside other sectors of work, such as public health, food security and livelihoods.
- Protection programming has the primary objective of improving civilian safety, and is of sufficient scope and scale to be considered a specific programme.

civilians are often the first victims and the deliberate targets of violence and abuse

In July 2007, Oxfam GB committed to a global approach to protection whereby, as a minimum, protection will be mainstreamed into all our humanitarian programming. This will involve ensuring that our programmes do not put people at further risk and actively try to make people safer, and that we actively analyse, monitor and respond to the protection environment as a routine part of our humanitarian programming. From this basis, we can then decide whether and how specific countries should go further and integrate protection activities into larger humanitarian responses, or run specific protection programmes. The challenge now is to ensure that this commitment to mainstreaming is put into practice in a way that is effective and manageable: as the Global Protection Adviser puts it, 'we need to reclaim mainstreaming'. It is a challenge shared with other commitments to mainstreaming (gender, HIV), and with other humanitarian actors who may not see themselves as protection specialists. Our experience of beginning to mainstream protection in humanitarian programming in DRC in 2006–2007 has provided some useful lessons for this process.

The protection context in Oxfam's working areas in Eastern DRC

Despite significant positive developments since the 2002 peace agreement, the situation in the provinces of North and South Kivu and the territory of Ituri remains extremely volatile. Over a million people are internally displaced in these areas. Sexual violence, harassment at illegal check-points and forced labour are widespread, and have become 'normalised'. The perpetrators include the Congolese army (FARDC), demobilised soldiers, local authorities, armed groups or simply 'men with guns'. In some areas, people are also facing abduction, killings, looting and violence by a proliferation of armed groups.

There is no shortage of legal standards to spell out exactly which rights are being violated. DRC has signed and ratified the major international human rights and refugee conventions, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). These human rights principles are prominent in the new Congolese constitution (2006), as well as in a new law on sexual violence. But despite delivering the first case to the ICC, impunity is the norm in DRC, with a police and judiciary that are absent, inadequate or corrupt. In reality the state, in the form of the armed forces and police, is more likely to be a perpetrator than a protector. A report from the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Congo (MONUC) states that the FARDC are responsible for 40% of human rights abuses.[1] The police and other state security services are responsible for 48%. Almost a quarter of sexual violence cases reported to MONUC are committed by the police. The few FARDC brigades which are well-disciplined are scarcely able to protect themselves, let alone civilians. Without food, water and accommodation, and often denied their meagre $22 monthly salary, they are under-trained and ill-equipped.

With state capacity to protect so weak, the international community is maintaining the presence of MONUC, the largest peacekeeping mission in the world. MONUC has a robust mandate allowing it to use force 'to ensure the protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence from any armed group, foreign or Congolese'. MONUC has made an enormous difference to civilian safety in DRC, particularly in Ituri and Goma (which MONUC troops effectively defended in November 2006). According to civilians in Ituri, if MONUC were not present 'we would leave tomorrow. It simply wouldn't be safe for us without MONUC. Not yet'. Yet MONUC has sometimes been accused of behaving more like an observer mission, using force only in self-defence and doing little to physically protect civilians. Civilians cite attacks on Bukavu in 2004, Rutshuru in 2005 and Sake in 2006 as examples of the international community's failure to protect them, and there is much confusion about the practical scope of MONUC's mandate. One community leader told us that MONUC does not protect civilians against violence from the FARDC and FDLR rebels because 'they have stopped intervening now

1 MONUC Human Rights Division, *The Human Rights Situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, report for July–December 2006, 8 February 2007, http://www.monuc.org/downloads/HRR_6Month_Eng.pdf.

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that Congo has a valid government'. The peacekeepers need clearer guidance to help them implement their mandate in practice, and this needs to be clearly communicated to civilians who are expecting protection.

With UNHCR, MONUC co-chairs the protection cluster, which exists to identify and respond to gaps in civilian protection. In some locations it has undertaken projects to monitor protection, train the Congolese army in human rights, build the capacity of the judiciary and advocate with local authorities. The performance of the protection cluster is, however, very inconsistent across the country. In Ituri, for example, the absence of NRC and ICRC means that the cluster is ill-resourced to gather information and respond to protection threats. In other locations, there is a shortage of UNHCR protection staff, and the agency has to choose between prioritising its role in refugee returns and its role as cluster lead and agency of 'last resort' for the protection of civilians still within DRC. Given the lack of protection by the state and the pressures on the formal international protection agencies, there is a clear imperative for all humanitarian actors to incorporate protection into the design and delivery of their programming.

Oxfam's approach to mainstreaming protection in DRC

Oxfam GB has worked in DRC since the 1960s, and currently delivers a water, sanitation and public health response in Ituri and North and South Kivu. In recent years, protection has been a central pillar of Oxfam's advocacy on issues such as the mandate and deployment of peacekeeping forces and reform of the Congolese military. In 2006, a strategic commitment was made to more explicitly and systematically address protection within our programming. To begin this process, a Protection Adviser was recruited for a six-month period to build the capacity of the team through action-oriented training, to undertake protection assessments in the communities where we are already working and to produce a strategy and practical tools for mainstreaming protection.

One hundred staff members from Oxfam GB and other NGOs were trained to use protection tools to analyse common threats and design responses. In North Kivu and Ituri, the Oxfam teams immediately put their training into practice, designing and carrying out a protection assessment in 17 communities, building the capacity of the team to gather sensitive information about protection. In mixed focus groups and individual interviews the teams asked about the main protection threats people were facing, who the perpetrators were, what the formal protection actors were doing to protect them, what their own coping mechanisms were and what solutions they would like to see.

What was most striking about the results was the enormous variation in the type and severity of threats, even between geographically close locations. This was particularly the case in Ituri – when we asked communities to rate how safe they felt on a scale of 1–10, with 1 being completely unsafe and 10 being completely safe, one community responded with 9.1, whereas another just 20km away responded with

1.25. Some communities in North Kivu reported that the FARDC were a major threat, but one said that troops in their area were well-disciplined and posed no threat to the population. The variability and changeability of the protection situation indicate the importance of localised and ongoing monitoring. A one-off, regionally generalised assessment could not have accurately reflected the real protection picture for individual communities.

The effectiveness of community coping mechanisms also differed in the face of threats of different severity. In some places, communities said that they had functional alert systems or simple responses, such as men accompanying women to the fields. In others, submission was the only option, with people stopping their visits to the fields, or giving up whatever was demanded of them in armed robberies or at illegal checkpoints. In one location, people said that they were thinking about poisoning their own crops – it would mean they would ruin their fields and it would not make them any safer, but it would prevent armed groups from taking their harvests.

the effectiveness of community coping mechanisms also differed in the face of threats of different severity

Based on the assessment, Oxfam GB drew up a protection strategy, focusing in its first year on mainstreaming protection in ongoing humanitarian programming. This will provide a basis to explore the possibility of protection programming, depending on the protection issues that emerge. The mainstreaming model was based around the programme management cycle, providing guidance to programme managers and teams on what needs to be done to integrate protection at each stage. A challenge with mainstreaming anything is to keep guidance detailed enough to avoid becoming a simple 'box-ticking' chore, yet manageable enough that it does not overtake the overarching aim of the programme. So, for the needs assessment and programme design and evaluation stages, the Protection Adviser worked with programme managers to come up with meaningful questions, objectives, indicators and means of verification.

The implementation and monitoring stage is in many ways the most important. We know that we have mainstreamed protection properly when a humanitarian team is able to identify protection issues when it is implementing its programmes in communities, handle the information sensitively and find an appropriate response. This needs to be the responsibility of the whole team, with the programme manager making the strategic or sensitive decisions. We integrated protection into weekly field reporting formats and set out guidelines for three options of action for managers in response to the information they were receiving from the field teams. These were:

- Referral of the issue to another agency competent to respond, or to the protection cluster to identify who can fill the gap.
- Local-level advocacy to reduce people's vulnerability or to reduce the threat to them.
- Adapting the programme to reduce people's exposure or vulnerability to the threat.

Programme managers were given guidance on how to choose from amongst these options, depending on the issue, their own capacity and that of other organisations, and potential risks.

Factors for success
At the time of writing, this approach is still very new in the DRC programme, and it is too early to evaluate it. However, a number of issues can already be identified. One was the fact that the decision to mainstream protection was proactively made, prioritised and 'owned' by the DRC programme management team. This meant that team members understood the necessity of protection and were committed from the start, rather than feeling they had to deliver on yet another externally imposed requirement. It was also striking that programme staff were very quick to grasp the meaning and relevance of protection, once they had received initial training. One staff member explained: 'I used to think that protection was something difficult, but in fact it is obvious – it is what we see every day in DRC'. Not a single person in the DRC team questioned the relevance of protection, and all were keen to find ways to take it forward in their work. Some individual programme staff members had already been carrying out protection interventions in their daily work, although not calling it protection. For example, one public health promoter had heard that a group of IDPs were being beaten by the FARDC. He raised the issue with a receptive military commander in the area, who was able to influence the perpetrators to stop. He regarded this not as a 'protection intervention', but as the obvious thing to do in his job.

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protection was one of two pillars in Oxfam's DRC advocacy strategy

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Oxfam's advocacy focus on protection in DRC was also a favourable factor. Oxfam had been advocating at national and international levels on the presence, mandate and conduct of MONUC troops and security sector reform in DRC, and protection was one of two pillars in the DRC advocacy strategy. There was also a network of local NGO 'advocacy focal points', who regularly provided situational analysis to the Oxfam advocacy team. Whilst the links between advocacy and programming on protection need to be reinforced and systematised, there is potential for mutual benefit. The experienced advocacy team and focal points can help the programme teams to undertake local-level advocacy, and can also take issues forward at a higher level.

Oxfam and other non-protection specialist humanitarian organisations can and must mainstream protection

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Externally, the humanitarian environment, whilst inevitably imperfect, was much more conducive to protection monitoring and action than in many other settings. Compared to Darfur, where Oxfam has also been working on protection, there is a relatively large 'humanitarian space'. Although some areas remain inaccessible and there have been attacks on humanitarian personnel, it is generally possible to publicly raise protection issues with the authorities. The presence of the protection cluster, although again imperfect in places, also meant that there was at the least a designated forum and lead agencies for protection coordination for programme managers to refer protection issues to. Where strong protection actors such as NRC, ICRC and UNHCR were present, there was much more optimism amongst our teams that mainstreaming protection might be a valuable part of a bigger process.

Constraints and challenges
Despite this favourable environment, the success of protection mainstreaming is by no means guaranteed. The biggest potential internal challenge will be enabling staff and managers to find time for it. Staff are working in difficult conditions to deliver large-scale water, sanitation and public health programmes, and are extremely stretched. Programme managers feel daunted at the prospect of following up on protection issues, and are therefore reluctant to start. There were also concerns about where the limits of mainstreaming might lie in a country of such widespread and endemic protection problems, and where the successful resolution of an issue can be hard to achieve and measure.

The extent to which a humanitarian organisation can have an impact on protection issues depends significantly on the presence and capacity of specialist protection allies. Protection mainstreaming will therefore be difficult in locations like Ituri, where key protection actors such as ICRC and NRC are absent and participation in the protection cluster is weak. It will become more difficult across DRC if UNHCR and MONUC reduce their investment in protection.

Conclusions and questions for the future
Oxfam and other non-protection specialist humanitarian organisations can and must mainstream protection. We have a duty to take people's safety into account in our humanitarian programming, not to turn a blind eye to protection issues, and to deal appropriately with them. Mainstreaming protection is a minimum of good programming, a necessary link to specialist 'protection' agencies, and can have a positive impact on people's safety. It is no longer a case of whether we should mainstream protection, but how we do it.

The next year in DRC will yield some interesting lessons on two key questions. Firstly, what will it take to make mainstreaming 'stick' as a programme approach, and is this possible without a dedicated adviser? And is mainstreaming enough where other actors and the state capacity to protect are absent? As one Oxfam GB manager in DRC explained: 'We don't have it all figured out yet, but we need to be brave and try'.

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Public health in crisis-affected populations: a practical guide for decision-makers

Francesco Checchi, Michelle Gayer,
Rebecca Freeman Grais and Edward J. Mills
Network Paper 61
December 2007

Never before has it been clearer what interventions must be implemented to mitigate the adverse health consequences of wars and natural disasters, and what standards those interventions must strive to achieve; similarly, the range of interventions at our disposal has never been greater.

Despite these advances, reviews of the global relief system suggest an ongoing failure to deliver. They also highlight the dire lack of credible data to help us understand just how much populations in crisis suffer, and to what extent relief operations are able to relieve that suffering.

Political considerations often obstruct the delivery of appropriate relief. The premise of this paper, however, is that lack of knowledge is also an important limiting factor. This paper argues the need for advocacy for timely and appropriate relief, grounded in clearly outlined, scientifically sound reasoning, focusing discussion on substantive matters and reducing the scope for political manipulation. As such, the paper aims to enable readers to better face up to the political and bureaucratic aspects of the global relief system.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Civilian protection and humanitarian advocacy: strategies and (false?) dilemmas

Marc DuBois, MSF-Holland

Sad but true: advances in the collective discussion of civilian security and protection during violent conflict far outstrip any progress in actually ensuring that security or protection. In the humanitarian arena, there is a gulf between the promise of protection and its realisation – a gulf downplayed by humanitarians due to our own self-interest or self-delusion.[1] Nonetheless, we must accept our limited lot. Humanitarians do not carry arms. We cannot freeze the assets of a top-flight marauder. We must work towards the protection of our beneficiaries through less potent mechanisms, such as risk reduction via intelligent programme design, the provision of information, strategic presence – and by raising our voice.[2]

As discussed during a recent series of HPG meetings at ODI, humanitarian actors practicing protection have increasingly taken on the mantle of advocates for the victims of crises.[3] By raising public awareness of the extent or nature of a crisis, by holding organisations with a formal protection role accountable for their responsibilities or by confronting perpetrators with the consequences of their actions, humanitarian organisations have sought to reduce abuses against civilians under attack. Some appear unhappy at this apparent expansion of the humanitarian mandate, charging NGOs with political meddling, or taking steps to block access for agencies perceived as posing a threat. ICRC's expulsion from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia in July 2007 is testament to the gravity of the issues at stake. Whether through diplomatic lobbying or public denunciation, advocacy can have negative consequences for beneficiaries, for staff and for the organisation's capacity to deliver aid. In other words, there is a perceived tension between operationality and advocacy, with one pitted against the other.

Bearing witness in MSF

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) uses a number of more-or-less interchangeable terms to refer to its humanitarian advocacy: *témoignage, witnessing (bearing witness), speaking out, campaigning* and *advocacy*. Albeit even a core term like témoignage has never been defined, MSF derives a substantial part of its identity from its commitment to bear witness: its 'rebellious humanitarianism'.

1 See Marc DuBois 'Protection: The New Humanitarian Fig-Leaf', *Dialogues*, (4):2–5, September 2007, MSF UK.
2 Humanitarian protection should not be confused with the provision of physical safety. It consists more in activities 'aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of individuals'. *Strengthening Protection in War* (Geneva: ICRC, 2001), p. 19.
3 Transcripts of the meetings, held in April and May 2007, are available at http://www.odi.org.uk/events/civilians_conflict_07/index.html.

> humanitarian actors practicing protection have increasingly taken on the mantle of advocates for the victims of crises

Bearing witness essentially refers to active engagement with local populations, through medical treatment and presence on the ground. The medical act may involve providing care to women and girls with sexually trans-mitted infections (STIs). But humanitarian action goes further: taking note of epidemic levels of STIs in a certain area; seeking to understand why the prevalence is so high, primarily by listening to the patients themselves (collapse of the local economy? survival sex? sexual violence?); and then calling attention to the problem. The key here is that MSF's humanitarian advocacy flows directly from its experience in the field, through medical data and eyewitness accounts, rather than through the kind of investigation and analysis a think-tank or human rights group might conduct.

Defensibility

The nature of bearing witness itself thus forms the first and most significant protection for the organisation. Put simply, our advocacy originates in our 'legitimate' aid activities, meaning that advocacy is our business (contradicting the frequent charge that we are meddling in affairs which are none of our business). If we speak of government forces pillaging villages and burning food stocks, we do so because our medical responsibility includes asking care-takers in our feeding centres why their children are malnour-ished.

Conceiving of fieldwork as a filter for advocacy initiatives implies that we are obliged to report what is happening when faced with the consequences. It also implies that we

> if we speak of government forces pillaging villages and burning food stocks, we do so because our medical responsibility includes asking caretakers why their children are malnourished

confront political actors with their responsibility. However, we do not propose political solutions. This requires an analysis well beyond the ken of our medical interventions. It also implies that MSF does not speak out *on behalf of* a local population (and hence endangering that population), but speaks in its own voice *about* that population.

Basing a message on direct experience should improve the accuracy of the message. Yet humanitarian organisations operate in a world with little if any accountability for their public advocacy. On the contrary: donor publics reward organisations for the sexiness of their revelations, for their condemnation of the plight of the victims and for their denunciation of the bad guys. It is easy to compromise accuracy through our own ardour and at the behest of our communications departments. Content must hence clear only the low bar of being motivated by good intentions, with little internal or external attention to the literal or scientific validity of the message.

What we denigrate as 'backlash' can thus be construed as the first stirrings of accountability. In certain contexts, the authorities have challenged the veracity of our reporting, for example charging that we are being used by locals who feed us fabricated or exaggerated information. There is only one solution: NGOs must be able to defend their work. For MSF, direct experience means that we do not assert, for instance, that certain villages have been burned down unless we have seen the ashes for ourselves.

The same principle extends to the literal accuracy of what we report. There is a critical distinction between saying '500 women were raped' and saying '500 women sought treatment for rape' or '500 women reported to MSF that they had been raped'. Similar concerns also govern the extrapolation and interpretation of data. It is in practice quite difficult to moderate the outrage which drives us into taking a public position. Do declining consultation rates after the handover of an MSF clinic to the local government demonstrate the invidiousness of imposing a fee for services, as MSF would be eager to conclude? Or are other factors at play, such as declining confidence in the quality of services or deficiencies in book-keeping?

Beyond accuracy, public advocacy needs to respect local sensitivities. For example, one government became angry because the language of an MSF report lumped government forces and rebel militias together in one term, 'warring parties'. Incredibly to us, the government barely reacted to the content itself, which consisted of a denunciation of abuses by government forces. This example highlights a key weakness in the expatriate-driven approach to témoignage.

Defensibility: strategy and methods

Most humanitarian organisations involved in advocacy understand the link between modes of action or tactics on the one hand, and impact (both positive and negative) on the other. Countless potential messages arise from any given situation, and the organisation must weigh possible approaches (from factual exposure to persuasion to denunciation/condemnation) and tactics (quiet diplomacy, passing on the information to other actors, semi-public advocacy, dissemination to a limited number of targets or full public diffusion). There can be no template, rather a case-by-case analysis balancing potential outcomes and consequences. There are, however, preparations to be made in advance of humanitarian advocacy which can greatly reduce the risk of a negative impact. These are outlined in Box 1.

Box 1: Strategy and methods to improve defensibility

1. Public reports and press releases should reveal nothing new to the authorities or other 'accused' actors. Public advocacy does not replace bilateral lobbying, and should follow such efforts. It is critical to the defensibility of the message that the NGO can assert that the problem *has* been raised, and yet persists.

2. MSF heads of mission personally deliver public reports to local counterparts and 'accused' actors prior to mass dissemination, as a matter of professional courtesy and to avoid catching officials off-guard.

3. MSF uses key national staff to screen public advocacy to highlight possible cultural or political sensitivities. That said, national staff should be insulated from perceived responsibility for the report as far as possible (for instance having only a limited role in the preparation of the report). It is important, for example, that an MSF nurse is able to explain to the local commander that the message (decrying the military's burning of villages) was the work of expatriates, and that his job is to treat people at the clinic and nothing more.

4. Before publishing major reports or press releases, the contents are discussed with the entire expatriate and national staff. Those working for MSF in the country must be able to explain the report and its underlying rationale, and not all staff will necessarily agree with a given analysis.

5. In deciding upon an advocacy strategy, special attention is accorded to minimising the risk of manipulation. For example, how does one speak of violence or a lack of protection in Darfur without having that message manipulated to favour the politically charged call for an international military intervention? In this regard, objectives are crucial: our actions must not *intend* or *aim* to have partisan political consequences.

6. Public advocacy must remain not only consistent with the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the organisation, but the analysis must also anticipate and counter effects upon the *perception* of these core principles.

7. When it is clear to MSF that the message will be controversial, or incurs a high risk of manipulation, provisional measures are put in place. For example, a Q and A can be developed, foreseeing certain reactions and setting out organisational responses. In more serious situations, contingency planning ensures programme continuity.

8. An obvious rule: make sure your own (glass) house is in order before you throw stones.

Decision-making

Each organisation has its own internal structure or protocol for making decisions about their advocacy. Typically, MSF examines a mix of factors:

- Impact on the security of MSF teams and beneficiaries.
- Impact on access and operational activities.
- Expected positive impact on the situation of the beneficiaries.
- Relation to MSF activities and identity.
- Importance of medical activities and other aid.
- Replacement possibilities (who can take over activities if MSF is denied access).

Scientific calculation is illusory: in the end, with experienced people around a table, decisions coalesce from what is necessarily a gut reaction to a situation. Some questions, however, remain unanswerable. How do we measure the value of advocacy to a population? If public denunciation of their plight helps restore some dignity to victims of violence, what value do we assign to this? What does it mean to people that our public report forms a historical record that breaks a silence or counters future denials? Do we understand the importance of victims having their suffering 'validated'? Given the inability to quantify these results, our faith in the benefits of advocacy may falter in the face of *What good will it do?* cynicism.

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each organisation has its own internal structure or protocol for making decisions about their advocacy

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From the process standpoint, discussion and development of advocacy take place at all levels, from projects to the desks managing the various geographic portfolios. The operational 'line' makes the final call, led by the Head of Mission and Operational Manager. Because humanitarian advocacy by one section of MSF may have consequences for others, other sections operating in the same country are notified, and their views taken into consideration. The draft report is then circulated internally.

The fallacy of opposition

The logic underpinning the opposition between humanitarian advocacy and humanitarian aid betrays an incomplete conceptualisation of the nature of humanitarian action itself. Except for theoretical purposes, the idea of protection cannot be separated from aid, as if delivering blankets were the *sine qua non* of the humanitarian actor and protection work were an optional activity, to be jettisoned at the first hint of trouble. Hence, the aid versus advocacy discussion is rooted in the incorrect perception that we can deliver technical assistance with our eyes, ears, mouths or hearts shut.

Burdening advocacy with the weight of this tension is manifestly unfair, a bias left over from the days when operations were equated with the delivery of assistance. In fact, this tension inheres in humanitarian action itself. Once protection work becomes an integral component of humanitarian action, the positing of one against the other loses its rigidity. It is impossible to deliver aid during crisis and conflict without incurring palpable risk. And yet we distinguish advocacy from aid when we think about risk. It would be odd to say, for instance, 'If we treat malaria in that village we may get attacked' in such a way as to suggest that treating malaria endangers security. Yet we accept the logic of warnings like 'If we publish X we may get kicked out of the country'. Moreover, the readiness of organisations to conceive of advocacy as a threat to access belies the reverse causal relationship: it is often because of and through advocacy that we gain and maintain access.[4] Is there any doubt that considerable and high-level advocacy is responsible for the relative bureaucratic ease with which humanitarian NGOs can enter Darfur?

The notion of advocacy versus aid seems to conceive of advocacy as an all-or-nothing proposition, one governed by a binary yes/no decision. In MSF, we often get bogged down in discussions of whether or not to bear witness, instead of the more relevant question of *how* to bear witness given certain risks and opportunities. Of course there should be hand-wringing – these are difficult decisions, with serious potential consequences for the organisation, its staff and even beneficiaries. Yet for all the anguish we invest in examining the possible harm posed by speaking out, there is seemingly zero interest in similarly analysing the consequences of our silence.

Conclusion

Humanitarian action comprises more than the sterile delivery of assistance. Stemming from a direct engagement with people in crisis, humanitarian organisations must bring aid to meet needs, while at the same time protesting against the man-made causes of those needs. MSF views this témoignage as part of humanitarian action, part of its identity. To minimise any threat of backlash and improve the likelihood of positive results, advocacy initiatives are developed and implemented with regard to the three axes of defensibility (content, strategy and process/method).

The nature of MSF's témoignage, whereby messages emerge from within the framework of the organisation's medical activities, provides a first layer of protection against hostile reactions. The practices encompassed by the concept of defensibility provide another layer of protection: gaining acceptance for advocacy, preventing potential harm from negative responses, and counteracting direct backlash. In an arena without monitors and where there is little accountability, humanitarian agencies must struggle to formulate public messages with equal parts punch and fairness (accuracy). The standard is high: we must be able to defend every word. In the end, though, it is perhaps not the hostile reaction of governments or warring parties that presents the greatest obstacle to

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4 And it is the silent who are often more likely to disappear than those capable of speaking out with both force and credibility.

humanitarian advocacy, but our own tendency to disconnect advocacy from the core of humanitarian action, and to focus solely upon its risks.

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Encroachment and efficiency: armed actors in the relief market place

Richard Luff, independent

This article examines the increased presence and expanded role beyond security of state armed forces in crisis situations. In particular, there seems to be a trend towards armed forces undertaking relief and recovery work in armed conflict and natural disasters. The role of military forces in providing assistance is most controversial in armed conflicts, where they are or may become parties to the conflict. In these circumstances, humanitarian agencies recommend that assistance should primarily be left to civilians, to avoid blurring the line between humanitarian actors and armed actors, eroding humanitarian principles and exposing humanitarian agencies to greater security risks. In high-profile armed conflicts such as Afghanistan, there is much debate about whether humanitarianism is being sacrificed in the name of politics and peace-building.

©Reuters/Yuriko Nakao, courtesy www.alertnet.org

US soldiers distribute relief supplies to tsunami victims in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, January 2005

A more crowded and complex environment
To contextualise the debate it is helpful to summarise the factors that have contributed to the greater presence of state armed forces in disaster zones.

> in 1998, the UN deployed 14,000 peacekeepers worldwide; by 2006, there were over 90,000, plus major deployments by NATO and other regional forces

First, peace support/enforcement operations have increased significantly. In 1998, the UN deployed 14,000 peacekeepers worldwide; by 2006, there were over 90,000, plus major deployments by NATO and other regional forces. NATO forces in particular have also been mobilised in response to major natural disasters, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake.

In many current peace support/enforcement operations, the prevailing political thinking within NATO and the UN is that integrating political, military and assistance interventions will maximise the effectiveness of peace-building efforts, resulting in durable stability and democracy in failed or damaged states. However, UN integrated missions often make the humanitarian aspects of the UN subservient to the political and military aspects of the organisation. Humanitarian agencies have raised concerns over this, and have provided guidance on maintaining the separation of humanitarian and political/military functions. Furthermore, the UN resolution on the Responsibility to Protect (RTP) may mean greater deployment of international armed forces in crisis situations in which humanitarian agencies are present. At the same time, some humanitarian agencies have actively called for military action to protect civilians. Some of the very humanitarian agencies that have called for state armed forces to be deployed will have to be increasingly sophis-

ticated and clear about the way they manage perceptions of association with them.

Alongside the increased presence of government armed forces in crises, the role of private security companies has also grown, notably in highly insecure and politically important environments such as Afghanistan and Iraq. In recent years, these companies have taken on a variety of assistance activities. While relatively little work has been done on the trends in this area, a glance at the websites of private security firms indicates the breadth of their activities, which include assistance and governance, undoubtedly driven by good business opportunities in these new areas. Donors are making funds available to private security companies to undertake assistance activities, without uniforms, often with guns and relatively unregulated. This is a major concern both for state armed forces and for humanitarian agencies.

Second, there has been a recognition of the importance of a more comprehensive approach to disaster management, and a consequent increase in the use of national armed forces in response to major natural disasters. For countries that have reasonably well-equipped national armed forces, this is often a logical choice given the material and personnel resources armed forces possess. However, natural disasters often occur in areas where there is underlying armed conflict, such as northern Sri Lanka and Aceh in Indonesia. In these cases, the armed forces may have until recently been, or may still be, parties to the conflict. Thus, the deployment of these forces in natural disasters may not be as benign as it appears.

Third, alongside the increased presence of national and international armed actors and their expanded roles, there has been a significant growth in NGO activities. According to one report, some 26,000 NGOs globally employ 19 million people, spending $1 trillion. As humanitarian agencies play more prominent roles, so they are more likely to encounter state armed forces.

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agencies need to manage perceptions of association with political actors, including state armed forces

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Finally, humanitarian agencies by their nature are very vulnerable and will quickly retreat when exposed to insecurity, as is well understood by those who may wish to curtail their presence. As the HPG report *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments* notes: a 'major violent incident' can cause 'some to pull back and the overall aid effort to falter'. This report provides clear data and analysis that political motivations play a large and growing role in targeted attacks. The significant investments in security management by all larger humanitarian agencies over the past ten years have almost certainly prevented a greater increase in injuries and fatalities. Clearly, then, for

security reasons, and to maintain independence, agencies need to manage perceptions of association with political actors, including, but not limited to, state armed forces.

Humanitarian principles in the crisis market place

The case for preserving humanitarian principles and protecting the inherently fragile construct of humanitarianism is at the heart of the so-called 'humanitarian space' debate. However, the principles are often not understood by state armed forces, are sometimes dismissed by politicians seeking to co-opt agency capacity and may be interpreted as a bid by humanitarian agencies to monopolise the delivery of assistance. The last point – that agencies do not have a monopoly on assistance provision – has been used to advocate for a more open market approach, undervaluing the importance of impartiality and independence in humanitarian action.

The principles debate has become somewhat sterile recently, and a fresh look is needed to break through what often appears to be an impasse. When humanitarian agencies talk about humanitarian space, they often actually mean humanitarian agency space, and specifically physical access for their work. One major agency has defined this as a space in which 'we are free to evaluate needs, free to monitor the distribution and use of relief goods and free to have dialogue with the people'. Conceptually, this definition may create the impression that humanitarian agencies want to hold on to some form of monopoly. For this reason, it is important to use a broader definition of humanitarian space, along the lines: 'the space for populations affected by crisis, particularly conflict, to access or receive assistance and protection in line with their rights and needs, i.e. on an impartial basis'. This definition acknowledges the reality that affected populations have their own capacity, but that they should also be able to receive assistance in line with their needs, regardless of who is providing it. This picks up on an important point highlighted in the Mapping the Security Environment project commissioned by the UK NGO Military Contact Group (NMCG), namely that 'local communities were more concerned that aid was delivered and less concerned about who delivered it'.

If the supply of aid potentially comes from an increasing range of actors, including armed actors and commercial companies, then traditional humanitarian agencies are going to have to argue their case more comprehensively, or else be undermined by those that would use an argument of realism against principles. This argument for a more realistic approach will draw in those who advocate for a more market-based approach to the supply of assistance. Situating the provision of assistance to address human loss and suffering within the concept of a market is problematic, not least because it undermines the hard-fought-for belief in rights, but it might help humanitarian agencies to recognise some parallels that exist with supply and demand in the market place. It may be more helpful and appropriate for us to consider what investments are being made to

provide assistance and protection to those in need, and whether the criteria for these investments are the right ones.

Assistance provision by armed forces: questionable investments?

There has perhaps been a more widespread acceptance of the role of military actors in delivering some types of assistance, but the nature and appropriateness of this assistance need to be examined more closely in light of whether investments are sound. Critically, this should oblige donors to consider more transparently why they are making money available to their armed forces to undertake assistance, and what they are paying private security companies to do. Closed and non-competitive agreements for the disbursement of funding are clearly far removed from the market practices that some may espouse. The local communities researched in the Mapping the Security Environment project would be very concerned about who delivered assistance if they were not able to access it because deliverers were partial about whom they worked with, or if it did not meet their needs in an appropriate way. In addition, if assistance was unavailable in one community because its provision by armed forces in a neighbouring province was very expensive and had used up limited budgets, communities would be outraged and deprived.

To reinforce their case, there is an urgent need for humanitarian agencies to examine the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of the assistance activities they undertake. (It is also worth noting that, if agencies can demonstrate relative value in their work over military and commercial actors, they will also be doing much to demonstrate their accountability, both to donors and to affected communities.) Of course, how we measure value-added and who measures it is key before comparisons can be made between humanitarian agencies, state armed forces and commercial firms. Although this is reductionist, we can look at basic costs as a first measure, though this will not fully take account of other critical factors, such as appropriateness, sustainability and impartiality.

> **there is an urgent need for humanitarian agencies to examine the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of the assistance activities they undertake**

Oxfam commissioned a research project in 2006 entitled *Encroachment and Efficiency: Are Military Forces Really Undertaking More Assistance Activities and How Efficient Are They When They Do So?*. This states: 'Finding figures on the military spend on assistance activities is extremely difficult, and most researchers have experienced significant barriers to accessing this information. A former NATO

Afghanistan PRT head suggested that there was a lack of transparency by military forces in revealing spends on assistance activities'. Invariably, information is classified for security reasons, and obtaining it has proved very difficult. Nonetheless, the scattered and incomplete information that is available points to significant expenditure and drastically higher costs for state armed forces as compared to humanitarian agencies. Evaluations by the Tsunami Evaluation Commission (TEC) and the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) indicate much higher costs for using military assets for assistance. According to USAID, 'international food drops, earthquake relief, and medicine deliveries have been counted since 1991, and these totaled $2.3 billion through 2000'. Between 1990 and 1996 the United States deployed military assets and supplies in 34 instances in response to earthquakes, typhoons, famines and floods. A key budgeting/charging consideration concerns whether armed forces separate out core operating costs from an 'aid contribution', who pays for each element and whether it counts as official government assistance. Even if aid contributions alone are charged to aid budgets, someone, somewhere still has to pay for core operating costs.

Beyond security, the biggest potential benefit that armed forces can bring is logistics and work on infrastructure, and this has long been recognised by humanitarian agencies. This is where militaries can most efficiently bring to bear their significant personnel and logistical capacity and equipment. However, a report by the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services on military involvement in civil assistance in peacekeeping operations listed a range of projects implemented by contingents in direct support of local communities, including medical assistance and the distribution of food, water, clothing and supplies. While there may be obligations under international humanitarian law to provide such assistance, doing so to satisfy political objectives and gain public profile is always a risk. Who foots the bill for this, and how effective will this expenditure have been? Furthermore, there is no political will to independently evaluate these activities, so it is difficult to assess their weaknesses and strengths.

Over the past few years, military doctrine has been further developed to cover assistance, but this is not particularly helpful as it varies from force to force, can be interpreted differently according to the commander in place at the time and can be used to camouflage real motives. In Afghanistan, the range of activities undertaken by the various NATO PRTs clearly demonstrates the incoherence of NATO doctrine. The bottom line from a donor and public perspective is what money is being spent by whom, and what can be achieved with these investments, not how comprehensive the doctrine is.

Conclusion

Governments will continue to invest in independent and impartial action undertaken by humanitarian agencies. But they will also invest in assistance undertaken by their own armed forces and by private security companies. Therefore, humanitarian agencies will increasingly find themselves working in close proximity to militaries and

private security firms, especially if major donors allocate greater proportions of their budgets to these armed actors. Some of their activities may resemble work that humanitarian agencies usually undertook, causing confusion about the identity and motives of those providing assistance. This means that humanitarian agencies must manage perceptions of association with these actors. In this changed context, humanitarian principles are necessary but not sufficient to preserve humanitarianism. Clarity about the benefits of making investments in humanitarian agencies is also required, in what increasingly looks like a marketplace. Agencies must advocate for increased transparency in government funding of assistance undertaken by state armed forces and private security forces. Finally, there should be political will to independently evaluate and learn from the assistance activities undertaken by state armed forces and private security companies, to provide a more objective basis on which to allocate funds.

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Comparing DDR and durable solutions: some lessons from Ethiopia

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An increasingly important area of focus for relief and development agencies relates to the demobilisation and reintegration of fighters and support for displaced people to return home or resettle elsewhere. Both groups – ex-combatants and forced migrants – are regularly implicated in war and post-conflict situations as perpetrators, victims and survivors of violence. They are widely considered to have become 'dislocated' from the mainstream, constitute potential 'spoilers' and are frequently targeted by comprehensive programmes designed to promote their sustainable 'reintegration' into society. But despite these and other similarities, there is comparatively little exchange between those working with soldiers and those working with forced migrants.

This article considers a number of lessons emerging from an innovative demobilisation and reintegration programme (DRP) involving more than 148,000 Ethiopian veterans. While launched specifically on behalf of veterans and not refugees or internally displaced people, the DRP offers potentially important insights for policymakers and practitioners working to promote 'durable solutions' for the displaced. While the discourses and lexicons may differ, the challenges associated with 'reintegrating' soldiers and forced migrants 'back' into their former lives are broadly comparable.

A critical lesson learned is that, while reintegration is inevitably context-specific, it should nevertheless be conceived broadly. Genuinely sustainable reintegration has economic, social and political dimensions, each of which is interconnected. Another lesson is the need for humility on the part of DRP donors and planners. In the case of Ethiopia's DRP, successful reintegration was in large part a function of the (relative) absorptive capacity of areas of return, the endowment sets of former soldiers and only lastly the quality and quantity of 'benefits' on offer. In other words, interventions on behalf of veterans

and displaced people should accommodate all three 'tiers' and recognise the role of targeted assistance in relation to the whole.

Comparing DDR and durable solutions

What, if anything, do former combatants and forced migrants have in common? For one, they are frequently exposed to a bewildering array of interventions administered by a disparate collection of humanitarian, development and security agencies. Often coordinated by the UN Department for Peace-Keeping Operations (DPKO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank, disarmament, demobilisation, reinsertion and reintegration programmes (DDR or DDRR) are expected to transform soldiers into productive civilians. Likewise, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a number of UN and non-governmental agencies often assist refugees and internally displaced people to achieve a 'durable solution' such as repatriation, resettlement or return, and to ensure that they are adequately 'protected' and self-reliant.

While those agencies administering DDR and durable solutions often work autonomously from one another, there are a few instances where they actively collaborate. Their cooperation is motivated more by necessity than by design. For example, throughout Africa and the Balkans, DPKO, UNDP, UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the World Bank often collaborate (with governments) to ensure that 'foreign' ex-combatants residing outside of their countries of origin are separated from genuine refugee or IDP populations, and are 'repatriated' back home. Such activities are frequently intensely political and may entail criminal proceedings. Predictably, there is comparatively less focus on their sustainable 'reintegration' into civilian life.

Regardless of whether there is (inter-agency) cooperation or not, both DDR and durable solutions ultimately seek to enhance the wellbeing of potentially vulnerable populations. DDR and durable solutions generally only proceed in 'post-conflict' contexts. They are designed to facilitate a long-term process – often with a host government acting as the coordinating authority – integrating sequenced assistance (e.g. rations, seeds, tools and training) with predictable linkages to mainstream development. Both sets of activities often involve a complex assortment of actors with varying mandates and competencies.

> both DDR and durable solutions ultimately seek to enhance the wellbeing of potentially vulnerable populations

In some cases, a 'natural' ordering of responsibilities and division of labour emerges. In the case of DDR, DPKO and to a lesser extent UNDP are frequently involved in disarmament. Owing to their comparative advantage, but also mandate constraints, the World Bank and others are often more engaged in demobilisation, reinsertion and reintegration. In the case of durable solutions, a 'cluster approach' recently emerged, in which different agencies assume responsibility for a range of pre-assigned priorities. UNDP, for example, often takes a key role in 'early recovery', while UNHCR is responsible for overseeing 'protection' and camp management.

Neither DDR nor durable solutions have been as successful as expected or envisioned by their proponents. For a host of reasons, ranging from the extremely complex environments in which they are established to the dilemmas associated with unpredictable assistance and collection problems between agencies, they only occasionally yield sustainable outcomes. It is doubly important, then, to learn from potentially 'successful' cases of DDR or durable solutions. The rest of this article reflects on the outcomes of a World Bank-supported demobilisation and reintegration programme (DRP) undertaken in Ethiopia following an 18-month war with Eritrea (1998–2000). Administered rapidly over a three-year period, the DRP stands apart as a rare success story.

Ethiopia's reintegration experience

The scale and scope of the Ethiopian demobilisation and reintegration programme was breathtaking. Between 2000 and 2003, more than 148,000 veterans – including more than 17,000 disabled soldiers – were disarmed and demobilised by the Ministry of Defence and provided with cash and non-monetary reinsertion and reintegration assistance via the Ministry of Labour and Social Services. The process was carried out efficiently and according to declared principles of transparency and equity.[1]

The vast majority of these former soldiers consisted of so-called 'new regulars' and 'militia', who were rapidly recruited from predominantly rural areas by the armed forces shortly before the war. The only other DRPs that remotely compare include the demobilisation of more than 350,000 Ethiopian soldiers (and rebels) following the collapse of the Derg in 1991, and activities supported by the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) in nine countries of the Great Lakes of Africa.

The political, security and economic context in which demobilisation and reintegration occur invariably influences the outcomes. A few key characteristics of the Ethiopian DRP stand out:

- It was undertaken following a vicious cross-border war with Ethiopia's avowed enemy (and former ally), Eritrea.
- The demobilisation entailed a controlled 'reduction in force' of a standing national army and disarmament was not contested.
- Most returning veterans were at first treated as heroes by public authorities and Ethiopian civilians.
- With the exception of a few border regions, communities of return were not devastated by years of conflict.

1 The total cost of the EDRP was approximately $174 million, with less than $3.1m provided by the Ethiopian government and over $170m supplied by an IDA credit.

- The war was comparatively short, so recruits were not away from their homes and fields for prolonged periods.

Taken together, these characteristics stand in contrast to other post-conflict situations in Africa, which tend to be marked by protracted civil wars and lingering political and criminal violence in their aftermath.

One recent assessment found that, while generally a positive intervention, the Ethiopian DRP yielded differentiated reintegration outcomes. The participatory beneficiary assessment adopted a proportional size sampling strategy among 15 *woredas* in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and SNNP. Overall, the study revealed that, while income and asset holdings partially deteriorated four years after the demobilisation process, many veterans considered themselves to be empowered and accepted by their families and communities, and not unduly discriminated against by political authorities. Whilst the proportion of rural and urban veterans slipping into lower income quintiles increased overall, there is comparatively little evidence of social pathologies or dysfunction.

It should be recalled that the *absorptive capacities* of areas of return were heavily influenced by a combination of macro-economic and environmental factors. Although measures were adopted by government officials and the World Bank to minimise the stresses of reintegration – including the phased provision of monetised assistance to veterans to avoid distortions to the local economy – overall national inflation rose during the period of the DRP. While it is likely that certain inputs stimulated local-level commercial activity, no evidence of this was found during the assessment. Ethiopia was also affected by a severe drought from 2001 to 2003, which disrupted cereal and pulse crops and intensified food insecurity in certain areas, including those in which veterans sought to integrate.

The origins of veterans and their *endowment* sets also shaped reintegration outcomes. The assessment found that there were pronounced differences in reintegration between veterans from rural areas and those from urban areas: more than 80% of all participants heralded from the hinterland. While there is ethnic and cultural variation between Ethiopia's regions, there is also a significant level of ethnic homogeneity in predominantly agricultural and pastoral areas, from where most recruits originated and reintegrated.[2] Endogenous factors such as kinship networks and respect for authority played a decisive role in facilitating reintegration outcomes. Also, because rural veterans were often away for only short periods, social capital remained largely intact. This was less the case for those originally recruited from urban areas characterised by more ethnic heterogeneity, less visible solidarity and higher labour inflexibility and standards of living.

2 This is especially the case in Tigray: more than 40% of all regular veterans, 'new regulars' and 'militia' participating in the EDRP were from this region. Amhara and Oromia are less ethnically homogeneous, followed by Addis and SNNP, where there is a high level of ethnic heterogeneity.

the predictability of assistance was almost as important as the amount received

With respect to DRP *benefits*, the assessment found that the predictability of assistance was almost as important as the amount received. Veterans were promised a host of entitlements by the Ethiopian government in the wake of the conflict – contributing to rising expectations. In some instances veterans borrowed from local money-lenders against the promise of future income and earnings. But a significant proportion of rural and urban veterans spent their initial cash assistance – the so-called transitional subsistence support – on consumer goods and debt repayment, rather than on 'productive' assets as anticipated by programme planners. This constitutes a form of moral hazard. When promised assistance failed to materialise in a consistent or regular fashion, veterans found their financial situation deteriorated.[3] Meanwhile, when training in financial management or enterprise development was provided 'after' they had spent their entitlements, they had little incentive to continue the course without the means to invest.

Conclusions

The DRP in Ethiopia was broadly successful when compared to other countries in Africa. The country did not relapse into conflict following the programme – although the recent Ethiopian-led intervention in Somalia is arguably a continuation of the previous conflict with Eritrea by proxy. Equally, the process was accompanied by comparatively little social unrest, and there is no evidence that criminality increased in areas of integration. A compelling feature of the DRP was its 'reintegration' strategy – an approach that consciously adopted international and domestic best practice and borrowed from contemporary development thinking. While the reintegration outcomes were mixed, they nevertheless yield important lessons for forced migration specialists.

First, the EDRP reminds us that reintegration has economic, social and political aspects. Genuinely successful reintegration requires improvements in all three areas and not exclusively in relation to economic livelihoods. Moreover, there are important linkages between various elements of reintegration. For example, real and relative declines in income and asset distribution can lead to changes in social status and relative acceptance at the family and community levels. It is therefore important to stress both 'economic' and 'social' aspects of the reintegration process – and the relationships between them.

Second, the absorptive capacity in areas of return invariably influences reintegration outcomes. The macro-economic climate – inflation, commodity prices and the

3 A household survey administered by an evaluation team (AGEG) found that 56% of respondents answered negatively to the question 'do you believe your reintegration into civil society has been successful?'.

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like – will invariably influence the behaviour and decisions taken by returning veterans. But other factors at the micro-level also matter fundamentally. For example, in rural areas there were comparatively more robust social and market networks, and the economy was less affected by labour migration, housing pressure and unemployment than was the case in urban areas. Sustainable reintegration thus requires a concerted focus on enhancing/strengthening the absorptive capacity of areas of return.

Third, the endowment set matters. The majority of participating veterans came from income-poor households and had comparatively low levels of employment, education and marketable skills prior to their recruitment into the armed forces. While most 'new' soldiers were originally recruited from jobs as farmers and agricultural labourers, urban recruits frequently 'self-selected' and often had few alternatives to joining the army. In other words, the endowment sets of most participating veterans were comparatively low well before the DRP was initiated. The expectations of donors and government planners of what can realistically be achieved in such contexts must be commensurate with the capacities and endowments of the target group.

Finally, if reintegration entitlements are to be made more effective, it is important to ensure the proper sequencing of financial benefits in line with training and vocational support. In many cases, cash assistance was provided to veterans before enrolment in training/vocational courses. Many veterans complained that they spent these funds 'improperly'. Few had any experience of managing finances on the scale provided, or expertise in making long-term investment decisions. The risks and trade-offs associated with providing lump sum payments to veterans without sufficient financial management skills are well known. Indeed, it is expected that the provision of assistance in phases allows for learning from mistakes.

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PRACTICE AND POLICY NOTES

Environmental degradation and conflict in Darfur: implications for peace and recovery

Brendan Bromwich, UNEP

The conflict in Darfur has greatly accelerated the processes of environmental degradation that have been undermining subsistence livelihoods in the area over recent decades. The implication of this is that environmental drivers of conflict have worsened as a result of the current crisis. An understanding of the physical and social processes involved must inform humanitarian programming, recovery planning and peace processes at local and national level so that this accelerated environmental degradation may be slowed and its impacts mitigated.

The debate over the environment in Darfur illustrates the complexity of a conflict that has numerous levels. The lowest level of conflict, between neighbouring tribes and villages, displays the environmental aspect of the conflict most acutely, as different livelihood groups seek to adapt their ways of life to increasing resource scarcity. This is happening in a context where traditional rules of environmental management have been weakened, and in places rejected altogether. However, even the conflict between different tribes has both local dimensions, over control of resources, and higher-level political dimensions. The local conflicts over resources have become a dimension of the wider conflict between Darfur and central Sudan, relating to long-term issues of political and economic marginalisation, amid regional tensions relating particularly to Chad. Ethnicity complicates the conflict at all levels. The interaction of these different levels of conflict is one of the defining complexities of the Darfur crisis. Thus, while resource scarcity is not solely responsible for conflict at the tribal level, it is a major driver, and must be seen in the context of wider political and economic marginalisation.

> an understanding of physical and social processes must inform humanitarian programming, recovery planning and peace processes

Darfur lies on the edge of a desert in an area that suffers both from an overall paucity of resources and a high degree of variability in the availability of resources. This scarcity and variability have required a high level of community management, given that different groups use resources in different ways for their livelihoods. The environmental aspect of the conflict therefore must be analysed with reference to governance and livelihoods.

Water resources and vegetation

Darfur has low and variable rainfall, ranging from less than 50mm in the northern desert to approximately 200mm around El Fasher, 300–500mm in Geneina and Nyala and up to 800mm or more in the south and in Jebal Mara. Figure 1 shows the rainfall records for El Fasher from 1917 to 2007. Rainfall has been lower in recent decades than previously, and dry years have become more frequent.

Rain normally falls in four months of the year, so there is a large variation in the availability of water between the wet and dry seasons. This is exacerbated by the limited storage provided by the Basement Complex geology that underlies most of the more populous parts of Darfur. The Basement Complex rocks are dissected by wadi valleys with alluvial deposits that are comparatively water-rich. Typical well yields in Basement Complex geology are 0.1 to 1.0 litres per second, as against 1–20 litres per second for alluvial areas.[1] This makes the wadi areas good for agriculture, in contrast to the wide rangeland on higher ground, which lies on Basement Complex.

During the dry season, livestock migrates off the rangeland to the wadi areas for shade and to feed on crop residues. A variety of longer-distance migrations also take place, including from the wet season rangelands in the north to the less arid south for the dry season. This system requires a high degree of cooperation between pastoralist and farming communities to negotiate access for transhumant herders and to safeguard farmers' crops from grazing animals. A wide range of traditional rules exist, for the management of long-distance routes, access to water sources at wadis through vegetable gardens, for the timing of different shepherding rules and for dispute resolution.

In arid and semi-arid areas, rainfall is the most significant determinant of the amount of vegetation, so the variability in rainfall and the poor storage of groundwater are reflected in the variability in vegetation both spatially and temporally in Darfur. Whilst this is most pronounced between the wet season and the dry, considerable variation exists between one year and the next. This makes Darfur's subsistence livelihoods additionally uncertain.

Long-term processes of environmental degradation and increasing scarcity

Darfur has experienced significant growth in population over recent decades, from just over 1m people in the mid-1950s to around 6.5m in the early 2000s (see Table 1).

The marked increase in population density since the mid-1970s has put pressure on both sedentary and pastoralist

1 Tearfund, *Darfur: Water Supply in a Vulnerable Environment*, 2007, p. 5.

Figure 1: El Fasher annual rainfall 1917–2007 and ten-year average trend line
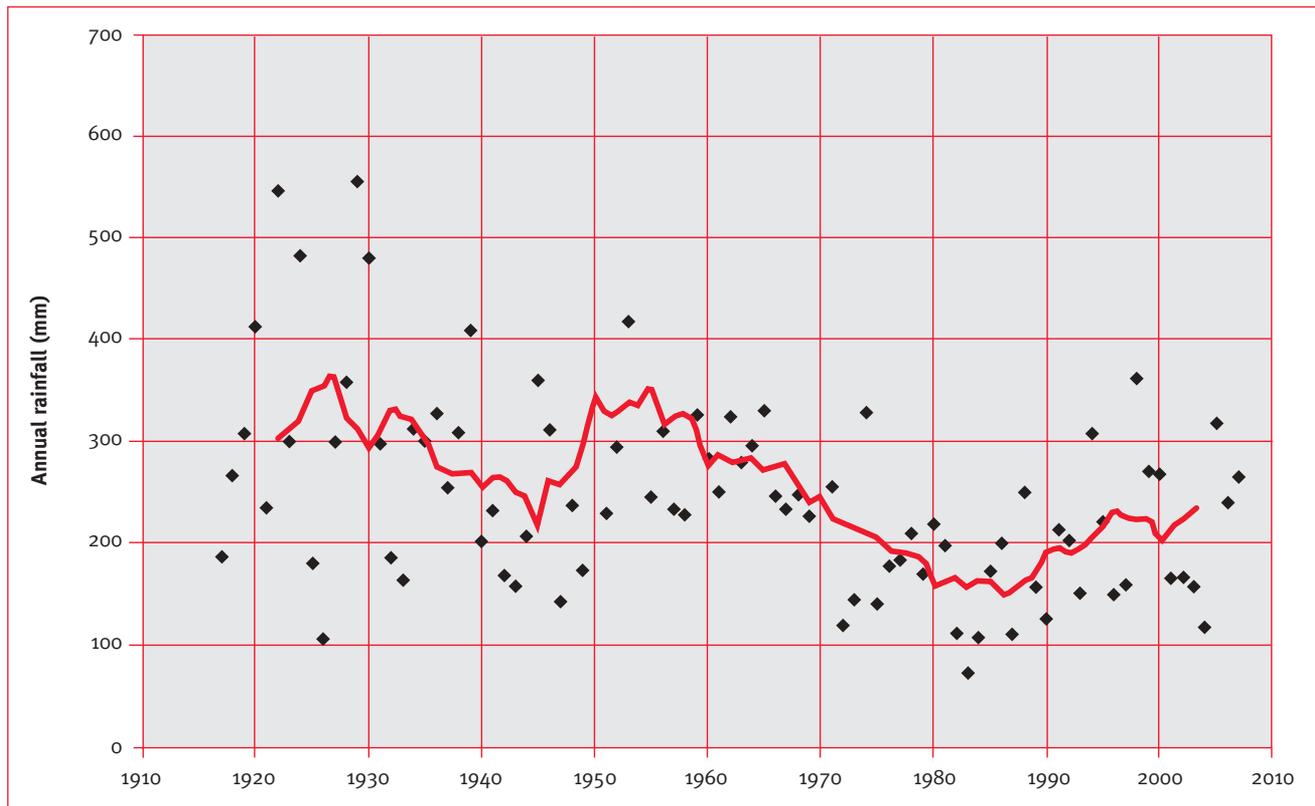
Table 1: Population in Darfur

Year	Population
1956	1,080,000
1973	1,340,000
1983	3,500,000
1993	5,600,000
2003	6,480,000

Source: University of Peace, *Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur*, December 2004, p. 35.

livelihood systems. The UN University of Peace conference 'Environmental Degradation as a Cause of Conflict in Darfur', held in Khartoum in December 2004, describes the following links between the environment and conflict:[2]

1. The increase in population density intensifies cropping and grazing.
2. This means shorter fallow periods for fields and overgrazed rangeland.
3. These processes cause a deterioration in yields and carrying capacities.
4. Larger areas are needed to support the same yields and herds, but demands and herds are increasing.
5. Herders and farmers compete for access to resources, leading to conflict.

2 The report of the conference proceedings is available at: www.steinergraphics.com/pdf/darfur_screen.pdf.

These long-term processes are also evident in the loss of forestry in the last three decades. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP)'s Post Conflict Environmental Assessment of Sudan estimates that deforestation in Darfur is in excess of 1% per annum.[3] The change in land use from 1973 to 2006 for the Kass area is shown in Figure 2 (page 24), where the proportion of land covered by forest fell from 51% to 36%. Forestry is of particular economic significance, not just because of its value for timber and fuel but also because of its role in protecting land quality.

The effects of these processes on the availability of fuel wood are stark, with significant scarcity across large parts of Darfur. In addition to the local demands, UNEP estimates that within five to ten years the northern states will be dependent on the south and Darfur for charcoal, exacerbating local conflict over control of natural resources.[4] Analysis of forestry in Sudan must therefore be made at the national rather than regional level.

Climate change

Rainfall records from El Fasher show a marked drop beginning with drought in 1972. Although there were a number of wet years in the 1990s, climate change models differ on whether recovery will continue, or whether the overall

3 UNEP, *Sudan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*, June 2007, p. 205, at http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications.php?prog=sudan.
4 *Sudan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*, p. 213.
5 *Changes in Extreme Weather in Africa under Global Warming*, Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI), www.knmi.nl/africa_scenarios/West_Africa/region8.

Figure 2: Changing land use around Kass, 1973–2006
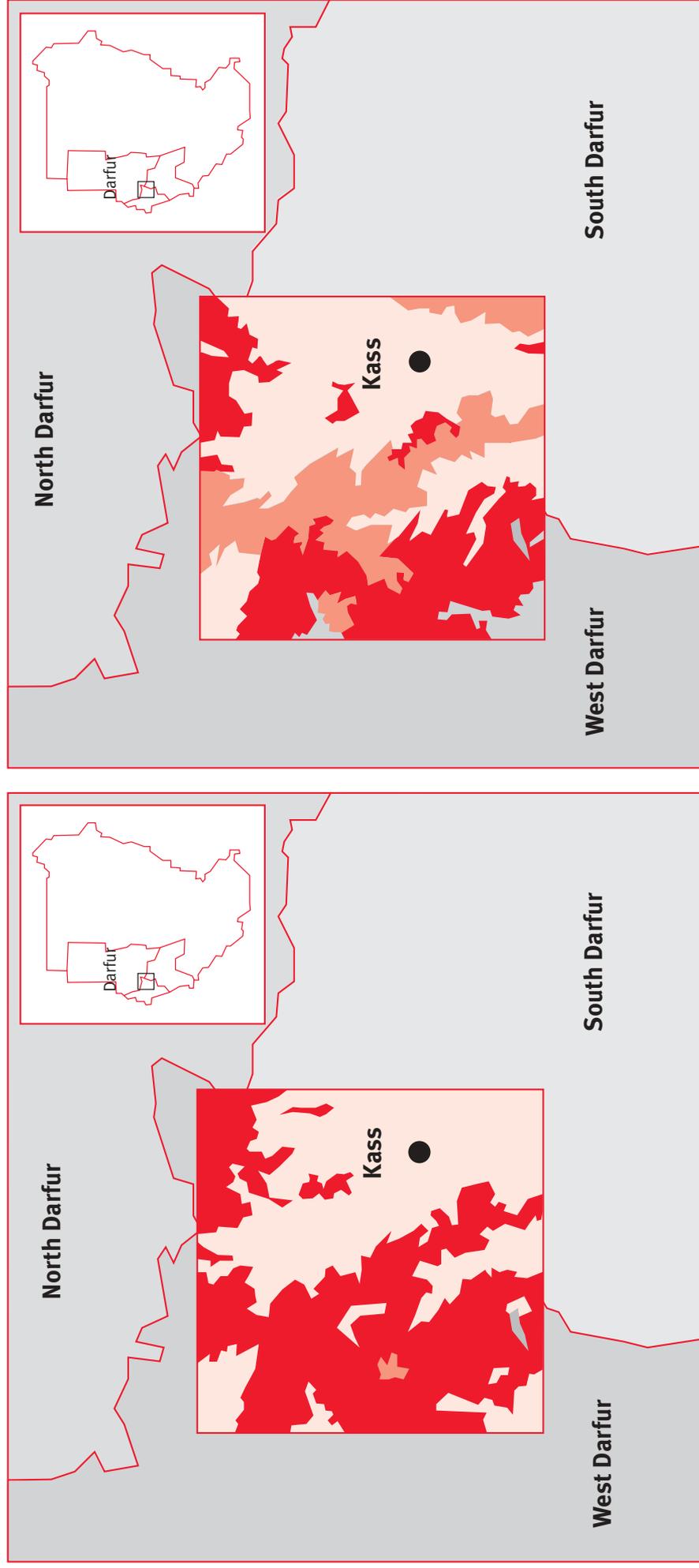
Forestry

Wooded grassland or bushland

Deforested areas

Source: Sudan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment, June 2007, p. 206, at http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications.php?prog=sudan.

Figure 3: Reduction in the length of growing period caused by climate change

200–2050

2000–2020

Key:

>20% loss
5–20% loss
No change
5–20% gain
>20% gain
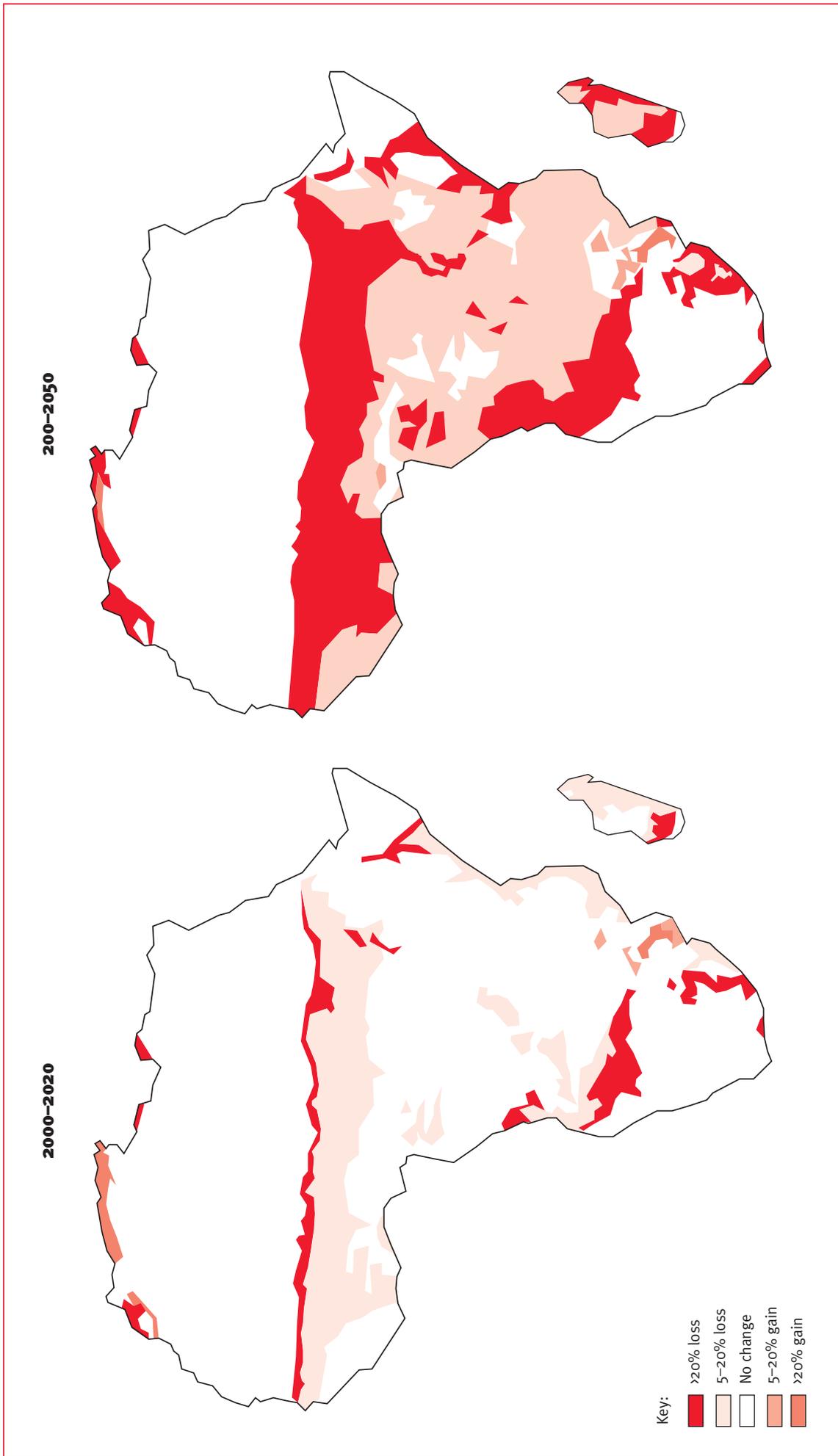
Source: P. K. Thornton et al., *Mapping Climate Vulnerability and Poverty in Africa*, ILRI, May 2006, www.napa-pana.org/extranapa/UserFiles/File/Mapping_Vuln_Africa.pdf.

trend will be further drying.[5] More significantly, droughts have become more frequent: 16 of the 20 driest years recorded have occurred since 1972. Climate change models also predict a reduction in the length of the growing period: Figure 3 (page 25) shows the reduction in the length of the growing period from 2000 to 2020 and 2000 to 2050. Parts of North Darfur will see a reduction of more than 20% between 2000 and 2020, with similar reductions across nearly all of Darfur by 2050. This will have a considerable impact on livelihoods and food security.

Chronic conflict and political change

Traditional governance in Darfur has been weakened.[6] The tribal leadership had legal authority under the Native Administration system until 1971, when the system was abolished. In 1986 it was renewed but its role has varied according to wider political and religious dynamics.[7] Profound changes, such as the redrawing of state boundaries breaking up tribal homelands, have altered the tribal-political map, but issues such as the marginalisation of tribes without land persist. Inconsistent and weak tribal administration have undermined traditional environmental management.

UNEP's Post Conflict Environmental Assessment lists 27 conflicts in Darfur since 1975 in which environment and livelihoods have been a component

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The abolition of the Native Administration system in 1971 preceded the 1972–73 drought, which meant that there was reduced governance capacity to address the problems of migration and conflict that occurred at the time. The most severe drought, in 1984, triggered major migrations and changes in livelihoods, again in the absence of tribal governance ahead of the reconstitution of the Native Administration in 1986. At the same time the number of weapons in Darfur was beginning to increase and regional ethnic tension was growing. This led to one of Darfur's more significant tribal wars between Fur and Arab tribes from 1987 to 1989. According to the contents of the Truce Committee's report,[8] the war related to both political and environmental issues. The agreement also lamented the weak governance at the time. This pattern of political and environmental conflict coinciding along tribal divides is reflected in the current conflict. This war was not an isolated event: UNEP's Post Conflict Environmental

Assessment lists 27 conflicts in Darfur since 1975 in which environment and livelihoods have been a component.[9]

Darfur has also suffered from under-investment in infrastructure and services, a reflection of the political and economic marginalisation at the root of the conflict between Darfur and Khartoum. Lack of education and health services and constrained access to markets restrict the diversification of livelihood opportunities as a means of adapting to the problems caused by environmental degradation.

Darfur cannot be reduced to a discussion over resource scarcity leading to conflict alone, but this scarcity, which is a major driver in conflict at the tribal level, must be addressed in the context of poor governance and under-development.

The impacts of the current conflict

The chronic processes of environmental degradation and the loss of traditional environmental governance have been greatly accelerated during the current crisis, both by the effects of massive displacement and by the fighting itself.

The unprecedented concentrations of population in Darfur are causing localised resource depletion. In Abu Shouk and Al Salaam camps, 12–15 boreholes of the 66 drilled have run dry.[10] IDP camps are generally located on the outskirts of market towns, resulting in the destruction of shelter belts, forestry and farmland. In addition to displacement, the following processes are causing severe environmental degradation:

- Uncontrolled deforestation is taking place, in the context of a breakdown of governance, driven by the role of timber and fuel wood in the war and crisis economy.
- Natural and physical assets are being destroyed as a feature of the war – farmers' crops are grazed by pastoralists' livestock, rangeland is burnt to prevent grazing and handpumps are destroyed.
- Crisis livelihood strategies have short-term horizons, undermining the natural resource base.
- Migration routes are blocked, leading to overgrazing in areas where livestock are concentrated.

Implications for recovery and development

The vulnerability of livelihoods in Darfur is characteristic of the rest of the Sahel, which also suffers from environmental degradation, population growth, poor governance, conflict, climate change, under-investment, dependency on natural resources and lack of opportunities for diversification. Many of these challenges – such as population growth and the increased frequency of droughts – are growing.

Since Darfur's economy is founded on natural resources, equitable and sustainable environmental governance at

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6 Helen Young et al., *Darfur – Livelihoods Under Siege* (Medford, MA: Feinstein International Famine Center, Tufts University, 2005).

7 Alex de Waal (ed.), *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 49–52.

8 *Report of the Popular Committee for Salvation on the Conference to Secure the Tribal Peace Agreement*, quoted in James Moreton, *Conflict in Darfur: A Different Perspective*, June 2004.

9 UNEP, *Sudan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*, p. 82.

10 *Darfur: Water Supply in a Vulnerable Environment*.

village and tribal level needs to be restored as a foundation for economic development. This must be done in a manner that can manage the recurring impacts of drought and crop failure. This will need numerous agreements between tribal groups and communities over access to and management of resources, in addition to resolution at the higher political level.

Efforts to support development in Darfur must learn from the experiences of the western Sahel, and vice versa. A longer-term holistic approach to supporting the region is required. Assistance must integrate development with the inevitable need for recurring humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. These activities must provide a foundation of support for economic development in the absence of a reliable resource base.

equitable and sustainable environmental governance at village and tribal level needs to be restored

The Sahel Working Group's report *Beyond Any Drought*, addressing vulnerability in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, makes the following recommendations, which apply well to Darfur:

- Plan for drought.
- Plan to improve capacity to resist and recover.
- Integrate humanitarian and development work.
- Support pastoralism – a livelihood adapted to the variability of resources in the Sahel.
- Understand the detail.
- Increase long-term assistance.[11]

Climate change, drought cycle management, disaster risk reduction and mitigation of the environmental impacts of the current crisis in Darfur all call for sustainable resource management, good governance and support to livelihoods – which are all needed as part of the humanitarian response in Darfur.

Tearfund's report *Darfur: Relief in a Vulnerable Environment*[12] provides an analysis of the environmental context and makes recommendations for integrating sustainable resource management into relief programming in order to maintain the resources needed for the humanitarian response, as well as for preparation for recovery. The follow-up report, *Darfur: Water Supply in a Vulnerable Environment*[13] highlights the need to anticipate dry years

in the humanitarian context. Drought preparedness is an urgent priority for the water sector given the unprecedented concentrations of population drawing on Darfur's poor aquifers and the variability of rainfall. Oxfam and UNICEF's introduction of groundwater monitoring in IDP camps addresses this issue. The Tufts University Darfur Livelihood Workshops provided livelihood analysis that demonstrates the role of environment and conflict, and provides further recommendations for appropriate relief and recovery programming.[14]

It is striking to compare the categories of adaptation to climate change presented in the Stern report with the impacts of the current crisis in Darfur (Table 2, page 28). The conflict has had a devastating impact on efforts to adapt to the impacts of climate change. However, two vital opportunities exist as a result of the large relief programme: to introduce new technologies, such as new building, energy or water management methods; and to build the capacity of individuals and organisations in livelihoods and environmental programming.

The process of adaptation to climate change would be a major challenge for Darfur in peacetime. However, both the major loss of natural resources and the undermining of traditional environmental governance make the challenge far greater. While uncertainties exist in the modelling of the predicted extent of climate change, the measures needed to adapt to its impacts are often the same as those needed to promote water and energy security in humanitarian assistance in the current context in Darfur.

Conclusions and recommendations

Darfur lies on the edge of a desert, in an area that suffers both from an overall paucity of resources and from a high degree of variability in the availability of resources. As a result of population growth, climate change, poor governance and conflict, it faces immense environmental challenges. Given the role of environmental degradation and the failure of environmental governance in undermining Darfur's livelihoods, these issues must be addressed under the humanitarian programme and as the focal points of a subsequent longer-term programme of support to Darfur. Humanitarian and early recovery programming must be undertaken in a manner that builds capacity to respond to these challenges. In sum, the massive overarching environmental narrative of the Darfur crisis calls for a new approach to environmentally sensitive relief and recovery programming and peace-building.

On this basis, the following recommendations are made:

1. The peace process must address the environmental/ livelihood conflict at the local or tribal level, in addition to higher-level political issues. Relationships between communities need to be knitted together

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11 See http://www.iied.org/mediaroom/docs/Beyond%20Any%20 Drought.pdf.
12 See http://www.tearfund.org/darfurenvironment.
13 See http://www.tearfund.org/darfurenvironment; and http://www.tearfund.org/darfurwatervulnerability.

14 See http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/BriefingNote_7_30_07.pdf; and http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/DarfurLivelihoods.pdf.

Table 2: Adaptation to climate change and the impacts of conflict

Stern's categories of adaptation to impacts of climate change	Impact of conflict in Darfur – and opportunities for interventions
Technology transfer: water management, combating desertification, agricultural technology, etc.	Limited access or funding for infrastructure development; however, a unique opportunity exists to introduce new technologies on a wide scale through relief and later recovery programming.
Human capital: health and education to empower communities to respond to the new environmental context.	One-third of the population displaced, other segments such as Aballa Arabs increasingly marginalised, with little opportunity to develop human capital. However, opportunities exist for learning through experience in relief programming.
Physical capital: appropriate infrastructure, e.g. sand dams, appropriate land zoning.	Villages destroyed, little development, land management impeded by lack of access.
Social capital: security, environmental management, good governance, traditional and kinship relationships that promote peace.	Violence between livelihood groups on a huge scale, as a component of, or fault-line in, the wider conflict. Massive loss in capacity for cooperation over environmental management. However, civil society could benefit from capacity-building under relief programming.
Natural capital: shelter belts, protected forestry, well-managed rangeland.	Massive asset-stripping, IDP camps in or near shelter belts, massive deforestation, rangeland management suffering as migration is disrupted. However, more forestry could be undertaken.

village by village in the context of numerous tribal agreements. Support to livelihoods is an important entry point for peace initiatives at the tribal level because different livelihood groups need to collaborate over access to natural resources.

2. Rural environmental governance needs to be rebuilt in Darfur in a manner that is sufficiently inclusive to withstand the challenges of severe droughts in coming years and the accompanying risks of further conflict.

3. Proposed support for economic development in Darfur needs to acknowledge that the resource base required as a foundation for sustainable development faces chronic degradation, which has been greatly exacerbated by the impacts of the conflict. Therefore, sustainable resource management, adaptation to the impacts of climate change, disaster risk reduction, drought cycle management, livelihood programming and rebuilding rural environmental governance will be core activities in restoring the foundation upon which Darfur's economy is built.

4. Drought and harvest failure must be planned for as normal occurrences; recovery and development planning must include a flexible relief component, on a demand-led basis.

5. Similarly, humanitarian programming must adapt itself to Darfur's considerable environmental vulnerability. Progress has been made in introducing environmental issues in relief programmes, despite increasingly diffi-cult operating conditions, but this needs significant expansion in terms of introducing timberless construction and improved energy programming such as planting woodlots to provide energy for camps. Environmental management needs to be integrated in camp planning in a strategic and systematic way. The opportunities for long-term benefits in technology transfer, capacity-building and mainstreaming environmental practice should be realised. Drought preparedness is a priority.

6. Analysis in humanitarian programming in Darfur needs to make stronger linkages between conflict, protection, livelihoods and environment. Impact assessments in each area need to refer to the others.

7. A major programme to reverse the rate of deforestation in Sudan is needed at a national level. This must include the increased use of alternative construction and energy technologies in order to slow deforestation in Darfur and other marginal areas.

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Understanding surge capacity within international agencies

Ben Emmens, People In Aid, and Rachel Houghton, consultant

Sudden-onset humanitarian emergencies are, by definition, difficult to predict and plan for. Although much can be done by way of preparing and strengthening an organisation's capacity to respond at both international and local level, emergencies still present organisations with many challenges. This article looks at how agencies might overcome some of these challenges through developing various capacities which, combined, constitute their surge capacity.[1]

Surge capacity defined

Major emergencies require international organisations to rapidly and effectively increase their resources – of people, money and materials – in the countries affected by an emergency. This ability to scale operations up (and down) swiftly, smoothly and productively – ie 'surge capacity' – is vital for fulfilling the humanitarian mandate and ensuring scarce resources are used efficiently and with maximum impact.

People In Aid's research has found that effective surge capacity is a pre-requisite for effective emergency response. Developing this capacity requires many different parts of an organisation (programmes, human resources, logistics, fundraising, communications, finance) to work collaboratively, coherently and consistently together, without losing focus on quality, accountability and longer-term impact. This is complex, and necessitates a clear strategic vision of how it can be achieved.

1 This article is the first in a series of three shorter pieces based on People in Aid's research 'Surge Capacity in the Humanitarian Relief and Development Sector'. This can be downloaded from the People in Aid website: http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/publications/surge-final.pdf. The research was initiated by, and carried out in partnership with, the Inter-Agency Working Group, under the auspices of the Emergency Capacity Building Project. For more information go to: www.ecbproject.org.

> **People In Aid's research has found that effective surge capacity is a pre-requisite for effective emergency response**

Box 1: Defining surge capacity

In the humanitarian context, surge capacity can be defined as the '*ability of an organisation to rapidly and effectively increase* [the sum of] *its available resources in a specific geographic location*', in order to meet increased demand to stabilise or alleviate suffering in any given population. Source: People In Aid, 2008.

The need for a clear strategic vision cannot be underplayed. One of the key findings of People In Aid's research is that surge capacity is not just an organisation's ability to mobilise an emergency response or rapidly deploy staff. Rather, it is the result of a continual process, from preparedness planning through to response, and on to transition/recovery programming. Consequently, it requires a holistic or 'whole organisation' approach, one in which agency mandate, structure, culture and leadership are just as crucial as protocols, processes and systems.
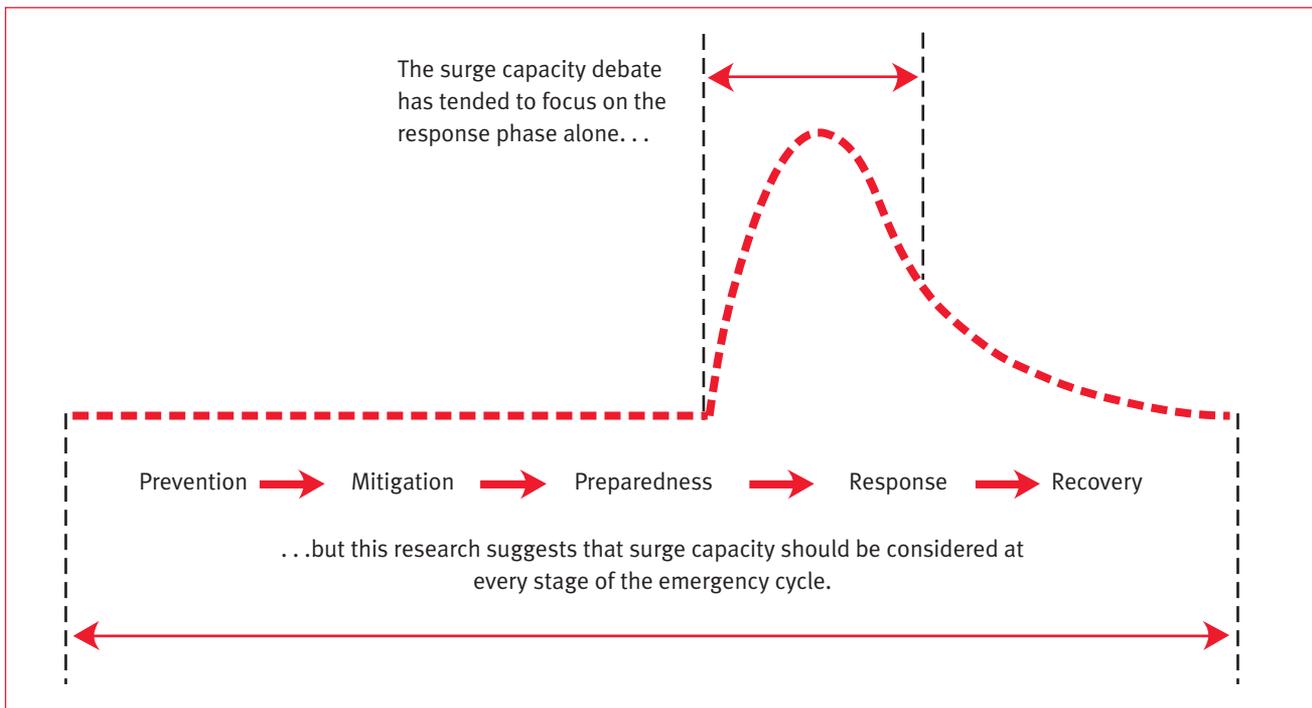
Analysing surge capacity

Surge capacity requires a collaborative, coherent and consistent combination of many inter-related components. During the course of its research, People In Aid identified ten critical 'enablers' of surge capacity:

1. The adoption of a 'whole organisation approach' to developing surge capacity. If this does not happen, capacity to respond is compromised.
2. Matching capacity to mandate and structure, within the context of a wider strategic vision. This has significant implications for the quality of an agency's programming as well as its accountability to affected populations.
3. Pre-positioning of funds. This is critical, and emergency units need to find ways to leverage greater amounts of unrestricted and other funds so that they can scale-up when required, respond to less visible emergencies, as well as build, and maintain, capacity between emergencies.
4. Investment in HR as a strategic function and not just an administrative one. This is necessary not only at HQ but also at regional and country level.
5. Well-trained and experienced staff, in particular strong and competent leadership. There needs to be long-term investment in staff development, including in career development. Focusing on behavioural as well as technical competencies is important.
6. Recruitment for second-wave and longer-term deployments needs, starting at the beginning of an emergency. If an emergency response is to be sustainable beyond the initial surge, counterparting between international and national staff at this stage in a response is vital.
7. Development of surge capacity at country and regional level, as well as at HQ. Strategic integration of aspects of emergency and development programming will help, as will the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction (DRR) across relief, recovery and development programmes.
8. Investment in rosters (and registers). More investment is required if rosters are to remain the preferred model for rapid deployment. If agencies opt to develop these tools, it is imperative they invest in adequate HR capacity to make them effective.
9. Development of standard operating procedures governing all aspects of an immediate response. This is especially important as being able to rapidly deploy will inevitably compromise ordinary agency policies and procedures.
10. The adoption of more systematised learning practices. This is vital in order to avoid making the same mistakes year on year.

Clearly, none of these ten elements just 'happens', hence the conclusion that developing surge capacity is in fact a continuous process which will require agency-wide planning, the matching of capacity with an agency's mandate, integration into its wider ways of working, and ongoing learning and performance improvement. Typically, surge capacity has been related to the point of emergency response, but People In Aid's research suggests it should be a consideration at every point of an agency's intervention, as depicted in Figure 1.

Yet even if an agency has each of these ten critical elements in place, evidence suggests that the challenge of bringing these different capacities 'to scale', in parallel, remains. Furthermore, the research found that developing surge capacity is also about collaboration *between* organisations, and that agencies are more likely to achieve certain goals more quickly and effectively if they work together. This is returned to in the second article of this series, and is explained in further

Figure 1: Surge capacity: the case for integrated interventions

The surge capacity debate has tended to focus on the response phase alone. . .

Prevention → Mitigation → Preparedness → Response → Recovery

. . .but this research suggests that surge capacity should be considered at every stage of the emergency cycle.

> **developing surge capacity is also about collaboration between organisations: agencies are more likely to achieve goals more quickly and effectively if they work together**

detail in the concluding chapter of People In Aid's report on surge capacity.

Resourcing surge capacity

Effective surge capacity requires access to resources: human, financial and material. People and money are undisputedly the core elements, and the availability of human resources for swift deployment is the anchor of any response.

How much surge capacity is required?

Within the context of their particular mandate, many organisations use indicators to classify the scope and extent of an emergency and to determine how much surge capacity is required. Larger agencies support their regional and country offices to develop emergency preparedness plans; some go beyond this, as in the case of Oxfam GB, which uses Emergency Management Plans to identify the individual who will assume the leadership role for each of its three categories of emergency response across its different regions. Oxfam considers leadership to be *the* vital component to the success of any emergency response, a finding echoed by all agencies interviewed for this study.

Human resources

When deploying human resources as part of an emergency response, agencies typically draw on one or more sources of staff:

- specialist emergency staff, for example from an emergency unit or full-time standing team (such as World Vision's Global Rapid Response Team);
- general staff, with appropriate skills and experience;
- externally sourced staff that are unknown to agency;
- externally sourced staff that are known informally to the agency.

Preparing and retaining emergency response staff is of paramount importance, and agencies utilise a number of different staff development tools to do this, such as regular training and workshops for those deployed as well as, for example, simulation training and performance appraisal. All of these help to build staff capacity, as do tools specifically designed to enhance organisational learning, such as Real Time Evaluations and post-response review workshops.

During People In Aid's research, Save the Children UK emphasised that the 'receptiveness of existing programmes for external surge' is also crucial. Thus, an agency's ability to respond quickly and effectively in times of increased need is fundamentally about meaningful national capacity-building. This is borne out by the research findings, which note that emergency units among the Inter-agency Working Group member agencies typically have a dual function: (1) to serve as part of the organisation's emergency response team; and (2), to provide capacity strengthening support to national offices in the development standard operating procedures (including emergency preparedness plans).

The type of human resources and the way in which they are deployed is also critical. This as well as other research by People In Aid suggests that certain behavioural and attitudinal competencies – such as flexibility, of systems as well as people – are essential when it comes to enabling rapid response. Many agencies agreed that their best responses came when different tools, procedures and practices worked in parallel, with the implicit need for staff to accept non-linearity in times of crisis.

> **having the financial means to initiate a response is a critical component of surge capacity**

Financial resources

Having the financial means to initiate a response is a critical component of surge capacity, whether that be money in the bank, special relationships with key donors or some other substantial source.

Each of the ECB member agencies has an emergency response fund which they use to support, to varying degrees, both their capacity development between emergencies and their ability to deploy rapidly when required. The extent to which they do this is based on the amounts available at any given time, and the level of commitment of the organisation. The funding arrangements work in different ways, with two models predominating – central coverage from unrestricted funds, and the use of funding on a 'revolving' basis, with expenditure reimbursed through subsequent grant funding.

Surge capacity mechanisms

A 'surge capacity mechanism' is invariably a complex system of different but inter-related components. It includes not only the different standing capacities described above – ie, people, money and materials – but also the tools, policies, procedures and resource configurations that an agency adopts when mobilising that capacity.

How an agency develops and deploys its surge capacity is a topic in itself, but at the heart of any surge capacity

mechanism lies the need for preparedness and flexibility. Flexibility in particular is critical because enabling a 'surge' often compromises existing ways of doing things. For the purpose of this article, surge capacity mechanisms are grouped into two categories: planning mechanisms and recruitment mechanisms.

Planning mechanisms
A credible surge response is usually preceded by some anticipation of staffing needs (workforce planning). This requires a productive partnership with the HR function, and agencies that respond most successfully to emergencies are typically those that have recognised the strategic importance of human resource planning and management in emergencies. This is particularly important to the sustainability and judicious financial management of any response.

Planning is only meaningful if it is accompanied by an understanding of available staff capacity, from two perspectives: first, the size of the pool of skilled and experienced people, be they at international, regional or local level (ie, the level of staff capacity); and second, the quality of staff capacity, particularly personal and technical competencies, but also the extent to which they are trained or mentored. The research also found that deploying specialist HR personnel at the beginning of an emergency greatly enhances the effectiveness of the response.

deploying specialist HR personnel at the beginning of an emergency greatly enhances the effectiveness of the response

Successful and smooth deployment depends on clear policies, procedures and systems that allow staff to be mobilised and managed in the required timeframe. It also requires a vision for how international and national staff will work together, which includes how an agency seeks to promote continuity in programming beyond the immediate rapid response.

Recruitment mechanisms
The foundation of most emergency responses consists of pre-existing staff capacity at country level. A number of agencies prefer to focus on building their country-level capacity as a way of mitigating the need for a large international response. However, the need for additional capacity is common and, as a result, recruitment mechanisms play a key part in enabling an effective surge response.

Recruitment mechanisms might be internal or external. Internal recruitment (or mobilisation) tends to involve either employing dedicated emergency response staff on permanent contract (so called 'standing teams') or redeploying/seconding staff from one location to another (generally people named on internal registers or rosters). External recruitment tends to involve either hiring people who are unknown to the agency or, commonly, recruiting people through an informal network of contacts, including registers.

Rosters and registers
Rosters and registers are, at their most basic, tools such as spreadsheets or databases to manage information concerning deployable staff. For People In Aid, the key difference between a roster and a register is that a roster contains information about a person's availability as well as their qualifications and skills, while a register tends to contain only the entry's contact details and an overview of their skills and competencies.

Sourcing staff for internal rosters and registers requires special attention, but external recruitment is equally, if not more, challenging. Creativity in both respects is required to ensure that staff of the highest calibre are deployed as part of an emergency response. Methods include maintaining lists of available staff, deploying promising staff into non-acute emergency settings, retention rosters and fellowship and training schemes. In addition, the ability to truncate procedures in an emergency context is desirable.

Conclusion
Surge capacity represents an entire system of policies and procedures; it is as much about an organisation's philosophical approach as it is about any single mechanism, such as a roster or register.

Developing an effective surge capacity rests on an agency's ability to make progress on many fronts, for example staff quality and capacity, flexible pre-positioning of funds and equipment, the development of operational management tools and strengthening capacity in countries and regions, as well as identifying the most useful partner organisations for development and incorporating DRR into longer-term and recovery programming.

Finally, it is clear that single agency scale will, at some point, become finite. To meet the challenge of increased need and limited resources, developing surge capacity is about leverage within organisations, and collaboration, as a form of leverage, between organisations. In working together, agencies are likely to achieve their goals more quickly, and there are examples of successful collaboration that has achieved just that (such as the Inter-agency Working Group member agencies in Sumatra in early 2007). Moreover, given signs that donors seem to be moving towards pooled funding arrangements at country level, this, together with pressure from policymakers and practitioners, provides an additional imperative for agencies to collaborate.

However, the shared humanitarian imperative provides an even more compelling case for collaboration: we know that the quality and outcomes of both relief and longer-term recovery and development are directly related to how well agencies work together in the immediate response phase, so our record has to improve in this respect, for the sake of the individuals and communities with which we work.

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Improving efficiency and effectiveness through increased accountability to communities: a case study of World Vision's tsunami response in Sri Lanka

Julian Srodecki, World Vision

The need for NGOs to be more accountable to those affected by disaster has been noted repeatedly in major evaluations, including the report of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition on the international response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.[1] For World Vision in Sri Lanka, the tsunami response provided an opportunity to implement an emergency programme in a more accountable manner and to work with the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership on a trial of their certification procedures. The overall results, particularly for the people we work with, were very positive and generated a great deal of learning, which is gradually being applied to other programmes. This article describes what was new, how World Vision's work benefited and some of the key factors in making this happen.

For World Vision, the major reason for greater accountability is to help those affected by disaster realise their rights and to improve the quality of the services provided to them. The general benefits of increased participation for communities have been well documented elsewhere, and a participatory evaluation with communities found that they valued World Vision's new approach in Sri Lanka as well.[2] To complement this work, this article focuses on the benefits of increased accountability to the implementing NGO, with a focus on staff perceptions of the benefits of increased accountability to the implementing NGO. It is based on two weeks of interviews with field staff on site in 2007. World Vision has greatly valued learning on accountability from others and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the wider debate.

1 See Chapter 5 of the report.
2 Alexandra Levaditis, *Humanitarian Accountability Team Lessons Learned: Perspectives from Communities and Staff*, World Vision Lanka Tsunami Response Team, September 2007.

'Without HAT we are just a company building houses' – Communications Manager, LTRT

Humanitarian Accountability Team (HAT): an overview

World Vision has a long-term development presence in Sri Lanka, but following the 2004 tsunami a parallel emergency response office was set up to manage relief and reconstruction efforts, called the (Sri) Lanka Tsunami Response Team (LTRT). To promote accountability in LTRT's programming, a Humanitarian Accountability Team (HAT) was set up to engage with communities to provide information, listen to their concerns, liaise with other stakeholders and give people a greater voice in LTRT's programming. HAT was established as a separate sector reporting directly to the Programme Director, and was empowered to represent stakeholder (community) perspectives up to the level of the Senior Management Team. Management of technical sectors such as shelter and child protection was done through an operations department, which focused on the implementation and technical management of projects and activities. HAT complemented this by focusing on community engagement, complaints, liaison with other parties (e.g. NGOs and the government) and monitoring the wider community context through tools like Local Capacities for Peace (LCP). This was implemented through a network of Stakeholder Representatives, based in each site office and working closely with communities. District Liaison Officers were also employed in site offices to serve as focal points for inter-agency coordination.

Ensuring that projects and staff are 'fit for purpose'

The HAT helped to ensure that projects were 'fit for (community) purpose', as well as meeting technical standards. Effective projects need to combine both of these elements. For example, in construction it would be possible to build a school that meets building regulations but cannot be used due to other factors such as location, lack of teachers or access difficulties for children. In LTRT, technical sector staff, such as engineers in the shelter programme, dealt with technical standards. Alongside this, HAT staff took the lead in working with communities to ensure that projects were 'fit for purpose', strengthening sustainability and increasing levels of community satisfaction. This helped to speed up implementation of the shelter programme as one team carried out technical preparations for implementation while the other worked with communities to lay the foundations for the project. Once projects were underway, this structure enlarged the options for community construction methodologies, removing bottlenecks and freeing up technical staff to spend more time on implementation issues.

This split also enabled technical staff to focus on the technical aspects of the project and on tasks that best suited their skills. This improved productivity and enhanced overall project effectiveness. Such an approach is valuable because hiring good technical staff with community liaison skills can be very difficult, particularly in large emergencies such as the tsunami, where there was significant demand for staff.

> ## 'HAT is the conscience of the programme – conscience with clout' – Stakeholder Capacity Building Advisor, HAT

Reduction in organisational risk

Having a function mandated to collect and represent community perspectives and complaints at all levels of the programme acted as a kind of internal nervous system for the programme, keeping decision-makers informed and reducing organisational risk. Senior managers valued having a community-based information system because it improved the information available to them and allowed them to tackle issues as they arose. Across the programme, it was found that being able to listen to communities and act on their concerns helped to reduce the number of disputes that had to be dealt with by senior management. As of September 2007, despite a large operation with over 700 staff at its peak and a budget of $112 million over three years, there were no court cases relating to project implementation.

Quality saves money

Over the course of the two years of operation, the HAT helped save over $5m by preventing unsuitable or unnecessary construction. For example, in Hambantota, World Vision was asked to build 400 apartments. Through its work with communities, World Vision found that the accommodation was not needed and was inappropriate, and no building took place. Savings were also made through better coordination with implementing agencies, which meant that over 175 houses went unbuilt in areas where housing supply was outstripping demand. Further savings were made through more robust community processes to refine beneficiary lists. In one example, World Vision was to donate a fishing boat to one family who had already received a boat through other means. This only came to light when other community members complained, and HAT staff were able to confirm that this was the case. In cases like this, the resources saved were reprogrammed in other areas or directed towards other beneficiaries.

Increased staff motivation and responsiveness to community needs

Having a function mandated to represent community perspectives within the programme helped busy staff to reconnect with their original reasons for joining World Vision, strengthening their commitment to organisational values. Greater knowledge of community priorities and concerns helped expatriate engineers and technical specialists to contextualise their work, and national staff deployed to new areas adapted to their new locations more effectively. For example, in field locations with a large Muslim population, cultural requirements for housing were different to other areas of Sri Lanka. Having a HAT team enabled these issues to be flagged up early, and led many District Managers to hire staff who were more representative of the locality.
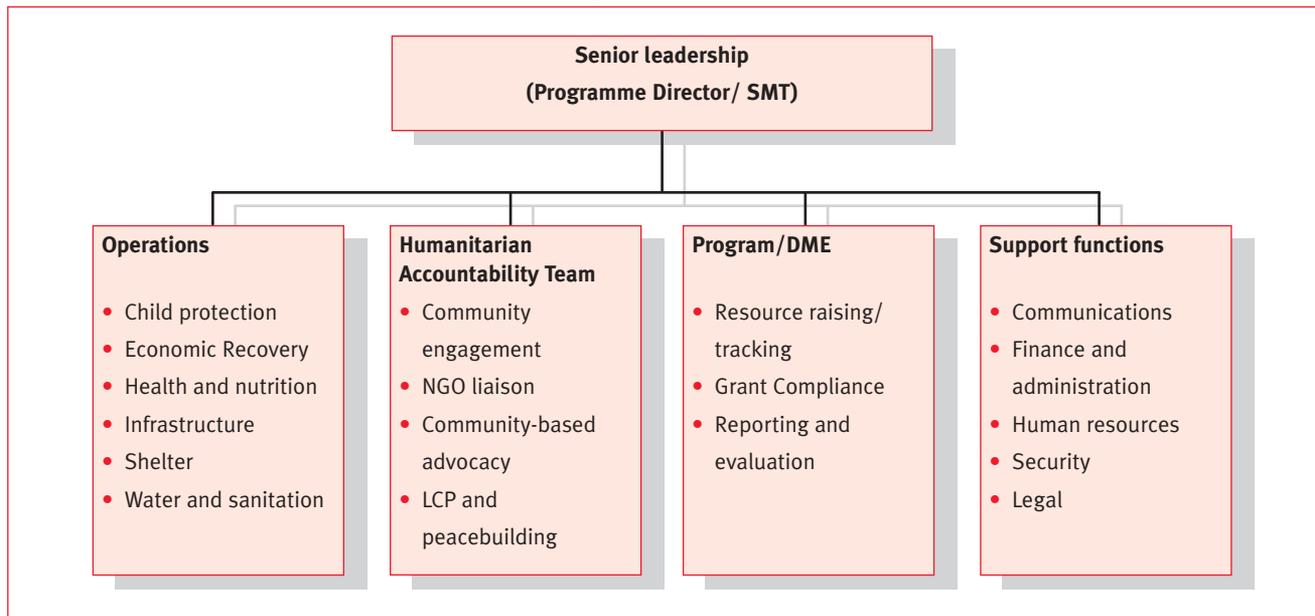
Critical success factors

Staff in Sri Lanka learnt a great deal about what it takes to make a humanitarian accountability function work at field level. Rather than an isolated tool or a stand-alone function, senior managers worked closely with the entire office to develop an overarching approach to accountability that cut across teams, functions and departments. This approach required significant support from senior management, an enabling structure and a change in the culture of the organisation.

Senior management support

A key factor in the impact of accountability in Sri Lanka was the decision of senior management to prioritise quality and accountability. This took two forms: the allocation of significant resources to the HAT, and giving the team the time and space to focus on quality. The HAT team cost about 3% of the total programme budget and had very capable staff. (Monitoring and evaluation costs connected to grant compliance and output tracking are not included in this total.) Senior managers maximised the impact of this investment by giving HAT a mandate to prioritise a single high-risk, high-impact sector, rather than spreading the team too thinly. Sectors involved in construction were chosen as the focus because they posed the highest organisational risk and potentially had the highest impact on beneficiaries. This was because of the high unit costs for housing and other types of construction and because individual families rather than whole communities would receive them. This meant that beneficiary selection processes needed to be fair and that any problems had to be resolved before construction was completed.

Figure 1: The LTRT structure from an accountability perspective

Senior leadership (Programme Director/ SMT)			
Operations	**Humanitarian Accountability Team**	**Program/DME**	**Support functions**
• Child protection • Economic Recovery • Health and nutrition • Infrastructure • Shelter • Water and sanitation	• Community engagement • NGO liaison • Community-based advocacy • LCP and peacebuilding	• Resource raising/ tracking • Grant Compliance • Reporting and evaluation	• Communications • Finance and administration • Human resources • Security • Legal

Senior management support also enabled HAT to hold others parts of the programme to account. This gave the HAT a clearly defined mandate to establish clear relationships with other teams and advocate internally on behalf of communities.

An empowering structure for accountability
HAT was separate from operational and grant compliance functions and reported directly to the Programme Director (see Figure 1).

Representation on the Senior Management Team (SMT) enabled the internal advocacy of community perspectives in a reasonably independent manner and made it easier for HAT to resolve community complaints. First, it facilitated a collaborative approach to resolving community complaints as HAT could participate in the search for solutions. Second, it enabled HAT staff to take complaints to the top. Where possible, community concerns were addressed at the field level, but this structure facilitated a graduated response, first to the line manager, then to the Operations Director and finally to the SMT/Programme Director.

A further benefit of this structure was that HAT staff at each project site were part of a management chain that insulated them from internal pressure to avoid raising or pursuing community complaints. Having an expatriate team leader can help to empower staff and encourage them to raise issues in non-confrontational or highly relational cultures, where talking about problems is not the norm or where there is a fear that long-term relationships might be harmed.

An organisational culture that supported accountability
A key factor in HAT's success was the development of an organisational culture that promoted accountability. All staff working in a field office were sensitised to the need for increased accountability to beneficiaries, and learned to see complaints in a positive light, as a way of improving World Vision's work. This was important because accountability field staff needed excellent relations with communities and

colleagues. This was achieved through a combination of good leadership and the adoption of a collaborative approach to handling complaints. The HAT team leader had strong influencing and coalition-building skills, and was able to develop collaborative relations between departments, sectors and sites. Second, HAT worked alongside implementing staff to resolve problems, making it a helpful ally rather than an external critic. Having HAT staff in each field site meant that problems could usually be resolved at site level. HAT staff were able to raise community concerns, strengthening trust and building good relations with community members. HAT staff were also able to offer practical community engagement services, facilitating assessments, refining beneficiary lists, managing community complaints and dealing with government liaison and coordination issues, and as such were seen as a useful component of the team rather than an external threat.

Conclusion

During the tsunami response, World Vision invested in a Humanitarian Accountability Team at a level that was new for the organisation. This enabled projects to be more responsive to community needs, but also yielded substantial benefits for the organisation. For busy field managers, under pressure to perform in difficult circumstances, the experience of World Vision in Sri Lanka shows that investment in accountability can make a substantial contribution to the internal running of NGOs, allowing them to work more efficiently and effectively in large-scale emergencies.

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UN humanitarian reforms: a view from the field

Katharine Derderian, Eric Stobbaerts, Iesha Singh, Simone Rocha and David Melody

From July 2006 to July 2007, a Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) working group undertook a field-based study on the UN's humanitarian reforms.[1] MSF has long been concerned about UN and donor policies of 'coherence', mission integration and the politicisation of aid in contexts such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone and Afghanistan.[2] The UN humanitarian reforms have generated renewed interest in how coherence translates into field reality, prompting MSF to gain a field-based understanding of the reforms.

Our study reviewed the reforms through three interlinked issues: 1) implementation; 2) impact on humanitarian response; and 3) influence on the humanitarian working environment. To reflect a range of different contexts and types of humanitarian response, MSF teams conducted research in Darfur, South Sudan, the DRC, Haiti, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as carrying out interviews on issues relating to Iraq, Somalia and Uganda. This study aimed to gain a field-based perspective across diverse contexts, and to draw practical conclusions about the impact of the reforms.

> UN humanitarian reforms represent an extension of integrated UN missions, whose structure and activities aim to align political, military and aid objectives

Our findings suggest that the UN humanitarian reforms represent an extension of integrated UN missions, whose structure and activities aim to align political, military and aid objectives. As such, the reforms foster an environment conducive to the breaching of humanitarian principles of independence, impartiality and neutrality. As the reforms introduce coordination and funding tools aimed at increasing coherence, the imperative to arrive at joint analysis and response stands in tension with the inherent diversity and complementarity of humanitarian action, based on independence of analysis and intervention. Within integrated UN missions, the reinforced role of the Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator/Deputy Special

Representative of the Secretary General in both coordination (clusters) and funding (the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)) risks further conflating political and humanitarian aims. In this highly politicised atmosphere, serious questions arise about how the reforms impact on perception of humanitarians in the field, and on their ability to provide timely and appropriate assistance to those most in need.

The reforms: an overview

Launched in early 2006, the UN reforms consist of three interrelated measures aimed at improving humanitarian response:

- The introduction of nine thematic 'clusters' for coordination at field and 'global' levels, with each field-level cluster led by a UN agency functioning as 'provider of last resort', and accountable to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator.
- The relaunch of the CERF as a financial instrument for rapid response and under-funded emergencies, followed up by the UN HC in-country, where priority-setting for response may occur through the clusters.
- Strengthening of the HC role as the hub for both clusters and the CERF, often with a simultaneously political and humanitarian function.

Analysis of the reforms has raised significant concerns, including:

- Whether they have achieved their stated goals of improving humanitarian response, including effectiveness, timeliness and accountability. Both the clusters and the CERF have been criticised for increasing layers of coordination and funding, while lacking accountability and consistent evaluation of their impact. Concurrently, cluster 'accountability' to the HC raises the question whether NGOs should be accountable to the UN system.
- The extent to which the reforms address broader problems in humanitarian response, including the lack of skilled staff, gaps in analysis and failure to fund and offer political support to humanitarian action. Clusters and the CERF are limited tools in addressing cross-cutting issues or long-term and transition contexts.
- The shape UN–NGO relations will assume. With UN agencies acting as cluster leads, or with direct access to CERF funding restricted to UN agencies, the UN wields significant influence over NGOs through the reforms – in stark contrast to the majority of aid capacity and activity, which is provided by field-based NGOs.

Most analysis evaluates the reforms according to their own logic, rather than examining the interconnected objectives of the different reforms and their impact on humanitarians' operational environment. Drawing on field-based examples, this article examines the ongoing

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[1] Completed in December 2007, this article represents the results of a field-based study conducted by MSF sections in Belgium, Holland and the UK, as well as the MSF-Brazil office. It does not aim to provide a comprehensive, global over-view of the reforms, or an institutional MSF position on them. The authors would like to thank Nouria Brikci (MSF-UK) and Sarah Martin (MSF-Holland) for their input.

[2] See, for example, Penny Harrison, 'The Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming: A Challenge to Humanitarian Assistance', *Humanitarian Exchange*, no. 19, September 2001; and MSF, *Angolans Left To Die*, October 2002.

Darfuri women walk through the ruins of Sirba village near el-Geneina. The village was ransacked during a government offensive in February 2008 to retake the area from rebels

than facilitating independent operations, analysis and/or advocacy. In Uganda, ECHO required 'partners' to fit their proposals into existing cluster strategies before granting funding. The British government is also focusing on funding clusters rather than individual NGOs. In the DRC, the clusters channel significant amounts of humanitarian funding from different multilateral mechanisms, including the CERF. Despite some checks and balances (such as the Pooled Fund Board, on which NGOs and donors have a presence), UN cluster leads wield significant power in inviting participants to meetings, submitting proposals and disbursing CERF funding.

policies of coherence and integration as furthered by the UN reforms, and their impact on the humanitarian environment and the provision of assistance.

Implementation of the reforms

The humanitarian reforms represent a positive attempt to address gaps in assistance and to improve humanitarian response. They have not, however, achieved this, and have only reluctantly been accepted, even within the UN system. Yet the clusters are becoming standard issue for UN missions, particularly in quick-onset crises.

The cluster approach has resulted in a proliferation of coordination platforms. In Liberia, for example, the WHO-led health cluster doubled up with the government's Health Services Coordinating Committee and an NGO-headed health forum, on top of disease-specific working groups and the general bi-weekly UN–NGO Humanitarian Aid Coordination Committee. Belying the reforms' aim of increased effectiveness, the UN clusters pre-empted existing government coordination bodies. Likewise, while the reforms' development of a systemic UN response to IDP needs has been a positive step towards assigning clearer responsibilities among UN agencies, increasing (technical) coordination is no substitute for a lack of political will, responsiveness, effectiveness and/or accountability in humanitarian aid. In Somalia, despite increased coordination meetings and a greater willingness to share information, cluster output is negligible, and there are still too few concrete interventions being implemented in-country for coordination to have any real meaning.

Within the clusters, political considerations enter into operational exchanges through funding mechanisms implicitly or explicitly linked to common operational policy or positioning, as well as through the 'inclusive' participation of political, military and aid actors. In such a context, coordination tends towards collective positions, rather

Despite its goal of supporting life-saving activities and/or responding to (under-funded) emergencies, our study found that the CERF is often used in a politicised manner. Between March 2006 and November 2007, $574 million was committed: $376m for 'rapid response', and $198m for 'under-funded emergencies'. Since the CERF covers emergencies under-funded by the UN Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), it frequently risks becoming an emergency sticking-plaster to cover chronic under-funding of often non-emergency UN programmes. CERF-funded activities have also often focused on facilitating the eventual saving of lives and/or livelihoods, rather than direct emergency interventions.

In several cases, assistance to specific regions or populations served (inter)national political interests, instead of prioritising immediate need. Thus, three-quarters of the three CERF instalments for Haiti in 2006 focused on infrastructure and rehabilitation projects in insecure areas of Port-au-Prince which the UN mission MINUSTAH was trying to control. Although Haiti was categorised as an under-funded emergency, these were structural, longer-term and high-visibility projects that seemed to fulfil a security objective, more than a humanitarian one. Likewise, Côte d'Ivoire's three CERF 'tranches' in 2006 all focused in and around Guiglo, a town that saw anti-UN riots and widespread destruction of UN and NGO infrastructure in January 2006. The CERF covered 'emergency' needs in Guiglo, including ill-defined IDP 'protection' activities ($950,000); the return of Liberian refugees to relieve strained assistance capacities ($1m); and vaguely-defined 'life-saving' activities in the region ($3m). CERF-funded activities included political, non-emergency elements, such as 'social events to improve inter-community relations and promote peace culture … bring[ing] together … all communities during the football world championship'.

the CERF is often used in a politicised manner

In an integrated mission setting, the reforms' reinforcement of the HC position simply strengthens the role of the many-hatted HC/RC/DSRSG, negotiating between global UN objectives (peacekeeping, state-building, development) and the imperative of humanitarian action. Even if UN agency heads are now supposed to be accountable to the HC in-country, questions are already emerging around the definition of humanitarian crisis and need for 'last resort' action, prioritisation among different fields of intervention, accessibility to CERF funds, the type and scope of operations and the imposition of restrictive security rules. Although too early to be sure, the results could include delays in response and the further politicisation of aid.

Finally, within the reforms and in integrated UN missions, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been abolished altogether, left under-funded or relegated to a diminished role of general coordination and interfacing with NGOs, without any significant influence to further humanitarian action within the UN system.

Impact on people in need

Our study found some optimism about the reforms' potential to mobilise increased resources, but the results have been questionable. Extra layers of administration and coordination provide cause for concern, while UN security rules sometimes bar UN agencies and their implementing partners from accessing insecure areas. Thus, in the DRC the Pooled Fund and the CERF increased funding overall, but it is unclear how much actually reaches people in need. Security restrictions make it difficult to assess, monitor and evaluate project quality, effectiveness or timeliness. Although the UN mission, MONUC, implements Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) through NGOs, these high-visibility projects seem to lack evaluation of their impact on the target population – let alone their implications for NGO neutrality and security. In Haiti, the resources poured into insecure areas of Port-au-Prince rarely translated into proper assistance programmes based on accurate needs assessments. Strict UN security rules were said to hamper UN agencies' capacity to assess needs and respond to them.

Despite new reform initiatives, it appears that the safe, dignified return of IDPs to areas with sufficient security and infrastructure is still secondary to the organisation of logistics and the overall political objectives connected with return. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the protection cluster planned to facilitate IDP return through support to infrastructure and basic services in the west of the country, despite the fact that no UN agencies had a permanent presence inside the volatile buffer zone to which IDPs were to return. Due to insecurity, MSF health structures were treating high levels of violent trauma in the same region. Other plans developed under the protection cluster included vaguely defined activities such as peace-building and peace education in schools, police training on IDP guidelines and programmes for women and children. In conflict settings, such activities raise questions about the UN definition of protection, and about the effectiveness of such approaches in ensuring physical security and the upholding of human rights and the right to assistance.

Impact on the humanitarian working environment

The launch of the clusters and the CERF has raised concerns about increased NGO dependence on UN context analysis and security, and/or on UN or donor strategies, such as linking IDP return with service provision, or cost recovery for healthcare. Such conditionalities politicise humanitarian assistance, risking negative perceptions towards the UN and international NGOs, potentially impacting on NGO security and humanitarian access and so diminishing timely and appropriate response to people in need. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, there is general agreement that the riots in Guiglo in 2006 were the result of the UN's simultaneous involvement in both the Ivorian political process and the provision of aid. After the African Union and the UN-led international monitoring mission declined to extend the mandate of the National Assembly, rioters besieged the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) compound in Guiglo and the local radio station encouraged young people to destroy 'all the symbols of the UN, including humanitarian organizations present in the town'. UN and NGO offices were looted and damaged, but MSF was unmolested, and MSF and the ICRC restarted their activities the day after the unrest.

In the DRC, protection clusters have called for MONUC deployments, launched human rights fact-finding missions, written letters and physically followed up on behalf of cluster members with the military and judicial authorities in response to troop movements, indiscipline or impunity. It is unclear what is done with this highly sensitive information, and what might happen should the local authorities respond by seeking out those behind the resulting cluster initiatives.

perception is fragile, and crucial to humanitarian access and security

Some access and security problems for humanitarians predate and are not necessarily linked with the UN reforms. Still, perception is fragile, and crucial to humanitarian access and security. Access and security for humanitarians and populations seeking assistance can decline where humanitarians are perceived as pursuing political goals through politicised or regionally biased assistance. During 2007, for instance, OCHA spearheaded a joint humanitarian plan of action for Iraq, with the participation of some Jordan-based international NGOs. For Iraqi actors, local NGOs and beneficiaries, this exercise risked rein-

forcing the already negative perceptions of a pro-Western agenda promoting reconstruction and democracy over the response to emergency needs.

Ultimately, if UN and/or international donors focus on particular regions or populations, NGOs may find themselves unable to intervene, even in response to independently identified needs, leaving populations in already marginalised areas without vital assistance. By further advancing the policies of coherence already present in UN integrated missions, the reforms threaten the diversity, complementarity and independence of humanitarian action.

Conclusions

Although the reforms' implementation is moving fast and in divergent ways, our study found that the logic of integration is as strong as ever across the contexts reviewed. To date, the tensions between the humanitarian and political-military arms of the UN, generated by different views of operations, funding and coordination roles, have not always strengthened the humanitarian response. With the continued blurring of lines between political and humanitarian objectives, the aid architecture established by the UN humanitarian reforms is simply not conducive to upholding humanitarian principles in practice. As an impartial and neutral response to the needs of the most vulnerable, humanitarians must remain vigilant or risk losing ground in the UN and donors' search for coherence. The present reforms risk further reinforcing these tendencies, and seriously hampering humanitarians' ability to sustain and defend independent, impartial humanitarian action both inside and outside the UN framework. Meanwhile, the potential risks of negative perceptions and loss of security for both humanitarians and their beneficiaries persist.

While demonstrating a quantifiable causal correlation between the UN's humanitarian reforms and a loss of humanitarian space remains challenging, it is clear that the reforms do impact indirectly on people in need through the failure to increase resource mobilisation, further appropriate, timely and effective responses and translate the significant time, energy and funding being channelled into the reforms into an impartial and concrete response to need. In the end, our study underlines the need for humanitarians to continue to pursue independence and critical engagement with the UN and other political actors in the field. Humanitarian independence demands intensive reflection about the concrete impact of 'coherent' policies, and above all an active engagement to preserve humanitarian space, with the aim of serving those most in need.

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PRACTICE AND POLICY NOTES

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