

Humanitarian Exchange

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About HPN

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



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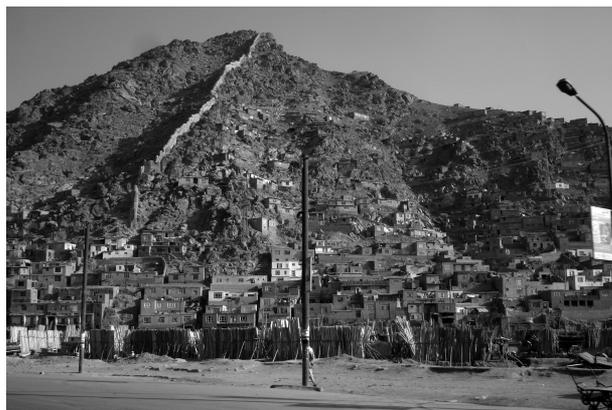
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Humanitarian space in Afghanistan and Pakistan is the theme of this edition of *Humanitarian Exchange*. A combination of violent conflict and natural disasters has led to widespread humanitarian needs in both countries. At the same time, humanitarian organisations face increasing challenges, undermining their ability to respond. The articles in this issue assess the nature of these challenges, and outline ways in which humanitarian organisations are attempting to overcome them.

In their articles on Afghanistan and Pakistan, Antonio Donini and Jonathan Whittall illustrate how belligerents are manipulating humanitarian assistance for political and military purposes. This has reduced operational access and limited the ability of humanitarians to assess and respond to needs. Meanwhile, communities and armed actors alike are becoming increasingly hostile towards what is viewed as a Western and politically partisan enterprise.

Nigel Pont and Ingrid MacDonald outline their organisational approaches to operating in these politicised environments, and strategies to gain acceptance with communities and belligerents. They emphasise practical adherence to the principles of humanitarian action, locally embedded and participatory programming and good political analysis and advocacy. Norah Niland emphasises how the systematic monitoring of human rights abuses and dialogue with warring parties in Afghanistan can be an effective means to improve the protection of civilians.

Nicki Bennett and Zahir Shah discuss the complexities of



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engaging in Pakistan with the military, which is both a belligerent to the conflict there and an important provider of humanitarian assistance. Despite the development of principles and guidelines, humanitarian actors have struggled to agree on their interpretation and adherence in practice has been haphazard. The authors emphasise the need for more coherence and coordinated approaches within the sector.

Articles in the policy and practice section of this issue explore new learning from using unconditional cash transfers instead of vouchers in Otuke District in Uganda; improving the appropriateness and impact of in-kind donations; the findings of a recent ICVA review of NGO coordination over the last ten years; issues affecting the coordination of the earthquake response in western Haiti; an innovative initiative which supports humanitarians and peacekeepers to make informed risk assessments when procuring air cargo and other humanitarian aid transport; the advantages of using community-based cost-benefit analysis in Malawi; and the inadequate levels of humanitarian funding being directed towards older people.

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

Humanitarian action in Afghanistan: an uphill battle

Antonio Donini, Tufts University

What does Afghanistan tell us about the condition of the humanitarian enterprise? After 30 years of war (and counting), the situation for ordinary Afghans is bleak, the manipulation of aid to advance political aims has reached unprecedented levels and humanitarianism is in a parlous state. Many factors affect the plight of Afghan civilians and the response to the crisis in the country. Three are briefly discussed here: the extraordinarily politicised environment, the difficulty of assessing the humanitarian caseload and a divided and weak humanitarian community.

Instrumentalisation

Afghanistan provides a sobering catalogue of unenviable characteristics:

- the world's longest-running major armed conflict;
- with some of the world's worst social indicators, compounded by extremely high levels of violence and gender discrimination;
- a distressing human rights situation, and poor protection of civilians; and
- limited access and a significant but unquantified humanitarian caseload.

However, what makes the Afghan crisis unique is the extreme politicisation of the context in which aid agencies work. Afghanistan is:

- the only complex emergency where all major donors – with the exception of Switzerland – are also belligerents;
- the only conflict where the political UN is fully aligned with one set of belligerents;
- the only complex emergency where the humanitarian UN is neither visibly negotiating access nor openly advocating for respect for humanitarian principles with both parties to the conflict; and
- the only protracted crisis where there is no critical mass of humanitarian agencies: only the ICRC and MSF are operating in a neutral and independent manner.

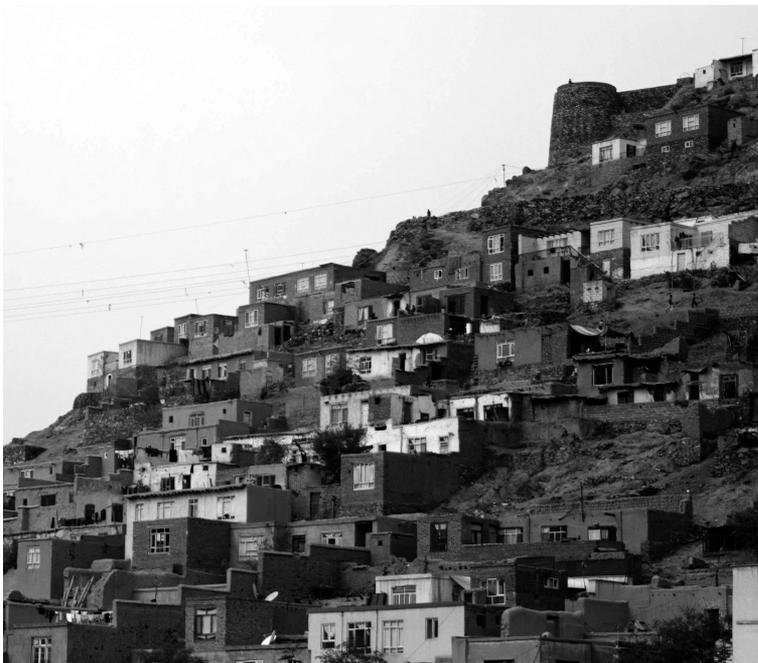
That belligerents would attempt to use humanitarian assistance to their advantage in order to achieve political objectives or win hearts and minds is nothing new. What is surprising is the extent to which the aid community at large, with the notable exception of a handful of 'Dunantist' agencies (i.e. agencies that recognise themselves in the founding principles of the ICRC) has been unable to shake off the perception that it is co-opted by, or associated with, the world-ordering enterprise that descended upon Afghanistan after the demise of the Taliban regime in 2001. The roots of this alignment, perceived but in many cases also real, are to be found, on the one hand, in the assumption (misguided, it turns out) that a post-conflict

era would be ushered in by the Coalition intervention and, on the other, in the consequences of the so-called 'joined-up', coherent or integrated approaches propounded by the Coalition powers.

The Taliban were routed in 2002, but they did not disappear. There was no attempt to include them in the internationally-mandated peace process. As an Afghan analyst quipped at the time: 'They are like broken glass. You can't see it but if you walk on it, it hurts'. The aim of the UN and Coalition members was to support the government. Donor largesse and the general affirmation of 'post-conflictness' gave a weak and increasingly corrupt government a *de jure* legitimacy – while *de facto* it was being strongly contested on the ground by assorted power-brokers (the new euphemism for warlords) and by a re-emergent Taliban and other insurgent groups. At the same time, humanitarian need was downplayed and the strong UN humanitarian capacity was disbanded.

Nine years later, the failure of this international strategy and its consequences for humanitarian action are stark. Humanitarian capacity is weak, there is no consensus on the basic operational requirements of humanitarian agencies, no clarity on humanitarian needs and an extremely politicised environment, where aid agencies are pressured into, or not averse to, supporting the Coalition and the government's political and military objectives. As a result, there is little understanding of or respect for humanitarian principles by the Taliban and other insurgents.

The beleaguered aid community is increasingly bunkerised behind blast walls of ever-greater height. In Kabul and other major cities, there is little to distinguish the blast walls of UN compounds from those of the Coalition or of private security companies. Aid agencies are cutting themselves off from the very Afghans they are meant to assist. This is particularly true of the UN, whose international staff can only move around in armoured vehicles in all but a few more stable areas in the centre and north. For NGOs as well, operational space is rapidly shrinking: long-standing relationships with communities are fraying because senior staff cannot visit projects. Remote management and monitoring difficulties are affecting programme quality. Responsibility and risk are being transferred to local staff, and the risk of being associated with the government or the Coalition is one that, understandably, few are prepared to take. The one-sidedness of aid agencies, real or perceived, is affecting both the reach and the quality of their work. With the exception of the ICRC and a few others, mainstream international agencies, UN and NGO alike, are becoming more risk-averse and loath to rethink the way they work. As a result, they are allowing their



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responsibilities to be defined by political and security considerations, rather than by the humanitarian imperative to save and protect lives.

Information vacuum

One of the consequences of the ‘coherence’ agenda – pursued both by the UN integrated mission and the Coalition – is that humanitarian needs have largely been obscured. In early 2002, the OCHA office was incorporated into the UN integrated mission. The UN humanitarian function was quietly disbanded. UN agencies, donors and most NGOs quickly followed suit. The emphasis was on post-conflict recovery and there was a reluctance to focus and collect information on humanitarian need. For donors, even in the face of escalating conflict, to do so would have been an admission that their strategy was not working. While a separate OCHA presence, with one foot outside the integrated UN mission, was re-established in January 2009, its leadership and capacity remain uncertain. The fact that the UN Humanitarian Coordinator is also the Resident Coordinator and Deputy SRSR further muddies the waters.

The absence of reliable data on the depth and breadth of the humanitarian crisis increases donors’ reluctance to acknowledge that a robust humanitarian response is necessary. Common sense leads many to surmise that increased conflict, reduced aid agency access, threats and violence against aid workers and attacks against government facilities would all conspire to reduce or even lead to the collapse of health and essential services in large swathes of the country, and that acute vulnerabilities requiring urgent attention are not being addressed. Although anecdotal data exists, for example on access to health,¹ a strong case documenting the

¹ L. S. Rubinstein, *Humanitarian Space Shrinking for Health Program Delivery in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Briefing Note, US Institute of Peace, Washington DC, October 2010, available at: <http://www.usip.org/resources/humanitarian-space-shrinking-health-program-delivery-in-afghanistan-and-pakistan>.

scale of humanitarian need has not been made. With the honourable exceptions of OFDA and ECHO, which have large unspent humanitarian budgets, the lack of hard data on vulnerability has provided donors with an easy way out: as one donor representative put it, ‘unless you can prove that there is a humanitarian crisis, we see no need to shift our funds from recovery to humanitarian activities’. Thus, paralysis.

At the same time, a new sense of urgency was also beginning to be seen. Donors and agencies alike had started to realise that an endgame of sorts was looming. With the reduction of US troops starting in mid-2011 and unpredictable changes in the offing, including increasing fragmentation of the political environment, some had caught on to the urgency of repositioning themselves. All of a sudden, talking to the other side, which had only recently been

anathema, seemed to be an idea whose time was rapidly coming. Pressure was mounting on OCHA to negotiate access for the wider aid community and to get a better handle on vulnerability in hard-to-reach areas.

Divisions in the aid community

Afghanistan is peculiar in that, unlike other major crises, very few traditional or ‘purist’ humanitarian agencies are working where they are most needed. The vast majority, whether UN or NGO, are multi-mandate agencies. Most NGOs perform a variety of relief and/or development functions, and in most cases receive funds from belligerent nations or work as government implementing partners or military/assistance hybrids such as the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. As for the UN agencies, they are perceived as having lost all semblance of independence and impartiality, let alone neutrality. As late as 2008, there was still widespread denial amongst these multi-mandate agencies and donors about the reality of the conflict and how it was impacting on assistance activities.²

Both NGOs and the UN now face difficult choices as they are seen as aligned with a government whose legitimacy is questioned, and a foreign military presence that is increasingly viewed with hostility or apprehension by Afghans. To be clear, working for the government (or in joined-up government–Coalition programmes) inevitably implies taking sides, and is seen as such by those who are fighting the government and the Coalition. Taking sides is a political act, defensible or not depending on one’s views. Agencies that cross the threshold of politics cannot expect to be seen as neutral and independent, although they can at times be impartial in their activities. Strictly speaking,

² See A. Donini, *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles Power and Perceptions – Afghanistan Case Study*, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2006 (and update *Humanitarianism Under Threat*, 2009). Available at: <https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/display/FIC/Humanitarian+Agenda+2015+---+Afghanistan+Country+Study>.

they cannot be considered ‘humanitarian’.³ This ‘Wilsonian’ position implies a degree of identification between the agency and the foreign policy objectives and values of its sponsors. At the other end of the spectrum, ‘Dunantist’ agencies put a premium on time-tested humanitarian principles. They see neutrality not as an end in itself but as a means to access, assist and help to protect those in need of humanitarian action. In situations of violent conflict, such as Afghanistan, it makes sense to try to achieve a clearer separation between Wilsonians and Dunantists, not so much for political or ideological reasons but because the Dunantist approach tends to be more effective in reaching those in need.

³ Jean Pictet, one of the ICRC’s leading thinkers, warned that Red Cross institutions, and by extension humanitarian agencies, ‘must beware of politics as they would of poison, for it threatens their very lives’. Pictet, quoted in Larry Minear, ‘The Theory and Practice of Neutrality: Some Thoughts on the Tensions’, *International Review of the Red Cross*, vol. 63, no. 66, 1999.

As the ICRC and MSF have demonstrated, in active war situations such as Afghanistan building trust around rigorous neutrality and independence with all sets of belligerents is the *only* viable approach. Insulation or separation from partisan political agendas is a better recipe for access and acceptance both by belligerents and communities. For this reason, these agencies are distinctly wary of UN-led coordination, not to mention integrated missions and other ‘coherent’ approaches. MSF has officially seceded from UN humanitarian coordination bodies. Perhaps this bifurcation between card-carrying humanitarians and other actors is no bad thing in difficult places like Afghanistan; maintaining the fiction that there is one aid community is unhelpful – and dangerous.

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Civilian casualties in Afghanistan: evidence-based advocacy and enhanced protection

Norah Niland

Afghanistan is now in its fourth decade of warfare, making it one of the most protracted conflicts in recent history. The nature of warfare, and related war agendas, have evolved over time and continue to do so in line with changing internal and external political objectives and ground realities. However, the absence of adequate measures to protect civilians has characterised the fighting since the outbreak of armed conflict in 1979.

According to an ICRC survey from 2009, almost all Afghans – 96% – have been directly or indirectly affected as a result of the immediate or wider consequences of war; nearly half (45%) of those interviewed had seen a family member killed and a third (35%) has been wounded in fighting.¹ Notwithstanding the likely drawdown of US forces beginning in mid-2011, and growing awareness of the urgent need for a negotiated end to the conflict, there is a high probability that the safety and protection of civilians will remain a concern in humanitarian and other circles in the foreseeable future.

This article explores efforts to mobilise attention in decision-making circles to the costs of war on Afghan civilians. It focuses on the role that systematic monitoring and investigation by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) Human Rights (HR) team, coupled with routine public UN reporting, has played in supporting advocacy aimed at enhancing protection for people whose lives are at imminent risk.

Changed policies, postures and attitudes

Nine years after the Taliban regime was routed by the

¹ ICRC/IPSOS, *Our World, Views from the Field, Afghanistan Opinion Survey*, Geneva, 2009.

the Taliban project themselves as fighting a war against an occupation that is hugely detrimental to Afghans

US and its allies, Afghanistan is engulfed in a crisis of governance and escalating warfare. As in other war settings, civilians have paid a high price. The importance of avoiding civilian deaths is, however, one of the few issues on which there is consensus across the diverse stakeholders engaged in Afghanistan; this consensus is central to changing attitudes to the war and how it is depicted. The Taliban now project themselves as fighting a war against an occupation that is hugely detrimental to Afghans; at the same time, they have issued public statements highlighting the need to safeguard the lives of civilians. US military and civilian decision-makers now emphasise the importance of protecting civilians in a conflict that is increasingly seen as a civil war fuelled by grievances associated with the corrupt and predatory practices of the Kabul regime. In recent years, the UN has repeatedly raised concerns about civilian casualties.

Hostility towards the war is widespread, especially in areas most directly affected, and where humanitarian action is constrained by insecurity. The ability of the UN and the larger humanitarian community – with the exception of the ICRC – to engage proactively and productively was also constrained by the dismantling of the UN’s humanitarian

coordination structure, and dedicated protection capacity, when UNAMA was established in 2002. The prevailing viewpoint then was that state-building was the critical and central priority.

It was only in 2007 that the issue of protection began to receive senior-level attention within the UN.² Efforts to promote protection were however widely seen as not impartial and as closely allied to counter-insurgency programmes. Civilian deaths as a result of actions by international military forces were frequently depicted, within and outside the UN, as ‘unfortunate accidents’; at the same time, anti-government forces were presented as ruthless killers with a penchant for ‘operating out of civilian areas’, even though many international military bases were located in densely populated urban areas, including downtown Kabul. This messaging was echoed by the media, and complicated efforts to convince all of the warring parties to comply with humanitarian and human rights norms.

A major challenge involved reorienting human rights monitoring, analysis and reporting so that perceptions of bias could be rectified. Objective analysis was of critical importance for understanding which circumstances or types of incidents were the most lethal for civilians. It was also important to start a dialogue with, or attempt to influence, the warring parties to change their attitude and behaviour in situations where civilians were at risk.

Systematic monitoring, investigation and reporting

The launch of the cluster system in Afghanistan in 2007 provided an opportunity to rethink and revamp efforts to enhance the protection of war-affected civilians. This included finding ways of maximising synergies between humanitarian and human rights entities. Thus, the work of HR UNAMA on civilian casualties was pursued within the humanitarian framework of the Protection Cluster; this helped build alliances. It also helped insulate advocacy on protection concerns from political agendas and perspectives at odds with principled humanitarian action.

HR monitoring was reoriented so that the focus was on investigating the circumstances in which civilians were killed. This was a departure from the previous preoccupation with determining whether a violation had occurred, and the provision of related legal analysis. In sum, monitoring produced data that helped bring attention to the issue of civilian casualties, and the need to reduce them.

Systematic data collection and up-to-date analysis, facilitated by an Afghanistan-specific, electronic database, proved critical to timely and credible UN public reporting and related advocacy efforts. Annual reports show comparable trends, including a rise of almost 40% in civilian deaths in 2008 over the preceding year; 55% of these deaths were attributed to the armed opposition and

² The UN organised a workshop in August 2007 with the Afghan authorities, senior ISAF and UN personnel, humanitarian and human rights staff and others in order to identify key protection challenges, and potential solutions and strategies.

39% to pro-government sources, while the remaining 6% were not attributed and were, mostly, the result of cross-fire incidents. The first six months of 2010 saw an increase of 21% over the same period in 2009, with 1,271 deaths recorded; 72% of these deaths were attributed to the armed opposition and 18% to pro-government forces.³

Advocacy was strategic and wide-ranging. It was greatly facilitated by regular public reports issued jointly by UNAMA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which garnered top-level media coverage locally and internationally, including in troop-contributing countries.

Initially, different sets of warring parties challenged the conclusions of the HR team on particular incidents and trends. In 2008, for example, data analysis showed that there was an increase in the incidence of ISAF ‘force protection’ or convoy incidents when new troops were rotated into an area. Data also showed that airstrikes were the biggest killer in the context of pro-government military tactics. Over time, however, ISAF came to acknowledge the objectivity of the reporting even if, on occasion, it disputed perspectives on particular incidents.

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A breakthrough occurred in August 2008 when an airstrike in Shindand, southern Herat, resulted in the death of over 90 civilians, including a large number of women and children who were killed as they slept. Video footage, including from a mobile phone, clearly showed infants among the dead, obliging ISAF to acknowledge that its version of events was erroneous. The Shindand incident acted as a catalyst for ISAF to develop a Civilian Casualty Tracking Cell that, in contrast to previous tracking mechanisms, was not dependent solely on after-action reports from troops involved in particular incidents. ISAF also shifted its stance on public information, refraining from issuing immediate statements on particular incidents. This allowed for a more thorough review of incidents and conclusions, based on a cross-section of insights.

Dialogue as advocacy

The focus on bringing down the casualty rate facilitated structured interaction with pro-government forces and also changed the tone and nature of the dialogue on measures to prevent avoidable harm to civilians. In September 2008, ISAF issued a Tactical Directive that limited the use of air strikes in particular circumstances in order to minimise risk to civilians. Subsequent Tactical Directives and the revised 2009 counter-insurgency doctrine, enunciated by

³ UNAMA, *Afghanistan, Mid Year Report 2010, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, Kabul, 10 August 2010.

General Stanley McChrystal, then overall commander for most international forces in Afghanistan, reinforced the importance of prioritising the protection of civilians. At the same time, however, Special Forces operations increased significantly in 2010. Their search and seizure operations tend to be conducted under the cover of darkness and their chain of command is unclear as some are involved in counter-terrorism rather than counter-insurgency activities and do not report to the ISAF Commander. This lack of transparency greatly inhibits public scrutiny and, by extension, efforts to influence Special Forces operations.

a multitude of factors shape the scale and nature of warfare in Afghanistan

The armed opposition has been responsible for a growing proportion, and the largest number, of civilian deaths since the insurgency took hold in 2005. Nonetheless, it has been able, to a significant extent, to avoid censure among Afghans for the civilian deaths resulting from its military activities. The Taliban are however not immune to public perceptions and criticism. They have routinely issued *fatwas*, or edicts, to their fighters enjoining them to limit the number of civilian casualties they cause. They have also taken steps to warn villagers not to use particular routes. In a meeting I had with elders from Marjah in March 2010, shortly after pro-government forces launched an operation to retake the area, there was no disagreement with the proposal that the widespread use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by the Taliban presented a deadly threat to civilians, and that better precautionary measures were needed.⁴

⁴ During the first half of 2010, IEDs accounted for 29% of all civilian deaths. In Marjah, IEDs were used liberally to impede the movement of ISAF troops.

Following the launch of UNAMA's mid-2010 report on civilian casualties, the Taliban proposed the formation of a joint commission to investigate civilian deaths. The Taliban had advanced similar ideas previously, pointing to their concern about their association with the growing number of war deaths, the highest proportion of which are the result of suicide attacks and IEDs.

Conclusion

A multitude of factors shape the scale and nature of warfare in Afghanistan. However, as the issue of civilian deaths has acquired strategic significance, belligerents, mindful of public perceptions, have taken efforts to protect civilian lives. Thus, while civilian deaths continue to increase, they have done so at a slower pace than the increase in conflict-related incidents.⁵ This is an important and welcome trend. It indicates that increased awareness of, and public debate on, the toll on civilians in the most recent phase of the war has been instrumental in the use of military tactics that have, in some instances, avoided civilian deaths. This highlights the importance of protection initiatives in explaining and exposing circumstances and trends that pose harm to civilians. Afghanistan shows that the more advocacy work is able to draw on credible evidence, the more likely it is that it will prove protective. Afghanistan also highlights the importance of maximising synergies between humanitarian and human rights entities concerned with protection, and doing so within a humanitarian framework and in a manner that does not impact on humanitarian space or access.

Norah Niland is currently on sabbatical from the UN having completed her most recent assignment in 2010 in Afghanistan, where she was director of human rights in UNAMA.

⁵ In mid-2010, the Afghan NGO Security Office (ANSO) noted that June 'marked a record for Taliban attacks – up 51% on the previous year to 1,319 operations'. Jon Boone, 'US Military Build-up in Kandahar Will Bolster Taliban, Warns Security Monitor', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2010.

Southern Afghanistan: acceptance still works

Nigel Pont

In 2002 Mercy Corps had an active presence in most districts of Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan, implementing large-scale agricultural livelihoods programmes. In the years following, programmes grew in scope and scale as major funding became available for the first time in decades. At the same time, however, the security situation was deteriorating. Armed opposition to the government started in the south, took root and spread. ICRC international staff had been targeted and murdered; the national staff of agencies with perceived affiliations with the international military agenda were being targeted in coordinated assassination campaigns; major international military offensives were taking place in the fields of partner communities; attacks on Western targets were becoming increasingly frequent and the criminal sector,

linked to drugs, private security and profiteering from the international presence, was booming. International staff had to fly between cities and could not visit communities beyond city limits, while national staff had to take extreme precautions, shedding any traces of organisational association while travelling.

By 2006 the threshold of acceptable risk for most international NGOs had been exceeded, and expectations of what could be done had to be reduced. Mercy Corps decided to continue working, albeit on a smaller scale using a zero-visibility approach. The strategy remained heavily dependent on community acceptance, in conditions where other international organisations could not work without the extensive use of armed private security companies.



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Currently, Mercy Corps has an active presence in five districts (82 communities) in Helmand and Kandahar.

The (security) strategy

Mercy Corps' strategy is heavily weighted towards an acceptance approach. In part this is grounded in the agency's long-standing presence in the area. Work started more than 20 years ago during the Soviet occupation and continued unchecked through the civil war and Taliban eras. Programmes follow simple community development principles rooted in locally led and highly participatory problem-solving and decision-making. Mercy Corps is a household name in many communities in the region, and staff have excellent connections. All are 'local locals', many of them respected 'white beards' with extensive local relationship networks. The organisation has become part of the local landscape, enduring multiple regime changes, growing and shrinking depending on funding, needs and security. Another key factor in Mercy Corps' acceptance approach has been its decision to focus on its core area of expertise, namely agricultural livelihoods. Agriculture is the mainstay of the local economy, and is not burdened with the same value-laden complexities as, for example, education. The majority of local Taliban are themselves farmers, with interests in improved agricultural productivity. In addition, not responding to localised conflict-related displacement has allowed Mercy Corps to avoid becoming embroiled in highly sensitive local politics and being seen to be 'cleaning up' after Western military operations.

More than a section in a plan

Maintaining acceptance involves much more than simply assuming that if we do good work, we will be accepted and safe. Mercy Corps' Afghan team does not distinguish between good programming principles and specific measures to actively manage acceptance. There are strict protocols in the 'protection' category covering such things as movement, communications and premises, but these

merely structure activities within a broader programming approach. Security management permeates the entire culture of the local organisation.

Good agricultural development requires excellent relationships that span tribal, geographic, government and non-state actors. There are of course substantial difficulties associated with relying heavily on well-connected local managers. Local politics are always represented in some way, and as certain factions gain ascendancy it becomes possible for them to influence the direction of development resources according to their affiliations, be it the area in which a project is implemented or who is hired. More obvious issues of ethnic balance are easier to understand, though it is much harder for international managers to assess the tribal and political make-up of offices and to try and keep it as balanced as possible.

maintaining acceptance involves more than simply assuming that if we do good work, we will be accepted and safe

Other NGOs also seek to manage perceptions of their organisations amongst various stakeholders, including the government, beneficiaries, their own staff, local community leaders and opposition members. These perceptions are the fundamental determinants of access. In a very messy field of competing interests, managing relationships with stakeholders who hold the key to accessing communities is vital. These stakeholders have varying and evolving interests in Mercy Corps' work, and trusted senior local staff must manage them accordingly. One of the most explicit relationship management activities is hosting Iftahar (the breaking of the fast during Ramadan) for

government and community elders. As the situation has deteriorated, deliberately placing projects in strategic communities with continued relationships has become increasingly important. If local communities value projects, local Taliban usually allow that work to continue.

The Taliban

As noted, the majority of local Taliban are farmers, and have an interest in improved agricultural productivity for themselves, their families and their communities. Their interests in development work in general are twofold, and somewhat contradictory. First, they clearly understand that a core component of the international strategy in Afghanistan is to expand the reach and credibility of the government through the provision of social and economic development. Hence, any organisation that has been contracted by the government to advance this agenda may be seen as an enemy. Second, as the Taliban's sense of their ascendancy in the conflict increases, and as their efforts to establish a more formal shadow political administration grow, they are starting to think more holistically about their relationships with communities. There are indications that they are trying to establish credibility with the local population, partly through enabling certain types of humanitarian and development work to take place. Some Taliban district governors have been authorised to allow organisations to work in their areas of control.¹ In such situations, NGOs' presence can lend credibility to the Taliban in the eyes of the local population – as was sometimes the case in the 1990s. As the insurgency has grown in strength and its representatives have become more visible to the local population, they also become susceptible to lobbying by local people. Communities in large part are interested in the projects NGOs bring and put pressure on the Taliban to allow these organisations to work. In many cases 'the Taliban' – by no means a homogeneous group – are locals themselves, and clearly understand the practical benefits, but also the local political necessity, of enabling, or at least taking credit for enabling, development activities to take place.

A new Taliban commander moved into a village in Helmand. His men stole a Mercy Corps water pump from a construction site and kidnapped a community leader. Community leaders agreed to negotiate with the Taliban commander in question. In the end, the kidnapped man was released and permission was given to move forward with the project. The commander even made a formal offer of protection – an offer graciously declined. Mercy Corps' head of office was not satisfied and sent the community leaders back to the Taliban to demand the return of the water pump. The next day, the pump was duly returned.

Managing donor and government expectations (and learning to say no)

Mercy Corps' capacity and presence in the south – where few can work – are very attractive to donors and a government keen to extend their reach. Mercy

¹ Interview with Michael Semple, Fellow, Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Harvard Kennedy School, September 2010.

Corps' leadership chose not to implement the National Solidarity Program (NSP) – becoming a government sub-contractor in the south was too politically charged. Repeated calls to expand the scope of Mercy Corps' micro-finance institution Ariana Financial Services (AFS) into rural Kandahar and Helmand were likewise resisted. In late 2006 USAID asked Mercy Corps to expand from Kandahar into a neighbouring province, Zabul. The local team decided that, while the work was programmatically important, the organisation lacked the presence and relationships that would have enabled access, and declined the request.

Acceptance is very localised

The decision not to extend into Zabul, just one province over from Kandahar, highlights that acceptance is a very local phenomenon. In Kandahar and Helmand, many people have been touched by Mercy Corps' work over the past two decades. One evening during Ramadan in 2007, Mercy Corps' most senior agricultural expert in Kandahar attended Iftahar prayers at his local mosque. After prayers he was approached by a young man whose family he knew, and who was now a Talib. The man asked: 'Aga [sir] do you still work for the foreigners?'. With slight hesitancy he replied 'Yes', with which the young man abruptly departed, leaving the older man concerned as to the meaning of the exchange. Later that night he received a phone call from the young Talib, who asked if he could have a bag of wheat seed. At a time when distrust of everyone associated with foreigners was growing, this local expert had retained his reputation as the man with the best wheat seed, and continued his work unmolested.

acceptance is a very local phenomenon

As the situation has deteriorated, the importance of staff and contractors having very local roots has become increasingly clear. Strong local leadership with deep connections and relationships in local communities is essential. Mercy Corps staff never formally meet 'the Taliban', but the line between farmers by day and Taliban by night is hard to determine. Community representatives and local sub-contractors manage these relationships; they come to the office, discuss the situation and a way forward is agreed.

Work continues, but scale is difficult

While staff are very security savvy, much management time is spent reinforcing a culture where personal safety comes first and all staff have the right to say no to any trips, and sometimes do. Staff collectively monitor conditions and make decisions on what is safe and what is not. The greatest risks are during field visits, primarily on the road to and from rural communities. Communities are heavily involved in making these visits possible. They are always consulted beforehand, and they sometimes accompany staff to the field. They sometimes reject requests to visit, primarily when they do not feel in control of local security. This usually means that elements of armed opposition

groups – often younger and more radical fighters as opposed to political operatives – are present or passing through.

Negotiating permission to work in parts of Helmand and Kandahar is an ongoing process. Relationships with communities remain more-or-less constant, though groups controlling any given area change frequently. A few months after elders negotiated written permission from one commander for projects in their community, that commander was replaced with another with whom a new agreement was required. Other organisations report similar experiences in other parts of the country.²

it is likely that risks will continue to increase and access will continue to contract

Looking to the future

It is hard to predict what the next two or three years hold in store for Afghanistan, though it is likely that risks will continue to increase and access will continue to contract. The overt manipulation of NGOs to achieve political or military objectives will continue, and the operational environment will become more fraught and volatile.³ It will remain difficult for Mercy Corps to maintain a balance between long-term development work and the imperatives

2 Giles Doronsorro, 'Worsening Outlook in Afghanistan', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2010.

3 Antonio Donini, 'Afghanistan: Humanitarianism Unraveled?', Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, May 2010.

and associated risks of addressing escalating conflict-related humanitarian needs.

Mercy Corps has consistently tried to maintain an identity separate from the government, the international military, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and contractors, but with so much of the development agenda and associated resources now subordinated to counter-insurgency and state-building strategies, some stakeholders may come to perceive NGOs as siding with their enemies. In the coming year, as Western governments try to reduce their troop numbers in Afghanistan, they may seek to increase their emphasis on social and economic development, making more resources available for work in contested areas. Meanwhile, as the province-by-province transition from international to Afghan security leadership gains momentum, it is likely that local security conditions will further deteriorate as patterns of power shift.

Afghans understand the vagaries of political necessity and are well accustomed to individuals and groups changing allegiances as political realities dictate, and NGOs will be able to continue working in whatever new landscape emerges. However, experience shows that, when allegiance shifts, it takes a great deal of diplomacy, politicking and time – it cannot be done in a hurry – before that party can operate safely in a given area. Understanding these perceptions and actively managing the relationships that govern them will be key.

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Securing access through acceptance in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Ingrid Macdonald, Norwegian Refugee Council

Humanitarian actors claim adherence to humanitarian principles in order to win the acceptance of local populations, parties to conflict and other stakeholders, and thereby secure access to vulnerable people at risk. In recent years, however, questions have arisen as to whether humanitarian principles are still relevant as a tool for securing access. Using Afghanistan and Pakistan as examples, this article outlines the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)'s approach to strengthening the implementation of acceptance strategies, including by reinforcing adherence to humanitarian principles. Implementing the approach will take time and effort, but with the changing nature of access challenges NRC believes that the effort is worth making.

Massive needs, limited access

Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries following 30 years of conflict and annual cycles of earthquakes, flooding and drought. Afghans have the world's second worst maternal mortality rate and an

average life expectancy of 43 years; approximately nine million are food insecure. In Pakistan, millions of people have been affected or displaced as a result of armed conflict and the recent devastating floods. The country has also suffered instability due to military coups, political assassinations and large-scale corruption.

NRC has large and established operations in both Pakistan and Afghanistan assisting Afghan refugees, returnees and internally displaced people. More than five and a half million Afghan refugees have returned since 2002, comprising 20% of Afghanistan's population. Despite these massive returns, Afghans still constitute the world's largest refugee population, with over 1.7 million registered refugees in Pakistan and almost a million in Iran. Most have lived in Pakistan and Iran for decades and have no plans to return, whilst those who have returned face massive reintegration challenges associated with crippling poverty, poor security, intensifying armed conflict, weak governance, lack of access to livelihoods and land and

recurrent natural disasters. Well over 300,000 Afghans are internally displaced.

Whether the challenges and dangers faced by humanitarian agencies working in conflict and complex emergency contexts such as Afghanistan and Pakistan are worse today than 30 years ago is debatable. What is evident is that the challenges to humanitarian access have changed. Both countries host a proliferation of actors – private sector, military, political, human rights, development and humanitarian – with identities and activities that can be difficult to tell apart; anti-terror and counter-insurgency campaigns have replaced Cold War conflicts; and rapid urbanisation, population growth, protracted emergencies and the increased severity of natural disasters are placing new pressure on civilians and humanitarian actors alike. Humanitarian agencies increasingly use physical security measures such as high walls, reduced mobility and, as a last resort for NGOs at least, armed security and escorts, limiting interaction with local people.

the challenges to humanitarian access have changed

With over 200,000 international and Afghan military personnel engaged in an intensifying conflict with opposition groups, humanitarian access has become extremely difficult to secure in Afghanistan. Humanitarian staff are regularly killed and kidnapped. It is unclear how many Afghans are being denied assistance and protection as a result. In Pakistan, the conflict between the government and armed opposition groups has severely constrained access in the north-west of the country. The recent devastating floods, along with bureaucratic obstacles, have placed further limits on access. Donor fatigue is an additional obstacle preventing Afghan refugees from accessing protection and assistance.

NRC's access strategy: perception, acceptance and access

In Afghanistan, NRC has programmes across the west, north, east and central parts of the country. In Pakistan, operations extend across the north-west. Activities include supporting Afghan refugees, returnees and IDPs with the provision of information, counselling, education, livelihood support, shelter and emergency non-food items, and assistance to resolve land and property disputes and access identity documents.

NRC has prioritised increased access to protection for populations affected by displacement as a global priority since 2009. Strengthening acceptance of NRC in order to increase access is at the core of this work. NRC's approach includes:

1. Ensuring that programmes are timely, relevant and robust

An important means for securing and maintaining acceptance is by demonstrating reliability, building trust, fulfilling agreed promises and delivering high-quality, transparent

and on-time programmes. In one sensitive area in Pakistan, NRC spent four months meeting influential elders and other stakeholders to build trust and to familiarise them with NRC's mission and activities before establishing programmes. The agency then prioritised delivering on commitments and ensuring quality. For example, when engaging local partners to support distributions NRC ensures a physical presence for monitoring and quality control. NRC also maintains consistent communication with affected populations. In Afghanistan a similar approach is being pursued with respect to shelter programmes in northern areas.

An important aspect of NRC's strategy is to enhance contextual analysis within country offices to inform programme design, planning and implementation. Analysis of the perspectives and relationships of different stakeholders will be strengthened, as well as needs and risk assessment methodologies. In response to Afghanistan's fluid and volatile context, the country office has enhanced its risk analysis capacity, has implemented comprehensive protection mainstreaming and will develop local-level communication plans. A key goal is to distinguish NRC as a principled humanitarian actor in an increasingly politicised and militarised environment. Enhancing beneficiary participation and accountability mechanisms, as well as strengthening programme synergies and delivery, will also be part of NRC's comprehensive review of its core programme activities in 2011.

Another aspect will be to strengthen the practical implementation of humanitarian principles as a tool for securing access. For example, according to the principles of independence and neutrality humanitarian actors should not have allegiances to conflicting parties or ulterior religious, political or ideological agendas, nor should they behave as an active agent of government policy. By strengthening adherence to these principles NRC will seek to separate itself from the conflict and demonstrate that it does not constitute a threat, thereby improving its ability to fulfil its primary mission of alleviating human suffering whilst ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable are met without discrimination.

Although it is often assumed that humanitarian actors intuitively understand how to translate humanitarian principles into programme design, implementation and decision-making, this is often not the case. More practical guidance is required. In 2011 NRC will develop guidance and training to reinforce principled humanitarian action within operations and advocacy. It is important that all NRC staff, especially national employees, who are often in closest contact with affected populations and local stakeholders, are adequately equipped to implement the principles and communicate them consistently. An initial workshop was held in Peshawar in July 2010, and another will take place in Afghanistan in 2011. The workshops focus on analysing access constraints and developing principled response and advocacy plans.

2. Building staff competency

A central component of NRC's increased access strategy is to have the right staff, in the right place, at the right time. An important initiative is to invest in building the

competency of key national staff to strengthen their engagement in contextual analysis, strategic planning and implementation. For example, in Afghanistan NRC is building the competency of national staff to tailor security systems to local areas, based on local contextual analysis. Ensuring that all employees are able to consistently communicate the organisation's approach and positions will be an important element of the access strategy.

3. Strengthening principled and structured engagement with all relevant actors

In order to safely access affected populations humanitarian actors often need to engage with, or operate in territory controlled by, armed opposition groups. However, in contexts such as Afghanistan and Pakistan engaging with all relevant actors can be dangerous, if not illegal. A recent judgement by the US Supreme Court, upholding a US federal law that makes it a crime to provide 'material support' to foreign groups designated as terrorist organisations by the US government, highlights how the criminalisation of aid and aid workers engaging with organised armed groups may undermine humanitarian access. As a result, NRC will develop positions and advocacy approaches, including holding a joint NRC/HPG workshop on the criminalisation of aid in the first quarter of 2011.

4. Targeted experience-based advocacy

NRC has also developed a Global Advocacy Strategy for 2010 to 2012, with increased access as the core priority. The focus of the strategy is to ensure consistency in the agency's advocacy messages, and to encourage decision-makers to reduce obstacles to access.

As a starting point NRC has initiated mapping and research which will inform the production of position papers and briefing papers. In order to ensure consistent communication, guidance and training will be developed to support NRC's messaging internally and with external decision-makers. The training will be rolled out to five countries during 2011. NRC will also conduct a series of workshops and publish reports during 2011 and 2012 as

part of a project funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Topics will include the relationship between humanitarian principles and operational access, the impact of UN integrated missions and the criminalisation of aid.

Together with advocacy work in-country, the Afghanistan and Pakistan programmes are crucial for building the evidence base for NRC's global advocacy work. One important issue here includes the risks posed to humanitarian action and the civilian population by counter-insurgency stabilisation programmes, efforts to ensure force security and intelligence gathering. Another focus is reinforcing NRC's advocacy for independent and principled humanitarian coordination and action in Afghanistan. With continued pressure for UN structural integration, UN and donor support for the counter-insurgency and security restrictions on UN personnel and facilities, NGOs may be placed in a position where they distance themselves from the UN in order to preserve acceptance, staff safety and access to the affected population. This situation would further fragment humanitarian assistance and protection efforts.

Conclusion

NRC's acceptance approach to access will not be easy to implement. If acceptance strategies were straightforward humanitarian access in Pakistan and Afghanistan would not be a problem. Whilst many of the tools and techniques employed involve practical responses to local conditions, the approach requires difficult decisions and serious resource and staff investment, and is easily undermined by the actions of other actors. NRC is investing in strengthening the quality, accountability and timeliness of its programming. Together with advocacy with decision-makers, NRC will invest in transparent and consistent communication with all stakeholders, and endeavour to equip staff with the skills and support they need to meet the many challenges they face.

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Civil-military principles in the Pakistan flood response

Nicki Bennett

The devastation caused by unprecedented flooding in Pakistan between July and September 2010 triggered a massive humanitarian response. The government of Pakistan, international donors, UN agencies, NGOs, faith-based groups, private sector organisations and volunteers alike mobilised to assist more than 20 million people directly affected by the floods. Foreign governments stepped forward to offer cash assistance as well as in-kind aid, including military assets.

On the ground, humanitarian actors were grappling with the challenge of launching an emergency response of unprecedented scale, across a huge and geographically diverse area.

For the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Islamabad,¹ this meant making decisions and issuing policy guidance not just on how to meet massive and urgent humanitarian needs, but also on how to do so in a principled way.

The Pakistan flood response proved that it is possible for an HCT to draw on principled policy frameworks to

¹ Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) aim to improve humanitarian coordination and policy-making and to promote partnership among the various members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. HCTs are chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator and consist of representatives of key UN agencies and NGOs. The International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement attends as an observer.

develop unified positions to guide operational practice, including on the issue of civil–military relations. However, the experience has also revealed a selective regard for agreed principles among certain stakeholders (both within and outside of the humanitarian community), and has raised questions about humanitarian agencies’ actual understanding of basic civil–military principles.

Using military assets: global and national policy frameworks

The use of military assets for humanitarian purposes has been discussed extensively by humanitarian agencies as well as UN member states. Working under the mandate of the UN General Assembly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has developed clear policy frameworks for the coordination of civil–military issues, including the ‘Guidelines on the Use of Civil and Military Defence Assets’, the ‘Guidelines on the Use of Military and Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys’ and the ‘Reference Paper on Civil–Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies’. The ‘Oslo Guidelines’, a collaborative effort between 45 UN member states and 25 international organisations, provide further guidance on the use of foreign military and civil defence assets.

Underpinning each of these documents is the basic principle of ‘last resort’, meaning that military capabilities can complement civilian efforts in disaster responses – but only when they offer a unique capability for which there is no comparable civilian alternative. UN General Assembly Resolution 59/141 of 2004 emphasises ‘the fundamentally civilian character of humanitarian assistance’, and underlines that military assets must be used ‘in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles’. Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality and independence.²

In Pakistan, the HCT has drawn on this global policy framework to develop the Pakistan Civil–Military Guidelines. Formally adopted by the HCT on 5 March 2010, these guidelines acknowledge the need for humanitarian and military actors to operate effectively within the same environment, and establish agreed principles and practices. They recognise that the use of military assets in a conflict-affected country such as Pakistan may have a negative impact on the perception of humanitarian actors’ impartiality and neutrality, and hence affect their ability to operate safely and effectively. Therefore, as a matter of principle, ‘military and civil defence assets shall not be used to support humanitarian activities’. The guidelines also acknowledge, however, that the use of military assets may be warranted in ‘extreme and exceptional circumstances’ where all of the following five conditions are met:

- Use of the asset is based solely on humanitarian criteria.
- It is a last resort, when a highly vulnerable population cannot be assisted or reached by any other means and there is no appropriate civilian alternative.

² A/RES/46/182, OP2 (1991), A/RES/60/124, PP4 (2005).

- The urgency of the task at hand demands immediate action.
- Use of the asset is clearly limited in time and scale.
- Use of the asset is approved by the HCT.

Since their adoption, these criteria have proven a useful tool for informing HCT decisions on specific response strategies. For example, a few months before the floods hit Pakistan the HCT used the criteria to decide whether military helicopters should be used to carry out an early recovery assessment in inaccessible landslide-affected areas of Gilgit Baltistan (the decision was no, as civilian alternatives were available and the proposed activity was not life-saving).

From policy to practice: the Pakistan flood response

The onset of the floods presented the Pakistan HCT with a range of difficult decisions regarding the appropriate use of military assets. Within days, humanitarian actors were raising serious concerns about lack of access in the northern districts of Swat, Kohistan and Shangla, where almost all major bridges and roads had been washed away or severely damaged. While some NGOs managed to reach these areas with medical supplies and initial relief items after 16 hours on foot or mule, it quickly became clear that the only option for the transport of heavy goods (such as food aid) would be by helicopter. On 5 August, the HCT reviewed the situation and found that all five criteria for the use of military assets were met, and approved a request by WFP to use military helicopters for the transport of food.

the floods presented the Pakistan HCT with difficult decisions regarding the appropriate use of military assets

Accessibility problems increased as the flood wave surged from the north of Pakistan to the south. Within weeks, large numbers of roads and bridges in other provinces, including Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan, had become impassable or partially submerged. On 20 August, the HCT expanded its initial authorisation of the use of military helicopters to include the transport of a range of life-saving relief items across Pakistan.

In both instances, HCT members agreed on clear measures to limit the potentially negative impact of using military assets. This included ensuring that military officials understood that their role should be restricted to transporting goods, and limiting the presence of humanitarian workers on military flights. HCT members also agreed that there should be no media on military flights, and that military markings should be removed from helicopters wherever possible.

Challenges in policy implementation

Despite the existence of a clear policy framework and the efforts the HCT made to develop unified positions on the use of military assets, the practical implementation of principles in the Pakistan flood response has not been without challenges.

the Pakistan government and several donors challenged the HCT's attempt to maintain a principled position

Lack of respect for civil–military principles

The first problem has been an apparent lack of respect for agreed principles among some humanitarian actors as well as UN member states, as illustrated by the case of the NATO air bridge. On 20 August, NATO announced its intention to create a strategic air bridge to transport in-kind donations from its member states to Pakistan. Additionally, and without prior consultation, this capability was offered to humanitarian organisations, and publicised as such. Of key concern to the HCT was the potential security risk to humanitarian actors if they openly associated themselves with a military alliance whose supply convoys to Afghanistan were coming under frequent violent attack within Pakistan (more than 100 attacks were documented against NATO assets inside Pakistan in 2010, killing 37 people and injuring 64). Following extensive internal discussions, the HCT concluded that it could not approve its members' use of the air bridge as it was not an option of last resort because air and sea transport was available commercially. Despite the clear policy framework, at least two UN agencies decided to make (albeit limited) use of the air bridge,³ as did a number of small NGOs who were not members of the HCT.

The Pakistan government and several donors challenged the HCT's attempt to maintain a principled position, arguing that no time should be wasted in moving goods into the country and that the use of the NATO air bridge would make the humanitarian operation more cost-efficient. Both claims were inaccurate. While the emergency response did suffer a number of delays in the delivery of relief goods, cluster leads repeatedly stressed to donors that these were related to supply shortages in items such as tents and tarpaulins, not to any gap in global airlift capacity.⁴ With regard to cost-efficiency, civil–military guidelines stipulate that cost may not be used to justify the use of military assets; in fact, the Pakistan floods confirmed existing findings⁵ that the costs involved in using military assets tend to be met from governments' humanitarian budgets.

³ These UN agencies were challenged on their decision to use the air bridge at an HCT meeting on 1 October, and did not make further use of it subsequently.

⁴ It should also be noted that the majority of relief goods (including many of the largest and heaviest relief items, such as staple foods) were generally sourced inside Pakistan and not in Western donor countries.

⁵ See SIPRI, *Effectiveness of Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response*, 2008, and an internal evaluation report by DFID on 'The Use of UK Military Assets in Support of the Pakistan Earthquake Response', 2006.

Difficulties in communicating nuanced positions

Clearly communicating agreed positions (including the nuances of certain civil–military principles) proved another challenge. Particularly for those who had not participated in the HCT's lengthy discussions, there appeared to be a direct contradiction between the humanitarian community's reluctance to use the NATO air bridge, while at the same time agreeing to use Pakistani and foreign military assets to reach cut-off communities within Pakistan. This led to accusations that the HCT was being inconsistent.

In fact, the HCT treated each case on its own merits. Recognising the complexities of the situation, the HCT did not place any ban on the use of military assets (including the air bridge), but merely requested that HCT members consult amongst themselves on each case to ensure a unified approach that would meet the criteria outlined in global and national guidelines. Similarly, the HCT could not publicly or permanently associate itself with a conflict party – instead, it agreed that humanitarian actors could coordinate with military counterparts around a set of relatively narrow and time-bound activities.

Struggling with definitions – what does 'last resort' actually mean?

A final complicating factor stemmed from disagreements between agencies about the actual meaning of an 'option of last resort'. On the one side were agencies that had not used any military assets, arguing that it was still possible to carry out humanitarian action using civilian alternatives. At least one NGO (MSF) has criticised the HCT – and the UN – for acting in a manner that could jeopardise the work of aid agencies who had gained trust and acceptance among communities in conflict areas.⁶ While some critics have said that they could not envision any situation in which they would accept the use of military assets in support of their own work, others agreed that exceptions could be made – but only where there was a direct and immediate threat to life and security (for example, using military helicopters to rescue a drowning person).

On the other side were agencies that argued for a broader interpretation of the principle of 'last resort', to include not just direct and immediate actions to save a specific life, but also indirect or gradual actions to save lives and alleviate suffering. It was this definition that HCT members (including those who chose not to use military assets for their own operations) ultimately used to inform their decisions to authorise the use of military assets to transport relief items to cut-off areas. It should be noted that this did not prevent some HCT members (especially NGOs) from adopting a narrower definition of 'last resort' in relation to their own activities.

Conclusion

The Pakistan flood response has demonstrated that civil–military coordination – including the use of military assets – remains a challenge, both at the political and operational level. This challenge can only be overcome if humanitarian actors and governments are committed to respecting agreed principles and mandates. Pressure from donors such as

⁶ MSF, 'Drowning Humanitarian Aid', *Foreign Policy*, 27 October 2010.

the US and the UK on the Humanitarian Coordinator and humanitarian organisations in Pakistan was inappropriate and contrary to the coordination architecture and Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative that they profess to support. Such actions threaten the authority of the HC and the role of the HCT, and risk politicising the response.

Where agencies and Humanitarian Country Teams are able to agree on common approaches, these should be communicated more clearly to all stakeholders. In Pakistan, a lack of proactive communication with national and foreign government officials about agreed principles and criteria appeared to result in misunderstandings and disagreements which might have been avoided or at least discussed more constructively had these stakeholders been engaged at an earlier stage.

Similarly, differences between agencies with regard to definitions should be resolved through early and more robust debates and a transparent examination of different mandates, at the local and national as well as global levels. While a diversity of approaches will always prevail, the Pakistan experience showed that even very different agencies are often in a position to develop common frameworks for defining their operations. At a minimum, agencies must openly discuss measures to mitigate the impact that difficult decisions may have on the broader humanitarian community.

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'We don't trust that': politicised assistance in north-west Pakistan

Jonathan Whittall, MSF

Humanitarian aid in Pakistan is being held hostage to internal and external military and political objectives. This occurs through the control and blocking of humanitarian assistance by the Pakistani military, and through the use of aid by donor countries as a tool of 'stabilisation' in areas considered strategically important. These trends are reinforced by the approaches and policies of the aid community. The highly politicised delivery of aid is eroding the capacity of humanitarian principles to ensure acceptance and access.

The politics of flood relief

The rhetoric accompanying the international response to Pakistan's recent floods played heavily on Western security concerns. Whilst the provision of international donor funding at times of disaster has never been driven solely by altruism, public declarations that the imperative to respond was underpinned by the need to prevent further destabilisation in Pakistan, thus helping to contain the spread of violent extremism, have never been more evident.

The rhetoric has exposed what has been happening in Pakistan for at least the past nine years. Counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and stabilisation efforts have dominated international engagement with the country. Aid funding has duly followed. The primary focus has been the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where since 2004 the Pakistani army has been engaged in a military campaign against the armed opposition, the Tehrik-i-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP). In 2009 the conflict intensified, with a large-scale offensive by the Pakistani military against the TTP in the Swat valley of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP). Well-documented humanitarian consequences ensued, primarily in the form of large-scale displacement.

The role of the military

The Pakistani military has attempted to address the consequences of its broader military actions by registering the displaced, distributing food and establishing mobile medical camps. The military's capacity to respond has been commendable, but significant gaps remain. In north-west Pakistan, relief for the displaced is allocated based on their area of origin as opposed to their needs: areas must be classified as 'affected' in order for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to be eligible for registration and assistance. Khyber Agency in FATA is an example of an area never officially recognised as 'affected' by conflict, and as such almost no assistance has been provided to IDPs coming from there.

As a humanitarian organisation, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) looks for those gaps, working to establish independently where the greatest needs lie. Mixed teams of international and national staff have been working for a number of years in volatile parts of KP and FATA, such as Timurgara, Hangu and Swat, providing secondary healthcare to conflict-affected people, host communities and IDPs. Yet there are other districts with high levels of need where access is conditional or denied. This is the case in Dera Ismael Khan and Tank districts, where the displaced from the recent South Waziristan offensive have gathered. MSF has tried for over a year to set up health facilities in the region, but the area remains off-limits. Space for MSF operations is only reopened when the government declares an area 'cleared' and begins 'reconstruction' and 'rehabilitation'. However, this has not been the case in the south of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or FATA. In 'cleared' areas such as Bajaur, access is still denied.

International political agendas

In contexts such as Pakistan, donors assume that, in the short term, the provision of relief will 'win hearts and minds',

whilst medium- to long-term development support will help to lift people out of poverty and thus decrease their vulnerability to ‘radicalisation’. MSF’s concern is not that donors have these alternative agendas – we resolve that problem by not taking their funds for our work in Pakistan – but rather that these alternative agendas are increasingly associated with and part of humanitarian action. When the US and its allies went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan and referred to humanitarian organisations as ‘force multipliers’, ‘part of the combat team’ and elements of ‘soft power’, the very meaning and understanding of humanitarianism was fundamentally, perhaps irrevocably, compromised.

Whereas in conflicts such as Kosovo, military intervention was justified on humanitarian grounds, in Pakistan we are seeing an inverse trend: the humanitarian response is being justified on security grounds. This has understandably increased the suspicion felt towards foreign assistance by many Pakistanis. As one patient in an MSF health facility at a camp in Lower Dir put it: ‘America is paying the people who are fighting against us and destroying our homes [i.e. the Pakistani army] and then they are giving the relief. We don’t trust that’.

in Pakistan the humanitarian response is being justified on security grounds

This distrust is exacerbated by the conduct of the US military in carrying out reconstruction activities. In February 2010, a bomb blast hit a paramilitary Frontier Corps¹ convoy in Timurgara, Lower Dir, killing approximately 14 people and injuring over 126.² The convoy was on its way to inaugurate a girls’ school rehabilitated with US funding after it had been blown up by the TTP. Among the dead were two American soldiers. The US embassy’s initial explanation was that the pair were USAID workers. The embassy later admitted that they were actually military personnel. Later still it emerged that the soldiers were dressed in local clothing. This was a clear example of a misrepresentation of military personnel as civilian humanitarian workers – with what intention is uncertain, other than adding to the confusion and blurring the distinction between the military and humanitarian spheres, with potentially fatal consequences.

A compromised humanitarian community

The approach of the UN in Pakistan has also represented a major challenge to independent humanitarian action. In the UN’s Pakistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2010, an introduction by the government of Pakistan explains its counter-insurgency activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA. Statements by UN officials have also proactively positioned the organisation in a way that has contributed to the politicisation of aid. In a statement that predates the

¹ The Frontier Corps is a paramilitary body under the federal Ministry of Interior. It is charged with maintaining control in KP, FATA and Balochistan.

² This represents the number treated in the MSF-supported emergency room in Timurgara.

floods, the UN special envoy for assistance to Pakistan, Jean-Maurice Ripert, appealed for more aid in order to ‘pacify some of the most volatile parts of Pakistan’.³ Another statement from UNHCR claimed that ‘Making sure 20 million people are rehabilitated ... is an international obligation: we are looking at a geopolitical situation where the stability of Pakistan we feel is in everybody’s interest’.⁴

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the UN in Pakistan is perceived as aligned with one side of the conflict and has become a target, notably in Balochistan, but also as evidenced by the bomb attack on the WFP office in Islamabad in October 2009 which killed five people. The inherent problem with this political alignment has been identified by OCHA in a recent cluster assessment report:

*the United Nations and the wider humanitarian community need to enact and implement the basic principles of engagement in armed conflict while reconfiguring some of the relations with the government in order to demonstrate the independence of humanitarian aid since the government is party to the conflict, while also quickly agreeing on a modus operandi for engagement with the armed opposition in order to access civilians in need outside government controlled areas.*⁵

The challenge of multiple mandates

International NGOs have not been bystanders to this confusion. In the case of Pakistan, there is recognition within the aid community that more principled engagement can bring with it improved security and community acceptance. Development activities are carried out under the guise of humanitarian principles. Thus, while the language of principles is used to describe the work of INGOs, the principles themselves are rarely applied in practice. For example, INGOs have used military assets to deliver flood assistance in conflict-affected areas, have allowed their lists of beneficiaries to be validated or corrected by the army and have accepted direct political involvement in the recruitment of staff and the distribution of aid.

Approaches to humanitarian aid are merging with longer-term processes of development and peace-building designed to build the legitimacy and capacity of the state and undermine support for the opposition. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlines the US approach to development as follows: ‘Our approach is not, however, development for development’s sake ... We in the Obama Administration view development as a strategic, economic, and moral imperative. It is central to advancing American interests – as central as diplomacy and defense’. This is not the first time we have heard this kind of justification for development from the US and other donor countries. Indeed, this is not the problem per se, except that a lot of the money for this political development is channelled to

³ ‘Aid Must Follow Pakistan’s Military Gains: UN’, Dawn.com, 27 April 2010, <http://news.dawn.com>.

⁴ ‘Pakistan Stability in Play with Flood Aid: UNHCR’, 5 October 2010, <http://news.dawn.com>.

⁵ Humanitarian Coordination Support Section Mission to Pakistan 20–29 April 2009, onerresponse.info.

INGOs, which then conduct their development activities in conflict areas such as Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq under the banner of humanitarian principles.

INGOs must ask themselves whether it is possible to engage in activities funded by and contributing to the objectives of one party to the conflict without fundamentally undermining a simultaneous engagement in principled humanitarian action. This leaves multi-mandate INGOs working in north-west Pakistan with a dilemma: international engagement may represent an opportunity to improve development outcomes, while at the same time playing a part in the process is incompatible with principled humanitarian action.

approaches to humanitarian aid are merging with longer-term processes of development and peace-building

An MSF perspective

While MSF does not confront this particular dilemma, due to our focus on medical humanitarian action, our desire to ensure that humanitarian principles remain central to our work has raised dilemmas of its own. For example, in some parts of north-west Pakistan where we have been unable to negotiate access, we may have been able to operate if we had agreed to work through national NGOs or only with members of our team from Pakistan. So far MSF has rejected this precondition, as in such a highly politicised and contested environment having mixed teams is essential because international staff can provide a buffer between national staff and community pressures, including pressures from armed groups. In other instances we would be allowed access if we used armed escorts. However, as these would be provided by a party to the conflict, this would contradict our neutral position and could make us a target.

We have had to question what role we may be unwillingly playing in counter-insurgency strategy, for example by working in an area that has just been declared as ‘cleared’ by the Pakistani military and prioritised for development and stabilisation. This was the case in Swat when MSF returned to the area to address the chronic lack of secondary healthcare immediately after the government offensive there had been declared a success.

We have also had to make uncomfortable compromises to enable us to operate in areas with massive medical needs. Not all of the health facilities that we work in are entirely gun-free, a working arrangement which is very important to us as a practical demonstration of non-militarised, neutral status. This is because we only work in a portion of a Ministry of Health (MoH) hospital, such as the emergency room – which reduces our ability to negotiate for the entire hospital to be free from guns – an issue often not seen as important for the MoH.

Conclusion

In the highly politicised aid environment of Pakistan – where both the national government and international donors seek to use aid in the service of political and military objectives – the aid community must resist attempts to co-opt and instrumentalise humanitarian action. There needs to be a clearer distinction between development activities that, however unwillingly, serve the objectives of the Pakistani government and the West, and a principled, humanitarian approach with an immediate, life-saving goal only. Both are legitimate forms of action, but they need to be distinct; in such an environment, a choice between them needs to be made. In the absence of such a choice, the value of humanitarian principles in gaining access and acceptance is rapidly being eroded. With the devaluation of the humanitarian ‘currency’, it is communities themselves that pay the heaviest price.

Jonathan Whittall is Humanitarian Advisor at MSF.

Military–humanitarian relations in Pakistan

Zahir Shah, Shangla Development Society (SDS)

The role of the military in civilian affairs is viewed with suspicion by civil society in Pakistan as elsewhere. The country has experienced a number of humanitarian crises in recent years, both natural and man-made. The devastating earthquake of 2005 and the terrible flooding of the last few months are two of the most recent large-scale examples. Low administrative capacity and complex political structures and relationships have made it difficult for the Pakistani government to respond without the support of the military, and the armed forces have played a range of sometimes controversial roles.

The Pakistani military played a vital role in the rescue operations after the 2005 earthquake and during the recent

floods. It is clear that, had the military not been involved, casualties in both disasters would have been much higher. The military facilitated relief operations by providing logistical support in the shape of helicopters, boats and personnel to deliver food and other relief items in inaccessible hilly areas or in plains inundated by floods. The armed forces also played an important role in the restoration of basic infrastructure including roads and bridges, and provided food and medicine to people left behind during the military operation against the militants in Malakand in 2009.

Humanitarian unease

Military–humanitarian relations need to be looked at in the larger framework of the political history of Pakistan,



©US Army photo by Pfc. Joshua Kruger/Released

Pakistani soldiers load reconstruction materials onto a truck in Khyber, September 2010

military–humanitarian relations must be looked at in the larger framework of the political history of Pakistan

where the military has been in political power for almost 31 years of the country's 64 years of independence. Military influence on civil authorities cannot be resisted. Military involvement in disaster response nonetheless makes many humanitarians uneasy. In Balochistan province, where the military is battling Baloch nationalists, no humanitarian organisations were allowed to provide relief to flood-affected people in 2007. People displaced as a result of the conflict are not given the status of Internally Displaced Persons, nor do they receive any assistance from the government or humanitarian organisations. No humanitarian or media organisations are permitted in tribal areas, where military operations against the Taliban are in progress. There is no credible reporting from the area as everyone is dependent on information provided by the government. Even casualty figures from US drone attacks originating across the border in Afghanistan cannot be ascertained. The situation on the ground will only become clear when humanitarian

organisations and the independent media are allowed to enter these areas.

Interaction between the military and humanitarian actors is minimal. The military keep to themselves and there is very little contact with humanitarians or with the civilian population, fuelling suspicion on both sides. Civilians are routinely beaten and humiliated, and on several occasions humanitarian agency staff have been manhandled. During the military operation in Swat, people were forced to evacuate their homes at very short notice – sometimes only three or four hours. No support was provided for transportation and no guarantees were given that property and belongings left behind would be protected. Several pregnant women gave birth while travelling on foot to escape the military operation, and no arrangements were made to help the sick, children or the elderly. Houses thought to belong to militants were blown up in what amounted to a form of collective punishment. Meanwhile, the military is acquiring land for cantonments under compulsory land acquisition laws. The price offered to the owners is much lower than the market rate, but owners have no option but to accede. Compensation payments are inadequate to meet losses.

Humanitarian silence

None of these issues has been taken up by humanitarian organisations. Instead, when international humanitarian agencies see that the military has taken control, they then limit

their own engagement. As a result, affected communities believe that they receive less assistance and feel abandoned by international humanitarian agencies. The return of IDPs in Swat started only when the military declared the whole district to be cleared and secure, yet at the start of the process humanitarian organisations were not allowed to work in the most affected areas of upper Swat for 'security reasons'. After the earthquake of 2005 international organisations built several health and education facilities, but after the military operation in Swat, where more than 200 schools have been destroyed, not a single one has been rehabilitated by international agencies so far. The government's rehabilitation efforts are cosmetic only. The civilian administration typically regards humanitarian organisations as alien and as following a Western political agenda. Meanwhile, politicians try their best to manipulate assistance for political gain.

In the aftermath of the militant uprising and subsequent military operations in Malakand, there was little trust in the military. Civilians, who suffered both at the hands of the militants and the military, found it difficult to differentiate between the two sides. As a result, the population at large felt alienated. Elected representatives did not meet people's expectations during and after the crisis, and had minimum contact with their electorates. Genuine leaders were sidelined, and it has been a well-defined strategy of the militants to kill influential elders

and political leaders in tribal as well as settled areas. In order to increase acceptance within communities the military formed Peace Committees, but these largely comprise ‘yes men’ or onetime militant supporters; as such their credibility has sometimes been in question, and they have no standing in the community. The military nonetheless directed humanitarian organisations to work through Peace Committee members, in a parody of ‘community participation’, and did not give the go-ahead for any relief distributions or other interventions unless the Peace Committee approved the beneficiaries. Predictably, the Peace Committees influenced the selection of beneficiaries as a means to maximise personal gain, leaving out the most deserving people in the process.

Advocating and lobbying for the rights of people in such situations is a dangerous undertaking, and many who have tried to do so have been silenced or killed. This makes it

very difficult for civil society organisations, whose main objective is to ensure that ordinary people’s voices are heard, to highlight issues involving the army. International humanitarian NGOs and UN agencies are treated better by the civil administration and the military compared to local organisations, as they have ready access to the international media. While international organisations dominate the clusters and working groups at the central level and have access to policy-makers, implementation is carried out mostly by local organisations. International organisations need to understand the situation in which their implementing partners are working and seek to influence the military wherever it is involved. International organisations look at things in black and white in light of humanitarian principles, but they need to understand that matters at the local level are most often played out in shades of grey.

Zahir Shah is Programme Manager for the Shangla Development Society (SDS).

Operational Security Management in Violent Environments

Good Practice Review 8 (Revised Edition)
December 2010

The first edition of *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments* (also known as GPR 8) was published in 2000. Since then it has become a seminal document in humanitarian operational security management, and is credited with increasing the understanding of good practice in this area throughout the community of operational agencies. It introduced core security management concepts and highlighted good policy and practice on the range of different approaches to operational security in humanitarian contexts. When it was published, the majority of aid agencies were only just beginning to consider the realities and challenges of operational insecurity. Few international or national organisations had designated security positions or policies and protocols on how to manage the risks of deliberate violence against their staff and operations. The GPR thus filled a significant gap in the policy and practice of security management.

Although a good deal of the original GPR 8 remains valid, the global security environment has changed significantly over the past decade. New conflict contexts have created new sources of threat to international humanitarian action. Increasing violence against aid workers and their operations, including more kidnappings and lethal attacks, has had serious implications for humanitarian relief work in insecure contexts. Meanwhile, agencies themselves have become much more conscious of the need to provide for the safety and security of their staff.

To reflect these changes, the Humanitarian Practice Network has published a new version of GPR 8. The new edition both updates the original material and introduces new topics, such as the security dimensions of ‘remote management’ programming, good practice in interagency security coordination and how to track, share and analyse security information. The new edition also provides a more comprehensive approach to managing critical incidents, in particular kidnapping and hostage-taking, and discusses issues relating to the threat of terrorism.

Unconditional cash transfers: giving choice to people in need

Silke Pietzsch, Action Against Hunger (ACF USA)

Action Against Hunger (ACF USA) has been working in Uganda since 1980, with operations in Karamoja and Northern Uganda. ACF's food security and livelihood operation in Otuke District (former Lira District) has changed since 2005, in line with the changing context from displacement to return to reconstruction over the last five years. In particular, as needs have diversified and markets have been re-established, ACF has increasingly turned to market-based and cash-based interventions, as shown in Table 1.

This article focuses on the LEARN-1¹ project implemented by ACF in Otuke District from February 2009 to January 2010. The project was designed to support the return and livelihood recovery process in Northern Uganda.

For ACF, the LEARN project was an opportunity to apply and expand its growing technical expertise in cash-based interventions, extending the cash transfer approach to Uganda and more specifically to Otuke District, where voucher-based projects had been under way for several years. In total, 34 villages in nine parishes were selected. Fifteen hundred of the most vulnerable households were given two cash transfers each totalling 570,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$) (\$285), spaced several months apart. There were four targeting criteria: human (disability, elderly, chronically ill, family members in feeding programmes); economic (loss of productive assets, loss of labour opportunities, debt, no access to savings/credit); socio-political (no family support, no external assistance, returnee/internally displaced); dependency ratio (number of family members below 14, above 60 years of age or chronically ill per economic productive family member); and suitability for the programme (including not moving away from the geographical area, and willingness to complete preparatory training).

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with the Equity Bank branch in Lira town to facilitate the cash transfers. Equity Bank opened bank accounts for beneficiaries free of charge and conducted training sessions in the field on the use of the accounts.² Although there were plans for Equity Bank to install several points of sale devices in Otuke District to facilitate access to the accounts, this was not in the end possible. Instead, the bank brought cash to the field using security escorts.

Following initial training, including the development of a household action plan for using the cash, beneficiaries

¹ LEARN stands for Livelihoods and Economic Recovery in Northern Uganda Programme.

² The main reason for using bank accounts was so that beneficiaries would not need to store large amounts of cash in their homes, and to encourage saving on a more formal basis. Local Savings and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) did not provide the necessary financial capacity and transparency.

Table 1: ACF Food Security and Livelihood interventions in Otuke District

Year	Interventions
2005	Seeds and tool distributions
2006	Seed and Livestock fairs
2007	Seed and Livestock fairs, income-generating activities (IGA)
2008	Seed and Livestock fairs, IGA, micro-projects
2009	Unconditional cash transfer (LEARN-1)
2010	Unconditional cash transfer (LEARN-2)

received an initial transfer of US\$250,000 in late July or early August 2009.³ Between the first and second disbursements, training was conducted in the four main activity areas selected by beneficiaries (crop production, livestock, animal traction and small business management). The second cash transfer was made between late November and early January. The overall cash grant was split into two transfers to facilitate monitoring activities between the transfers, and to ensure that funds from the first transfer were not misused for illegal or antisocial purposes, which would have led to exclusion from the programme and no second transfer.

Besides the usual monitoring of baseline, post-distribution monitoring and a final evaluation in June 2010, a graduate student from the Institute des Regions Chaudes of Montpellier SupAgro in France spent three months with ACF researching the livelihoods of programme beneficiaries in summer 2009. A consultant from the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) also visited Lira to assess the impact of the cash transfers on local markets in November 2009.

Programme results

Impact on food security and livelihoods

The impact of unconditional cash transfers is much more difficult to predict than that of in-kind or voucher-based food security and livelihood projects. One of the main advantages of unconditional cash transfers is that beneficiaries have complete freedom to spend aid money on what is best for them, rather than having to accept what the implementing organisation or donor thinks is best for them. From past programme experience and beneficiary feedback, ACF thought that households would invest primarily in seed and other agricultural inputs, and in small businesses. Indeed, had this been an in-kind distribution project ACF would probably have distributed seed and income generation activity (IGA) kits. Instead, the majority of beneficiaries chose to buy livestock. Approximately US\$650,000 (\$325,000) was spent on livestock purchases. In total, the average household spent US\$480,000 (\$240, or 84% of the total grant) on productive

³ At the time of the distribution, the exchange rate was US\$500,000 = approx. \$275.

assets, and US\$90,000 (\$45, equivalent to 16% of the total grant) on immediate needs. Over half of the money used for immediate needs was spent on food (54%), with smaller percentages going on medical bills (11%), school fees (9%), household items (7%) and debt repayment (4%).

The impact of the project on the livelihood assets of households was generally significant, as most invested in livestock. This accelerated a long-term household recapitalisation process, which is explained in Figure 1.⁴ The project also had a significant impact on local non-beneficiaries – particularly medium-sized farmers and small traders – from whom beneficiaries purchased many of their items. The sustainability of the project was good, largely because beneficiaries chose to invest in long-term productive assets. Roughly 70% of households used some of the cash to purchase food, but quantities were quite small (US\$50,000 (\$25)). Most of the food purchases were made with the first transfer, which came during the annual hunger gap, and hence the food purchased had a transitory effect on households' food security.

Impact on markets

Aside from the impact on beneficiaries themselves, one of the frequently cited advantages of cash-based interventions is the potential positive impact they can have on the local economy. The Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP)⁵ conducted a study⁶ on the impact of the LEARN-1 cash transfers on local markets in Otuke and Lira District following the first cash disbursement. The study concluded that at least 50% of the money from the first disbursement passed directly to medium-sized farmers in Otuke, who were the main source

⁴ Adapted from Filippo Brasesco, *Enlarging Existing Knowledge about Direct Cash Transfer Projects in Support of Returnee Livelihoods: The Case Study of Otuke County, Northern Uganda*, October 2009.

⁵ The Cash Learning Partnership is an initiative of Oxfam GB, Save the Children UK, the British Red Cross, the Norwegian Refugee Council and ACF International. See <http://www.cashlearning.org>.

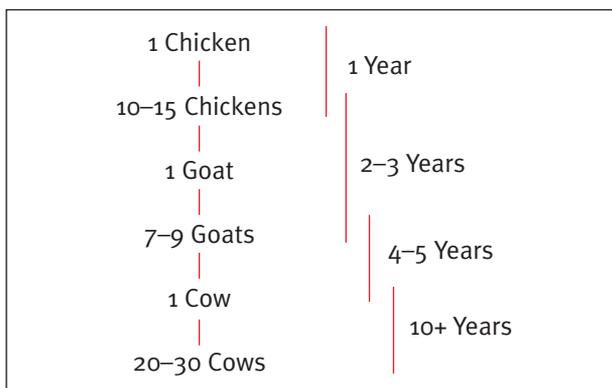
⁶ Pantaleo Creti, *The Impact of Cash Transfers on Local Markets*, CaLP, March 2010.



Goats being vaccinated

©Silke Pletsch

Figure 1: Household recapitalisation process



of goats for beneficiaries. Aside from goats, many of the other items purchased by beneficiaries were bought outside of Otuke. Although some cattle were purchased in Orum market from traders bringing cattle from Karamoja, most were obtained in livestock markets elsewhere in Lira District (Apala, Amach) or in the neighbouring Teso sub-region. Ox ploughs and income-generating items were mostly purchased from Lira town. Figure 2, which is reproduced from the CaLP study, shows the cash flow following the disbursement. Whereas in-kind and voucher projects result in cash going directly to large traders, with direct cash transfers much of the cash passes first through medium farmers and small traders. This intermediate step represents a significant secondary impact of the project on local non-beneficiaries.

Due to the open nature of the Ugandan economy and the relatively small influx of cash in relation to the economy as a whole, there was no inflationary impact on medium- and long-term local prices. However, the CaLP found that there was a short-term rise in prices, which it refers to as 'flash inflation'. This occurred in the local weekly markets in

the trading centres of Otuke during the first and second weeks following the disbursement.

Unconditionality and grant size

One of the main advantages of unconditional cash transfers is that beneficiaries, not implementing organisations, decide how to spend the money. The LEARN project clearly demonstrates that cash transfers enable recipients to quickly adapt to changing circumstances and needs.

Deciding on the size of the cash transfer is one of the most important decisions in the design of a project. The amount of cash provided needs to be large enough to have a significant impact on household food security and livelihoods. In this case, the figure of US\$570,000 for the combined transfer was arrived at based on local market

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Figure 2: Cash flow following disbursement

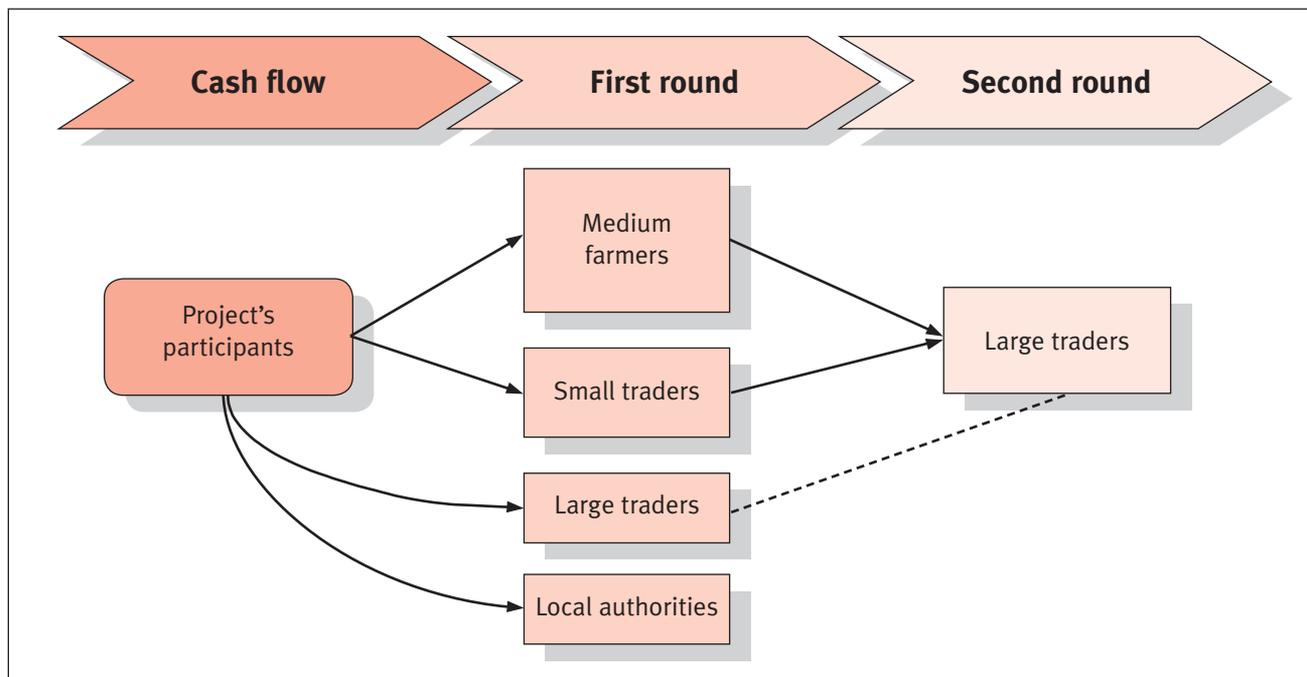
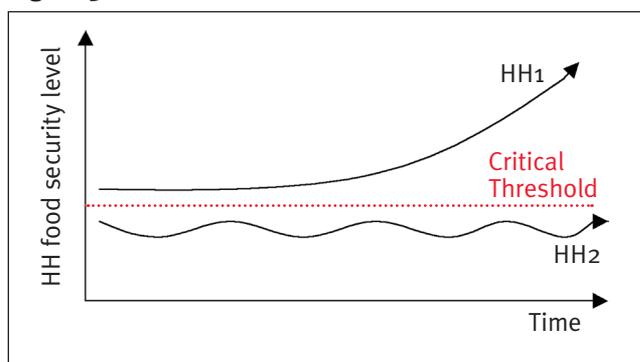


Figure 3: The Critical Threshold



prices and estimates of household needs.⁷ Greater than the entire annual income of some households, the transfers enabled purchases of productive assets (e.g. starting an income-generating activity and buying livestock), while also covering immediate expenditures. Nevertheless, cash transfers should not be seen as the solution to all of a household's problems, but rather as an effective way to help them restart key economic activities from which they can make profits and grow and expand in the future. The minimum amount of cash required for households in Otuke to become food secure is indicated in Figure 3 as the Critical Threshold.⁸ This is estimated at US\$160,000 (\$80), which is enough to buy four goats. To enable households to launch a significant productive activity, US\$250,000 (\$125) would be needed. Given

⁷ The proposed amount was actually \$250, covering agriculture inputs/IGA equipment, food and other needs. The amount was later increased during the course of the programme due to increases in the budget as a result of the favourable exchange rate with the Norwegian Kroner.

⁸ Adapted from Obie Porteous, *ACF Project Evaluation, Livelihoods and Economic Recovery in Northern Uganda (LEARN-1)*, July 2010.

⁹ This is roughly equivalent to the US\$91,000 (\$45.50) that beneficiaries spent on average on immediate needs in the LEARN-1 project, according to post-disbursement monitoring data.

current prices, an additional US\$100,000 (\$50)⁹ would be required to help cover immediate needs, such as food and medical bills. Taking into account potential variations in beneficiaries' situations and market prices (with an additional margin of US\$50,000), US\$400,000 (\$200) would be the amount of cash needed to have a long-term impact on household livelihoods and food security. Comparatively, the transfers were potentially larger than necessary to achieve the above-mentioned objectives of passing the Critical Threshold and attaining food security, hence catapulting the most vulnerable households far ahead in the livestock capitalisation process and turning them in very short order into the big businessmen and employers of their villages.

The evidence from the project shows that the impact of unconditional cash transfers can be significantly greater than comparable in-kind or voucher projects because beneficiaries are free to choose how to spend the cash at the time it is received. Hence the unconditional nature of the grant is a significant additional benefit in itself, allowing recipients the flexibility to respond to changes in their circumstances. Evidence from the LEARN project suggests that even highly vulnerable households will use cash transfers to invest in long-term productive assets, while the flexibility of cash facilitates work with the most vulnerable because part of the transfer can be used to cover immediate needs. When most items purchased are produced locally, cash transfers can bring substantial efficiency gains, even when beneficiaries live far from major markets.

Conclusions

In-kind assistance (or part of it) is often exchanged at below market value for other items the household needs more, lessening its value and impact. Especially in cases where distributions arrive out of sync with the seasonal calendar, beneficiaries often have no choice but to barter the goods received. The impact of unconditional cash transfers can

be significantly larger than comparable in-kind or voucher projects because beneficiaries can prioritise expenditure according to their needs and recent or anticipated changes in the local context.

The design of any programme is best supported by a participatory baseline study, with communities potentially participating, which anticipates needs on the ground and helps define the details of the planned transfer, at the time of programme inception. A cash transfer programme needs to define cost calculations and transfer amounts, linked to the programme objectives. The flexibility inherent in a cash transfer allows for situations where fast-changing contexts and beneficiary priorities might diverge from the initial baseline study. Cash transfer amounts should be appropriate to the particular context (e.g. emergency, recovery, development). More work is needed to understand how cash transfers are used in different contexts, and to determine appropriate cash transfer amounts. Cash transfers are not likely to cause general price inflation in an open economy with interlinked markets, though short-term

inflation in local markets can have a significant impact on the prices of goods immediately after cash disbursement.

Once the LEARN-1 Norwegian Embassy Consortium evaluation has been completed, more analysis needs to be focused on the direct impact on household-level food security and livelihoods, for instance in terms of income, dietary diversity and nutritional status, and other livelihood indicators. Additionally, given available resources, a comparison should be made between ACF's past in-kind or voucher programmes (seeds and IGAs) and the current unconditional cash transfer programme, and the impact and sustainability of each approach on household food security and livelihoods.

Silke Pietzsch is Senior Food Security and Livelihoods Advisor for ACF-USA, based in New York. Silke would like to thank Erik Engel (ACF Lira FSL Programme Manager) and Hanibal Abiy Worku (ACF Uganda FSL Coordinator) for implementing the programme discussed here, and Obie Porteous, who conducted the LEARN-1 evaluation.

In-kind donations: who benefits?

Moustafa Osman, disaster management expert

When a disaster strikes and images of hungry and destitute women and children appear in the news, many feel compelled to help. Some of this help is in the form of cash, while others opt for in-kind donations of goods and services. In-kind donations can be valuable resources, filling a gap at a crucial time. However, inappropriate, untimely and inefficiently managed donations can hamper relief efforts by impeding the distribution of priority items. While most people have good intentions, some view disasters as opportunities to dump leftover or unwanted items regardless of whether affected populations need them.

This article explores the impact of in-kind donations on both givers and recipients, and suggests some guidelines for individuals and aid agencies when considering whether to give in kind.

Customs and culture

The commodities donated by individuals, companies, governments and organisations and sent to areas affected by disasters or other humanitarian crises are not necessarily compatible with local cultures, customs and preferences. For example, there have been situations where donors have sent jeans to Darfur, where people do not wear trousers, and French soft cheese to Indonesia. In some cases, the sending of such items can cause additional health risks (as with the French cheese, a perishable item usually made with raw milk). Recipients may even see some items – such as bacon sent to Lebanon – as insulting.

In-kind donations which are alien to prevailing customs and cultures may result in changes to the diet and behaviour of the local population, and a corresponding

reduction in demand for traditional crops or commodities. One example might be bringing disposable nappies and sanitary towels into communities where women normally use cloth nappies and towels.

Irrelevant aid

Even if an item is really needed, like clothing, it should still be appropriate. For example, during the 2001 flood disaster in China, size 12 sports shoes (far too large for Chinese feet), with a market value of \$120 each, were reshipped from the US to China, where they had originally been manufactured. Food and medicines past their expiry dates are routinely sent to disaster zones, and I have seen numerous cases of outdated or discontinued medical equipment such as X-ray machines being sent without spare parts or operating manuals.¹ Once received, these items are often stored unused for months, at considerable cost. In most cases they end up being scrapped, but only after the donor receives a certificate of thanks and in some cases a tax exemption as well.

Costs

One of the main reasons for discouraging in-kind donations relates to the costs associated with collecting, sorting, packing and transporting the items. These costs often outweigh any benefits. A report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) notes that major food aid donors such as the United States still send food from their own surpluses. This is despite the fact that sourcing such food in the affected country can

¹ See Nicole Johnson, 'What a Waste', Al-Jazeera, 7 August 2010, <http://blogs.aljazeera.net/middle-east/2010/08/07/what-waste>. According to Johnson, the Ministry of Health in Gaza reports finding 70% of medicines unusable and receiving ten-year-old equipment.

Box 1: The ultimate beneficiary

Food is frequently provided in kind by major donors, especially the United States, which uses food aid allocation to support American farmers during periods of excess supply. According to WFP, the US is the world's largest donor of food aid, accounting for 57% in 2004. Next come the European Union, with 20%, and Japan, with 8%. As the largest donor, the US can frequently be relied upon to provide large amounts of food aid in response to WFP appeals, even when food is not the most appropriate intervention for the situation.

cut costs by half. Even when that is not possible, it is still a third cheaper to buy it from a neighbouring country in the region.² Even so, I have seen rice – the country's major agricultural product – being sent to Indonesia. Free aid, especially food, is also likely to have an adverse impact on local markets, forcing down the price of locally produced items. 'Dumping' free food and other relief items which can be produced locally may damage domestic production.

Time

Collecting in-kind items is not only expensive, but also labour-intensive and time-consuming. Large numbers of personnel are needed to sort, clean, pack, send and distribute these items. In many cases, in-kind commodities take many weeks to reach the disaster-affected area, by which time it is too late to meet immediate needs. It is usually much quicker and cheaper to buy food and other relief items in the affected country or in neighbouring countries. This also helps to support local markets.

cash is often preferred because it does not have the disadvantages of in-kind relief

Logistics

Unwanted goods may clog up air- and seaports and prevent essential supplies from getting through. The American Red Cross³ reports that transporting donated goods is costly and difficult in the aftermath of a disaster, as roads are often damaged or impassable and easily clogged with shipments of non-priority items. In addition, ill-thought-through donations may need special clearance or do not meet the recipient country's customs and legal criteria (for instance India⁴ and Indonesia do not allow the import of second-hand clothes, to protect their national manufacturers). As a result, goods remain in customs for months, accruing additional costs and paperwork.

Cash – often the better alternative

There is a growing body of evidence and increasing

2 Joint Evaluation of Effectiveness and Impact of the Enabling Development Policy of the World Food Programme (WFP), February 2005, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/62/14/37336432.pdf>.

3 See http://www.redcross.org/article/0,1072,0_332_4498,00.html.

4 Karen Tranberg Hansen, 'Helping or Hindering? Controversies Around the International Second-hand Clothing Trade', *Anthropology Today*, vol. 20, no. 4, August 2004, <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com>.

consensus amongst humanitarian actors that cash transfers are more effective and efficient than in-kind donations. The Department for International Development (DFID)⁵ and the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) have argued that, unless aid agencies specifically request them, donations of food and clothing are less helpful than cash. Oxfam has played a lead role in lobbying against in-kind donations of drugs and other goods and services to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria.⁶ The OECD also believes that cash would be a better form of aid in most cases by enabling people to exercise choice, increasing local demand and reducing disruption to local markets.⁷

The main reason why cash is often preferred is because it does not have the disadvantages of in-kind relief: it gives aid agencies greater choice from the beginning to direct resources (and if necessary redirect them at the last moment) in order to meet the most immediate needs of affected people; it is more cost-effective as it is much easier and faster to mobilise and can enable people to purchase goods and services appropriate to their needs. Most importantly, pumping cash into a local market helps economic recovery.

The way forward

As stated above, cash is often a better alternative than in-kind aid. However, if aid agencies are considering in-kind donations, they should ask themselves:

- Why does the donor want to donate these materials?
- What does the donor require in return?
- Do the affected people really need these goods or services?
- Have they clearly requested them?
- Are the items culturally acceptable?
- How long will it take for the goods to reach their destination? Will they arrive too late to do any good?
- Has a proper cost-benefit analysis been done, and have all costs been taken into account, including 'hidden' costs such as staff time?
- Who will bear the costs?
- If the donation involves machines or equipment, are they in working order, are spare parts available and does the recipient country have the expertise to operate and maintain them?
- What will be the likely effects on the markets in the recipient country?
- Is local procurement a better option?
- Do the goods comply with the recipient country's legal requirements?
- Do regulations in the recipient country allow for the import of the goods?

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5 See <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/emergencies/dec.pdf>.

6 See http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/issues/health/pir2005_globalfund.htm.

7 John Farrington, Paul Harvey and Rachel Slater, *Cash Transfers in the Context of Pro-poor Growth*, Hot Topic paper for OECD/DAC Povnet Risk and Vulnerability Task Group, ODI, July 2005, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/33/58/36570713.pdf>.

Strength in numbers: catching up on a decade of NGO coordination

Paul Currion and Kerren Hedlund

In the wake of the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan floods in 2010, the need for effective NGO coordination is clearer than ever. As part of a previously planned initiative, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) has carried out a review of NGO coordination in a range of humanitarian responses over the last ten years to contribute to the ongoing process of improving overall coordination. ICVA will shortly publish a series of case studies and develop basic guidelines as resources to help NGOs establish better coordination in the field.

This article presents an overview of some of the general findings and critical issues raised during the research. Based on the long-standing assumption that coordinating NGOs is like herding cats, we anticipated a struggle to find good examples of NGOs working together, but instead we found more than we could include. Our case studies cover Afghanistan, Haiti, Iraq, Kosovo, Myanmar, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Pakistan and North and South Sudan, but there were many other potential examples from elsewhere, including Guatemala, Liberia and Somalia.

NGO coordination appears to be the norm rather than the exception. At the very least, NGO staff responding to emergencies maintain bilateral or multilateral relations to facilitate their work. This type of 'coffee shop coordination' is usually overlooked in most coordination studies – understandably, since it is almost impossible to measure – but it is nevertheless an essential element of a healthy coordination ecosystem.

Some documentation exists regarding more visible NGO coordination based around formally constituted coordination bodies. However, few of these documents identify lessons which might be replicated in other countries and, even if they did, there are no mechanisms for sharing those lessons. As a result, valuable lessons have been lost and NGO coordination has progressed little over the last ten years. This is a problem for the entire humanitarian sector; NGO coordination is a critical component of a well-functioning humanitarian system, providing a civil society counterpart (and sometimes counterweight) to coordination initiatives established by governments and UN agencies.

The post-cluster world

The introduction of the cluster approach following the 2005 UN Humanitarian Response Review marked a turning-point in the development of humanitarian coordination. However, the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project has found that humanitarian reform is still not working as intended, primarily due to lack of leadership at the field level. NGOs are unlikely to provide that sort of leadership given constraints on their resources (in particular staff time), but where UN agencies do not meet their cluster lead obligations, NGOs have convened their own sectoral meetings. One example came from South Sudan, where NGO leadership in the

WASH sector contributed to the 2010 decision to include NGOs as official cluster leads and co-leads.

In general, however, most NGO staff believe that this is unsatisfactory, and most of our respondents expressed support for the cluster system – with two caveats. First, many NGOs would like to be more involved in improving the cluster system at field level, with some of the larger NGOs clearly prepared to take on leadership roles. This reflected a concern that active NGO involvement in sectors has been and should continue to be critical. In Afghanistan in the 1980s, sector working groups played critical roles in establishing basic standards, but as national government and UN institutions became stronger, these groups tended to be folded into centralised coordination structures, which seems to be a common pattern in many places.

the Humanitarian Response Review marked a turning-point in the development of humanitarian coordination

Second, the cluster system is not mandated to deal with broader humanitarian issues: practical questions such as security procedures or NGO-related legislation, and questions of principle such as civil–military relations and humanitarian access. Such issues tend not to be addressed by the cluster system (or other institutional coordination mechanisms), and NGO coordination bodies usually aim to create space to discuss and resolve common positions on these issues.

The great weakness of NGO coordination is that it tends to be reactive, and NGO coordination bodies themselves are normally set up in response to one of three conditions:

- Resisting attempts to impose coordination by the UN or governments, although NGOs are usually committed to maintaining or improving links with such mechanisms.
- Filling gaps in existing coordination structures, for example in Iraq following the withdrawal of UN agencies after the Canal Hotel bombing in August 2003.
- Addressing NGO concerns that are not being dealt with by other actors, particularly where those concerns involve humanitarian principles, such as in Kosovo in 1999 or the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 2000.

The stated reasons for forming NGO coordination bodies are similar in every country, namely the recognition that collective action can achieve common goals more effectively than individual initiatives. The perception that coordinating NGOs is like herding cats appears to be based on a misunderstanding of *what* NGOs are trying to achieve through coordination.

The shape of coordination

While governmental and inter-governmental organisations attempt to impose top-down coordination structures (at least partly in an attempt to impose order on frequently chaotic situations), NGO coordination is usually built from the bottom up. As a result, externally imposed NGO coordination mechanisms fail to take root, while those generated and supported by NGOs themselves tend to show great resilience. This finding should not alarm the UN, governments or any other institutions responsible for coordination; while the UN's humanitarian reform process has produced mixed results, the cases we looked at showed that overall humanitarian coordination tends to be seen as more successful (if more difficult) by all parties in those places where NGO coordination is more successful.

Ensuring coordination within the NGO community from outside that community is largely a matter of generating the interest, allowing the space and providing the tools to help NGOs form their own coordination bodies. Some of the most constructive experiences have come from simply providing additional human resources to existing coordination bodies, in the form of (for example) an Information Officer in post-conflict Kosovo or a Liaison Officer in post-cyclone Myanmar.

Despite the greater flexibility of NGOs compared to government bodies, all of our case studies uncovered a similar type of structure. This has enabled us to develop a basic model for NGO coordination bodies, which ICVA will pursue in the next stage of its project. While the recurrence of a particular model of NGO coordination shows its resilience, it is worth remembering that the cluster approach has demonstrated the weakness of a one-size-fits-all approach. We must recognise that coordination structures vary depending on local conditions, from crisis to crisis, country to country, and over time. The appropriate form of NGO coordination in the response to an ongoing conflict should – in theory – look very different to the appropriate form in response to a sudden-onset natural disaster.

NGO coordination does not always require the formation of an NGO coordination body. Before establishing a formal body, it is therefore worth pausing to consider whether there are other ways of achieving the same coordination goals; when managing such a body, it is worth continually asking how it needs to develop in order to stay responsive to changing conditions.

Coordination adding value

The persistence of NGO-led coordination bodies suggests that they have value for their members, and that NGOs are happy to participate in coordination mechanisms when the incentives are right. This does not necessarily mean financial incentives – institutional donors do not have to make participation in coordination a prerequisite for receiving funds, for example. Donors clearly have a role, but their influence should not be overstated; in the 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami and the Haiti earthquake, much of the relief funding was channelled through NGOs. Some observers suggested that this may have had the effect of removing one of the primary incentives for NGOs to coordinate, partly

explaining the poor coordination overall, although this has not been confirmed by empirical study.

Our case studies suggest that lack of participation in coordination mechanisms (such as cluster meetings) does not necessarily indicate a reluctance to coordinate. Of the many barriers to effective coordination – different mandates, different sectoral interests, different target groups, different operating principles and so forth – the most basic obstacle is a lack of resources. Coordination has a cost – whether in time, money or other resources – and NGOs are willing to pay that cost only if they see the benefits, particularly so in the case of national NGOs.

We must bear in mind that in some cases the costs of coordination may not be worth the benefits, either to NGOs or to affected communities. A cost-benefit analysis of NGO coordination has never been attempted, but should be core to future evaluations of coordination. It is also notable that none of the coordination bodies covered has established clear measures for their success, something which also requires more attention in evaluations.

in some cases the costs of coordination may not be worth the benefits, either to NGOs or to affected communities

No matter what the details of a particular coordination mechanism are, the best way to ensure participation is to ensure that it delivers the benefits that stakeholders require and expect. Many coordination initiatives have adopted a clear service orientation, explicitly so in the case of initiatives such as the PakSafe security office currently being established in Pakistan (modelled on the successful Afghanistan NGO Safety Office). Every single case study in this review confirmed that the critical factor in keeping organisations engaged in coordination processes is surprisingly simple but seldom realised: maximising the benefits of coordination (particularly in terms of providing services), while minimising the costs of participation.

Conclusion

Our review of NGO coordination raises two critical policy questions. First, what do NGOs want from coordination? Given the weaknesses in the cluster system, for example, will becoming more active in taking the lead in sectoral coordination help us to achieve the impact we seek on the ground? Second, how can we use NGO coordination bodies to promote the broader changes we want to see in the sector around familiar issues such as humanitarian principles and new challenges such as urban disasters? Individual NGOs participating in coordination bodies are unlikely to be able to address either of these questions without guidance at the global level.

One particular issue that cut across all the case studies concerned partnership with national NGOs. Some inter-

national NGOs have a closer relationship with their national counterparts than other actors, and can act as entry points for national NGOs, yet coordination mechanisms instigated by international NGOs tend to focus on their own concerns. Different NGO coordination bodies have dealt with this question in different ways, but there are notably few models for engaging national NGOs in the context of coordination bodies. This has been highlighted in Haiti, where NGO coordination activities are struggling to include more than a handful of the huge number of local civil society organisations. This issue requires urgent attention.

We end on a note of caution, since the success of a particular model of NGO coordination in the past does not guarantee its success in the future. While we believe that NGO coordination is effective, it is effective in achieving a specific set of objectives, and must be part of a broader system of coordination if it is to be truly successful. NGOs

in general have failed to address the growing complexity of the humanitarian endeavour, the increasing variety of humanitarian actors, the blurring of humanitarian principles and the incidence of new types of disaster, particularly related to climate change and urban risk. These are exactly the sort of challenges that require collective action by NGOs if they are to be addressed successfully; establishing and participating in field-based coordination mechanisms is now a requirement for NGOs, rather than an optional extra.

Paul Currion and **Kerren Hedlund** are consultants working on ICVA's 'Mapping and Learning from NGO Coordination Bodies' project. This article was written on a personal basis, and does not reflect the official views of the ICVA Secretariat or ICVA's membership. The findings of the work are available at www.ngocoordination.info. Any enquiries should be sent to Manisha Thomas at ICVA (manisha@icva.ch).

Coordinating the earthquake response: lessons from Leogane, western Haiti

Stephanie Julmy

The earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January 2010 lasted just a few minutes, yet is estimated to have killed 222,000 people and left over 300,000 injured. The damage was such that 2.3 million people were displaced. In Leogane, the closest city to the epicentre, 80%–90% of buildings were damaged or destroyed. Institutions that would normally be at the centre of a disaster response were devastated: more than half the hospitals in the affected area were destroyed or damaged, while 60% of governmental, administrative and economic infrastructure was destroyed. The international community was also affected, with the UN alone losing 101 of its staff.

The international response was enormous, and Port-au-Prince was soon inundated with international relief organisations, international armed forces, corporations, civil-society groups, faith-based organisations and private citizens from around the world. To support the coordination of the relief effort, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) deployed staff specialising in humanitarian affairs, information management, needs assessments, donor relations and reporting. In addition to its main office in Port-au-Prince, OCHA opened three sub-offices, including one in Leogane on 24 January, 12 days after the earthquake.

Coordination

By the time the Leogane office was established, around ten field hospitals were functioning in the city, and a rapidly growing number of NGOs were distributing relief supplies. With organisations too busy distributing life-saving relief items to carry out assessments, there were countless requests from aid organisations for guidance on where to distribute relief and on sectoral priorities, and for

information on the overall situation. Local authorities also wanted help coordinating their response.

In collaboration with the provincial authorities, OCHA established coordination mechanisms in line with the coordination framework implemented in Port-au-Prince. It also chaired cluster meetings for the first few weeks until cluster leads set up a presence in Leogane. This initially included three priority clusters (Health, Food and Emergency Shelter), the inter-cluster coordination forum and a coordination platform with the local authorities. The Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) cluster had already been set up by DINEPA, the Haitian ministry for water and sanitation, which was managing coordination throughout the country in collaboration with UNICEF. Other clusters, including Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Early Recovery and Protection, were rolled out as and when lead agencies deployed to Leogane.

From the outset, the cluster approach in Leogane proved critical in ensuring improved partnerships among international humanitarian actors as well as with national authorities, facilitating information sharing, enhancing coherence and limiting duplication. Health was a case in point. With limited access to resources, and limited specialised staff, health providers and field hospitals were overwhelmed with patients and desperately in need of a functioning referral mechanism with other field hospitals. Coordination meetings at the sub-national level facilitated this process and allowed for a market-style exchange of equipment and health specialists. The cluster approach also ensured the application of standards and guidance agreed at the national level, supported equitable response and encouraged joint activities, for instance joint needs



Temporary shelter in Leogane

assessments. The inter-cluster coordination group in turn facilitated coordination between clusters on cross-cutting issues, and ensured agreement on the priorities and strategies for response.

The late arrival of dedicated staff to lead and manage the clusters in Leogane (including cluster coordinators and information management focal points) had several adverse effects. Most importantly, it led to delays in developing concise overviews of needs and gap analyses. NGOs were asked to lead some of the clusters instead of the global cluster lead agencies, but limited capacity and the lack of staff dedicated to coordination meant that those that accepted did so only for limited periods. In the first two months, cluster leadership in some clusters changed frequently. In the case of Protection and Early Recovery, delays in the deployment of cluster leads made it harder to address cross-cutting issues and incorporate protection and early recovery into other areas of activity at an early stage.

in the first two months, cluster leadership in some clusters changed frequently

National NGOs and civil society organisations often have a comparative advantage in early response due to their links with local communities and authorities. In Leogane, many of the clusters involved representatives from local NGOs and civil-society groups. In this the Protection cluster was exemplary: it called upon its existing – and extensive – network of contacts from local organisations involved in protection, ensuring a collaborative approach between international and Haitian actors. In many cases, however,

local groups were involved thanks to their own initiative rather than a concerted effort by cluster leads to engage them. Cluster leads should place greater emphasis on ensuring adequate participation of national NGOs and civil-society organisations from the outset, and engage them as equal partners in decision-making and implementation, rather than seeing them merely as implementing partners.

The interdependence between the many aspects of the humanitarian response underscored the need for inter-cluster coordination to enable effective information sharing and decision-making on topics that did not clearly fall under any one cluster's 'responsibility'. In the case of shelter provision and rubble removal, for example, this was addressed in the inter-cluster coordination forum and through bilateral meetings between the Shelter cluster and Early Recovery cluster leads. A number of non-humanitarian actors (including foreign militaries and the private sector) had a critical role to play in rubble removal, and rubble removal was a necessary first step before humanitarian organisations could begin providing transitional shelter. Coordination with foreign militaries was considerable and effective. OCHA rapidly deployed a Humanitarian Civil–Military Coordination Officer, who initiated dialogue and facilitated interaction between humanitarian and military actors. However, relations with the private sector (both local and international) were very limited in western Haiti, at least in the first two months after the earthquake. Humanitarian practitioners would benefit from clearer models for engaging with the private sector to support the provision and distribution of assistance.

Assessing needs

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team's rapid assessment provided preliminary information

regarding needs. In areas affected by the earthquake it was assumed that everyone was in need of life-saving relief, including food, water and shelter. As a result, few organisations carried out their own assessments in this first phase, instead focusing all their resources on responding to immediate survival imperatives.

The situation was rapidly changing, however, and information was needed on where people were going, where they were staying and what they needed. The joint inter-agency needs assessment had yet to start. In order to obtain information on the situation in the area, OCHA called on EU Civil Protection Team (CPT) assessment experts deployed with UNDAC to conduct visits in Leogane and surrounding districts, along with district representatives. The purpose of these field visits was to obtain, and maintain, a clear picture of the evolving situation, including the location and approximate population of informal camps and needs per sector and geographical area – information that was not available anywhere else at the time. This was vital for supporting and guiding decision-making in the first weeks. Based on these visits, which OCHA alone would not have had the capacity to undertake at that time due to insufficient staff, OCHA was able to guide humanitarian partners towards certain locations, issues or vulnerable populations.

The Rapid Interagency Needs Assessment in Haiti was ready six weeks after the earthquake. Unfortunately by this time the information was no longer timely. Moreover, it had not been consolidated or presented in a way that could support decision-making at the sub-national level, which was what aid agencies and organisations in the field needed. The assessment was carried out in ten communes of the larger Port-au-Prince area (which included Leogane), and in 44 quadrants selected in the rest of Haiti (a total of 217 sites in 54 ‘communal sections’). In the larger Port-au-Prince area, assessment teams collected information for every communal section. This approach was appropriate as there were considerable variations in the extent to which people were affected across the different communal sections. In Leogane for example, three communal sections – where the city of Leogane was located – were very badly hit, while the remaining ten communal sections were considerably less affected. Needs too varied considerably. However, the assessment report did not provide data disaggregated by communal section, but only compared the larger Port-au-Prince area with the rest of the country. This was interesting from a global perspective, but was unusable by people in the field, who had to make operational decisions based on needs on the ground.

Ensuring equitable distribution of aid

In the first weeks of the response, the bulk of the aid brought to western Haiti was distributed in spontaneous

settlements, as opposed to other areas such as where people had set up temporary structures in front of their houses. Furthermore, certain communes received more aid than others: the commune of Leogane received more aid than the nearby commune of Gressier, for example. This caused secondary population movements that could have been at least partially avoided had humanitarian aid been more equitably distributed between camp and non-camp settings, and across affected areas. People quickly understood that if they wanted to receive relief items, a camp was the place to be. Spontaneous settlements began to mushroom in size and pop up near towns and on the sides of roads, in places where aid workers could not fail to notice them. The number of camps in Leogane started to increase, while in Gressier they decreased. This underscored the critical role of cluster leads in ensuring that cluster partners distribute aid equitably from the outset of an emergency response. Although humanitarian organisations often talk about ensuring equitable humanitarian assistance, this was not properly discussed until secondary population movements began, by which time it was already too late. Cluster leads must also ensure that information is collected and analysed in a way that is disaggregated between camp and non-camp settings. This was not systematically done, at least in the first few months.

Conclusion

The Haiti earthquake response is probably one of the most challenging emergencies the humanitarian community has ever faced. The extent of the destruction overwhelmed the international aid system. From the point of view of western Haiti, several lessons were learned from the response. In terms of coordination, humanitarian agencies largely underestimated the magnitude and complexity of the disaster, and consequently did not allocate the proper resources to it, including in affected areas other than the capital. While the cluster approach proved its value in managing and coordinating humanitarian assistance, the need for sufficient cluster coordination staff from the onset was underscored, with gaps resulting from delays in some staff arriving in the ‘deep field’. The earthquake response also highlighted that cluster leads should place greater emphasis on ensuring that cluster partners distribute aid equitably from the outset of an emergency response. Finally, although the Rapid Interagency Needs Assessment collected a wealth of information from around the entire country, analysis of the results remained too general to provide the information to support and guide decision-making at a sub-national level.

Stephanie Julmy worked for OCHA in Leogane during the first two months of the Haiti earthquake response. This article has been written in a personal capacity, and the views expressed do not represent those of the UN.

The ethical procurement of air cargo services

Jon Fowler, EthicalCargo

The use of businesses connected to armed groups and trafficking networks to transport humanitarian aid is a problem long privately acknowledged by aid workers in complex political emergencies and disaster relief operations. Until recently, it was largely seen as one of the inevitable compromises that have to be made in order to get aid through in high-risk conflict and disaster zones where few reputable commercial companies are prepared to venture. However, new draft procurement guidelines¹ published by the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission (ECHO) call for greater due diligence in contracting transport services. The ECHO guidelines focus particular attention on humanitarian air transport, often one of the largest single budget line items in aid operations.



The wreckage of a crashed Antonov 32 near Goma in eastern DRC, May 2008

© Lionel Healing/APP/Getty Images

EthicalCargo

The ECHO procurement guidelines cite EthicalCargo as a resource for addressing this important although under-discussed issue. EthicalCargo (see www.ethicalcargo.org) is a new project providing a 'one-stop-shop' to help humanitarian and peacekeeping actors make informed risk assessments when procuring air cargo services. Funded by ECHO and the Swedish International Development and Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the aim of the project is to reduce humanitarian agencies' exposure to logistics and transport companies involved in illicit activities.

Run by former aid workers, the project recognises the humanitarian imperative – getting aid to those who need it most – while providing online tools and telephone hotline support to allow organisations to adopt a 'transformative strategy' when the only available transporter is a company with links to destabilising commodity flows.² As such, EthicalCargo does not recommend banning or blacklisting companies, but offers humanitarian organisations practical negotiation techniques which can influence the behaviour of air cargo companies that stand to gain more from humanitarian aid or peacekeeping contracts than they do from the occasional shipment of weapons to armed groups. Decision-making is supported by online databases and alerts to members (membership is free for humanitarian agencies), as well as sample procurement policies. Conflict-sensitive logistics is one way of implementing the Humanitarian Charter in practice, so that the provision of assistance does not

¹ Available from http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/about/actors/DRAFT_Procurement_Guidelines_Sept2010.pdf.

² Destabilising commodities are commodities that 'fuel, fund or facilitate conflict', such as blood diamonds, conflict-sensitive minerals from unregulated mines, narcotics and weapons.

'render civilians more vulnerable to attack, or ... bring unintended advantage to one or more of the warring parties'.³

Air transport and destabilising commodities

Air transport plays a key role in illicit arms transfers and destabilising commodity movements such as narcotics and other valuable raw materials. The fact that the major African conflicts of the last 20 years have occurred in countries that are landlocked and have poor road networks means that transporting arms and minerals by air is often the only practical option.

air transport is often one of the largest single budget line items in aid operations

Since the emergence of commercial air cargo companies using former Soviet aircraft following the end of the Cold War, non-governmental transport providers in Africa have become a focus for UN investigations and campaigning organisations such as Amnesty International. Media attention has focused on Viktor Bout, the so-called 'Merchant of Death' and inspiration for the Hollywood film *Lord of War*. Bout now faces trial in the US on arms-trafficking charges.

Air transport represents the 'choke point' for the trade in destabilising commodities: it is where arms-traffickers and narcotics cartels come to the surface, as all aircraft transporting such destabilising commodities have to be registered to individuals and companies with names, addresses and bank accounts. Air cargo companies all require an Air Operating Certificate; their planes have to be registered and insured, and are subject to safety

³ See paragraph 2.4 of the *Humanitarian Charter*, Sphere, 2004.

checks by civil aviation authorities. That said, companies seek to avoid scrutiny. Falsified cargo details and the use of front companies for leasing or chartering planes are common attempts to hide the identities of those involved. Uncovering the links requires expert research.

‘Gap-filling’ customers

In May 2009 the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) published a Policy Paper entitled *Air Transport and Destabilizing Commodity Flows*. The paper looked not only at the important role of commercial transport actors in arms-trafficking, but also their involvement in the full spectrum of destabilising commodities, their connections to humanitarian and peacekeeping organisations and the effect of European Union safety bans on their business operations.

The study revealed that ‘90% of all air cargo companies named in United Nations and other arms trafficking-related reports have been documented as also providing services for humanitarian aid and peace help operations between 2003–2009’.⁴ This will not have come as a surprise to many. Air cargo operators display a willingness to operate in conflict zones; use rear-loading aircraft that can land on bush airstrips; and are willing to bend the rules to meet tight deadlines. These are all attributes sought both by humanitarian organisations and those transporting destabilising commodities.

Although humanitarian organisations are small (and unpredictable) customers for many of these companies, especially compared to the air-freight costs of peacekeeping operations, they are often important ‘gap fillers’. Once a company has flown to a conflict-affected area on other commercial business, humanitarian organisations are one of the few other customers available.

Tough contexts and negative consequences

In conflict-affected countries air cargo options for humanitarian organisations are often limited. Air cargo services in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with its weak aviation control and largely unregulated export of conflict minerals, have been mostly supplied by companies with extremely poor safety records. They have also been implicated in arms-trafficking. In Sudan, strong government influence in the aviation industry has meant that UN agencies, peacekeeping forces and NGOs have had to use the services of operators documented by the UN as violating the arms embargo on Darfur.

While some cargo is moved by specialist humanitarian air transport services such as the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) or ECHO Flight, a great deal is moved by the commercial sector. Initiatives such as joint safety audits of commercial operators are already in place in the field – adapting these to include ethical criteria would be a simple and effective way to minimise risk.

The contracting of suspect air cargo operators raises a series of issues.

⁴ *Air Transport and Destabilizing Commodity Flows*, SIPRI Policy Paper 24, 2009.

- Humanitarian principles. Different organisations are signed up to a range of humanitarian standards, codes of conduct and commitments to accountability, the cornerstone of which is often impartiality and neutrality.
- Protection. A ‘Do No Harm’ approach to programming in practice means avoiding contributing financially to actors that facilitate or fuel conflict that endangers civilians.
- Arms control initiatives. Many organisations support initiatives related to weapons control.
- Accountability to donors. Both institutional and private donors expect their money to be used responsibly, and expect agencies to do everything they can to minimise corruption and any negative impacts of interventions.
- Safety. Cargo carriers involved in destabilising commodity flows often have very poor safety records, putting agency personnel and goods at risk.

The problem of limited information

While the contracting of suspect air cargo operators in some cases is due to the restrictive contexts described above, in other cases it is simply the result of limited information during decision-making. This is due to assumptions around the way that air charter companies (brokers) work, and a lack of specialist knowledge of the complicated ownership networks governing cargo operators, particularly when an agency organises its own charter flight directly.

Using a broker – a company that acts like a travel agent for the client, dealing directly with the air cargo operators – is a common way for humanitarian organisations, including their donors, to arrange for the transportation of relief items by air. While it makes sense to entrust such experts with the complicated details of chartering aircraft, it cannot be assumed that a broker will propose companies to the client based primarily, or at all, on ethical considerations. This is usually because the client has not made it clear what ethical considerations are important to them – the emphasis is usually only on price and availability.

If brokers are presented with a detailed ethical procurement policy by a client it is in their business interest to respond to it. Anecdotally, brokers dealing with aviation experts within a humanitarian organisation know not to offer ‘suspect planes’, whereas NGOs with less expertise may not know the difference and may only be presented with the cheapest option.

Non-specialists

When organisations enter into direct contracts with air cargo operators, particularly in countries of operation, these contracts are not necessarily made by aviation logistics experts or with the support of head office, particularly if the cost of the transportation is below a certain financial-reporting cut-off point. It is also unrealistic to expect even experienced aviation logisticians to be up-to-date with the complicated networks behind destabilising commodity flows. In these situations fast access to information from specialists such as EthicalCargo can make a key difference.

EthicalCargo can support organisations to communicate their ethical standards to brokers and to carry out due

diligence checks on the kinds of aircraft they are being offered.

Justification for donors

One concern raised during EthicalCargo's training sessions is that donors or auditors may not be prepared to accept ethical criteria as a justification for not choosing the cheapest option. Although this issue is different for different organisations, some things for procurement departments to think about include:

- The organisation is not normally under any obligation to explain to the bidder why they did not win the contract. Sensitive information can be communicated to the donor/auditor only.
- Ethical procurement policies make it clear to air transport actors that they need to satisfy high ethical standards. A bid is less likely to win if a company is unable to demonstrate convincingly that they can meet such standards. This is particularly true of large contracts with big companies.
- Open-source information is usually available to demonstrate why a certain operator would be considered high risk and did not win a contract.
- Actors involved in destabilising commodity flows typically fail to meet other standards such as safety, transparency in their business practices and environmental standards, all of which constitute less sensitive grounds for rejecting a bid.

Ethical procurement is a very practical example of an area where the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative could follow ECHO's lead and establish donor guidelines and support for implementing agencies to realise GHD principles.

Facing the challenges

Different organisations have very different standpoints on ethical issues and humanitarian principles such as neutrality.

ethical procurement policies make it clear to air transport actors that they need to satisfy high ethical standards

As EthicalCargo does not make value judgements itself it is important that agencies take decisions based on their own criteria. This is particularly important as much arms-trafficking research is based on United Nations or European Commission investigations of sanctions violations. As these reports are the outcomes of political decisions by the Security Council, the information available is selective. Adopting EthicalCargo's sample ethical transport procurement policy is not a condition for using its services – we want to encourage discussions within and between organisations about informed risk assessment in procurement.

Jon Fowler is the Training Manager of the EthicalCargo initiative, hosted at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). SIPRI is an independent international institute dedicated to research into conflict, armaments, arms control and disarmament. Its website is at: www.sipri.org.

Since June 2010, EthicalCargo has run over 50 risk assessment and awareness-raising sessions for over 260 logisticians and policy personnel from more than 75 NGO, UN and donor organisations in Europe, the US and Africa. Training material is available for integration into organisations' own training materials. A major conference in Brussels dedicated to the issue of conflict-sensitive logistics and coordinated humanitarian air transport, co-hosted by ECHO and other stakeholders, is currently being planned for early summer 2011. For more information on this or any of EthicalCargo's services, contact fowler@sipri.org.

Investing in communities: a cost–benefit analysis of building resilience for food security in Malawi

Courtenay Cabot-Venton and Jules Siedenburg, independent consultants, and Jessica Faleiro and Jo Khinmaung, Tearfund

Almost a billion people are food insecure, most of them in developing countries. Food insecurity is compounded by climate change, which is predicted to make natural disasters such as drought and flooding more frequent and severe, in addition to making weather more erratic generally. Communities engaged in small-scale agriculture are particularly vulnerable to these trends. Preventative investments in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation and resilience can minimise damage while enhancing food security. However, persuading donors and governments to make preventative investments can be difficult.

To help address this gap, Tearfund conducted a community-based cost–benefit analysis of a DRR and food security programme in a Malawian agricultural community. The programme, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and coordinated by Tearfund's partner, Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Synod of Livingstonia in Malawi, has run for four years and spans 53 remote villages in Mzimba District.

An overview of the cost–benefit study

Malawi is vulnerable to extreme weather events, including both droughts and flooding. While floods displace more

people and result in greater damage to fixed assets, droughts are a greater cause of food insecurity and death.

The study found that the DRR and food security programme had a highly positive impact on target communities in terms of household incomes and assets, education, health and reduced mortality rates. Remarkably, for every \$1 invested, the programme activities delivered \$24 of net benefits for the targeted communities, to help them overcome food insecurity while building their resilience to drought and erratic weather. This positive financial return provides a powerful argument for investing in preventative activities in vulnerable small-scale agricultural communities. And this is a conservative estimate; the true figure could be as high as \$36 (and is based only on those benefits that could be quantified).

Community-based cost–benefit analysis (CBA) is an evidence-based tool that can be used to analyse the benefits of resilience-building activities, offering an important contribution to debates on the value of integrating resilience-building into development and humanitarian programmes. However, the quantitative benefits of initiatives should be considered alongside their qualitative benefits, to ensure a holistic assessment. CBA also needs to be done in a transparent and accessible manner.

The empirical evidence gathered by the fieldwork showed that drought has had serious impacts in the study area. According to the affected communities, the main direct impacts of drought in the past were widespread crop failure, reduced access to water and adverse impacts on livestock production such as emaciation, illness and death. The picture that emerged from the testimony of affected communities was that drought created a ‘vicious circle’ of food insecurity, asset depletion, environmental degradation and vulnerability to climate shocks.

In sharp contrast, the DRR and food security programme delivered profound benefits to targeted communities, contributing to a ‘virtuous circle’ of food security, asset-building, environmental restoration and climate resilience.

If another big drought hit, it wouldn't be like before. Ample food would still be available within the community, since some farmers have greatly increased their production and those using soil and water conservation techniques may get a good harvest despite drought. We also now have savings from previous years. We are much more secure now.

Community member from Jobe Jere village

The cost–benefit analysis was based on quantitative estimates of the following programme benefits:

- increased crop production;
- increased livestock production (goats);
- avoided loss of education (from drop-out/hunger/lack of school fees); and
- avoided loss of life (from malnutrition or hunger-related mortality).

The CBA was conducted in conjunction with a review of the government of Malawi's policy and practice in the realm of food security and risk management, to understand the broader context in which communities' own efforts sit. The government of Malawi seems to have made good progress by increasing investment in agriculture. However, there is insufficient money for effective disaster risk management or to scale up interventions. There are also questions around the effectiveness, governance and transparency of the Agricultural Input Subsidy Programme, and it was reported that other aspects of agriculture, such as extension services, lack support. While this study demonstrates that an effective and well-targeted local programme can deliver profound benefits for a specific community, further progress towards achieving greater food security requires strong policy frameworks at a national level, coordinated across government ministries, coupled with decentralisation of budgets and decision-making to district and local levels and effective partnerships between the government and civil society.

Benefits of the DRR programme: the ‘with’ scenario

The evidence gathered by the fieldwork shows that the CCAP DRR programme has delivered huge benefits to the farming community. The evidence for the scenario with the DRR programme only covers normal rainfall years and erratic rainfall years since the district has not experienced a severe drought since the programme began. Yet it is notable that, despite people's vivid memories of the ravages of drought, they are nonetheless quietly confident about the future.

What brought about this remarkable transformation? When asked which programme activities were most important to delivering food security, given the threat of drought, the focus groups all cited the same factors: crop diversification, soil and water conservation and the provision of drought-resistant livestock. This unanimity underlines the centrality of these factors to food security in this context. It is also notable that all three activities involve farm production, revealing the importance of farm income to food security. Specifically, interventions in these areas involved the following:

Crop diversification: CCAP encouraged diversification into both different crop types and improved maize varieties via capacity-building and the provision of seed. Alternatives included nitrogen-fixing crops and perennials such as cassava, groundnuts, beans, soya and pigeon pea. Interplanting was encouraged as a means to raise production, improve climate resilience and control pests.

Soil and water conservation: CCAP fostered sustainable agriculture via capacity-building in Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) practices, including applying manure to fields, composting, water harvesting, contour ridges, tied ridges with vetiver grass and agroforestry.

Livestock production: CCAP provided each target household with a breeding pair of goats as part of a pass-on scheme,

Figure 4: The 'without' scenario – the severe drought of 2001–02

The severe drought of 2001–02 had the following direct physical impacts:

- widespread crop failure
- adverse impacts on livestock – emaciation, illness and death
- reduced access to water

These impacts resulted in the following knock-on effects during and immediately after the drought:

Economic impacts:

- depletion of household assets, which undermines people's capacity to maintain livelihoods and food security following the drought
- distress sales of livestock and other household assets at depressed market prices (sometimes as low as 10% of normal levels)
- loss of education – many families cannot afford school fees and, even where they can, children are too weak or worried to concentrate
- women travel up to five hours per day to get water, relative to one hour or less normally. Water only used for drinking and cooking, but not bathing
- high levels of disease, particularly dysentery, which go untreated because people lack money to buy medicines

Human impacts:

- widespread malnutrition and anemia (ie swelling), particularly affecting men – who are expected to provide for their families first – the elderly and children
- people forced to rely on hardship foods such as weeds, maize husks and the roots of banana trees, which often cause vomiting
- loss of life due to severe malnutrition and susceptibility to disease, especially in men and children under five
- some men shot by wardens for hunting (ie poaching) in the neighbouring game reserve out of desperation

Social impacts:

- Harm to social fabric, notably forced marriages and infidelity as a means to obtain food, and theft of household goods and crops
- No reproduction (people too weak to be intimate)

... with significant longer-term consequences:

Economic impacts:

- direct impacts were still being felt in 2003, after the severe drought had passed, due to the population being so weak. Critically, people were too weak to work in their fields for more than one to two hours per day, so production was poor despite normal rainfall
- high drop-out rates – girls who married and boys who went to work on estate farms did not return to school
- where possible, people took out loans to meet immediate needs despite exorbitant interest rates, thus incurring debt

Human impacts:

- breakdown in social fabric, notably failed marriages due to infidelity and the forced marriage of teenage girls
- girls emerging from forced marriages were generally unable to remarry subsequently due to social stigma
- stunted growth of children as a result of malnutrition, and long-term impacts on health status of the community

Social impacts:

- increased HIV due to sexual promiscuity

Natural impacts:

- people were forced to eat roots of banana trees, which kills the tree and destroys future production

Figure 2: The 'with' scenario – crop diversification, livestock production and Soil and Water Conservation (SWC)

The DRR programme took the following actions:

- Provision of alternative crop types and early-maturing seed varieties
- Donation of two breeding goats to each household
- Training in SWC
- Contingency planning for future shocks

These DRR actions have had the following direct impacts:

- doubling of crop yields in normal rainfall years
- improved crop yields in irregular rainfall years due to greater resilience
- increased livestock numbers – a key asset
- increased use of water-harvesting and micro-irrigation

With benefits including:

Economic impacts:

- increased income from crop production, thanks to crop diversification and SWC
- increased household assets in the form of goats and new investments, raising income and providing fallback options in periods of hardship
- livestock provide a source of manure for cropping, as well as providing milk, protein and cash income
- intercropping and SWC help control crop pests
- educational gains from children consistently attending school, increasing skills and options
- livelihood diversification fostered by activities and the possible investment opportunities they create

Human impacts:

- improved nutrition and choice of foods, eg diverse crops, livestock products
- lives saved, not only through improved nutrition, but also fewer deaths due to hunting (ie poaching) in game reserve (shot by park wardens)

Social impacts:

- village disaster management plans in place

Natural impacts:

- restoration of local environment, thanks to SWC practices bringing better soil fertility, more trees and livestock fodder, greater water retention

... with significant long-term consequences:

Economic impacts:

- new income allows people to have an adequate diet, maintaining their capacity to work and learn. This in turn ensures food security and helps build a better future
- surplus income used to pay for school fees, milling of grain, petty trade and new assets such as bicycles, all of which bring longer-term development gains
- build-up of savings and assets for future contingencies

Human impacts:

- people avoid the suffering associated with malnutrition and fear of famine and associated social disruption
- strong, well-fed people are less susceptible to disease

Social impacts:

- social fabric is strengthened – marriages are not strained, livestock are used for social events such as weddings and funerals, unity amongst the churches has increased, people are again able to sit and discuss problems
- future natural disasters not likely to disrupt social fabric
- improved confidence and sense of dignity – people feel they could cope with another severe drought
- community solidarity – farmers who have benefited most will be able to help others in times of hardship

Natural impacts:

- restoration of the natural resource base leads to reversal of land degradation that improves the productive capacity of land and the resilience of farm production
- improved local hydrology makes it easier to access water

Table 1: Calculation of benefits

Intervention	Description of benefit	Total benefit	Benefit per household
Increased crop production	Maize crop yields increased by 100% in good years and by an even greater margin in erratic rainfall years	Good year = \$612,000 Erratic year = \$1,360,000	Good year = \$144 Erratic year = \$320
Increased number of goats	Value of four additional goats per household plus value of manure	\$725,334	\$170
Avoided loss of education (drop-out)	Loss of education days due to drop-outs is avoided across 20% of the population	\$29,040	N/A
Avoided loss of labour	Farmers can work a full six hours each day in the year following the drought, as opposed to only being able to work 1.5 hours per day due to weakness/hunger	\$153,000	\$36
Avoided loss of life	Years of lost income are avoided	\$9,800	N/A

whereby the household passes a young goat on to a neighbour when their own goat has given birth. Goats are a key asset because they are a drought-resistant species and are not susceptible to tsetse fly, yet still produce manure, milk and meat.

During the focus group discussions, it became clear that a basic aspect of the CCAP programme was its role in restoring degraded lands. This addressed key agricultural needs, notably soil and moisture. It also diversified livelihoods, provided marketable assets and built climate resilience. It was relevant because local farmlands had been degraded and hence had infertile soil with low water-holding capacity, creating poor growing conditions for crops and acute vulnerability to climate change.

Results

Table 1 summarises the key findings from the analysis.¹ The calculations were supported by the following assumptions and/or observations:

- The programme was estimated to have 4,250 direct beneficiaries. CCAP worked directly with 5,000 farmers, but it was estimated that approximately 85% of these people adopted the full range of innovations advocated, while 15% adopted only a subset.
- The programme delivered diverse indirect benefits to the wider population, notably others in the target villages and people from neighbouring villages. Indirect benefits included copying SWC practices and experimentation with crop diversification, and being loaned goats or given improved seed varieties by neighbours.
- The major changes observed among target households over the last five years are attributable to the DRR programme, as this was the only significant development initiative in the target zone in recent

¹ For the full methodology, data, assumptions and calculations or to see how these figures were derived, please refer to the full report (www.tearfund.org/investingincommunities).

years. Plan International provided food aid to target groups (orphans, AIDS sufferers, widows, the disabled, the elderly) in the period immediately following the severe drought of 2001–02. The government also engaged in limited water provision and agricultural extension activities.

- This assumption fitted with the statements of the farmers themselves, who strongly asserted that CCAP's activities had had a transformative effect on their livelihoods and food security in the face of drought.

Lessons learned from the CBA process

Both programme partners and target communities found the CBA approach easy to understand. The Malawian farmers readily understood the idea of comparing 'with' and 'without' scenarios and identifying concrete, quantifiable impacts. They were amused at the study team's relentless emphasis on numeric impacts, since they tend to think more in qualitative terms. Yet they also found this approach compelling as they listened to examples from individual farmers about their experiences with the programme interventions. Some participating farmers were clearly surprised by the results others reported, and it seemed that the focus group discussion was a learning process which could spur further adoption of programme innovations.

Some aspects of this process worked especially well. The farmers seemed to enjoy talking about the broad themes raised by the study team, notably local hazard impacts, coping strategies and responses and changes over time. They seemed to relate well to framing food security as the goal and drought and increasingly erratic weather as key threats. They also appreciated the concept of climate change, since they had observed major climatic changes in recent years that they termed 'crazy weather'. Villagers even had firm ideas about the causes of climate change, pointing in particular to widespread deforestation in the area over recent decades.

Other aspects of this process were more challenging. Notably, the study involved asking farmers to comment on various competing scenarios, which sometimes led to confusion. For instance, farmers had to discuss not only the ‘with’ and ‘without’ cases, but also the effects of each of these cases under different rainfall scenarios, i.e. normal rainfall, erratic rainfall, severe drought. Farmers were also asked to tease out the significance of different programme interventions.

Several caveats need to be stated regarding the applicability of community-based CBA to evaluating DRR interventions:

- CBA could work less well where the programme in question has only started recently, since some programme activities deliver results only gradually, and hence may take time to be fully appreciated by communities. Many SWC practices fall into this category.
- CBA works particularly well where the programme being assessed includes a range of activities, providing communities with scope to speak about their relative importance.
- Quantitative findings must be set in their qualitative context, since many benefits and costs are difficult to quantify.

In summary, community-based CBA is an invaluable tool for evaluating DRR interventions. As seen from the results of the present study, it offers strong support for preventative investments and provides a powerful tool to advocate for future DRR interventions with donors and governments. It is equally well suited to assessing the impacts of investments in climate change adaptation. CBA can also help programme partners and donors think through their programming choices in a systematic, rigorous way.

Recommendations²

Governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs should:

- Integrate CBA, risk analysis and resilience-building activities into development planning and implementation to address underlying risk factors.
- Integrate DRR into central policy and programming, such as the national agricultural policy.
- Increase investment in reducing the risks of severe food insecurity and preventing food crises – i.e. at least 10% of humanitarian aid budgets.
- Promote strong linkages and coherence between climate change adaptation, DRR, poverty reduction and national sustainable development plans.
- Strengthen local adaptive capacity, ensuring that funding reaches the poorest and most vulnerable communities.
- Support effective partnership between civil society and government at local and national levels to increase the transparency and accountability of resources for intended beneficiaries.

‘This information will help us understand how the programme interventions can bring changes in the lives of beneficiaries. This process brings out the real achievements of our work, namely how the people have gained from it. It does so in a participatory way, which gives good information while making people think about the progress they’ve made.’

Richard Sulu, Programme Manager, CCAP

Courtenay Cabot-Venton and **Jules Siedenburg** are independent consultants. **Jessica Faleiro** is a Policy and Research Officer on Disaster Risk Reduction at Tearfund. **Jo Khinmaung** is a Policy Officer on Food Security at Tearfund.

² See the full report for the complete version.

Older people and humanitarian financing

Jo Wells, Marcus Skinner and Jessica Dinstl, HelpAge International

In 2010 HelpAge International undertook an analysis of UN Consolidated Appeals (CAPs) and Flash Appeals for 12 emergencies in an effort to understand the degree to which the needs of older people were recognised and addressed in humanitarian programming. The study aimed to ascertain whether levels of humanitarian assistance were commensurate with the numbers of older people and their needs, and therefore whether the principle of impartiality – that humanitarian assistance is provided according to need – is being upheld.

Approximately 11% of the world’s population are people over 60 years of age; by 2050 this figure is expected to rise to 22%, and with it an increase in the overall number of older people affected by emergencies. It is commonly assumed that the help older people require in disaster situations will be delivered by general relief programming

or as part of family and community support. Yet analysis of OCHA appeal documents, situation reports and needs assessments shows that the specific needs of older people go largely unaddressed.

This article examines the level of funding being directed towards older people in emergency contexts, and highlights ways to mainstream assistance for older people into humanitarian responses.

Humanitarian financing and older people: research findings

The study analysed CAP and Flash Appeals in 12 humanitarian crises since 2007, covering a total of 1,912 projects. The findings show a distinct lack of targeted programme activities for older people despite specialised requirements such as nutritional support and chronic disease management.



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A woman receives an eye exam in Camp Acra, Haiti

There is minimal reference to older people within proposals compared with other vulnerable groups (e.g. women and children). While CAPs and Flash Appeals represent only a portion of donor funding in a crisis, they provide a good proxy indicator of the level and nature of official funding.

- Across the 12 emergencies only 0.2% of funded projects (five) included an activity specifically targeting older people.
- Comparatively, 43% of funding went to projects (273 projects) targeting women and children.
- In five of the crises studied (Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, OPT and Honduras), not one project in any sector explicitly referred to or provided targeted assistance to older people.
- In financial terms, the CAPs and Flash Appeals raised a total of \$4.2 billion in the 12 crises. Of this, \$8.2 million (0.2%) was allocated to projects that included an activity that specifically targeted older people.

Clusters are responsible for coordinating humanitarian action and ensuring that key gaps are filled, including for ‘cross-cutting’ issues such as age. Yet the research shows that some clusters are still failing to ensure that the specific needs of older people are included within assessments and subsequent responses.

- Several clusters did not highlight older people as a vulnerable group in need of support.
- Others did not include any activities specifically targeting older people.
- A total of seven health cluster projects in five countries targeted activities to older people, as did five in the protection cluster, in three contexts.

The humanitarian financing research illustrates the extent to which agencies ignore and fail to respond to the needs

Case example: Georgian conflict

The conflict in Georgia in 2008 displaced an estimated 80,000 people, a large proportion of them older people. For others, ill health or mobility problems meant that they were unable to flee. Those who remained behind in their villages were often left with no water, electricity or heating, in situations of extreme hardship and economic insecurity. Whilst a number of agencies involved in the response recognised the vulnerability of older people, this did not translate into programmatic action. The Flash Appeal made no mention of them in its priority areas, and the Joint Needs Assessment conducted by the Georgian government, the UN, the European Union (EU) and the World Bank failed to recognise older people’s particular needs. Out of 112 projects submitted to the Flash Appeal only three mentioned older people as a vulnerable group.

Case example: Pakistan floods

Older people’s needs went largely unaddressed in the response to the floods that struck Pakistan in 2010. Despite evidence of malnutrition among older people needs assessments did not disaggregate groups by age, and the health cluster’s use of 49 years of age as its cut-off point for data collection made it impossible to assess properly the health situation of older age groups and to identify and address age-specific health concerns. Of the 86 projects submitted to the Pakistan Initial Floods Emergency Response Plan, 13% recognised older people as one of a number of vulnerable groups. However, only 1.2% of submitted projects targeted the specific needs of older people. In the revised Flash Appeal of November 2010, following the secondment of a specialist in ageing to support the clusters, 20% of the projects submitted mentioned older people as a vulnerable group, and 6% included an activity that addressed older people’s needs, for example building age- and disability-appropriate latrines, psychosocial activities and protection.

of older people in emergencies. However, addressing these needs demands not only more financing, but also an understanding of what specific targeted activities should look like.

The specific needs of older people

The number of older people affected in any emergency varies depending on the context. For example, the proportion of older people can be high in IDP and refugee camps. In the Gulu District of Northern Uganda, 65% of those remaining in camps in 2009 were over 60 years of age.¹ Additionally, in areas of high HIV and AIDS prevalence or conflict, there is an increase in ‘skipped generation’ households, where older people become the primary caregiver to children who have lost one or both parents.²

our findings show a distinct lack of targeted programme activities for older people

The specific needs of older people fall into four main areas:

- Appropriate healthcare (e.g. treatment for age-related chronic diseases, mental health conditions, visual impairment).
- Nutritional support that takes into account specific age-related needs (e.g. for protein and micro-nutrients).
- Appropriate livelihood support for older people including those with reduced strength and mobility.
- Protection requirements (e.g. tracing and family reunification for older people separated by displacement; skipped-generation families).

One major challenge to effective humanitarian response results from the assumption that general distributions of food and non-food items and the provision of shelter or healthcare services provide adequate support to older people. In reality older people often find it hard to access general distributions; as with other potentially vulnerable groups, there is a need to complement programming with specific targeted activities.

Concrete steps to identify and respond to the most vulnerable

Needs assessment

Unless older people are counted and their needs and contributions made visible from the outset of a crisis, agencies will continue to assume that all older people are equally and similarly vulnerable, and will disregard the contribution that they can make to recovery efforts. In

¹ T. Okello, ‘Strong and Fragile: Learning from Older People in Emergencies’, HelpAge International and WHO, November 2007.

² J. Wells and F. Samuels, ‘The Loss of the Middle Ground: The Impact of Crises and HIV and AIDS on “Skipped-generation” Households’, Project Briefing 33, November 2009.

particular, concrete action should be taken to:

- Disaggregate assessment data by sex and age in sectoral and multi-sectoral assessments. This will allow for a better analysis of the differing impact of crises and disasters on older men and women compared with other age groups, as well as a differentiation between the ‘old’ (60 years-plus) and the ‘oldest old’ (80 years-plus). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Phase II Cluster Evaluation notes that ‘hardly any documents at country level including needs assessment contain age and sex disaggregated data’.³
- Identify who amongst the old are the most vulnerable, for example older-headed households caring for young children; older people who are isolated or without community or family support; and older people who are very old and frail, who suffer from chronic illnesses or who are living with disability.

To support the development of more effective needs assessments HelpAge has been engaged at both the global and field levels, ensuring that assessment frameworks include older people, as well as providing technical support in the field to the protection cluster to increase awareness, knowledge and skills in identifying and responding to protection risks for older people. This support has resulted in the inclusion of older people as a special category in needs assessments in some emergency contexts, including Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan.

Programme design

Concrete steps can also be taken in programme design and development to ensure that older people’s needs are addressed:

- Design and implement humanitarian response programmes that are age-sensitive. Examples include ensuring that relief distribution points are accessible for mobility-challenged older people and providing direct delivery of relief goods for those who are housebound; consulting with older people at every stage of programming; identifying older people who are at risk of malnutrition and providing them with supplementary food; and ensuring that shelters and latrines are easily accessible, with rails and ramps for people with mobility problems.
- Promoting intergenerational programming so that older people are not isolated from younger generations. For example, older people have a role to play in supporting the education and care of younger generations, and sharing traditional knowledge and coping strategies to support livelihoods and early recovery. Conversely, younger generations can help older people reconstruct their shelters or return home after displacement.
- Livelihood recovery and support programmes should include older people, who often make an active contribution to their families’ livelihoods late into old age. Such approaches not only address the needs of older people and their dependants, but also enable older people to continue to make a contribution to family and community wellbeing.
- Community understanding of vulnerability can play a

³ IASC, *Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, Synthesis Report*, 2010.

critical role in the identification of those most in need. Community referral systems should be established to identify those most in need, and enable them to access services. In Haiti HelpAge has established a system of 'friends' within IDP camps, who identify and refer the most vulnerable older people and inform them of their entitlements.

Conclusions

As an overall picture of humanitarian response, the research conducted on humanitarian financing and wider HelpAge experience demonstrate that sectoral or cluster responses that build on the capacities of older people, as well as supporting their needs, remain inconsistent, unpredictable and far from proportionate to the scale of what is required.

The provision of targeted assistance to complement general

programmes is already well established for children and women. There is substantial learning in the sector that can be used to design and inform complementary and/or tailored programming for older people. This research indicates that this learning has yet to be mainstreamed by the international humanitarian sector.

Despite the historical lack of inclusion of older people in humanitarian response, concrete steps can be taken to ensure that they are taken into account within general emergency relief. This will ensure that we are providing for all vulnerable groups and that the humanitarian principle of impartiality is upheld, with aid distributed without distinction and according to need.

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Common Needs Assessments and humanitarian action

Richard Garfield, with Courtney Blake, Patrice Chatainger and Sandie Walton-Ellery

Network Paper 69
January 2011

This Network Paper draws on field experience from more than a dozen Common Needs Assessments (CNAs) to identify the opportunities, costs and trade-offs involved in carrying them out. Without assessing the needs of those affected more accurately, accountability and effectiveness in humanitarian action will not be possible. But assessments are often completed far too late, and provide far too little useful information, to guide funding decisions or provide a comparative base for monitoring during recovery. Surveys can be too expensive and try to do too many things, producing results that arrive too late and are too complex to be useful.

At their best, common inter-agency, inter-sectoral needs assessments help to develop a better joint understanding of needs, capabilities, and appropriate response. Yet in trying to meet too many objectives, CNAs have sometimes failed to live up to their promise. Carrying out a CNA takes time and resources; even when funds and experienced assessors are available, results have not always been useful or timely.

This Network Paper summarises the basic characteristics of a common needs assessment, reviews experience in using assessments in recent years and highlights the problems encountered. The paper demonstrates what CNAs can achieve, and details their limitations. It then provides an overview of steps to avert common problems. We hope that this will assist in producing better, more useful and more timely assessments, contributing to improved humanitarian response.

Humanitarian Practice Network

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

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

HPN's activities include:

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

HPN's members and audience comprise individuals and organisations engaged in humanitarian action. They are in 80 countries worldwide, working in northern and southern NGOs, the UN and other multilateral agencies, governments and donors, academic institutions and consultancies. HPN's publications are written by a similarly wide range of contributors.

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

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