

Opening Space for Long-Term Development in Fragile Environments

The critical role of humanitarian aid

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The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) Principles commit donors to “provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development.” The linkage with longer-term development, while extensively debated in the past in connection to the “relief to development” continuum, has received relatively little recent attention and is not measured in the GHD indicators. This paper argues that these links are becoming both more important and more complex, and outlines some initial ideas strengthening these links.

Background

The range of situations in which large-scale humanitarian aid is being provided has increased dramatically in the last decade. In 1995, twelve countries received humanitarian aid of over US\$20 million.² By 2005, this had increased to thirty-eight countries. Countries where humanitarian aid volumes have increased substantially include Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Guinea, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Myanmar, Nepal, and Somalia. These are complex environments, ranging from new post-conflict governments with reasonably broad popular support to those with fragile ongoing peace processes, as well as countries where social vulnerability has been caused by deteriorating political governance conditions and increased conflict or repression. For some long-standing recipients of humanitarian aid, all these conditions have prevailed at different times over the last two decades, or continue to prevail in different parts of the country.

The same period, in particular the post 9/11 years, has also seen increasingly *simultaneous* provision of humanitarian and development aid, along with significant increases in international assistance for peacekeeping.³ The existence, side-by-side, of humanitarian activities, development assistance, and peacekeeping operations—

all on a large scale—poses new challenges for both humanitarian and development actors.

Thinking among humanitarian and development actors on the provision of aid in crisis and post-crisis situations has also evolved. Several trends are worth underlining. First, development actors have become “more engaged with how to engage” in the most fragile and conflict-affected environments, a challenge which was previously left principally to the humanitarian actors. This debate focuses on the centrality of state-building and peace-building goals as a prerequisite for making sustainable progress in poverty reduction in weakly-governed, fragile environments, such as DRC, Timor-Leste, Sudan, and Haiti.⁴

Second, increased attention to security goals and the rise in peacekeeping operations has led to a new emphasis on security/development and security/humanitarian linkages, including the concept of integrated missions, and the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

Third, while the conceptual frameworks of the Millennium Development Goals, human security and social protection offer the potential for increased consensus on objectives between humanitarian and development actors, the initial, rather apolitical, discourse on the “relief to development continuum” has become more complex. A comprehensive 2004 survey of the academic literature and policy debates underlines the impact of the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences in increasing caution within the humanitarian community with regard to linkages with other forms of assistance, together with renewed attempts to “brand” humanitarianism’s distinctive principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality.⁵

Both the complementarity and the contradictions between these policy debates are summarised in the two sets of internationally endorsed principles covering, respectively, Good Humanitarian Donorship and Good International Engagement in Fragile States and

Situations.⁶ Both sets of principles stress the need for flexible, yet predictable, responses and for links between humanitarian assistance and longer-term development. However, they also differ in emphasis, in particular as regards the “independence of humanitarian objectives from political, economic and military objectives” (GHD Principles), versus the need to “recognize the link between political, security, and development objectives.”

Given this context, how can humanitarian aid fulfill the GHD aspiration to “support recovery and long-term development”? Should humanitarian actors even attempt to insulate humanitarian activities from local political governance conditions and from the goals of longer-term political, peacekeeping, or development assistance? What should development actors do to strengthen positive linkages with humanitarian activities? This paper attempts to address these questions in two specific contexts: first, where there is government-led recovery and second, where the international community is unwilling or unable to engage with national authorities.⁷ These contexts are not mutually exclusive and may coexist in one country in different sectors or different geographical areas.

Humanitarian-development linkages in situations of government-led recovery

In Liberia, Haiti, DRC, Burundi, Afghanistan, and Timor, as well as in post-conflict, post-tsunami Aceh, donors are attempting to support a government-led programme of reconstruction and recovery, involving both continued humanitarian assistance and a concerted effort to build capacity and accountability in state institutions. Similarly, in South Sudan and Kosovo, while the eventual status of these territories is not yet determined, it is clear that local leadership and functioning local institutions are critical to the success of recovery efforts. In all these situations, international actors have recognised that:

- While national institutions and some individual leaders may not be free from accusations of previous involvement in corruption or human rights abuses, the national leadership commands broad popular support and is, in varying degrees, willing to undertake pro-peace, pro-governance, and pro-poor reforms, making government-led recovery a viable hope for exit from crisis;

- Delivery of rapid results, visible to the population, is a priority for consolidating peace-building or political transition efforts, yet state institutions do not have sufficient capacity to deliver rapid results across the country;
- In the medium term, without state institutions which are both capable and accountable at a basic level, no exit from the crisis is possible.

Many of these recovery programmes display a gap between immediate humanitarian provision and developmental activities, where the latter move too slowly to avoid a vacuum in service provision and economic recovery on the ground. This gap is often seen either as a funding problem—leading to policy prescriptions for new funding instruments for transition financing—or the result of slow and bureaucratic procedures in development agencies. Such criticisms have merit, in particular with regard to donor procedures. Development institutions must reform their approach to the processing of funding decisions, deployment of experienced staff on the ground, and contracting and payment systems. Many have already started to do so.

Procedural and funding difficulties, however, do not adequately explain delays in early recovery. In many of the situations above,⁸ large-scale funds were available under quick-disbursing procedures throughout the two-year period following the crisis. Problems in accelerating the pace of recovery activities—even where ample funding and flexible international procedures are available—have reinforced the renewed focus on institutional issues. The transition from humanitarian to development activities is not only a funding transition, but also a shift from execution primarily by international agencies to execution primarily by national institutions—“doing it themselves, rather than our doing it for them.” Thus a significant gap between humanitarian and development activities can occur if national institutions do not have the necessary capacity to take programme decisions, let contracts, oversee activities, and make payments. The pace of efforts to build capacity and accountability within national institutions, therefore, plays a key role in determining how quickly developmental activities can take over from humanitarian interventions. In this sense the gap is an institutional as much as—in some cases more than—a funding or procedural problem.

What does this context mean for the planning and delivery of humanitarian activities and the linkages to development aid? If we accept that a reasonable level of

capacity and accountability in state institutions is a critical basis for peace and longer-term development, and that weak institutions are central to the relief-to-development gap, it means that humanitarian actors must give greater consideration to the links between humanitarian activities and efforts to build capacity and accountability in national institutions. For development actors (and national authorities), it means questioning the assumption that humanitarian assistance under a government-led recovery programme should be short and sweet, and acknowledging that in some situations a more gradual transition to state-provided services may allow a better balance between the delivery of rapid benefits to the population, and the time needed to build capable and accountable state institutions. For both humanitarian and multilateral development actors, it means engaging with the inherently *political* nature of state-building and peace-building efforts, without compromising the basic principles which govern our assistance.

The technical level: Clear planning for transition

Bridging the institutional gap requires a much more systematic transition from international agency or NGO-led assistance to state-led service delivery and social protection. In a government-led recovery situation, this implies joint planning on post-conflict humanitarian activities—as opposed to ad hoc consultation—with a country's national leadership.

The need for joint transition planning applies particularly to sectors of humanitarian assistance which concern a *temporary incapacity* of the state to deliver services (in response to an ongoing need of the population) rather than a *temporary need*. For example, humanitarian programmes may span both life-saving services which are only provided in a crisis—such as untargeted food aid, temporary shelter, or emergency health services in refugee or IDP camps—as well as services which the state or other national institutions normally provide in a functioning administration, such as primary education and healthcare, water and sanitation, and maintenance of transport links. These latter sectors are both much more central to long-term issues of state-building, and (often) more politically sensitive for governments who seek to build their own credibility in delivering to the population. For these latter activities, a clear transition plan can help ensure that state institutions take over coordination and provision of services as they build national capacity.

Box 1 illustrates the close collaboration between national counterparts, UN agencies and the World Bank to provide for this type of transition in the health sector in Timor and a similar programme in Afghanistan.

Box 1: Transition from non-government to state provision of services

In both Timor and Afghanistan, recovery in the health sector has drawn on the capacity of humanitarian NGOs for immediate service provision as part of (rather than separate from) a programme to gradually transfer management and delivery skills and responsibilities to national institutions. This allowed for a positive balance between quick visible services to the population and longer-term institution-building. The Timor process was phased as follows:

- Phase 1: NGOs provided emergency health services; the framework for a national health system was created by a coordinated assessment and planning process by Timorese health professionals, UNTAET, WHO, and the World Bank;
- Phase 2: Government-signed memoranda of understanding with international NGOs to deliver priority health services; a national policy and training programme was conducted and a basic pharmaceuticals distribution system created;
- Phase 3: Government assumed financing of NGO services and conducted management training for national staff;
- Phase 4: NGOs transferred responsibility for district health-management systems to government, which continued to contract international doctors, while Timorese doctors were in training overseas.

The programme generated significant development results: child mortality declined dramatically, immunisation rates increased from 26 to 73 percent of all children, and from 26 to 41 percent for skilled attendance at birth; institutions created also proved resilient; during the political crisis of 2005, the health ministry continued to deliver services.

While the programme is at an earlier stage in Afghanistan, similar results have been achieved: a fourfold increase in the number of people receiving care at rural health centres, and an increase from 5 to 63 percent of women receiving prenatal care. The program operates even in the most insecure areas.

A similar approach could be taken to refugee and IDP return and the provision of local infrastructure, social protection, and livelihood support to assist reintegration. Each sector will need different institutional arrangements⁹ for such transitional programmes. For example, using the capacity of international NGOs may make sense in health, while community structures may be better suited to function as transitional delivery mechanisms for local infrastructure rehabilitation, education, or livelihood-support in the period prior to the building of local level government capacity.

Timing of the handover from non-government to state provision of services also varies for different functions and areas of a country, with the state capable of assuming and being accountable for some functions earlier than others. Insecure areas or those in which local state institutions are particularly weak may require a longer handover period. For example, as described in Box 1, Timorese institutions were ready to take on the administration of public finances and social services by the time of independence, but not those of justice and security, where a short transition period had disastrous effects for governance and, ultimately, human security.

Such systematic planning early in the recovery period remains rare in practice. More frequently, there is a gap between high government expectations around the authority and capacity of the state to channel external funds for service delivery, and continued donor funding of independent humanitarian activities through UN agencies or NGOs. This creates a disconnect between the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) and nationally-led recovery planning. A commonly agreed results framework, as adopted in Liberia in 2005, would help bridge this divide. Such an approach will often require development actors to engage in more realistic planning with national authorities and humanitarian partners, bearing in mind the time it will take to rebuild and transform basic state functions, and the need for continued large-scale humanitarian activities in the interim.

There are significant potential benefits both for crisis-affected countries and international donors in making these changes. Governments—which are often suspicious of humanitarian Appeals—tend to be reassured by a dialogue on their increasing role in coordination and service provision, and by the identification of specific benchmarks for the transition from non-government to state service provision. Dialogue early in the recovery phase can also help clarify expectations. For example, in

South Sudan, if there had been a more in-depth dialogue with leadership of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement about the time required to build state institutions capable of channeling large-scale aid for service delivery, it is likely that there would have been more realistic planning of development assistance, with an explicit longer-term role for humanitarian activities.

Clear transition planning also has the potential to improve the predictability of humanitarian funding. Consolidated Appeals are typically underfunded, especially in those sectors which respond to temporary state incapacity rather than temporary need (Box 2).

The presentation to donors of a clear transition plan, where humanitarian funding needs decrease gradually over time as state capacity increases, is likely to result in more secure funding for those humanitarian activities needed while state institutions are being established. This would also facilitate joint support for external financing needs from both humanitarian and development institutions, bringing greater pressure to bear from the IFIs, UNDP, and other multilateral development agencies in support of humanitarian financing needs.

Box 2: Lack of credible transition frameworks affects humanitarian financing

Global figures on humanitarian financing demonstrate the constraints faced in financing sectors where national counterparts and donors expect to see a strong framework for the transition to state service provision. The Humanitarian Appeal 2007 reports that 89 percent of the support requested for food was received in 2006, but only 16 percent of that requested for education, 26 percent for health, and 30 percent for water and sanitation. These latter are the sectors where humanitarian agencies are responding to a *temporary incapacity of the state* rather than to a *temporary need of the population*. There is, therefore, a much greater imperative to plan a transition back to regular state service provision in these sectors. It is likely that one of the principal reasons that these sectors are so chronically underfunded is that donors perceive a high overlap with government-led reconstruction plans, and are hence unwilling to provide long-term humanitarian funds in the absence of a clear plan and funding requirement for the transition from humanitarian to national institutional provision.

Source: OCHA, Humanitarian Appeal 2007.

The political level: Accepting and mitigating political risk

Creating a positive role for national institutions¹⁰ which associates them with humanitarian and early service delivery is key to the credibility of a post-conflict settlement. Schools and clinics which are rebuilt with the logo of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office or USAID provide concrete benefits to the local population, but they do little to build the credibility of national institutions in the eyes of the population in a manner which will sustain longer-term peace and recovery.¹¹ In situations where there is genuine government will to reform and rebuild, there are therefore enormous political benefits, in a positive sense, to adjusting the traditional humanitarian approach to incorporate increased engagement with the state. But there are also risks involved for international actors in associating too closely with weak state institutions which are vulnerable to corruption and political manipulation.

Closer engagement with national institutions does not necessarily imply co-option or naivety. It is reasonable for international actors to ask that a government-led framework for recovery demonstrate a growing commitment to political inclusion and equity, human rights, pro-poor policies, and action to diminish corruption. This is an area where development actors could usefully learn from humanitarian approaches. If the structural and cultural tendency of humanitarian actors is to be state-avoiding, the structural and cultural tendency of development actors is to be state-supporting, often to the detriment of early awareness of increasing abuses by state institutions. While efforts to boost the credibility of post-conflict state institutions may require an adjustment on the part of humanitarian actors, they also require that development actors guard against human rights abuses or the punitive use of aid, encourage a clear division of state functions from partisan political activities and transparency in government claims of progress. Development actors have often been slow to recognise emerging problems in these areas.¹²

Dealing more directly with the political risks and opportunities involved in government-led post-conflict recovery, therefore, requires increased efforts to understand the politics of post-conflict peace-building and state-building, as well as how to mitigate the risks. Both the character of staff and organisational culture can affect one's understanding of the political dynamics involved. For humanitarian actors, the principled independence of humanitarian aid from political objectives

is, for good reasons, crucial. Although most development actors have improved their understanding of political governance as a development issue, they may frequently view short-term political concerns as corrupt or opportunistic, weakening their focus on poverty reduction.

The concept of peacebuilding provides a framework to differentiate between the positive and negative political impact of aid decisions which may be more acceptable to both humanitarian and development practitioners, due to the focus on local political impact, rather than international political interest.¹³ For example, attempts to stop humanitarian or development aid from reaching villages or population groups which have supported rebel groups or opposition political parties would be deemed unacceptable on peacebuilding grounds. But, while political in nature, attempts by national politicians to *prioritise* aid to insecure opposition-held areas or population segments which might be susceptible to recruitment by armed groups (such as urban youth), may be seen as a more positive and healthy manifestation of a commitment to peacebuilding and to normal, peace time political dynamics. That said, these are always grey areas. Closer engagement requires strong analysis, staff with the experience needed to make the required judgments and better links with institutions leading peacebuilding and mediation efforts.

Military-humanitarian engagement

Before we look at the links between humanitarian activities and medium-term development in collapsed and deteriorating environments, let us briefly consider the recent debate regarding military-humanitarian linkages for long-term development and recovery. While humanitarian principles have long included independence from military objectives (reiterated in the GHD Principles), the position of the humanitarian community on interacting with military forces has evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War, with increased, although still cautious, coordination. This evolution has paralleled or mirrored the increasingly violent and complex nature of many of the contexts in which humanitarian assistance has been and is being provided. In more recent years, the development of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, and later Iraq, has renewed heated discussion about the appropriate role of the military in humanitarian activities. This is an important issue for long-term governance in conflict-affected countries. Box 3 outlines some of the development considerations involved.

Box 3: Role of the military in humanitarian activities: Long-term development impact

The use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) has renewed debate about involvement of international armed forces in humanitarian and development activities. This has focused on two types of risk:

- from the humanitarian side, that military involvement in distributing aid will obscure an already fragile understanding of the independent nature of humanitarian assistance, and that the utilisation by the military of humanitarian projects for intelligence-gathering purposes will compromise the security of other humanitarian aid efforts;
- from the military side, that deploying key military assets into humanitarian functions will undermine concentration of effort on military objectives.

There is yet another risk to consider from a long-term development perspective, that of the inappropriate example set by the military in fragile post-conflict societies. In most societies with high governance ratings, the military does play a role in responding to crises, as in the aftermath of natural disasters or terrorist attacks, through critical functions such as search-and-rescue and the restoration of key infrastructure and transport links. These functions should therefore not be contentious in weaker societies, provided international or national forces are perceived to be neutral actors, and have not become partisan players in a local conflict.

When the armed forces go beyond this and become responsible for local administrative, humanitarian and service delivery functions, there is a considerable risk for longer-term development. For example, if international forces are involved in the oversight of local civil servants and the investigation of criminal activity, it becomes extremely difficult to explain to local political and military leaders why a clear separation of roles between the military, police, and civilian authorities is a critical part of good governance. This is particularly important in fragile post-conflict societies, because the role of the military is often at the heart of the conflict, with security sector reform one of the key priorities for sustainable peace-building.

Thus, the valid contribution of external peacekeeping forces is linked to their ability to assist in establishing a more secure local environment in both the short and long term. Explicitly modeling the limitations on the role of the military in a democratic society is an important effect to achieve to support this goal. Of course, this requires that national government, humanitarian and development agencies respond with sufficient speed and scale to support civilian governance and social protection functions.

Humanitarian aid in “unacceptable” governance environments

Government-led recovery forms one important context for the provision of humanitarian aid. But humanitarian activities also play a critical role in environments where the international community is unwilling or unable to engage with state authorities. These include:

- collapsed administrations, where the steady erosion of central state authority has allowed local economic strongmen to compete freely and violently for control over resource rich areas;
- strong states, in which closed political systems impose high levels of suffering and hardship on the populations they administer.

In the first case, the international community cannot engage with national institutions because responsible state institutions either do not exist or do not control all their territory. In the second case, the international community is unwilling to support a government-led process of social protection. In such situations the aid community finds itself under the humanitarian obligation of delivering the basic services and life-saving support that would otherwise be the responsibility of the national authorities to provide.

Other writers have commented that the debate on linking relief and development has tended to ignore these “prolonged crisis” situations, presuming a clear transition along the lines of the government-led recovery program described above.¹⁴ Yet, many of the most difficult humanitarian interventions of the last 15 years have been characterised by just such non-linear progress and multidimensional layers of conflict and governance problems. Indeed, the two situations may exist simultaneously within one country, as is arguably the case with regard to different state functions and different geographical areas in Afghanistan and DRC at present.

In these contexts in particular, the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence have been key to positioning international aid efforts outside of the politics that define the “unacceptable” governance environment. Upholding the GHD Principles has been central to the humanitarian community’s strategy to oppose attempts by local warlords or repressive state authorities to instrumentalise, politicise, and constrain activities. Similarly, advocacy over the independence and impartiality of humanitarian aid has been used successfully

to counter externally-driven advocacy positions which question or seek to halt humanitarian assistance on political grounds.

In hindsight, however, the question can be posed as to whether the humanitarian community's strict adherence to the non-political or independent nature of its obligations has not, in some cases, hindered its ability to appreciate socio-political changes as they occur, blinding itself to the emergence of both risks and opportunities.¹⁵ The risks of an excessively "apolitical" approach were demonstrated in the DRC by the re-establishment of control by genocidal forces from the Rwandan conflict over the population in the Goma camps in 1994, and the setback faced in the humanitarian community's attempts to address the violence in the early stages of the Ituri conflict (see Box 4).

In both cases, the primary issue was the change in local leadership dynamics, with responsible traditional and community structures losing authority in relation to violent and unscrupulous local leadership.¹⁶

The ease with which the genocidal forces were able to re-establish control over the population in the Goma camps in 1994, under the eyes of a large assistance presence, hindered the humanitarian community's ability to provide much needed humanitarian assistance to large numbers of innocent refugees in the camps, complicated the post-genocide humanitarian and recovery efforts inside Rwanda, and compromised peace and reconciliation in the Great Lakes region. In Ituri, where some of the lessons from Goma had been taken into account, the humanitarian community's attempts to address the violence in the early stages of the conflict faced setbacks, as the sole humanitarian focus of engagement with the local leadership proved to be insufficient.

The problems of the international response in Goma and Ituri have long been recognised by humanitarian practitioners. While the debate that such situations have generated frequently focuses on the question of security, one could argue that, in the preliminary stages, the real issue is that of political engagement at the local level. In the context of Ituri, a more intense and sustained political effort to work with local community leaders in their conflict-resolution efforts was needed. In order to counter the emerging authority of extremist criminal elements, specific actions should have been identified to signal the international community's confidence in traditional leaders, such as involving them in the planning and monitoring of the response, and making it clear from the outset that the international community

Box 4: Humanitarian intervention in Goma and Ituri

From the outset of the massive humanitarian intervention in Goma in 1994, the international community moved quickly, reluctant to acknowledge the nature of the political leadership which had provoked the massive movement of refugees into Zaire. The speed and intensity of the international response in this situation contrasted sharply with the much-discussed international *inaction* during the genocide in Rwanda. It was only in November 1994, when fifteen international NGOs threatened to withdraw from a number of the camps in Goma and Bukavu that the issue of politicisation of the camps was seriously raised. The subsequent discussions occurred months after the perpetrators of genocide had regained control of the camps, a process started in September 1994 with the murder of community leaders who were working with aid agencies. By the time the international community had recognised the need to act, it was too late. There was no alternative leadership structure left in the camps.

Until six Red Cross workers were killed in Ituri in April 2001, the humanitarian community worked closely with local community leaders to contain the violence which periodically flared. What was not fully appreciated at the time was the extent to which the attempt to support traditional authority directly countered the interests of local economic warlords. Thus, the more successful the humanitarian community's efforts to support conflict management at the community level, the more these extremists resorted to sophisticated forms of manipulation to reignite intercommunity tensions. Every spike in violence corresponded to a further weakening of traditional authority. Though aware of increasing tensions, the aid community did not immediately detect a significant increase in the degree of violence and were not attuned to the extent to which this was increasingly undermining the overall humanitarian effort.

unequivocally condemned the acts that had been committed in Rwanda during the preceding 100 days.

Humanitarian aid organisations raised the valid concern that implementing such measures introduces an unacceptable level of political involvement on the part of individual agencies. It must be recognised that, on the one hand, an emphasis on safeguarding the neutrality and independence of humanitarian aid delivery, and, on the other, the notion that political engagement is critical to avert much of the suffering in some of the most violent contexts, are, in fact, not contradictory. Understanding local political dynamics does not mean that humanitarian

agencies have to lead political efforts. It does, however, imply the ability to adjust delivery mechanisms to emerging political opportunities and risks. Such an approach would be consistent with both the humanitarian donorship principle of supporting long-term development, and the fragile-states principle of “taking the context as the starting point.”

A stronger focus on the interaction of humanitarian activities with local political dynamics may also indicate in some cases the need to advocate for stronger and more formalised international support at the political level. Although the international community has recently attempted to integrate political, security, and humanitarian responses, the focus of much of this effort has been on the security, rather than political aspects. Political initiatives have been weakly resourced, and, where they exist, have concentrated more on resolving national conflicts than on facilitating sub-national or local conflict resolution and political development. A better mix of international instruments is needed to make local humanitarian, political, and security strategies coherent, and thus ensure stronger political support to sustain the gains made through humanitarian activities.

The extent to which humanitarian assistance is asked to operate beyond its intended scope is one that is even more relevant in “unacceptable” governance environments. In a situation where sanctions have been imposed, disallowing development aid, a conventional interpretation of humanitarian aid¹⁷ accepts the provision of basic food and medical aid to vulnerable populations, but does not authorise support for education, sustainable livelihoods, or other long-term, essential services.

In cases where governments are unwilling or unable to deliver essential services to their population—sometimes for prolonged periods of time—the humanitarian community is faced with the difficult question of whether humanitarian aid should fill the void in order to prevent an even greater crisis. The counter-argument is that such substitute services inadvertently support delinquent or negligent governments by allowing them to redeploy fungible domestic resources for their own political or personal gain, rather than investing them in public services. While the latter is a valid concern, the medium to long-term implications of *not* supporting interventions that strengthen the ability of communities and individuals to sustain themselves—and eventually to participate in a transition process—is an equally important consideration. Attention to longer-term development linkages in such circumstances, in particular the local institution-building elements of humanitarian aid,

necessitates recognising the special political and operational risks at play, and taking active steps to mitigate these.

If properly applied, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles provide a solid framework for these “unacceptable” governance environments, where the aid provided should:

- be fully transparent and accountable;
- reinforce the primary responsibility of states for assisting victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders;
- strengthen the capacity of local communities.

From the outset, every opportunity should be seized to make clear to authorities that engagement is based on the understanding that it is the state’s responsibility to provide services to its people according to international standards, and carries the expectation that global goals, such as the MDGs and international human rights Conventions, are adhered to. In closed environments, attempts have been made to provide assistance with performance-based, phased implementation criteria, which include the acceptance of monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Transparency in a humanitarian crisis can also contribute to opening debate within closed systems. To view pariah regimes as homogeneous structures is, in many cases, an oversimplification. Mid-level civil servants, civil society and opposition groupings, and community leadership, aware of the deficiencies and injustices of the system to which they belong, may be open to finding entry points to improve governance. Humanitarian issues may also offer possibilities for dialogue between opposing parties.¹⁸ Thus, part of the value of a principled and robust humanitarian response for longer-term development is to provoke internal debate. In part, this can be done through the dissemination of fact-based needs assessments, and continuous attempts to dialogue with the authorities, opposition, and civil society groups at all levels.¹⁹

Thus, key to the effective provision of assistance in contexts of deteriorating governance is the maintenance of a strong and visible international presence which can provide independent information about the situation on the ground. While donor “branding” of assistance should be discouraged in situations of government-led recovery, the case can be made that in cases of “unacceptable” governance such international visibility is both justified and desirable. In the best case scenario, the identification

of humanitarian activities as independent and international allows the process of aid delivery to model more accountable and inclusive governance, which would not be possible if humanitarian activities were to be strongly associated with the state.

The deliberate retention of an international flag for aid in these circumstances does not negate the value of participatory approaches at the local level. Engaging community recipients in the identification of aid priorities and in the delivery of services furthers an understanding of the premise under which the assistance is provided—avoiding misinformation about the role of government or political affiliation in humanitarian provision. More important, it offers an opportunity for positive longer-term governance impact. The strength of local communities emerges as much from the organisational opportunities provided by a participatory approach to aid delivery as it does from the protective deterrence provided by the physical presence of international organisations. Box 5 looks at this issue in greater detail.

Nor, in situations of deteriorating governance, should the international branding of humanitarian efforts—focused on community-driven rather than state-driven delivery mechanisms—imply the complete exclusion of state social service provision entities. Governance structures in many of these contexts do not consist merely of the political leadership/elites considered “unacceptable.” Civil service administrations often do provide social services, albeit limited. And in the event of a political transition, many of the civil servants involved in service delivery will remain in place.²⁰ Institutional capital must be preserved, not only to address suffering today, but to strengthen the ability of communities and individuals to participate in the transition process.

In cases of collapsed administrations and states under sanctions, development actors tend to have little direct presence or financing role, and linkages are therefore less immediate than in the context of government-led recovery programmes. As with adjustments to humanitarian responses, discussed earlier, there are some critical areas where development actors can adjust their practice as well. These include devising ways for development institutions to play a supportive role behind humanitarian efforts—for example, by contributing expert analysis of local social and economic conditions, supporting community structures, or offering innovative institutional and financing arrangements. Similarly,

development actors could draw more on the expertise and knowledge of local conditions developed by humanitarian practitioners when a potential transition opportunity emerges.

Box 5: Community empowerment in difficult governance environments

In many prolonged crises, given limited donor support and restrictive environments, there are often constraints on the scale of the field presence of humanitarian actors. Engaging community structures becomes one of the most effective means of ensuring and extending the impact of a humanitarian response. Though support for community networks can take various forms, it invariably involves focusing mobilisation efforts on specific needs, in part to protect the non-political label of the response. For example, communities may be mobilised to address primary education through parent-teacher interaction. Similar local self-reliance structures may be set up to address food distribution and livelihood needs.

The use of community structures as a conduit for humanitarian aid has strong potential for longer-term development benefits, through increased empowerment and local transformation, especially leadership development; demonstration of a participatory model of local decision-making; strengthened community debates about poverty, exclusion, and local conflict resolution; and demonstration of transparent and accountable public expenditure approaches.

Essential to the support of local communities is the establishment of a localised presence of humanitarian organisations—even if staffed by nationals of the country—as technical facilitators rather than direct providers. To be truly effective, the localised humanitarian presence must seek to gain acceptance of the local authorities. Initially, it can serve as a deterrent to abusive local authorities, who may hesitate to commit exactions in front of witnesses whose influence they have yet to gauge. Thus, one of the functions of a localised presence is to facilitate the interaction between the authorities and local communities, and, more specifically, to assist local communities in articulating their needs and concerns. An effective local presence also provides a recourse mechanism for communities, who then have an additional channel through which to present their grievances. The more principled—hence independent—the response, the more effective it becomes, and the greater the ability of local communities to resist pressures.

Conclusion

In recent years, debates on the linkage between humanitarian assistance and long-term development have stagnated. There have been positive examples of cooperation between humanitarian and development actors on the ground, and these offer lessons which can be applied in emerging and post-crisis situations. At the same time, global policy discussions and the experience of delivering aid in the most fragile and politically contentious environments have tended to move humanitarian and development actors in somewhat different directions as regards strategy and organisational culture, with development actors increasingly stressing support for state-building, and humanitarian policy-makers focusing on efforts to enhance the real and perceived independence of humanitarian aid.

We have argued that the emphasis in the GHD Principles on safeguarding the neutrality, impartiality, and independence of humanitarian aid delivery is compatible with political engagement, and that the strengthening of national institutions is critical to the alleviation of suffering and fostering a sustainable exit from crisis. Humanitarian, like development activities, always have political impact, via decisions on when, where, and to whom to provide assistance, and with whom to consult in decision-making. Efforts to understand and address the political impact of humanitarian intervention does not in any way compromise its neutrality or independence. It does, however, allow a greater adjustment to local realities and hence greater potential to support sustainable recovery and long-term development.

The recommendation to strengthen the political understanding of post-conflict recovery applies equally to humanitarian and development actors. While humanitarian actors tend to be structurally and culturally state-avoiding, development actors tend to be structurally and culturally state-supporting. Both need to adjust these approaches to take into consideration the local political context. Specifically, there is an opportunity for both communities to differentiate their approaches and their partnerships in response to situations of government-led recovery, in contrast to those characterised by collapsed administrations or repressive regimes. An increased focus on peacebuilding would assist in shifting organisational culture so as to fully incorporate analysis of, and appropriate engagement with, local political dynamics in humanitarian and development responses.

In government-led recovery contexts, greater willingness to associate humanitarian activities with emerging post-conflict state institutions and to plan the transition from nongovernmental to state provision of services has the potential to make the gains from humanitarian interventions more sustainable, while also ensuring more predictable humanitarian funding. On the development side, a parallel willingness to discard the standard assumption that conflict periods represent a short break in “normal” state provision of services is needed. This would mean efforts to engage in more realistic planning with national authorities and humanitarian partners concerning the time it takes to rebuild and transform basic state functions. It also means that development actors must acknowledge the value of continued large-scale humanitarian or other nongovernmental activities in the interim. In situations of collapsed administrations and repressive regimes, development actors could play a stronger supportive role by providing analysis of local conditions and developing innovative institutional and funding arrangements.

Responding to the complexity of these situations stretches the capacities of humanitarian and development actors to their limit. An effective response also requires combined and complementary efforts from political and security actors. Considerable progress has been made in recent years in strengthening security-humanitarian and security-development linkages. The political element is also crucial, yet tends to be under-resourced and under-valued, in particular at the sub-national and local level.

Finally, renewed efforts to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian-development cooperation would be supported by a push from the donors and authorising structures of the key multilateral institutions to adapt planning and results-monitoring frameworks. This is particularly important in government-led recovery contexts, where large-scale humanitarian assistance is provided simultaneously with development aid. A requirement to develop and report on common results frameworks which link programmes under Consolidated Appeals with longer-term frameworks such as government-led recovery plans and poverty reduction strategies would assist in shifting organisational culture of both the humanitarian and development communities towards closer and more effective cooperation.

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Notes

- 1 Sarah Cliffe is Head of the Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Group at the World Bank. Charles Petrie is United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator for Myanmar. This article reflects the personal views of the authors, and not those of the World Bank or the United Nations.
- 2 In constant 2005 dollars.
- 3 The correlation between emergency aid and development aid in the years 1995–1997 was negligible (.02); by 2003–2005 it had increased to .23.
- 4 OECD-DAC literature from the Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation and Fragile States Groups summarise much of this evolving thinking among development actors.
- 5 Hammer and Macrae, eds., 2004.
- 6 See *Principles of and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, 2003; *Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States*, 2007.
- 7 The paper focuses on the delivery of aid in political and conflict-related crises rather than natural disasters, although some of the conclusions may also be relevant to post-disaster recovery.
- 8 The Aceh situation was particularly notable for the flood of international funds made available after the tsunami. But it is also difficult to argue that lack of funding availability was the binding constraint in Afghanistan, Haiti, Kosovo, South Sudan, or Timor.
- 9 See Ghani et al., 2005, for a discussion of core state functions; see Cliffe and Manning (forthcoming) for a discussion of varied transitional approaches to different sectors.
- 10 The terms "National authorities/institutions" are used synonymously with "the state," although during an ongoing peace process, the appropriate counterpart structure may be transitional structures involving parties to the peace process, in addition to government.
- 11 In general, donors rather than UN agencies and NGOs are at fault here, in insisting on donor visibility in order to boost the credibility of their own institutions, to the detriment of efforts to build the credibility of post-conflict states. It is, of course, critical to maintain support for humanitarian aid amongst the governments, parliaments, and interest groups of donor countries. A better compromise, however, would be to "double (or triple) brand" the humanitarian activities taking place within a government-led program, giving credit to the donor, the implementing agencies, and the counterpart government agency.
- 12 A clear set of agreed benchmarks between national and international actors—as in the case of the Results Focused Transition Framework in Liberia—can expose problems early and galvanise international response.
- 13 See for example OECD-DAC, 1997 and 2001 and Quinn and Lange, 2003.
- 14 Hammer and Macrae, eds. 2004.
- 15 This is equally true of the development community.
- 16 In Ituri, insecurity had reached a state of equilibrium, as alternative authorities used intimidation and violence to retain their control over populations and resources. Hence, the act of scaling up humanitarian aid in itself tended to destabilise this equilibrium, with the attendant risk of escalating the conflict.
- 17 Conventional interpretations of humanitarian assistance would consider life-saving interventions to be part of humanitarian assistance, in addition to meeting temporary needs in other sectors.
- 18 The potential of humanitarian activities for initiating dialogue is the basis of the important work performed by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
- 19 Engagement and dialogue with closed regimes frequently raises the concern that any form of interaction only strengthens them, and may undermine the population's confidence in the international community's willingness/ability to address their suffering. However, in contexts of "unacceptable" governance, the confidence that populations have in international assistance organizations and the wider international community is based far more on the ability of the most vulnerable to voice their needs and grievances—and the perception that assistance/services can be trusted—than on whether or not there is discussion with authorities. In fact, it can be argued that in complex political environments, local populations view as reassuring the fact that organisations defending their interests are able to access those with local or national power, and see abandonment as a far greater international sin than dialogue with the officials of a repressive regime.
- 20 The attempt to purge the Iraq administration of all Baathist party members demonstrates the inadvisability of a strategy which excludes efforts to preserve the human and institutional capital of previous administrations.

