

Coping with Crisis; Coping With Aid Capacity Building, Coping Mechanisms and Dependency, Linking Relief and Development

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1. BACKGROUND AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. This paper was prepared at the end of 1996 as hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees poured out of Zaire and the entire Great Lakes region looked poised to collapse. It is a crisis which has occupied the full attention of the UN humanitarian emergency response system. Against this backdrop, this paper has taken a long view of equally pressing issues facing each UN agency today; that is, how can we more effectively strengthen the capacities of affected communities to cope with crisis and thereby hasten their recovery process?

2. Specifically, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Local Capacities and Coping Mechanisms and the Linkages Between Relief and Development charged the consultants to [a) furnish an inventory of UN agencies' efforts to identify, utilize and strengthen local capacities, and to give guidance on how to improve these practices; [b) provide a better understanding of why the potential contribution of inherent local capacities are often ignored or downplayed in disasters, and to discuss the benefits of utilizing these capacities; [c] identify practices and institutional frameworks that have undermined local initiatives and traditional coping mechanisms, and to devise a check list of strategies and procedures necessary to avoid these negative externalities; and, [d] develop a set of good practices and innovative approaches to improve relief and development linkages.

3. Although written under the auspices of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, this work was prepared for a UN interagency committee. As assigned by the various UN agencies and bodies that comprise this committee, this paper considers the relationships between coping mechanisms and capacity building, with reference to the links between relief and development. These popular terms - - capacity building, coping mechanisms, linking relief and development - -do not, by themselves, make natural bedfellows. Rather, each is a loosely associated component of the sphere of influences on livelihood strategies that are pursued by people living in disaster-prone areas, the overwhelming majority of whom are women and children. These concepts should be situated in a larger context that incorporates, for example, market relations, analysis of migration, analysis of food security systems and frameworks for understanding women's and children's survival strategies. This, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper. 2

1This paper, prepared for the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee Sub-Working Group on Local Capacities and Coping Mechanisms and the Linkages Between Relief and Development, is the result of a brief "desk study". The information contained herein was obtained nearly exclusively from documents found at various UN offices. Where possible, UN staff were consulted. A bibliography of relevant sources is found at the end of this paper.

2 See Lautze, S. (a), (1996) "Lives Versus Livelihoods: How To Foster Self-Sufficiency And Productivity of Disaster Victims", U.S. Agency For International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance Occasional Paper Number One, March 1996, Washington, DC, for a more complete framework analysis.

II. COPING MECHANISMS, CAPACITY BUILDING AND DEPENDENCY: AN INTRODUCTION TO BASIC CONCEPTS

4. In response to shocks, such as military attacks, floods or economic collapse, people cope. Displaced persons seek shelter with extended families. Merchants provide short-term loans. Parents send their children to live with relatives in safer, more productive areas. In response to repeated shocks, the ways people cope become systematic and refined. Over time, these coping responses become coping mechanisms. For example, in an atmosphere of frequent raiding by armed factions, farmers reduce production and diversify storage techniques. Women living in displaced camps for extended periods convert relief grain to alcohol to generate income. In response to endemic shocks, however, these coping mechanisms replace earlier livelihoods, a process known as adoption. For example, when pastoralists lose the bulk of their cattle, most turn to migrant wage labor. Within one generation, the cattle culture can be completely lost and adaptation to another way of life entrenched.

5. The purpose of coping mechanisms is to protect the fundamental means of livelihood for disaster-affected populations.' Even in the worst of disasters, decisions made in crisis reflect the awareness of life beyond the emergency. People affected by disasters employ emergency measures (i.e., coping mechanisms) to reduce their vulnerability and minimize the effect of crisis so as to recover as quickly as possible. In essence, disaster-affected communities demonstrate the clearest examples of how emergency responses are related to livelihood strategies or, in current parlance, how relief and development are linked.

6. By their very origin, all coping mechanisms are sub-optimal. Coping mechanisms are employed only as second(or third-) best options to the community's preferred way of life. These mechanisms are imperfect and can become more exploitative as crisis intensifies. Nevertheless, they represent the best informed response to crisis, as they are developed by those whose lives and livelihoods are most vulnerable. Deliberate attempts by relief and rehabilitation organizations to assist communities to better cope in the face or wake of a disaster are capacity building interventions. The term derives from the observation that, although crises occur periodically, they only escalate into disaster situations when they outstrip the capacity of a community to cope with them. Where vulnerabilities are the identifiable weaknesses that make communities prone to disasters, capacities are the identifiable strengths upon which communities can draw to avert, mitigate or recover from disaster. It follows then, that capacity building is any intervention designed either to reinforce or create strengths upon which communities can draw to offset disaster-related vulnerability.

7. Interventions can prevent the erosion of a community's ability to employ its coping mechanisms (capacity damming), strengthen the better aspects of adopted coping mechanisms (capacity building) or assist Communities to derive better alternatives, a process known as capacity

seeding. In this paper, the term capacity building is used to cover this spectrum of activities. Capacity building entails far more than the channeling of emergency resources through local organizations. As the name implies, it is a process of building relationships at the local, national and international level to more effectively respond to crisis. In broad terms, capacity building is "the nurturing of the abilities needed by society to take control of its destiny and to manage and direct the development process".⁴

8. Ill-advised capacity building interventions can not only destroy local capacity they can reinforce coping mechanisms that, though promising in the short-term, have long-term harmful effects. Therefore, all coping mechanisms employed by an affected community must be evaluated on two criteria: Is the community capable (with or without outside assistance) of reinforcing them? Are the coping mechanisms worthy of being reinforced? This could be called the "C&W Test" (i.e., capable and worthy) for coping mechanisms. In short, once a coping mechanism passes the C&W Test, it becomes a candidate for capacity building.

9. Dependency is one way people cope with crisis. Dependency can be defined as extreme reliance on resources beyond one's control. Displaced persons can become dependent, for example, either upon the UNHCR or their in-laws until their return is feasible. As with any method of coping employed over time, dependency can become a coping mechanism or even a full adaption. Dependency is an excellent example of the value of the C&W Test for the range of coping strategies used by people in crisis. At some point in or after a crisis, dependency may represent the best of several coping mechanisms available to the population. It may also be a necessary step to help populations regain independence in much the same way, for example, that WFP Food For Work development programs assist farmers in the lengthy transition from exploitative agricultural cultivation to sustainable forestry. However, long-term dependency can be crippling to a society's ability to shift from crisis to stability. It is important for humanitarians to distinguish between necessary and destructive forms of dependency before pursuing strategies to reduce or increase dependency.

111. THE MERITS OF UNDERSTANDING COPING MECHANISMS AND BUILDING APPROPRIATE CAPACITIES

10. In order to assist disaster-affected populations, the UN humanitarian relief system must invest in a better understanding of how people cope with crisis. There is room for improvement in the system's ability to do this, as the "surprising" and relatively good health of refugees recently returning from Zaire demonstrated. Interventions by outside agencies can undermine the coping mechanisms employed by the most vulnerable, a point detailed later in this paper. Relief responses must be informed by a better appreciation of the actions taken by people to survive crisis if manipulation and diversion of relief resources is to be minimized.

⁴ Rau, C.B., "Capacity Building: Some Conceptual and Operational Issues", Draft Report prepared for CCPOQ, 19 November 1996, UN/New York, p.7.

It. The benefits and drawbacks of pursuing capacity building interventions must be weighed against two other alternatives open to the UN system: supporting a parallel, international, agency dominated system of service delivery or not providing assistance to victims. Currently, disaster relief responses are a mixture of these three options. The first has been gaining momentum since the end of the Cold War. Most resources are delivered through parallel, international NGO and UN structures. In some areas, disaster-affected populations are not assisted where access is blocked by military or political actors or where conditions of operation are simply untenable. Elsewhere, relief and rehabilitation resources are channeled to and through indigenous institutions and national governments.

12. Successful capacity building is a daunting and heretofore mostly elusive task. It is difficult to identify, understand and enhance coping strategies. Nevertheless, it is the role and responsibility of development organizations to equip governments and societies to cope with crisis through comprehensive capacity building measures long before disaster strikes. Emergency capacity building efforts must start as soon as the possibility of crisis faces a community. Where there is advanced warning (e.g. intelligence on troop movements), people begin to cope before crisis strikes. It is at that time that emergency capacity building interventions need to be initiated, rather than several years' hence after negotiated peace accords are signed.

13. Some of the challenges and rewards of capacity building were discovered in the UN's efforts in southern Sudan, where

*... working out the details of what capacity building would entail, and how to go. about it, was greeted with both scepticism and a lack of consensus among international agencies ... Some agencies felt that capacity building was inappropriate in an unstable environment, while others saw capacity building as 'developmental', and hence a deviation from the main priority of emergency relief. Concerns over the neutrality of international agencies in the South were also raised.*⁵

14. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for the UN system to learn to support coping mechanisms through capacity building in all complex emergencies, especially as awareness grows of the potential for humanitarian assistance to directly harm the most vulnerable and indirectly hinder the recovery process. Many UN agencies, unlike most NGOs, will stay in affected countries long after the crisis has passed and are likely, in the long run, to realize the benefit of capacity building interventions. Properly done, capacity building "is self-liquidating but in a manner that it does not leave behind voids and wastelands".⁶

15. Capacity building holds further resonance for the United Nations system. Especially in weak states torn apart by civil conflict the UN increasingly is having to move into power voids that would

5UN/DHA (c), p. 18 L
6Rau, p. 7.

have otherwise been filled by civil authorities. This is a role that the UN system neither welcomes nor is prepared to fill for extended periods. Again, the case of Sudan is instructive.

The rationale for capacity building in the early 1990's was the general recognition of the need for stronger and more effective local structures to support the delivery of humanitarian services. The weak capacity of Sudanese counterparts was seen as a hindrance to the implementation and coordination of OLS programs. This led to UNICEF taking on roles normally played by indigenous civil political institutions. 7

16. Efforts to build the capacity of local organizations have contributed to laying the foundations of civil society, for example, in southern Sudan and Angola. This year's review of OLS found that "the mutual obligations established within the Ground Rules have played an important role in shaping the development of social welfare structures in opposition movement areas." Likewise, outside agencies can assist communities to capitalize on nascent pro-peace interests by providing space and an opportunity for a number of voices to be heard.

People most ready to disengage from conflict are those who have least respect for existing leadership (that is, the leaders who are pursuing war) ... (P)eople who are willing to take risks by asserting their opposition to war are, for the most part, committed to a 'return' to governance which they can respect. In most cases, those who work toward disengagement also work for the establishment of what they name 'democratic' institutions; that is, they see a link between the ability of 'leaders' to manipulate people into warfare and a lack of inclusive democratic community structures. Therefore, one way in which they disengage from war-like actions is by promoting inclusive civil society. 9

17. Disaster relief efforts that assist local organizations to maintain accountability to the populations they serve and to gain access to international donors substantially increase a society's absorptive capacity for external resources. In addition to increasing the effectiveness of disaster relief responses, this increased capacity has profound implications for post-conflict rehabilitation. From the West Bank and Gaza to Mozambique and Bosnia, UN agencies' rehabilitation and development efforts have been dramatically slowed because of limited absorptive capacity. This benefit is particularly clear to 'traditional' development institutions. The World Bank recognizes that "relief programs need to maximize local inputs, in order to build the capacity necessary for the early stages of reconstruction."¹⁰

7 UN/DHA (c), p. 180 - 181.

8 UN/DHA (c), p. 54.

9 Anderson, M.B., (1996), *Do No Harm.: Supporting Local Capacities For Peace Through Aid*, Collaborative for Development Action Local Capacities for Peace Project, Boston, p. 46-47.

10 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Paper - Draft", 15 August 1996, Washington, D.C., p. 27.

IV. UN AGENCIES' ACTIONS TO IDENTIFY, UTILIZE AND STRENGTHEN LOCAL CAPACITIES

18. Across the spectrum, UN agencies, offices and departments recognize serious resource limitations, anticipate an ever-increasing demand for emergency relief response capacity and understand the unintended negative consequences of generating dependency. In response, each UN agency has acted to stay abreast of the most recent developments in disaster relief thinking. This includes the UN's efforts to capture the potential benefits of effectively utilizing local capacities through reducing vulnerability, strengthening coping mechanisms and increasing popular participation in relief and rehabilitation activities. This section outlines four strategies currently employed by the UN humanitarian response system with respect to coping mechanisms, capacity building and linking relief and development.

A. Strategy One: Active Policy Formulation

19. As the lessons from earlier and on-going complex emergencies are appreciated and disseminated, UN agencies have increasingly sought to address linkages between relief and development, as well as to consider issues of capacity building and coping mechanisms. Dialogue and debate have led to active policy formulation, one example of which is the very existence of the Sub-Working Group for whom this paper is prepared. FAO, WFP, WHO, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP and UNDHA, 11 among others, have all reviewed measures to work more effectively with affected populations, and all are currently working to turn rhetoric into reality. This is an important first step.

*In Tajikistan, UNHCR developed a policy to enhance the local capacity in government and an emerging independent judiciary as well as among the law enforcement institutions such as civil police and the court system."*¹²

¹¹ 'See, for example, any of a number of papers written for the ECOSOC process (especially Hugh Cholmondeley's "The Role of the United Nations System in Post-Conflict Recovery"), as well as agency-specific documents including: "Building Bridges Between Relief and Development: A Compendium of the UNDP Record in Crisis Countries"; the proceedings from the UNHCRAPA conference on "Healing the Wounds: Refugees, Reconstruction and Reconciliation"; and "United Nations Programme in Mozambique to Support the Development of a National Mine Clearance Capacity".

¹² de Mello, S.G., "Tajikistan: An Account of Lessons Learned", Memorandum, 15 April 1996, UNHCR/Geneva.

20. In addition, UN and multilateral organizations that once focused on the 'traditional' realm of development in stable contexts are aggressively studying the linkages between relief interventions and development strategies. Hard questions are being asked: What is our agency's comparative advantage?" How can relief and development resources, both fiscal and human, be more rationally distributed so that transitions from chaos to stability are more timely and seamless? Though cynical conjecture abounds regarding the motives of development agencies seeking a greater share of relief budgets, the current debate is healthy and will, ultimately, benefit those who are trying to cope with crises.

21. In these efforts, the UN system is not alone. Major donor bodies, including the DAC and USAID's OFDA" have commissioned extensive investigations that focus on the better utilization of local capacities. Realizing the limits of their own capacities, NGOs have pledged to strengthen and work more closely with potential local counterparts.¹⁵ Taken together, these efforts are generating standards of principle and codes of conduct that are shaping the formulation of policy throughout the international humanitarian relief system.

B. Strategy Two: Sectoral/Technical Capacity Building and Socio-Political Capacity Building

22. Complex emergencies entail the deliberate disruption of public goods and services once provided by recognized authorities or available through the 'moral economy', including kinship networks, informal reciprocal agreements, cultural customs, etc. In some emergencies, these services (e.g. health, education, labor exchange, and insurance) can be completely destroyed. For example, in Rwanda between April and July 1994, over 80% of the health professionals were killed or fled the country."

23. As a matter of routine, UN agencies work to identify, train and utilize individuals from

13 For example, the World Bank is currently reviewing its comparative advantage, as discussed in "Post Conflict Reconstruction Policy Paper". In "Building Bridges Between Relief and Development", UNDP outlines its strengths in governance and coordination.

14 See "Lives vs. Livelihoods: How to Foster Self-Sufficiency and Productivity of Disaster Victims - - A Strategy Paper Prepared for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance"; "Aid With Integrity: Avoiding the Potential of Humanitarian Aid to Sustain Conflict"; and, the DAC Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation's "Draft Policy Orientations: The Special Challenges of Assistance In Crisis and Recovery".

15 For example, the Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct states "Humanitarian assistance should build on local responses" and the Mohonk Criteria asserts that "Humanitarian assistance should strengthen the efforts of local governmental and non-governmental organizations to relieve suffering and build self-reliance."

16 KUMar, K., Tardif-Douglin, D., Maynard, K., Manikas, P., Selickler, A., and Knapp, C., (1996), The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience: Volume Four :Rebuilding Post-War Rawanda, David Millwood (editor), Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, Odense, p. 12.

affected communities that have appropriate skills bases. For example, training birth attendants and medical officers are standard and accepted emergency responses. In a similar vein, the UN is working to establish an indigenous demining capacity in Mozambique." Importantly, UN agencies (unlike many NGOs) work to strengthen whole systems of social services, often through governments. Numerous examples can be found in other sectoral areas, including training agriculture extension officers and water and sanitation workers.

Donors have provided limited direct assistance to the government for strengthening its management, coordination and information systems capacity in the health sector. However, for example, WHO was instrumental in providing direct technical assistance to the Ministry of Health in health policy formulation, guidelines and health sector reform.

18

24. There are fewer examples of UN initiatives to build social, political or economic capacities in disaster-affected communities. Arguably more controversial and difficult than technical interventions, some programs have attempted to strengthen affected communities' attempts to reorganize to better cope with crisis. The most comprehensive examples of socio-political capacity building are the Capacity Building and Humanitarian Principles Units of the Operation Lifeline Sudan/Southern Sector. Less deliberate examples are mentioned in passing in various reports -mostly in reference to actions taken when access for foreign agencies has been denied.

C. Strategy Three: - Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation of Capacity Building

25. There is renewed interest in capacity building. While the cross-cutting issues of sociopolitical capacity building in complex emergencies have yet to receive a full and proper analysis, efforts are being made to report on a range of capacity building efforts. A quick search for "Capacity Building" in ReliefWeb will yield a few dozen 'hits'. From UN Consolidated Assessment Appeals to routine reporting from Liberia, it has become customary to at least comment on capacity building efforts either needed or underway in disaster-affected countries. However, the range of activities considered as capacity building is narrow, usually limited to technical sectoral or disaster management training. Activities such as partnerships between international and national organizations are often not considered 'capacity building' and therefore do not appear in ReliefWeb searches." Nevertheless, reporting on capacity building is increasing and with it, knowledge of the

17 See UN/DHA, "United Nations Programme in Mozambique to Support the Development of a National Mine Clearance Capacity", 19 April 1996, UN/DHA/New York.

18 Kumar, K., et. al., p. 13.

19 See, for example, UN/DHA, "Final Report: DHA/Tajikistan" 20 February 1995, UN/DHA/Tajikistan. Under the heading "Capacity Building", an IOM-managed capacity building workshop for disaster mitigation and preparedness is discussed. However, in a section on programmes, the good work of the Aga Khan Foundation is praised for "working with a local NGO, which itself was helped to be established (by AKF) (which) is working on making the region self-sufficient in food production." Of note, this was not considered "capacity building" by the

UN's collective experience.

26. The recent OLS Review provided a useful overview of capacity building in Sudan. Valuable insights and criticism are included in the report. This will help to inform not only the UN's continuing efforts with capacity building in Sudan but in other countries where difficult but necessary capacity building is attempted. The Multi-Donor Evaluation of Rwanda highlighted problems encountered and successful interventions that were made by UN agencies faced with both limited national capacity and various ill-prepared international organizations. An increasing appreciation of both the complexity of and the need for capacity building has emerged from these and other reports, in addition to the ensuing debates they have inspired.

D. strategy Four: Human Resource Development and Team Building

27. As a system, the UN is working to develop individual skills and country teams through training and team building exercises, including, for example, the UNDP-funded Disaster Management Training Program (DMTP), the Complex Emergency Training Initiative (CETI), and the UN Staff College at Turin. Currently, there is general agreement that the UN should do capacity building. A typical statement in support of capacity building reflects this consensus:

*disaster preparedness should be institutionalized using local capacities with the full participation of all stake holders. This should be coupled with needs assessment, ensuring that foreign aid responds to the local needs and supports local capacities.*²⁰

28. Equipping UN staff and country teams to achieve this outcome is another matter altogether. Training programs include only limited focus on sectoral and especially socio-political forms of capacity building. Given the UN's limited experience with capacity building, it remains an abstract concept and therefore understandably absent from training curriculum. Some agencies, however, are moving to better prepare staff to consider capacity building interventions, including UNICEF's Complex Emergency Training Unit. Others are strengthening their understanding of gender dynamics in conflict, including UNHCR's People-Oriented Planning, as well as efforts by UNFPA and WHO.

authors of the report.

²⁰ High Relief Committee, et. al., "Final Report: Workshop on Disaster Management: Lessons Learned and Future Planning", May 1996, Brounmana.

V. ACTS OF OMISSION: MISSING THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF INHERENT CAPACITIES

Something is terribly wrong in the provision of humanitarian aid, especially to Africa. 21

29. Despite the good efforts of the UN system, much of the potential contributions of local organizations, national institutions, nascent local NGOs and other inherent capacities are routinely missed in emergency responses. As a rule, when major crisis erupts, the international humanitarian response system (often fueled by political pressures and high-profile media coverage) automatically sets in motion a range of actors to assess, appeal, fund, procure and deliver goods to the most vulnerable. This massive infusion of resources is rarely, if ever, controlled or managed by affected communities. Six important reasons for this state of affairs are considered in this section."

A. Reason One: Lac of Capacity to Build Capacity

30. As a rule, donors, NGOs and the UN system lack the ability to tap automatically and effectively into local capacities in complex emergencies.²³ This is true for a variety of reasons, but is due primarily to the absence of an alternative model to the current system of providing free relief goods and services (increasingly delivered by international NGOs). Although aware of the problems caused by this *modus operandi*, the system does not know how to operate in any other fashion.

Traditionally relief operations have been centralized, top-down, standardized, resource-intensive, donor-dependent and subject to sudden termination. This undermines local capacity and local institutional structures. 24

31. This lack of capacity to use or build capacity is also due to limited institutional knowledge, a lack of previous experience with capacity building and a dearth of case studies focussing on how to work with affected populations in crisis." It is not surprising, then, that truly effective means of

21African Rights, "Humanitarianism Unbound? Current Dilemmas Facing Multi-Mandate relief Operations in Political Emergencies", Discussion Paper No. 5, November 1994, London, p. 27.

22 In this and the following section, it would be unfair and inaccurate to point to the actions of any one UN agency for these deficiencies. Rather, it is the collective effort of the broader system of humanitarian relief that spans a range of NGOs, UN agencies, international, multilateral and bilateral organizations that contributes to these missed opportunities. This chain of response capability is only as strong as its weakest links.

23 Examples too numerous to count abound, but this should not be taken, necessarily, as a sign of malintent on the part of the humanitarian relief community. Mary Anderson points out, "This occurs inadvertently and unintentionally and usually is not even recognized by those involved. It represents no failure of good will but, rather, a set of conditions and choices which interact to produce negative impacts." Anderson, M.B., (Forthcoming), International Assistance in Conflict: An Exploration of Negative Impact, p. 4.

24 UNICEF, "Rethinking Strategies and Response to Systemic Crises: Implications for UNICEF - Proceedings of Workshop", 27 - 28 April 1995, UNICEF/New York.

25 Anthropologists working on the Multi-Donor Evaluation of Rwanda concluded that "there is no easy solution to this problem, and the issue of better managing the relationships between emergency and national

working with local populations are neither taught formally in training seminars nor exchanged informally among more and lesser experienced staff.

Much remains to be done in terms of developing professional training courses and internationally-recognized technical and professional qualifications in specialist fields. Perhaps of even greater importance is the need to retain experienced personnel between emergency operations. Difficult and often dangerous working conditions and the lack of job security result in an unusually high turnover and a young age profile in most relief agencies. 26

32. Young age profiles, however, do not translate into relief workers focussed on the special capacities of children and women. Children, who are often full, capable participants in the war effort, are perceived to be passive victims in extended relief operations, with no special attention to their abilities, capacities or potential. Relief workers are not trained to build on the skills, energy and resourcefulness of youth.

33. Ethnic, gender, age or religious differences between international relief workers and the populations they aim to serve can also hinder attempts to identify local capacities. For example, the fact that most of the UN staff working in emergencies are men may be a handicap when working to enhance the capacities of local women and women's organizations.

34. Where attempted, capacity building interventions have not been evaluated thoroughly and few of the lessons learned have been captured and disseminated. In part, this is due to a tendency to underestimate the potential for replication of interventions across a range of cultures and countries, as well as donors' general unwillingness to fund evaluations." As is currently being learned in Afghanistan,

one can find examples that both strengthened and undermined local capacity - - the far more difficult job is looking for systematic patterns of success and failure and learning from them.²⁸

35. Adequate methodologies for evaluating projects that capitalize on local capacities have yet to be formulated. This may be the most serious barrier to building the humanitarian system's structures needs further research." Borton, et. al., Vol. III, p. 147.

26 Borton, J., Brusset, E., and Hallam, A., (1996), The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience: Volume Three: Humanitarian Aid and Effects, David Millwood (editor), Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, Odense, p. 150.

27 Interview, Anthony Raby, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN/DHA, New York, 11/26.

28 UN/DHA (b), "Afghanistan: Coordination in a Fragmented State - - Draft Report", UN/DHA, Policy Analysis Division, Lessons Learned Unit, forthcoming, New York, p. 51.

capacity to build capacity. Without a strong basis to defend the advantages and recognize the disadvantages of working with local communities in crisis, discussions of building on local coping mechanisms and working to link relief and development are apt to remain at a level of rhetoric unsubstantiated by action.

B. Reason Two: Philosophies of Intervention

36. Humanitarianism has a long and proud tradition of providing assistance to people in their most difficult hours. The realization that this well-intended relief could actually do more harm than good in complex emergencies has only slowly seeped into the consciousness of the more experienced relief agencies. Philosophies of intervention formed in natural disasters, early disaster work in interstate wars and in development work continue to inform today's disaster responses. These mind sets do not readily facilitate the identification of local capacities in complex emergencies because of a "caretaker mentality", the tendency to view capacity building as a sector or product rather than a process or philosophy of intervention, and the difficulty of attaining a maximum degree of neutrality in complex emergencies.

Caretaker Mentalities

The assumption that displaced or disaster-affected communities are 'rescued' by humanitarian aid undermines people's coping strategies, their resources and resourcefulness, and their capacity to organize for mutual support. 29

37. Emergency humanitarian relief assistance is geared toward alleviating the worst suffering of the most vulnerable. This focus on vulnerabilities engenders a "caretaker mentality" in many relief workers who view "beneficiaries" not as proactive survivors but as helpless victims of unspeakable tragedy. The obvious and often traumatic suffering of crisis-affected populations can overwhelm relief workers who, themselves, may be influenced by media or socialization to view disaster survivors as passive. In the heat of crisis, the international humanitarian relief community has a tendency to overestimate its capacity to respond, overestimate the vulnerabilities of affected communities and underestimate the survival capacities of affected communities. This can badly skew the self-perception of relief workers and relief organizations who, often wrongly, believe survival of the majority is dependent upon their actions.

38. These forces combine to blind outsiders to the subtle and important capabilities that local populations use to ensure their survival. Where undertaken, studies indicate that these efforts can be more important and effective than the more high-profile and expensive external interventions that are the norm in responding to crisis in complex emergencies.³⁰

29 Eurostep, "Gender and Humanitarian assistance: An Eurostep Paper", May 1996, Brussels, p. 8.

30 For examples, see the OLS Review, pages 146, 161 and 163.

It is worth recalling that relief aid rarely accounts for more than 10% - 15% of the total food consumption of areas stricken by famine, with the consequence that enabling people to help themselves is a far more effective means of overcoming hunger than sending relief."

Negative Linkages Between-Development And Relief

39. Several problems with capacity building in disasters are reflections of issues of capacity building in development settings.³² This relationship yields weak and negative links between development approaches and relief interventions. In the first instance, emergency capacity building is limited to a narrowly defined range of technical sectors. In the second, the failure of development to adequately build social institutions prior to crisis means that there are few (if any) such institutions available to use or strengthen when complex emergencies erupt. The humanitarian system cannot be expected, in the height of crisis and chaos, to build institutions not strengthened through development investments during more stable periods.

40. Some potential contributions of local communities in complex emergencies have been bypassed because 'traditional' emergency capacity building interventions have focused on technical sectors rather than social, political or economic systems. This is a reflection of the model of capacity building often used in development practice where the "theoretical framework of capacity building has long been subsumed in technical cooperation (TC)."¹¹ Understandably in complex emergencies, the expectations of national authorities, UN agencies, donors and NGOs are shaped by their extensive experiences with development agencies. These expectations are mutually reinforcing, reducing emergency capacity building attempts to strengthening technical sectors. While these types of capacity building interventions are important, this narrow view means that a whole category of local capacities is rarely sought and hence rarely employed. Given the extent of damage by complex emergencies to social systems (kinship networks, elders, gender relations, groups of children who manage cattle camps, etc.), to economic systems (markets, insurance, credit, infrastructure, etc.) and to political systems (local councils, traditional authority and decision-making, democracy, peaceful conflict-resolution mechanisms, etc.), this deficiency is problematic.

41. Currently, issues of capacity building in developing settings are receiving increased vigorous attention.

31 Africa Rights, p. 13

32 It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct a broad assessment of the impact of traditional development practice on societal breakdown and complex emergencies. Suffice it to say that Rwanda was a model of development in Africa. 'The case can be made that development can exacerbate inequality and existing societal divisions, leading to conflict.

33 Rau, p. 5.

*There is growing concern that conventional development processes have created neither national expertise nor institutional capacity to sustain development. This is due to excessive emphasis on short-term projects with finite impact rather than investment in human capital; directing support to governments rather than towards societies; excessive dependency on foreign experts resulting in minimal local ownership and control of the development process; and development of individual capacities without regard to the organizational or institutional context.*³⁴

42. There is emerging consensus that attention should be paid not only to national capacity building but also to community capacity building and to nurturing not only the institutions of the state but also of the civil society. However, as in disaster relief circles, these emerging concepts have not been translated into standard operating procedures. In addition, there is a realization that

the development aid system still neglects most of the non-economic aspects in favor of a narrow economic-technical approach ... there are little or no working relations between the development aid system and organizations dealing with these issues, such as political movements, human rights organizations or unions. ³⁵

Confusing Independence With Neutrality

43. The tensions between humanitarian imperatives and military strategies have been addressed in the formulation of humanitarian law. More than any other organization, the ICRC has worked to operationalize the resulting humanitarian principles, including the paramount concept of neutrality. For the ICRC, neutrality is necessary to enjoy the confidence of all and is achieved best by working on both sides of the conflict." Forged in the realities of working in interstate wars, this understanding of neutrality served the humanitarian community well until the Ethiopian famine of 1984/5.

44. In the subsequent decade, humanitarian agencies have scrambled to maintain neutral humanitarian space in intrastate conflicts where relief resources are increasingly manipulated and politicized. In seeking to remain neutral, most relief organizations have focused on the perceived "apolitical" tasks of delivering health, water and sanitation services or relief food through channels that limit the involvement of local actors to technical aspects. Complicated by the rapidly changing state of sovereignty, working to identify, utilize and strengthen local capacities for, say, organizing

34 Rau, p. 7.

35 Uvin, P., (1996), Development, Aid and Conflict, Reflections from the Case of Rwanda, Peter Uvin, the United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research, Research for Action., p. 24.

36 Levine, I., "Sudan: In Pursuit Of Humanitarian Neutrality" in Aid Under Fire: Relief and Development in an Unstable-World , UN/DHA in collaboration with ODI and ODA, 1995, p. 37

community groups or empowering marginalized producers, is largely perceived as "too political" by both relief organizations and some authorities, and hence a violation of neutrality.³⁷

45. These views are not unfounded. In the chaos of conflict, working with or providing resources to some organizations can grant legitimacy to inappropriate political factions, a fundamental violation of neutrality. Ignoring the political tensions inherent in complex emergencies, however, does not create neutral humanitarian space. To the contrary, it leaves agencies open to gross exploitation and manipulation.

While weakening local capacities, humanitarian aid risks legitimizing and thus strengthening warring factions. They may claim credit for the provision of relief, mobilize populations on the basis of promised aid, organize and/or control local distribution structures, and favor supporters over opponents. 38

46. Unfortunately, "neutrality of intention does not necessarily translate into neutrality of fact."³⁹ Indeed, "neutrality of impact appears impossible." It is a daunting task to seek to intervene with a minimum of naivete and a maximum of neutrality in complex emergencies - - one currently undertaken only by the most experienced agencies, including some UN agencies. It is also a combination accomplished only with extensive contributions from local communities. For agencies that confuse detachment from communities with neutrality, however, local capacities to offset the worst effects of complex emergencies will continue to be missed or worse, exploited or undermined altogether, as was so painfully demonstrated in the Rwandan crisis.

The extremists who had mounted the genocide knew they could rely on the international relief community to respond with material assistance, and that there would be few if any efforts to isolate them from the mass of the population. 41

C. Reason Three: Real and Perceived Pressures To Act Urgently

47. When television screens around the world are filled with the terrible images of starving children and suffering adults, the best part of our humanity demands that we spare no effort to feed

37 See, for example, UNICEF/OLS Southern Sector, "Notes on the Question of Capacity Building: 12 Months On", UNICEF/OLS Southern Sector, 1994, Nairobi.

38 Prendergast, J. and Scott, C., "Aid With Integrity: Avoiding the Potential of Humanitarian Aid to Sustain Conflict", U.S. Agency For International Development Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance Occasional Paper Number Two, March 1996, Washington, DC, p. 11.

39African Rights, p. 24

40Anderson, p. 13

41African Rights, p 27.

the hungry, care for the ailing and shelter the homeless. Governments act quickly to provide massive resources, relying heavily on existing infrastructures to channel relief to disaster areas. This process quickly gains its own momentum and, for so long as the general public can see the suffering, external resources flow. When the images fade or are replaced by starvation and suffering elsewhere, the momentum (and accompanying effort and resources) rapidly shifts.

48. The media reinforces an approach dominated by international agencies. The media and international agencies enter "a morality play" in which the "good guys" (almost always white and from the North) come to rescue the helpless victims." While the international agencies rush for media coverage to maximize their funding bases, the media itself rarely asks the hard questions. Rather, it usually goes along in promoting the need for massive, quick and dramatic interventions.

49. Under such circumstances, there are both real and perceived pressures for relief organizations to act urgently. Certainly the rapid response of the international community to the cholera outbreak in Goma in 1994 spared countless lives. When global malnutrition rates soared to 30 - 40% of the under five population in parts of Somalia and Sudan in the early 1990's, it was the immediate and ready capacity of UN agencies and international relief organizations that saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Likewise, donor-funded and managed stockpiles of food, plastic sheeting, medical kits and jerrycans are essential to the effectiveness of these types of operations.

50. These "turn key" responses to crisis, however, do not include the systematic identification, utilization or strengthening of local capacities. It is difficult, complicated and time consuming to conduct sensitive and thorough analysis of the range of coping mechanisms people employ, understand often subtle and complex community organizational structures and determine how best to utilize and strengthen the most sustainable aspects of these capacities. Capacity building, under the best of circumstances, is an arduous process. In an atmosphere of crisis, suspicion and violence, it is perceived to be outside the realm of possibility for most relief organizations. Further, capacity building efforts usually involve more human and fewer material inputs, a fact that leaves the process highly vulnerable to being undermined by relief agencies who prefer to "dump" relief supplies in areas of perceived needs.

From the ever-widening array of ever-more flexible NGOs, there is always likely to be at least one agency that is prepared to operate in any given situation. If no NGO is operating in a particular political emergency, it is almost certain that one will improvise sufficiently to begin a relief programme, and scoop the publicity and funds.⁴³

42 Hammock, J.C. and Charny, J., (1996), "Emergency Response As Morality Play: The Media, The Relief Agencies and The Need For Capacity Building," in Robert Rotberg and Thomas Weiss (eds) From Massacre To Genocide: The Media, Public Policy and Humanitarian Crises, The Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C.

43 African Rights, p - - 19.

51. For reasons of profile and fund-raising, international relief organizations need to be seen "doing" something to respond to disasters but capacity building interventions are not "CNN-friendly". Negotiating anti-cattle raiding arrangements in exchange for training para-vets is a process not easily captured on film or in a "sound bite". Images of well-meaning foreigners providing wet feeding to malnourished children are considerably more evocative in many Western societies from whence the bulk of the private funding of relief operations originates.

52. From a purely technical perspective, agencies must spend money raised for the emergency at hand or face legal and/or public relations consequences. Reserving emergency funds for future rehabilitation activities leaves agencies vulnerable to damaging exposure and public criticism. By the nature of their origin, disaster resources must be spent as quickly as possible. The result is that many relief operations are "supply driven"; that is, requisite interventions are often delimited by a short list of available relief supplies rather than determined by a comprehensive assessment of capacities and vulnerabilities characterizing the emergency situation. Further, when peace does break out or after the acute stage of the emergency is over, funds dry up for the critical reconstruction and recovery phase. In many cases, this means that the root cause of the conflict is incompletely resolved.

D. Reason Four: Resistance by 'Winners' and Subordination of 'Losers'

53. Economic assets, social infrastructure and community cohesion are targets of war. The strategic and deliberate destruction and manipulation of productive and social systems characterize complex emergencies. Some have noted that "famine is functional" and serves to enrich the few at the cost of many.⁴⁴

*Militarily, disrupted communities cannot defend themselves. Economically, desperately poor displaced workers are willing to work for pitifully low wages. Politically, weak civil societies are associated with weak political opposition .*⁴⁵

54. Complex emergencies are marked by extreme impoverishment of marginalized groups ("losers") and by massive accumulation of those with economic, political and/or military power ("winners"). Capacity building interventions designed to offset this destructive imbalance are likely to face resistance by winners who stand to lose hard-fought advantages over losers. The stakes are not small.

44 Keen, D. "The Functions of Famine In Southwestern Sudan: Implications for Relief, in Macrae, J. and Zwi, A. (eds), War and Hunger, Zed Books Ltd., Atlantic Highlands, pp 111- 124.

45 Lautze, S. (a), p. 8 - 9.

*We did not adequately prepare for the political implications of our actions. In shifting from responsive relief to strategic rehabilitation, we entered a politically charged arena ... USAID was accused of preparing the south for eventual separation from the north. Although within USAID the prioritization of resources was determined on conditions of operation, assessed needs and available capacities, to the (government) this appeared as a de facto pro-rebel bias.*⁴⁶

55. Given that winners are, by nature of their authority, usually relief organizations' administrative or de facto counterparts, such resistance can deter any effective attempts at capacity building from the outset. Likewise, by the very nature of the destruction wrought by complex emergencies, losers can be extremely weak. In extended complex emergencies, whole communities have been fragmented, cohorts of children have grown up uneducated and illiterate, and years of pervasive fear have stifled the courage necessary to organize in the face of opposition. As a result, outsiders may find it nearly impossible even to identify nascent capacities.

E. Reason Five: Leadership, Personalities and Team Composition

56. Given the relatively limited combined organizational experience of UN agencies, NGOs and donors with capacity building in complex emergencies, individual relief personnel still determine to a great extent the agencies' approach to working with local communities. In sum, personalities count. Depending upon the mix of donor, NGO and UN personnel working on a complex emergency, it may be more or less possible to undertake coordinated, in-depth sectoral, social, political or economic capacity building interventions. The key is to get the "right combination of people and then anything is possible and you can make a tremendous difference".⁴⁷

57. Many UN agencies are decentralized, allowing for variation in the nature of interventions pursued from country to country. Some offices are staffed by leaders who are risk-takers; others follow more measured approaches. The resident coordinator in Kabul noted that

it is essential that the broad principles for future development be deeply ingrained in the relief process itself .. In Afghanistan, we have been fortunate that the Director of UNOCHA has been well attuned to the need to inculcate this thinking into the design of UNOCHA appeals and programmes, and has taken seriously the need to use emergency funds for activities going far beyond relief, and even beyond life

46 Lautze, S. (b), "Me Great Experiment In Southern Sudan", Proceedings of the Symposium on Greater Horn of Africa Restoration and Development Initiatives, October 19 - 20, 1995, Institute for African Development, Cornell University.

47 Raby

58. There are comparatively few UN staff who work in complex emergencies. This pool of workers, "the humanitarian elite", is frequently and rapidly transferred from one emergency to the next - - from Iraq to Sudan to Somalia to the West Bank to Rwanda to Angola, etc. Where established, successful combinations of staff cannot be maintained as high staff-turnover characterizes country office staffing patterns. As one UN official explained, "the UN is like a deck of cards - - it keeps getting shuffled." This system of staff rotation allows for little or no reflection on the lessons learned from one emergency to the next. In addition, staff have few opportunities to delve into the unique characteristics of the complex emergency at hand, or the many facets of society affected by the crisis.

59. This is only half the equation, of course. The mentality, energy, philosophies and assumptions of local leaders, national organizations and civic groups are equally, if not more important. Capacity building can be imposed on societies, but successful capacity building cannot.

F. Reason Six: Micro Focus in Macro Environments

60. By their nature of concentrated suffering, emergencies lend focus to micro environments, e.g. the refugee camp, the host village, the bombed market. Likewise, relief organizations, especially NGOs, tend to focus their response on the micro-level, i.e., the project. The resulting donor funding pattern can look like isolated dots on a map, each representing a funded project, rather than a comprehensive strategy for addressing a multi-faceted crisis. In Bosnia,

*UNICEF has adopted an approach which is aimed at helping professional and civil structures adapt to the effects of the war. NGOs, however, have set up their own projects which are outside these structures. It is not difficult to understand why. NGOs are private organizations which have to compete with other agencies for government and public funds. To do this they need a profile and a track record. 'Own brand' projects are essential for advertising and fund raising purposes. That this process may undermine indigenous capacity appears to be rarely discussed.*⁵⁰

48 Correspondence to Peter Hansen, Under Secretary General of DHA from David Lockwood, Resident Coordinator UN/Kabul, Afghanistan, 13 May 1994.

49 Raby

50 Duffield, M., "Complex Political Emergencies With Reference To Angola and Bosnia: An Exploratory Report for UNICEF". School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, March 1994, Birmingham, p. 74

61. The focus on communities or target groups can exacerbate tensions by ignoring broader social relations or glossing over intra community conflicts based on gender, class or land rights.⁵¹ The more subtle positive and negative macro effects of project-focussed interventions are rarely explored and seldom understood. According to UNDP,

*business networks are often intact despite civil disorder, and can be used to good effect when moving towards normality. Where rural commercial networks have vanished entirely, their resurrection poses a major challenge, particularly in relief environments dominated by the free distribution of food and other goods.*⁵²

62. Given that markets and economies continue to function even when states fail, this lack of appreciation for economic relations means that the capacities embedded in the economy are usually overlooked by relief organizations. It is often the case that local businesses, food supplies, markets and flourishing private economies - including government-sponsored and private sector arms and drug trade - continue to function in areas suffering from acute emergency or in nearby regions. These in turn work within a global economic context that helps to define the possibilities for economic sustainable activity. Effective long-term livelihoods strategies can only build on constructive local opportunities within the macroeconomic context.

VI. ACTS OF COMMISSION: UNDERMINING LOCAL INITIATIVES AND TRADITIONAL COPING MECHANISMS

63. The previous section outlined why the global emergency humanitarian relief system usually fails to pro-actively seek out, use and strengthen the coping mechanisms employed by disaster affected populations. This section considers the more directly harmful practices that undermine local initiatives and traditional coping mechanisms. It faults the nature of emergency humanitarian responses, e.g. types of assessments conducted, staffing patterns and choices, implementing rhetoric unsubstantiated by reason. In some cases, the emergency response system has the potential to do more long-term harm than is justified by short-term benefit, leaving people to cope not only with crisis but also with the adverse effects of humanitarian aid. In far too many cases, the system does not consider the potential negative impacts of its actions, assuming instead that good intentions translate into benign positive effects.

A. Poaching Endangered Species: Talented National Staff in International Organization

64. The gross income disparity between national staff working for international organizations compared to government civil service or national organizations has been well-documented. In

51 Prendergast, J. (1996), Frontline Diplomacy: Humanitarian Aid and Conflict in Africa, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, p. 27.

52 UNDP, "Building Bridges Between Relief And Development: A Compendium of the UNDP Record in Crisis Countries" Draft 15/1/96, UNDP/New York, p. 6.

economic terms, it is understandable that talented nationals who survive complex emergencies and elect to remain in service to their countries and communities should go to the highest bidder as both great demand and limited supply drives wages upward. There are few instances where the institutional impact of this "poaching" has been analyzed. In Afghanistan, where working directly through government institutions is viewed as an unacceptable transgression of neutrality, NGOs and UN agencies have attracted the best available Afghans. As a result,

*the UN policy of not working through Government agencies (either central or local government) does not just mean that these organizations are not strengthened it means they are being actively demolished.*⁵³

65. Poaching leaves in its path a crumbled government and a demoralized civil service. This has obvious implications for the prospects for recovery. It also has less obvious impacts on the quality of relief interventions, including measures to strengthen coping mechanisms. These elite groups of nationals usually have experience communicating with outsiders and serve important functions as translators, not only directly of language but indirectly of culture, politics and society. Outsiders' views are radically shaped by these interpretations. When seeking to work with local counterpart organizations, international staff can be subtly manipulated to "see" some, but not other, local capacities, depending upon the perspective, loyalty or motivation of their national staff. Where fiscal or material resources are to be provided, these biases can be marked.

B. Asking the Wrong Questions, Acting on Answers: The Focus on Individual-Vulnerability Commodity Logistic

66. Like natural disasters, complex emergencies damage such hallmarks of civilization as social services, market networks and agriculture enterprises while at the same time increasing demands for these essential functions. Unlike natural disasters, however, complex emergencies are also characterized by the deliberate destruction of political, social, economic and environmental institutions. These institutions are not limited to formal organizations, but include a wider range of social institutions, such as kinship networks, reciprocal migration patterns, the family, local markets or the irrigation councils, for example." Despite strategic and deliberate assaults on institutions, relief interventions are designed to alleviate individual vulnerability, e.g. health posts are established to treat sick people and feeding centers are established to nourish starving children. This primary focus on individual vulnerability is an inadequate response to the larger problem of the vulnerability of institutions in complex emergencies. Based on an in-depth study of Bosnia and Angola, one author called for

53UN/DHA (b) p. 54.

54 UN/DHA (b), p. 53.

an approach to vulnerability that takes into account the structural nature of complex emergencies ... (and) focusses on advocacy and the support of institutions ... (T)here is a need to move away from vulnerable people to vulnerable institutions. After all, unless indigenous capacities and relations can be improved or helped to adapt, recovery will be that much longer taking place.⁵⁵

67. He also noted that to do so would be moving into uncharted territory. The humanitarian relief system does not yet have the language, tools or methodologies for such an institution-based approach to disaster relief. However, for so long as this remains unaddressed, the fabric of civil societies will continue to unravel unabated.

68. Despite an ever-increasing appreciation for the complicated, multi-faceted sources of vulnerabilities, the range of coping mechanisms available to affected populations and numerous opportunities for capacity building, vulnerability assessments usually reflect only the most observable aspects of apparent vulnerabilities, e.g. numbers of refugees, global malnutrition estimates, available food stocks, etc. Reporting, monitoring and evaluation of relief operations are likewise focussed on "the numbers game".¹⁶ Extensive logistical exercises are guided by these field assessments. The resulting humanitarian response system is nearly exclusively logistics-oriented. Especially where military support is involved, the bulk of available resources facilitates the movement of relief goods from point A to point B. In protracted emergencies, this cycle of assessment, delivery and perfunctory reporting occurs on an annual basis with regrettable predictability. For example, in Sudan

coping strategies have rarely been assessed. Moreover, OLS assessments in the Northern Sector in particular have, in most cases, been limited to attempting to measure only the most visible aspects of the crisis, in order to determine immediate material needs, with little analysis of the socio-economic situation of OLS beneficiaries, or the root causes of the crisis they face.⁵⁷

69. This has been called a "needs-only" approach and has been criticized for masking the structural causes of conflict, thereby running the risk of deepening and perpetuating crisis. One highly experienced relief worker detailed why this model can fail:

- it ignores outsiders' historical roles in shaping the unequal internal relations that characterize the crisis;
- it restricts ownership of program activities to external agencies rather than focusing on the need for local communities to rebuild their own societies;

⁵⁵Duffield, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Prendergast, p. 3

⁵⁷ UN/DHA (c), p. 112.

and,

- it fails to provide the relational analysis necessary to identify strategic intervention opportunities.⁵⁸

70. There are many relief workers who "regard the proper role of humanitarian aid as a purely technical function, and provide assistance blindly without concern for cause or intent." As a result, the impacts of relief operations on livelihoods essential for survival are not explored, but are instead assumed to be positive, despite a growing body of evidence to the contrary. Relief provided in this fashion can potentially protract conflict in three ways:

- aid that is used directly as an instrument of war (by manipulating access or population movements and by outright diversion);
- aid that is indirectly integrated into the dynamics of conflict (by increasing available resources to prosecute conflicts and 'hijacking' humanitarian infrastructure); and,
- aid that exacerbates the root causes of war and insecurity (by increasing competition, favoring one group over another, targeting, or by influencing who has control or access to aid and aid organizations). ⁶⁰

71. Further, relief operations that are not informed by adequate analysis of coping strategies can undermine or fail to support the fragile livelihoods of people living through complex emergencies.

There has been a tendency to underestimate how, over a period of years, households may be forced to survive through resource depletion ... or by out migration. In this regard, the effectiveness of both food and non-food interventions can be measured best not by the extent to which they prevent outright starvation but by the extent to which their cumulative effects stabilize populations, and retains Productive labor within the rural subsistence economy. ⁶¹

72. To avoid these negative consequences, assessment methodologies must be developed to include broader, if more subtle dimensions of at least fundamental market, political and social relations. As one relief worker observed, "if you're resource-driven, you identify beneficiaries. If you're principle-driven you identify problems."⁶² If the question is asked 'how do we get food or supplies from point A to point B,' the answer is simple and can be reduced to logistics best

⁵⁸ Wagner, G., as quoted in Prendergast, p. 8

⁵⁹ UN/DHA (c), p. 14.

⁶⁰ For a full discussion, see Prendergast, p. 17-35.

⁶¹ UN/DHA (c), p. 161.

⁶²Boudreau, T. of SCF/UK, as quoted in Prendergast, p. 4.

performed by international agencies. If the question asked, however, is 'how do these people survive and get back on their feet,' the answer is more complex, and includes socio-economic, cultural and political factors and is predominantly directed by local peoples.

73. It is unreasonable to hope that relief interventions will support coping mechanisms if no effort has been invested in understanding the strategies people are pursuing to protect their lives and livelihoods. This is especially important in protracted emergencies. Critically, however, the humanitarian system lacks the framework for collecting, analyzing or incorporating strategic assessments into relief operations.

The only thing which is clear is that the people designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating are often not asking (the right) questions and even when they are, they do not have the tools or the programmatic framework to make use of the answers. 63

C Learning the Hard Way: Failed Attempts at Capacity-Building

74. Various attempts at capacity building have failed, resulting in wasted resources, loss of precious time in disaster response and discouraged relief workers, both national and international. Many experienced international relief organizations intend to strengthen national organizations but have encountered tremendous obstacles. In some instances, indigenous NGOs act as "fronts" for government or military factions, thereby gaining direct access to humanitarian resources for military purposes. Because the UN is geared towards working with authorities, it runs a risk of creating structures for the sole sake of establishing counterparts, and some of these authorities can be damagingly illegitimate.⁶⁴ Evaluations of UNHCR's Quick Impact Programme (QIPs) for returning Mozambican refugees identified other factors that contributed to unsuccessful capacity building.

The seminar concluded, however, that it was hard to make practice out of this policy due to the local partners being administratively weak, technically inexperienced and with limited financial management capability. Pressure for rapid implementation simply did not allow for the time to train and monitor weakpartners.⁶⁵

75. As a next-best option, international organizations have attempted to partner with local organizations. These efforts have often been marked by gross inequalities because national organizations have no access to donors or control over their counterparts' resources. In some cases,

63 UN/DHA (b), p. 52.

64 Interview, Phillip O'Brien, UNICEF/NY, 11/29/96.

65 UNHCR, Mozambique: An Account From a Lessons Learned Seminar on Reintegration: Geneva 24 -25 June, 1996.

e.g. government-controlled areas of Sudan, international NGOs are expected to "twin" with national NGOs, providing resources but keeping expatriate presence to an absolute minimum. These experiences have demonstrated that

"capacity building by osmosis" is not possible. Considerably more investment in resources and, critically, time and manpower are required.

*Some agencies' vision of capacity building goes no further than handing out cash to relief wings of rebel organizations. If a decision is made by an agency or agency consortium to support a capacity building agenda, these players must then create the capacity within themselves to carry out such an agenda responsibly ... This requires a staffing response; someone should be hired early on in an emergency to address capacity building questions across the board.*⁶⁶

76. Where resources have been transferred to national partners, these organizations have become dependent upon their international counterparts to sustain their operations. Ultimately, the simple fact remains: international relief organizations are, themselves, increasingly dependent upon donor governments and UN agencies to fund their operations. This is not a model that most budding national organizations who will need to rely on domestic resources can hope to emulate.

77. Where talented national individuals or groups of individuals are to be found in complex emergencies, there is steep competition to attract these capacities. This problem is exacerbated when NGOs gravitate toward more secure and more accessible areas, like Western Equatoria, Sudan or the Dalmatian Coast in Bosnia. Lack of absorptive capacity is not only a critical problem in rehabilitation efforts but in emergency interventions as well. As one former NGO director explained

it's really a problem of economies of scale. In Angola, there are just a few national organizations that can handle grants larger than \$10,000 and they are vastly oversubscribed because everyone wants to work with them. Indeed, everyone is under pressure from their headquarters to work with national organizations. The difficult task is finding the 'second tier' of national organizations with whom to work. ⁶⁷

78. In some instances, hasty and insufficient efforts to strengthen national institutions have threatened the success of the sensitive transition from relief to rehabilitation. According to USAID in Mozambique, UNOHAC failed to plan for the considerable investment in time and resources necessary to rebuild institutions devastated by complex emergencies.⁶⁸

66 Prendergast and Scott, p. 37.

67 Interview, Stephen Jackson, former country director, Troicare/Angola, 11/23/96.

68 Carlson, R. D., "Humanitarian Assistance - - Lessons Learned", remarks to the UNOMOZ Workshop, New York, March 27, 1995.

D. Institutional Racism: Near-Exclusive Reliance on Foreign Organizations

79. Despite the importance of coping mechanisms, relief organizations tend to pursue the most expedient route in responding to disasters, often not taking time to examine what communities are capable of doing for themselves. The primary response of the international donor community has been to fund parallel services (health, water, sanitation, education, agriculture production, transportation, etc.) provided by international NGOs and UN agencies to fill the void created by the weakened or 'failed state'. The emergence of a parallel NGO and UN system has been documented in Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia and a number of other disaster-affected countries. The parallel structure unintentionally weakens civil society in part because international NGOs understandably seek to maximize their own project performance in responding to the most urgent of perceived emergency needs. This severely undermines the capacity of local communities to cope with crisis by generating long-term dependency on foreign organizations, as is still apparent in Mozambique today. Further, these responses may not necessarily correspond to the priorities of affected populations or their governments. In Rwanda,

*the inability or unwillingness of some NGO:s formally to engage the Ministry of Health in the project assessment, design and approval process further diminishes success in the health sector, and has contributed to a perception on the part of government officials that emergencies are perpetuated so as to allow relief agencies to stay in business.*⁶⁹

80. The massive response to the crisis in Goma in 1994 highlighted additional problems with the near-exclusive reliance on foreign NGOs for service delivery in complex emergencies. International relief organizations are completely unregulated, resulting in vast differences among the most and least experienced agencies. There has been sharp criticism of the performance of some NGOs in Goma.

*It is unacceptable that a NGO with little or no relevant experience is able to send personnel to a humanitarian relief operation and engage in activities that discredit or undermine the overall effort, provide unacceptably poor standards of service and care to their beneficiaries, and then leave without any recourse. Such activities would not be tolerated in Western countries, where many of the NGOs in question are based.*⁷⁰

81. Increasingly, relief operations are characterized by institutional racism, that is, the assumption that almost any foreign organization or individual is more useful than almost any national organization or individual. In Sudan,

⁶⁹ Kumar, et. al., p. 14.

⁷⁰ Borton, et. al., p.153.

*while the (OLS) Ground Rules make for a capacity building undertaking, this has not been adequately honored. OLS agencies, moreover, show a distinct preference to employ Ethiopians and, especially, Kenyan staff rather than Southern Sudanese. A valuable training opportunity is therefore being lost.*⁷¹

82. These practices have subtle but very important implications for the impact of relief operations in complex emergency. Increasingly, the UN is responding to pressures from donors and NGOs to focus diplomatic negotiation efforts on issues of access for international relief organizations. These efforts take precedence over advocacy of peace, justice, human rights and humanitarian law. A recent UNICEF-supported study concluded that "this situation leads to the perverse reality that the more burning and killing is done against local populations, the more resources will be sent in response."⁷² This "access for the sake of access" can serve to undermine the capacity of communities to fend for themselves. For example, in some complex emergencies, this has been demonstrated by a number of communities that specifically request WFP to not serve their areas, for fear of drawing attack.

E. Jumping on the Bandwagon: The Relief to Development Continuum and Other Fads

83. Capacity building, coping mechanisms, dependency and the relief to development continuum are some of the latest buzz-phrases of international relief. While interest in these issues is based on well-founded concern for improving the quality of assistance provided to disaster-affected countries, their popularity as "the latest trends" may be their very undoing. Agencies work to keep up with the latest in disaster relief policy. However, in doing so, they run the risk of implementing concepts without a full understanding of the basis of these policies. The results can be very damaging. This has been well documented in Sudan. For political reasons, the Government of Sudan has fully embraced the "relief to development continuum" and declared the "emergency" over, despite ongoing hostilities. The GOS now only permits international organizations to register for rehabilitation or development activities. However, as described in the OLS Review, this "shift in focus from relief to development at the policy level has not been matched by realities on the ground."⁷³

84. A focus on dependency, for example, prompted USAID to reduce the quantity of food assistance provided to the Khartoum displaced camps, despite continuing and alarming rates of malnutrition. In addition to eroding nutritional standards, "available information indicates that there has been no gradual improvement from an emergency situation associated with high levels of malnutrition and excess mortality, to a situation of improved food security or increasing self -

71 UN/DHA (c), p. 39.

72 Prendergast, p 10.

73 UN/DHA (c), p. 87.

reliance."⁷⁴ Also in Khartoum, one part of the UN system tried to build the urban planning capabilities of the Ministry of Housing - - including the relocation of squatters and IDPs - - while the other half of the UN system responded to the emergency needs generated by the Ministry's en masse destruction of the shelters of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons.

VII. NEXT STEPS: STRENGTHENING THE PERFORMANCE OF UN AGENCIES AND OTHER HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

*What is necessary is not only a break with dated structures but a total disconnect from obsolete mind sets.*⁷⁵

85. While more is being written about the problems of providing international assistance in complex emergencies, there are few ideas about how to address the systemic damage to local capacities wrought by the international humanitarian relief community. What is needed is an entirely different model of relief intervention, one that entails far less emphasis on the mass provision of free relief goods and more support for creative means to strengthen the measures taken by people, especially women and children, in disaster areas.

86. As an important first step, the LJM agencies are beginning to ask probing questions about the impacts of their development programs and relief interventions: Are we doing harm? To what extent are our interventions neutral? Do we really help women and children? The specific recommendations listed below are intended as initial and modest steps to assist the respective members of the ECOSOC Sub-Working Group in the difficult challenge of answering to these much needed queries.

Step One: Balancing the Assessment and Programming /Appeals Processes

87. The UN routinely conducts vulnerability assessments to guide not only short-term interventions but to form the basis of UN Consolidated Appeals. These assessments usually focus on filling material gaps in resources available to communities, e.g. identifying numbers of health kits required, metric tons of relief food to be imported or rolls of plastic sheeting to be stockpiled. Issues of the modalities of service delivery (including analysis of local capacities) are rarely considered. Rather, it is assumed that once donors provide adequate assistance, then project success is given. The focus on material inputs and relative neglect of the systems of service delivery perpetuate relief responses that are supply-driven. These assessment modalities further miss the critical dynamics of winners and losers in complex emergencies, e.g. the criminalization of economies in complex emergencies (drugs, arms, slavery), efficiency losses in resource transfer (exchange rates,

74 UN/DHA (c), p. 148.

75 Rau, p. 5.

beneficiary sales of relief goods), attempts by agriculturalists and pastoralists to preserve productive assets, competition among national government ministries for scarce relief and rehabilitation resources, etc.

88. It is imperative that UN agencies conduct both vulnerability and capacity assessments routinely and simultaneously and ensure that these assessments inform the process of project implementation. This entails broadening the frameworks currently used in vulnerability assessment. Where potentially positive interventions that strengthen local capacities and reduce local vulnerabilities are identified, support for capacity building interventions must be included in the UN Consolidated Appeal, as well as "Flash Appeals". Over time, these vulnerability and capacity assessments should form a data base of positive and negative experiences with capacity building, including examples of capacity damming, capacity seeding and capacity building interventions that have focussed on the special capabilities of children, women and the elderly in crisis. This cumulative information should be made widely available in order to inform and strengthen the programming process.

Recommendation One: On the basis of both vulnerability and capacity assessment and analysis of local, national and international winners and losers, include and prioritize support for capacity building interventions in UN Consolidated Appeals.

Step Two: Adopting a Philosophy of Capacity Building

89. The UN's experience with capacity building in complex emergencies is limited but, as an institution, its knowledge base is expanding as critical reviews and evaluations are written and disseminated. Relief workers need to have access to these reports, and be trained to understand at least the basic aspects of coping mechanisms, capacity building, dependency and linkages between relief and development. This must happen not only at the country team level, through exercises such as those held in Turin, but deliberately at the field level as well, particularly for field monitors. At the very least, UN staff should be informed from the outset that relief interventions can do more harm than good. Initial training for UN headquarters and field staff need not take more than one or two days.

Recommendation Two: Require ALL UN staff working on complex emergencies to be trained in the fundamental principles of intervening in complex emergencies, including skills development in capacity assessment methodologies.

Step Three: Changing-the Modis Operandi

90. Simultaneously, the UN as a system must learn how to intervene in complex emergencies with an overarching aim of supporting coping mechanisms, strengthening local capacities, and laying the foundations for recovery from the outset. Such a model of intervention does not presently exist. The UN should identify one or two complex emergencies, such as Somalia and Sierra Leone, and,

through a combined interagency commitment, deliberately support coping mechanisms and capacity building in all relief and rehabilitation efforts. This would entail researching and implementing specific capacity building strategies for children and women, a task that would be better accomplished by UN emergency response teams that more accurately reflected the ethnic, racial, religious and gender composition of affected countries.

91. In addition, the UN system would have to limit the extent of poaching of staff from government bodies. This could be accomplished through frequent secondment with rotation of national civil servants to and from UN agencies. While highly complicated administratively, this would at least more equitably distribute the benefits of working for international agencies while providing incentives for talented national staff to remain employed by their governments and local NGOs. UN agencies could also work with donors and international NGOs to coordinate efforts to standardize remuneration packages for national staff.

Recommendation Three: In a small number of complex emergencies, develop, use and test a model of intervention that, rather than relying primarily on international organizations, gives first priority to strengthening and working through local capacities for assessment, identification of emergency inputs and service delivery.

Step Four: Rethinking Development and Relief Linkage

92. The linkages between development programs and relief interventions are complex, bi-directional and symbiotic. There is growing appreciation of this, as is indicated by the World Bank's increasing preference for the language "spheres of influence" as opposed to a "relief to development continuum". Development agencies need to focus their efforts on creating the civil institutions necessary to respond locally and effectively to crisis. Likewise, relief agencies must manage relief responses to complex emergencies not as ends in themselves but as building blocks for eventual societal rehabilitation. This includes incorporating the social and economic risks and costs associated with complex emergencies into the standard cost-benefit calculus currently used in development project formulation, approval and evaluation. In addition, development agencies need to focus on developing civil institutions that represent and serve women and children, the primary victims of war. As these groups are universally disenfranchised, the UN agencies have a special role in advocating the development of formal and informal institutions that will effectively support their coping mechanisms adopted in crisis. While development interventions currently aim to improve the services available, they do not necessarily strive to build institutions and organizations that can function when the majority of men are unavailable, such as in times of war.

Recommendation Four: Development agencies must facilitate and strengthen the organizational capacity of groups of potential war victims (especially women and children) to enable them to respond effectively to crisis, and must evaluate development staff on their effectiveness at accomplishing this task.

Recommendation Five: Train, equip and instruct relief workers to design and implement relief interventions that explicitly lay the foundations for recovery and evaluate performance based on their effectiveness at accomplishing this task.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

*A special responsibility rests on the UN system. It is the pacesetter and catalyst to international economic cooperation. Capacity building will not just happen; it is a qualitatively different process than technical assistance.*⁷⁶

93. This paper was prepared as the ECOSOC process wound to a close, and was presented to the Sub-Working Group on December 12, 1996 in Geneva. Although group members were unable to review the paper within their own agencies in advance, the meeting was highly instructive, reflecting both a strong degree of interest on the part of the agencies and vast differences in interpretation of the issues. Regrettably, the authors could not review most papers provided by some UN agencies in advance of writing the working draft. Also, in the course of producing this paper, there was not sufficient time to make a proper survey of the institutional barriers to more efficiently linking relief and development programs, supporting creative capacity building interventions or helping communities cope with crisis with a minimum of dependency. These institutional barriers include donors' outright unwillingness to fund programs that fall outside the traditional sphere of relief and development, donor practices of excessive earmarking and donor funding of uncoordinated NGO implemented projects. As these are issues that could be constructively addressed through the ECOSOC process, some group members expressed regret that this valuable opportunity had not been fully exploited.

94. The donors, however, are only one part of the constraint. Within and among the UN agencies, links between relief operations and development programs are disjointed and weak due to a number of issues, including financial procedures, mandates, personnel, organizational structures and available skills bases. The brevity of this desk study did not allow for adequate consultation with the UN agencies to delve into these important barriers. Rather, the frameworks presented here are broad and general. The authors, however, are encouraged by the UN agencies' willingness to take the next step forward; that is, to look within their respective agencies and identify these barriers as well as their own practices that lead to harmful acts of omission and commission.

95. As these agencies move forward, it will be important to situate the role of capacity building in the range of innovations necessary to truly link relief and development efforts. Towards this end, the UN agencies should develop and adopt a broader framework of principles and strategies governing relief interventions in complex emergencies. The following provides a sketch of what such a framework might be.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Rau, p. 4.

⁷⁷ This framework was originally designed for USAID but has been modified here for demonstration purposes. See Lautze, S. (A) for a complete discussion.

Principle

Complex emergencies require strategic interventions

The key to saving lives and livelihoods is capacity building.

Timing is everything.

Migration under stress undermines productivity and self-sufficiency.

Social dynamics influence the success of relief responses.

Markets are necessary to save lives, improve productivity and restore livelihoods.

Poorly designed relief interventions undermine self-sufficiency and increase vulnerability.

Strategy

Assess the political, military, social and economic aspects of each crisis in complex emergencies and respond accordingly.

Create UN agency and interagency policies regarding capacity building

Work together with development and relief experts to develop social, political and economic indicators that inform complex emergency early warning systems.

Minimize stress migration and its effects.

Design interventions to ease the impact of complex emergencies by enhancing the coping strategies of women, children and the elderly.

Use markets to maximum advantage.

Establish sustainable systems.

96. Lastly, the authors wish to thank the members of the ECOSOC Sub-Working Group for this opportunity to explore the important issues of capacity building, coping mechanisms, dependency and linkages between relief and development. For us and for our colleagues in the United Nations, this is a long-term process that will continue after the current ECOSOC review ends.

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