FORCED
MIGRATION
review

Humanitarian reform:
fulfilling its promise?

Also includes articles on:
Iraq, Darfur, Colombia,
Bulgaria, Bhutanese refugees,
accountability, protection,
profiling IDP populations,
role of the private sector

and regular contributors:
RSC, NRC, IDMC,
Brookings-Bern,
RAISE Initiative

Refugee
Studies
Centre

from the editor

As with any reform, says UN Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes in his article on page 4, "you have the believers, the sceptics and the opponents." The perspectives of all three camps are represented in this issue's feature section on humanitarian reform – which we hope will contribute to a constructive and fruitful debate around the world.

We are very grateful to Concern Worldwide, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, OCHA's Humanitarian Reform Support Unit, Save the Children UK, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP for providing financial support for this issue. Many thanks also to former FMR Co-Editor Tim Morris for his invaluable editing assistance.

I'm delighted to announce the appointment of FMR's new Co-Editor, Maurice Herson, who will join the FMR team in January. Maurice was an active member of FMR's Advisory Board for some years and will be known to many of you through his years of work with Oxfam GB and more recently with ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action).

Please note that the schedule for the next two issues of FMR has changed. In light of current events, we have brought forward the feature theme on Burma. FMR 30 – due out April 2008 – will now focus on Burma. The deadline for submissions is 3 January 2008; full details at www.fmreview.org/burma.htm. The following issue, FMR 31, will include a major feature section on climate change and environmental displacement. Deadline for submissions is 3 March: see www.fmreview.org/climatechange.htm. If you are planning to submit articles for either of these issues, please contact fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk as soon as possible.

As usual, there will be space in both issues for a number of 'non-theme' articles. We welcome articles on any subject relating to forced migration and are particularly keen to publish more articles reflecting the perspectives of individuals and communities directly affected by displacement.

All back issues of FMR are online at www.fmreview.org/mags1.htm.

We occasionally email individual readers to ask for advice on matters relating to FMR. If you have changed your email address in the last three years, we would be very grateful if you could email us at fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk to let us know. Many thanks.

If you would like to receive notification by email as soon as a new issue of FMR goes online and whenever we issue a call for articles, please sign up online for our email alerts: www.fmreview.org/alerts.htm.

With best wishes for your work.

Marion Couldrey

Editor

This year is the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Refugee Studies Centre. In his article on page 74 of this issue, RSC Director Roger Zetter looks back over the past 25 years and underlines the Centre's core commitment to linking scholarship to policy and practice.

contents

Humanitarian action: a Western-dominated enterprise in need of change

by John Holmes

'Reform' is a loaded word. No matter what the line of work or whether it's in the public or private sector, it can mean different things to different people.

For those who believe in it, it's about fixing things and improving on them. For the sceptics, it's about changing things for the sake of change, or replacing one slightly dysfunctional system with another equally dysfunctional one. For those opposed to it, it's about replacing systems that work (in spite of all their faults and weaknesses) with inappropriate ones that are bound to fail because they have been dreamt up by people in ivory towers who have little real understanding of the situation on the ground.

So it is with humanitarian reform: you have the believers, the sceptics and the opponents. Fortunately, the vast majority of humanitarian practitioners believe in the need for change and adaptation. They recognise the need to improve the way humanitarian organisations do business. They are all too aware of the continuing proliferation and sometimes fragmentation of humanitarian actors and the problems that arise when there is a lack of operational capacity, planning, predictability and coordination. They have seen what happens when some categories of people (such as the internally displaced) are not dealt with in a systematic way or when particular sectors receive inadequate attention. They are all painfully aware of the failings that we have seen in recent years in places like the Congo, Darfur, Liberia and northern Uganda.

The package of humanitarian reforms put forward by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)[1] in 2005 and 2006 is ambitious and far-reaching. It falls into three main areas: first, achieving more adequate, flexible and timely humanitarian financing; second, strengthening the 'Humanitarian Coordinator' system; and third, ensuring more systematic and predictable attention to all the main sectors of response, in what has come to be known as the 'Cluster Approach'.[2] Underpinning all this is the need to strengthen our interface with governments and to forge stronger partnerships amongst humanitarian actors – particularly between UN and non-UN actors.

As with any reform process, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. So the question now is whether or not the reforms are working. Are they making things better? An in-depth evaluation is currently underway but the results are not yet available. What we can say now is that implementation of the reforms has been in some respects slower than we had initially hoped, but that we are already seeing improvements in a number of areas.

The new Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)[3] has provided more than US$ 500 million during its first 18 months to help kick-start programmes in new emergencies and to fund projects in under-funded humanitarian operations. Other innovative funding mechanisms such as local pooled funds are also being tested. A new training programme for Humanitarian Coordinators is being developed and relations between the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinators are being strengthened. We are also in the process of diversifying the pool of Humanitarian Coordinators to include more women as well as more people from the South and from outside the UN. Meanwhile the Cluster Approach has helped to ensure more standardised and predictable responses in a number of emergencies. For example, in the Lebanon emergency in 2006 lead agencies were designated for all sectors within the first 48 hours of the onset of the crisis. In many previous emergencies it took months, if not years, to do so.

But while there has been progress in some areas, clearly we have a lot still to do. In some countries, humanitarian actors continue to lack sufficient confidence in the Humanitarian Coordinators who lead the response. We know we need better Humanitarian Coordinators but this will take time. In the case of the CERF, there are a number of administrative problems that we need to overcome, including ways of ensuring that NGOs have adequate access to these funds (even if it is not direct access) and to reduce costs when money is channelled through UN agencies to NGOs. In the case of the Cluster Approach, we need to ensure that global cluster leads[4] honour the commitments they have made and that clusters continue to build up their capacities.

Cluster Approach

The Cluster Approach is perhaps the most far-reaching of all the reforms. It is about raising standards and ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership in all sectors. It requires moving away from the narrow focus on agency mandates of the past to a broader focus on sectors, with genuinely inclusive sectoral groups ('clusters') working under clearly designated cluster leads. This more structured approach should enable international actors to be a better partner for governments, who have primary responsibility for leading humanitarian responses in their countries. It

provides governments with a clear counterpart within the international humanitarian community for each of the main sectors or areas of humanitarian response.

The Cluster Approach requires a fundamental shift in cultures and mindsets, with cluster leads working as 'facilitators' within their respective clusters and also being available to be the 'provider of last resort' where this is needed. We still need to invest a lot of time and energy in training organisations to be good cluster leads, and in training individual staff to be good cluster coordinators. This will take time and we should

at the global level by a specific organisation, designated as the global cluster lead. Over the past two years, these cluster leads have worked with their partners to build stockpiles and pool resources at the global level, to agree on common operational standards and procedures, and to provide support to governments in affected countries in coordinating emergency response within their sectors. Donor governments have invested over $50 million over the past two years to build this extra global response capacity.

To go back to where I began, 'reform' is a loaded word for some. Nearly

leads and clusters in general to carry out their activities. In other words, the reform programme is now becoming simply the way we do business. We also need to think beyond the package of reforms that were agreed by the IASC in 2005-06. The Independent Evaluation of Humanitarian Response Capacity carried out in 2005[5] made a number of recommendations on which we have yet to act and of which we must not lose sight.

Finally, the Global Humanitarian Platform, which is not an IASC initiative per se but which has the full support of the IASC, is a useful forum for re-examining the whole question of partnership. International humanitarian response is still a Western-dominated enterprise and one which urgently needs to be adapted to reflect the realities of the 21st century. In particular, we need to recognise the many new Southern NGOs and the fact that many NGOs now dwarf UN agencies in terms of operational capacity, budget and size. The Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) – an initiative flowing from a July 2006 dialogue between the UN and NGOs[6] – provides

UNHCR/H Caux

A refugee family in Chad carrying their belongings after their makeshift shelter was flooded.

not be too impatient in looking for quick results. But neither should we tolerate complacency. There is no reason to put off until tomorrow what we can start doing today.

The Cluster Approach is not just about improving sectoral coordination at the country level; it is also about building up global humanitarian response capacity, particularly in areas where we often saw gaps in the past. As a result of the Cluster Approach, there are now globally accessible, centrally managed emergency stockpiles and other resources that governments can call on to complement their own response. Resources for a given sector (such as emergency shelter) are managed

two years into the IASC humanitarian reform process, I think the time has come to stop talking about reform and to simply concentrate on making the most effective use of all the instruments and mechanisms that we now have at our disposal. Humanitarian Coordinators have clear terms of reference and we must hold them properly accountable for complying with these. The CERF provides an excellent mechanism for funding vital programmes at the start of new emergencies and in neglected crises and we need to continue to maximise its use. The broad focus on sectors and clusters, rather than on individual agency mandates, is here to stay and we need to continue to strengthen the capacities of cluster

us with a unique opportunity for further dialogue amongst a wide range of humanitarian actors on these and other issues.

John Holmes is the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).

1. IASC is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

2. See previous FMR articles: www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR25/FMR2531.pdf and www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/BrookingsSpecial/06.pdf

3. http://cerf.un.org

4. For a list of global cluster lead agencies, see: http://ocha.unog.ch/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=217

5. www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2005/ocha-gen-02sep.pdf

6. www.icva.ch/ghp.html

The Global Humanitarian Platform: opportunity for NGOs?

by Elizabeth Ferris

The Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) was created in July 2006 to bring together the three families of the humanitarian community – NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the UN and related international organisations – to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action.[1]

While often confused with the larger humanitarian reform process – with its clusters, revised funding instrument and plans to strengthen the Humanitarian Coordinator system – the GHP is a stand-alone initiative which seeks to strengthen relationships between the major humanitarian actors. The development of the GHP has its roots in the recognition that the challenges facing those involved in humanitarian response are simply too great for agencies to be able to go it alone.

Until now, the international humanitarian community has been structured around a UN core with non-UN actors on the fringes. The UN has taken the lead and other actors either followed or opted out and continued to carry out their own programmes. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)[2] is made up of all the UN agencies working on humanitarian issues, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IOM, the World Bank and three NGO consortia: the Geneva-based International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)[3], the Washington DC-based InterAction[4] and the Geneva- and New York-based Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR)[5]. While non-UN actors are included in the IASC, the agenda of IASC meetings is largely UN-centric.

The GHP starts with a different premise: that the international humanitarian community is made up of three equal families. Recognition of this would be both a radical change for the UN system and an affirmation of the reality that NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement mobilise more resources for humanitarian assistance than the UN, have more field staff and have greater capacity for humanitarian advocacy. Donors are increasingly channelling funds through NGOs who are perceived as more cost-effective and flexible than UN agencies. The two largest governmental donor agencies – the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) – each channel between 60-70% of their assistance through NGOs.[6]

In July 2007 leaders of UN agencies, INGOs and consortia, national NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement came together to endorse Principles of Partnership (PoP)[7] which will form the basis of relationships within and between the three humanitarian families. They agreed to base their partnership on the principles of equality, transparency, a results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity. They further committed themselves to implement these principles throughout their own organisations and in their relationships with each other.

NGOs are accustomed to criticising UN agencies for their shortcomings but the GHP's success will depend on recognition that the NGO world itself is also in need of transformation.

International NGOs

The large INGOs are major humanitarian players. Fewer than a dozen of them deliver 90% of the funds mobilised by the NGO community.[8] The five largest INGOs (CARE, Médecins sans Frontières, World Vision, Oxfam and Save the Children) are, in fact, families themselves, with affiliates in different countries. Most have greater annual budgets than UNHCR. They have high professional standards and have been the moving force behind efforts to increase NGO accountability, including accountability to beneficiaries. They have the expertise and the human resources to carry out research and to play a leadership role in the development of policies. They have the ability to generate front-page stories in Western newspapers. INGOs have a seat at the GHP table in their own right[9] and also through the four NGO consortia in which they participate –InterAction, ICVA, SCHR and the Brussels-based Voluntary Organisations In Cooperation In Emergencies (VOICE)[10] network of European NGOs. Large INGOs have multiple accountabilities – to their own governing bodies, donors and the coalitions of which they are members.

What do the principles of partnership mean for INGOs? In some areas, they work together very well. SCHR, for example, has instituted a system of peer reviews and InterAction does an admirable job in collective advocacy. But they also compete with each other for funds and for visibility. This competition can make it more difficult to apply the principles of transparency and responsibility. The principle of transparency, for example, emphasises the importance of early consultations and sharing of information. While it's fairly easy to share information on current developments or to report on

programmes underway, it's more difficult to move to the next level of sharing plans and strategies while they are being developed. Each INGO has its own strategic plans, both globally and often at the country or regional level as well. While they may share information with each other, they are accountable to their own governing structures, which makes collaborative planning difficult. Given their multiple layers of accountability, to what extent can we talk about INGOs being responsible to each other? How can the big INGOs work on 'results-oriented coordination based on concrete operational capacities' when, in the competitive funding market, they need to emphasise their unique identities?

As they grow and become more professional, they also run the risk of becoming increasingly similar to UN agencies. As the head of one UN agency said in the July 2007 GHP meeting, "I'm worried when I hear the NGOs speak – they sound just like us. Please don't become like us. We need you to remain NGOs." In fact, the large international NGOs probably have more in common with UN agencies than they do with Southern national NGOs. The relationship between INGOs and national NGOs is the biggest challenge facing both NGOs and the future of the GHP.

National NGOs

National NGOs – those that work in one country – are often the first to respond to disaster. They are usually the ones who deliver the food and pull most of the survivors from the rubble while the international NGOs are getting to the scene or getting supplies and staff to their national affiliates. While INGOs may decide to withdraw from a given country when their priorities change, national NGOs are there for the long haul. National NGOs vary tremendously in size and capacity; while some have only a handful of staff, others employ hundreds of people and have high professional standards.

UNHCR carries out much of its work through national NGOs. In 2007, UNHCR had 550 agreements with 424 national NGOs for a total of $89.4 million. It had 417 agreements with 151 international NGOs for $138 million. While UNHCR has far more national NGO partners, much more funding goes to INGOs. And working with national NGOs is a challenge for UNHCR; as one UNHCR staff member told me: "it's as much work to develop and monitor an agreement for $10,000 with a national NGO as for an agreement for $1 million with an international NGO. And our monitoring capacity is limited."

National NGOs are recognised as playing an important role in the international humanitarian system and there have been attempts over the years to include them in important humanitarian initiatives, such as UNHCR's Partnership in Action (PARINAC) process started in 1994.[11] Several national NGOs participated in the GHP meetings in 2006 and 2007 but their number was far fewer than that of INGOs. One African participant in this year's GHP meeting recounted that at the meeting in his country to talk about the principles of partnership, there were 27 UN representatives, 26 INGO representatives, three from the Red Cross/Crescent but only one from a national NGO.

When we look at the relationship between national and international NGOs it is clear who wields power – in spite of the rhetoric of NGO solidarity. The larger INGOs have greater financial resources and sometimes sub-contract with national NGOs to carry out certain projects. But international NGOs are also increasing their presence in Southern countries. The number of INGO field offices rose 31% to 39,729 between 1993 and 2003 and this number has surely increased since then.[12] Some major donors now require the field presence of an INGO as a condition for funding. National NGOs complain that, in some cases, INGOs are displacing them from work they have carried out for many years and that they poach their best staff at salaries which national NGOs cannot match. While there are many cases where relations between international and national NGOs are based on mutual respect and complementarity, it is also clear that this partnership is usually an unequal one.

As noted in FMR28,[13] there is a lot of talk about capacity building of national NGOs but people mean different things by the term and its

Post-tsunami assistance by the European Commisssion through NGOs, Tamil Nadu, India

implementation has been spotty at best. And there is a darker side to the capacity-building discussion. INGOs may well have a vested interest in keeping the capacity of national NGOs low to avoid even greater competition for funds.

One of the differences between international and national NGOs in terms of participation at the GHP is that while INGO participants can talk knowledgeably about a dozen different country situations, national NGOs are usually very knowledgeable only about their own situation. INGO staff members are at ease with UN jargon, have specialist staff following the complexities of UN reform and can read through the hundreds of online and printed documents being generated by the reform process.

Empowering national NGOs

How can national NGOs play a greater role in the GHP and in humanitarian reform efforts generally? One possibility is to provide more support for national NGO leaders so that they have time to attend international meetings and to read all the documents. These representatives could be involved in the planning process and be supported to participate in GHP follow-up mechanisms. A crash course on UN – and eventually GHP – processes could be organised for national NGOs to enable them to participate effectively. National NGO coordination structures could be supported in countries where they do not exist in order to enable the national NGO participants to represent the broader national NGO community. However, these initiatives would not only be expensive but would also not address the issue that the agenda of the GHP continues to be set by agencies based in the North.

 A second option would be to change the GHP itself. The agenda and format of meetings could be changed to enable more substantive contributions from national NGOs. By focusing on a particular country or by meeting in a country affected by conflict, the contributions of national NGOs could be enhanced. However, meeting outside Geneva would run the risk of the GHP losing the participation of its powerful

INGOs and UN agencies. It's one thing to expect the head of a major agency to travel to Geneva for a one-day meeting – quite another to ask him/her to travel to Bogotá. Moreover, focus on a single country would enable NGOs from that country to be more active participants but would not necessarily encourage the participation of national NGOs from other countries or regions.

A third possibility would be to shift the focus of the GHP from meetings between heads of agencies to a field-driven process and to redefine 'field-driven' to ensure that national NGOs have a leading role. Energy would be put into coordination at the local level and leadership given to those NGOs willing and able to take the lead. At the July 2007 meeting of the GHP, it was agreed to establish humanitarian partnership teams at the country level with roughly equal representation from UN and non-UN organisations, including national NGOs. The teams are expected to be co-chaired by a UN representative and a representative of either the NGOs or the Red Cross/Red Crescent, selected by that constituency in the country. The humanitarian partnership teams are intended to be a place for strategic discussions of country-specific humanitarian issues and priorities for collective action, and for ensuring both complementarity and coherence of the humanitarian response.

If the principles of partnership are to re-shape relations between humanitarian actors and to enhance the complementarity and effectiveness of humanitarian action, it makes sense to place the emphasis on the countries where humanitarian response is needed, rather than on annual meetings in Geneva. There seemed to be general support for this view at the July GHP meeting. The establishment of humanitarian partnership teams offers the opportunity not only to reshape relations between UN and non-UN agencies but also for INGOs and national NGOs to transform their relations with each another.

If this transformation is to take place, INGOs must change. If international NGO staff in, say, Colombo, are to become more accountable to other NGO staff in Sri Lanka, they will need encouragement from

their headquarters. INGOs need to expect their staff to collaborate with other NGOs as well as with UN agencies and to hold them accountable for doing so.

It takes time to develop partnerships. Improved coordination requires more meetings between busy people. As participants in the July 2007 meeting recognised, organisational cultures need to change and this requires support from the leaders of humanitarian organisations. It will take time and commitment for change to take place – for UN agencies to recognise that NGOs are not just the implementers of UN-initiated projects and for INGOs to accept national NGOs as equals.

The GHP offers new opportunities for strengthening relationships within the international humanitarian community but there have been many previous efforts to strengthen coordination which have failed. It is all too easy for agency heads to meet in Geneva and make fine sounding declarations. There have to be tangible incentives for collaboration to work. NGOs and UN agencies alike have to feel that their own work is more effective because it is collaborative. For the GHP to make a difference in the lives of refugees, IDPs and others affected by conflicts and natural disasters, a lot more needs to happen.

Elizabeth Ferris (eferris@brookings. edu) is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC and co-director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (www.brookings. edu/fp/projects/idp/idp.htm).

1. For more information on the GHP, see www.icva. ch/ghp.

2. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

3. www.icva.ch

4. www.interaction.org

5. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/about/schr. asp

6. Abby Stoddard, *Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy*, Bloomfield CT: Kumarian Press, 2006.

7. www.icva.ch/doc00002172.doc

8. Ibid.

9. However, MSF has recently decided not to participate in the GHP.

10. www.ngovoice.org

11. www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/ partners?id=3bbc5bd7a

12. William Mclean, *Foreign NGOs Map New Route to African Legitimacy*, Reuters, 2005 www.globalpolicy. org/ngos/credib/2005/1009route.htm

13. www.fmreview.org/capacitybuilding.htm

Challenges of collective humanitarian response in Sri Lanka

by Firzan Hashim

Grappling with how to respond to both conflict and tsunami-induced displacement, Sri Lanka is an ideal testing ground for the principles of humanitarian partnership which are at the heart of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP).

Set up in July 2006, the GHP brings together the three pillars of the humanitarian community – NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the UN – to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian action. The GHP seeks to promote partnership on the basis of five principles: equality; transparency; a results-oriented approach; responsibility and complementarity.[1]

Laudable as these principles are, many Sri Lankan NGOs are suspicious. Most local NGOs are at the mercy of INGOs and they feel that the GHP will alienate them further, solidifying the role of a privileged elite group of humanitarian response agencies with access to funding. Local agencies are struggling for the right of local people and field actors to make decisions in a climate shaped by interference, bureaucracy, inflexibility and big brother attitudes. They fear the GHP will introduce enhanced and burdensome rules and regulations to access funding. Some INGOs working in Sri Lanka are also wary that the UN wants to bring them further under their control.

There is confusion about the principle of equality. Would local and international NGOs who deliver services with vigour and vitality be recognised and appreciated or will they be sidelined? Agencies not directly involved in relief and development – particularly those focused on human rights – wonder how they will fit in and retain independence. Will they be able to express their views without being dictated to by the government or having to achieve consensus from the humanitarian community?

Many doubt whether the GHP will necessarily lead to more timely and effective humanitarian response. The last twelve months in Sri Lanka have been some of the most turbulent in its history, with increases in killings, abductions, assassinations, artillery mortar exchange, aerial bombardments, combatant casualties, suicide bombings and disappearances. There has been a series of bloody attacks on humanitarian workers, and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has blatantly violated humanitarian principles by forcing aid workers to undergo military training. Recent military operations have displaced many people. There have been many occasions where local NGOs and some INGOs have gained access to such areas to provide relief to the trapped and destitute even before the government has issued a clearance certificate testifying that areas have been cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance. The UN is constrained by its security procedures from doing so, often resulting in delayed access for those NGOs dependent on UN support. Should such hesitation become contagious, NGOs would lose their response flexibility – a worrying prospect considering the government agencies' slow and ponderous response to displacement.

However, there are encouraging developments as a result of the humanitarian reform process. The three humanitarian families are now jointly represented at high-level government meetings in Sri Lanka where humanitarian issues are discussed by a newly-formed Consultative Committee for Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA). The international community is represented by the US, UK and EU ambassadors, the humanitarian sector by the UN heads of agencies and NGOs by the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA). Sub-Committees of the CCHA have been established to focus on logistics and essential services, resettlement, welfare, health, education and livelihoods. An effective collation and dissemination mechanism is in place to receive and provide information at the field level.

There is no doubt that effective cooperation between humanitarian workers is of paramount importance. However, principles of partnership need to be thoroughly understood, accepted and publicised by the heads of agencies. To achieve GHP goals we need sincerity and commitment to engaging local organisations and allowing them to retain their independence and their ability to robustly pursue their objectives within the framework of collective humanitarian response.

Firzan Hashim (depexecdir@cha.lk) is the Deputy Executive Director of the Consortium for Humanitarian Action (www.humanitarian-srilanka.org), a humanitarian service provider and membership organisation of Sri Lankan civil society organisations. This article is based on interviews with member organisations. Firzan Hashim was a participant at the July 2007 meeting of the Global Humanitarian Platform in Geneva.

1. For further information about the GHP see www.icva.ch/ghp.html and the article by Elizabeth Ferris on pages 6-8.

Unity in diversity – the One UN, UNHCR and Rwanda

by Tim Maurer

Rwanda is one of eight countries chosen to pilot the 'One UN' concept. In an impoverished nation shaped by displacement, there are currently 16 UN agencies. The challenges of 'Delivering as One' – and tackling inefficiency, fragmentation and inter-agency competition for resources – are daunting.

'Unity in Diversity' is the slogan and guiding principle of the One UN team in Rwanda. In April 2007 all resident and some non-resident UN agencies signed up to an ambitious schedule for the implementation of 'One Programme', 'One Budgetary Framework', 'One Leader' and 'One Office' endorsed by the Government of Rwanda.[1]

What does this mean for the people of concern to UNHCR in a country hosting some 50,000 refugees – predominantly Congolese – and still facing the challenge of its refugee past and the aftermath of the turbulent events triggered by the 1994 genocide?

Once the 'One UN'/Delivering as One' reform has been implemented, there are a number of outcomes that could significantly enhance refugee protection. The creation of national asylum systems, effective returnee monitoring mechanisms and prevention of new refugee movements are fields where the One UN reform has significant potential. In protracted refugee situations such as Rwanda the link between development and refugee issues is obvious. Prospects for durable solutions, in particular local integration, could be enhanced by long-term strategies. A stronger link between development projects and refugee assistance might reduce the kind of discrepancies between services available to refugees and surrounding communities which often have potential to stir up xenophobic resentments. One Programme could forge closer coordination and cooperation among UNHCR and other agencies. Property restitution – always a destabilising factor in post-conflict post-displacement situations – could be more coherently tackled by a One UN thematic group bringing together several UN agencies such as UNDP, FAO and UNHCR. In crosscutting sectors such as water and sanitation, HIV/AIDS, the environment or education, the One UN reform offers opportunities for agencies such as UNHCR to focus on the value added by each agency's individual specific expertise and to avoid duplication.

The UN family in Rwanda already has a common security policy. Using synergies by sharing fuel, travel, garage, office and transport facilities has been identified to further enhance effectiveness. At present, resources cannot be used jointly since the UNHCR office in Kigali is located a few kilometres away from the other UN agencies. Having joint premises and sharing resources in the capital

Kigeme refugee camp, Rwanda, 2006.

and in the field would increase effectiveness, reduce overheads and mainstream teamwork into everyday work. Reduction of duplication and transaction costs would enable greater transparency, harmonisation of procurement, administration and finance, and a better performance of a results-based management.

Might 'One UN' endanger protection?

There are a number of potentially negative outcomes of the One UN reform, particularly for principles of impartiality and neutrality. In the case of UNHCR, this concerns its special mandate based on the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol and its independence of action

UNHCR/Tim Maurer

"ownership, comparative advantage and maximum effectiveness and accountability." To what degree will a One UN be able to take into account the rights reserved for specific groups such as refugees and asylum seekers? It is not clear how safeguards such as the principle of *non-refoulement* can continue to be guaranteed given that the process is government-owned, -signed and -driven.

In order that government ownership does not compromise the impartiality and neutrality of the UN, the systematic integration of the principles outlined in the UN Charter, international conventions and international law will be crucial. The One UN Concept Paper in Rwanda

to guarantee the protection of people at risk of *refoulement*. In the greater picture these concerns centre on a rights-based approach. Moustapha Soumaré, the UN Resident Coordinator in Kigali, stated during the signing ceremony of the One UN Concept Paper that the reform is based on principles of

outlines its vision that "The UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, together with the seven core conventions, provide overall guidance to the UN system in Rwanda." Much will depend on how the One Leader role is implemented and what role human rights will play once the Resident Coordinator

takes the lead in representing the UN system. Ultimately, the neutrality of the UN is preserved by reminding governments of their primary responsibilities and obligations derived from international treaties as well as international customary law.

When the UN speaks with one voice through One Leader, advocacy could be more effective than when a single UN agency raises issues of concern with governments. In the case of the Security Council's denunciation of repeated recruitment of refugee children from Rwandan camps, for example, a strengthened 'One UN' system might be more effective in producing results on the ground.

Given the chequered history of the UN in Rwanda, successful roll-out of the One UN reform would project a strong signal and a step forward not only for Rwanda but the entire troubled Great Lakes region. The reform has the support of the donor community which is now united in calling – via the Paris Declaration process[2] – for more accountability, transparency and effectiveness in the aid system. Expectations are high. Success will depend on the in-house capacity and willingness to view this process as an opportunity for the UN system as a whole rather than to the advantage of a single agency only. Particular caution ought to be exercised in regard to the integration of human rights. It is up to the UN to prove if it is capable of Delivering as One or if the danger of becoming marginalised will prevail. The success or the failure of the One UN reform is first and foremost in the hands of the UN itself.

Tim Maurer (tim.maurer@fu-berlin. de) worked as an intern with UNHCR in Kigali in 2006 and in Geneva in 2007. He is a student of political science at the Otto-Suhr-Institut für Politikwissenschaft of the Freie Universität Berlin.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the UN.

Kigeme refugee camp, Rwanda, 2006.

1   'One UN: 'Delivering as One' in Rwanda; Concept Paper', Office of the Resident Coordinator, April 2007. www.undg.org/docs/7100/ 0One%20UN%20Concept%20 Paper%20-%20Signing%20version.pdf

2   www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_ 3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html

UNHCR, IDPs and humanitarian reform

by Jeff Crisp, Esther Kiragu and Vicky Tennant

UNHCR has undertaken a fundamental reformulation of its IDP policy, with the intention of bringing certainty, consistency and predictability to its involvement.

"Uncertain, inconsistent and unpredictable." Those were the damning words used to assess UNHCR's policy towards IDPs in an evaluation report commissioned by the agency in 2005. Jointly undertaken by an independent consultant and a UNHCR staff member, the report provided a wealth of empirical evidence to support the conclusion that UNHCR had for many years adopted an unfortunate 'pick-and-choose' approach towards its engagement in situations of internal displacement. "While an ad hoc system has advantages," the evaluation observed, "it can also be a cause of tensions between organisations, confusion with governments and false expectations amongst IDPs. Generally, UNHCR has had difficulty justifying its abrupt reversals of position on IDP involvement." In the intervening two years the agency has heeded the message.

Humanitarian reform and IDPs

The humanitarian reform process was based on a recognition that responses to complex emergencies and disasters often failed to meet the needs of IDPs and other affected populations in a timely and consistent manner. A number of measures were introduced to address this situation, including the establishment of an agreed division of labour (the Cluster Approach) amongst UN and other humanitarian agencies. Under the provisions of this arrangement, UNHCR assumed a leading role in

efforts to ensure protection of conflict-related IDPs, provision of emergency shelter to such populations and the coordination and management of IDP camps. In addition, UNHCR agreed to participate actively in other areas

UNHCR trucks brought IDPs from Gouroukoun site to host villages in the area, Eastern Chad, 2006.

UNHCR/H Caux

including health, water and sanitation and to work closely with OHCHR and UNICEF to ensure protection of people displaced by natural disasters.

Having made these new commitments, UNHCR launched a series of initiatives designed to ensure that the organisation's new IDP policy was effectively elaborated, articulated and evaluated. Beginning with a four-day workshop in Nairobi for UNHCR staff members engaged in IDP operations, the organisation embarked upon an internal consultative process which was then extended to external stakeholders, including other UN agencies, NGO

partners and Executive Committee members. At the conclusion of this process, UNHCR issued a policy framework and implementation strategy entitled 'UNHCR's role in support of an enhanced humanitarian response to situations of internal displacement'.[1] This was followed by the publication of a complementary paper on 'The protection of internally displaced persons and the role of UNHCR'.[2] At the institutional level, the organisation's new commitment to the issue of internal displacement was marked by the establishment of an interdepartmental IDP Support Group and the appointment of a Senior Coordinator for IDP Operations, backed by a dedicated IDP Support Team.

Evaluating UNHCR's IDP response

At the October 2005 meeting of UNHCR's Executive Committee, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, had given a firm promise to make UNHCR "fully engaged as a

predictable partner" in the new approach to situations of internal displacement. In accordance with this, in the course of 2006 UNHCR undertook an important extension to its operational involvement in IDP situations, especially in the five African countries where the Cluster Approach was introduced: Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Somalia and Uganda. To ensure that UNHCR learned and shared appropriate lessons from this experience, the organisation's Policy Development and Evaluation Service and IDP Support Team undertook Real-Time Evaluations in each of those countries between April and July 2007.

With the exception of Liberia[3], UNHCR had not been significantly engaged in support to IDPs in the five operations reviewed prior to the activation of the cluster arrangements in 2006. In Liberia, the agency had taken on enhanced responsibilities for IDP protection from early 2005, and by the time the Cluster Approach was formally introduced, a highly successful IDP return and reintegration programme was already well under way. In the other four countries, UNHCR's new responsibilities under the Cluster Approach required a much more decisive reorientation of its country programmes, deployment of additional staff and targeted fundraising, so as to ensure that new IDP programmes did not draw resources away from the agency's mandated refugee activities.

Compounding this challenge was an extremely complex humanitarian context in each of the pilot locations. The countries identified for the initial roll-out of the Cluster Approach were precisely those where the failings of the humanitarian response had been most marked. The challenge facing UNHCR and others tasked to steer the Cluster Approach in early 2006 was therefore a gargantuan one.

The decision to undertake an early evaluation of the effectiveness of UNHCR's new IDP programmes was shaped with this context in mind. As with other 'real-time' evaluations, the purpose was to capture lessons and, if necessary, take corrective action at as early a stage in the process as possible. Three-person evaluation

teams conducted extensive interviews with IDPs and the communities hosting them, with NGO, government and UN partners in the Cluster Approach, and with UNHCR staff at headquarters and in the field.

The teams concluded that in all of the operations reviewed, the introduction of cluster arrangements had brought tangible dividends in forging a common vision amongst humanitarian actors and in targeting resources more effectively on the basis of jointly identified needs. The process of cluster activation had nonetheless not been optimal, and many humanitarian actors in the field felt that it had been imposed on them with little consultation, and with little in the way of support or guidance in the initial stages. Buy-in from NGOs had initially been limited but their engagement had increased over time, particularly where funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)[4] had been made available for projects identified through the cluster framework.

The litmus test, of course, is whether this solid progress in the reorganisation of humanitarian action translates into immediate positive and lasting improvements in the lives of IDPs and other war-affected communities. On this, the findings were considerably less encouraging. In all of the operations reviewed – with the possible exception of Liberia – the humanitarian effort still falls short of what is needed to ensure that basic standards are met.

Many IDPs interviewed by the evaluation teams were still living under flimsy plastic sheets, forced to engage in exploitative casual labour arrangements, with limited access to basic health care and sanitation facilities. Women in Eastern Chad spoke of the risk of rape when they ventured out of the settlements to seek firewood[5] and in DRC IDPs described how they fell further and further into debt as a result of rents imposed by 'host' communities.[6] In Uganda, the evaluation team observed that many of the IDPs in new sites were "living at the most abject level of subsistence… foraging for food in the bush or engaging in exploitative forms of labour…"[7] IDPs in Somalia who had fled recent fighting in Mogadishu described

how landowners had prevented them from constructing sanitation facilities, forcing them to use a large rubbish dump behind the site at which some women had been raped.[8]

Despite this sobering overall picture, the teams identified many concrete positive developments which appeared to be solidly linked to the introduction of the Cluster Approach and to UNHCR's enhanced role within it. In the area of protection, significant strides have been made in conceptualising some of the key challenges faced by IDPs as human rights issues – which has facilitated the development of protection strategies and effective advocacy campaigns.

In Northern Uganda, UNHCR and its partners played an essential role in unlocking the lingering restrictions linked to the government's anti-insurgency strategy through a successful 'freedom of movement' campaign, backed up by a series of practical interventions to give this concept practical effect. This included opening up access roads, de-mining and rehabilitating water sources. In DRC, the return of almost 400,000 IDPs to their homes in South Katanga was facilitated by advocacy which led to adjustments in the deployment patterns of peacekeeping troops in order to secure key areas of return.

The agency also developed a series of protection-related projects to address gaps identified through enhanced protection monitoring, displacement tracking and IDP profiling. These include legal assistance programmes, land rights projects, assistance to survivors of rape, support to disabled IDPs and community-based reconciliation initiatives. IDPs interviewed by the evaluation teams specifically cited some of these projects as having brought tangible benefits.

The camp coordination and camp management cluster has so far only been formally activated in Uganda and Chad – in part due to concerns by the humanitarian community about the institutionalisation of camps in locations where the trend was towards return and in part because many IDPs are living in host communities. The evaluation teams highlighted the potential

A view of Omiya-Anyima IDP camp, northern Uganda, May 2007.

IRIN/Manoocher Deghati

for UNHCR and its partners to play a more decisive role in the coordination of support to IDPs grouped in host communities, collective centres and other locations not traditionally categorised as camps. They also pointed, however, to the inequities which continue to persist between standards of assistance to IDPs and refugees, and between IDPs in different locations, and urged a more systematic harmonisation of assistance which meets basic minimum standards for all beneficiaries.

The evaluations also critically examined UNHCR's own staffing and budgetary arrangements, and found that in some locations these had been left wanting. The agency was slow to deploy additional staff with the right profile and experience, resulting in excessive burdens on existing staff and an over-reliance on UN Volunteers and short-term secondments. In some locations inflexible budget arrangements resulted in short-term programming, undermining UNHCR's quest to become a more predictable partner. A strategy to address these structural issues is currently under development,

and proposals for a new budget structure were reviewed by UNHCR's Executive Committee in October.

Since the analysis of UNHCR's engagement with IDPs carried out in 2005, UNHCR has made considerable strides in equipping itself to become a more functional and effective partner within the Cluster Approach arrangement. This commitment has manifested itself in the extensive internal and external consultations, development of a clear policy and strategy and a concerted focus on evaluating and drawing lessons from the implementation process so far.

Be that as it may, the Cluster Approach is clearly a work in progress, and much remains to be done to develop clear benchmarks and indicators which will enable its impact on IDP and other affected communities to be tracked and assessed. Considerable work also remains to be done on engaging more decisively with governments and national institutions; gearing it more effectively towards early recovery; bringing national NGOs and civil society into the process; and ensuring the participation of IDPs and other beneficiaries in assessment, planning

and implementation. The success of the approach will lie ultimately not just in an effectively functioning process but in its ability to bring tangible benefits to the lives of IDPs and other affected populations. In this respect, the indications are that UNHCR's contribution is having a solid and positive impact but that adjustments are needed to enhance this still further and to ensure that it is fully mainstreamed into the work of the organisation.

Jeff Crisp (crisp@unhcr.org) is the Head and Esther Kiragu (kiragu@unhcr.org) and Vicky Tennant (tennant@unhcr.org) are Senior Policy Officers in UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES).[9]

1. www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4693775c2

2. www.unhcr.org/home/RSDLEGAL/45ddc5c04.pdf

3. www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RESEARCH&id=3fd7320c4&page=research

4. www.cerf.un.org

5. www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/AMMF-75EC2U?OpenDocument

6. www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/46ea97fe2.pdf

7. www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/46c1b8b92.pdf

8. www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/46e927652.pdf

9. www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/research?id=3b850c744

Is humanitarian reform improving IDP protection and assistance?

by Anne Davies

Humanitarians are slowly developing better systems to profile IDPs and address their protection and assistance. It is still difficult, however, to say with certainty that humanitarian reforms are having any positive impact on the lives of IDPs.

In an article Magnus Murray and I wrote for FMR in 2005[1] on protection and assistance deficiencies of the UN humanitarian programme in Liberia we concluded that, with improved humanitarian leadership, these deficiencies could be reversed. Today, the process of humanitarian reform is slowly taking root in many countries. A key challenge is how to quantify and qualify the realities of internal displacement in order to help decision makers prioritise resources according to greatest need for protection and assistance.

In Somalia and DRC – two of the eight countries in which the Cluster Approach is being trialled – IDP statistics are a moving target. The conflict dynamics in both countries mean that people flee from or within areas where conflict flares up and may remain displaced for different periods of time or move around in search of safety. Tracking their movements and obtaining and maintaining data on their numbers and specific situations have always been challenging; yet without clearer estimates it is difficult to know how to design appropriate activities to alleviate their plight or to advocate for resources on their behalf. Moreover, not all IDPs are equally vulnerable and a mere statistical estimate does not necessarily reveal who among them are in most need of protection, assistance or other support to their coping mechanisms. A logical starting point for prioritising scarce resources is to obtain a more accurate and insightful 'profile' of IDPs.

During the last two years the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC)[2]

has made efforts to improve IDP data collection by working on methods to 'profile' them in different country contexts. The process is led by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.[3] IDP profiling involves not just getting more accurate numbers but also obtaining essential information on their particular characteristics. It has entailed obtaining common agreement by the majority of stakeholders on data collection and profiling methodology, how to analyse data and, most importantly, how to update data. With this commonly agreed approach, agencies can formulate more appropriate and coordinated projects and donors can have a more credible evidence base on which to support them.

The cluster system has been instrumental in propelling a common approach to IDP profiling. Prior to its inception each agency counted IDPs in its own geographical area of operations or according to its mandate, leading to duplication in areas where many humanitarian actors were operating and gaps in those where they were not present. Also, double counting took place when IDPs moved back and forth according to the conflict dynamics of the area, so that those who had been displaced due to conflict at a given date were counted again when a new outbreak of hostilities displaced the same people again. This was – and will probably always remain – a recurrent dilemma for Population Movement Committees[4] who recognise that even when they manage to obtain more credible IDP data, it can quickly

become outdated by new waves of conflict and displacement.

In the case of Somalia, the Protection Cluster, comprising the UN country team based in Nairobi and international NGOs (most particularly the Danish Refugee Council), agreed a common approach to profile IDPs. Agencies embarked on a strategy of first obtaining a historical overview of displacement in Somalia by means of a comprehensive desk review of all IDP statistics gathered during the previous three years. This in turn enabled them to locate the most salient information gaps and to then address those gaps through on-site monitoring and surveying. The fact that every step of these exercises was undertaken with the common consent of interested agencies lent legitimacy to the methodologies chosen for profiling and agreement on the results obtained. Unfortunately timing was bad in the case of Mogadishu and the planned survey was undertaken during the height of the conflict, which led to the results becoming outdated as soon as they had been collected and analysed. Nevertheless, a positive outcome of the survey was a much improved understanding of the dynamics of displacement and the reasons why certain groups had fled and remained displaced. The matrix that resulted from the country-wide desk review provides a common format for agencies to use as baseline data when undertaking new profiling studies in specific areas.

Other profiling studies have been conducted in 2007 using a variety of methodologies in different settings (Khartoum, Chad and Central African Republic, to name a few) and have similarly involved consultation through the Protection Cluster. This has resulted in commonly accepted IDP reports and statistics that form the evidence base on

Displaced people carrying sacks of maize from the distribution centre organised by WFP, Jowhar, Somalia, September 2007.

which to programme targeted responses. It has also demonstrated that IDP profiling is more successful when organised through the cluster mechanism rather than when studies are conducted unilaterally.

How can improvements be measured?

The Cluster Approach – initially considered confusing and a recipe for too many meetings – is slowly becoming instrumental in establishing, by consensus in working groups, agreed standards and principles for protecting IDPs. Not all of these are yet in circulation but the consultative process has involved workshops in different countries to obtain consensus on what they need to improve. The workshops have not only proved useful networking fora to discuss questions of concern but have also given stakeholders a clearer basis for understanding requirements. For example, the forthcoming *IDP Protection Handbook*, a compilation of different chapters contributed by key protection stakeholders, is near finalisation, as is an IASC publication providing guidance on IDP profiling in the field. With commonly agreed frameworks in place, there is now greater certainty about how to proceed in coordination with other similarly informed humanitarian actors and greater confidence in embarking on joint initiatives to profile, protect and assist IDPs. But measuring how all this translates into an improvement in the day-to-day lives of IDPs is not easy. And there is also the question of whether the establishment of the cluster system, measured against impact, is cost-effective. Are funds going towards administrative costs rather than to beneficiaries and, if they are, in what way does this benefit the target population? Donors should insist on a detailed cost analysis of the different clusters in 2008.

The Cluster Approach employed in Pakistan after the 2005 earthquake received mixed reviews in terms of its efficiency and coherence in the

IRIN/Manoocher Deghati

early stages. However, some clusters were successful in streamlining delivery on the ground. One particularly useful initiative set up by the Protection Cluster was the Joint Protection Monitoring System, aimed at monitoring and reporting protection incidents in the IDP camps and gaps in access to services and rights in areas of return. While not without its challenges, the Cluster Approach was reported as successfully building a strong coordination mechanism between partners. This was not only useful for creating a space in which to discuss protection issues but also had other positive outcomes: tackling policy-relevant issues such as landlessness, standard operating procedures for camp closure, serious medical conditions and disability, female-headed households and orphans.

Perhaps it is too early to judge whether improvements in the humanitarian response can be linked to a positive impact on the lives of IDPs. Various reports indicate that success still hinges to a great extent on leadership, both at the humanitarian coordinator and at the cluster levels. In 2006 OCHA led an assessment of the Cluster Approach in the pilot countries resulting in the IASC Interim Self-Assessment of Implementation of the Cluster Approach in the Field[5]. The studies and workshops organised in the four cluster roll-out countries examined

mainly procedural aspects of cluster performance and yielded scant revelation on how any part of the humanitarian reform process has resulted in concrete improvements to IDPs. This was reflected in the report's acknowledgement that "it is not yet clear the extent to which more effective leadership and coordination through the Cluster Approach contributed to successful outcomes."

A more comprehensive external evaluation is currently underway in two phases, with expected completion date the first quarter of 2008. This looks set to take a harder look at outcomes. A fundamentally important aspect of this evaluation will be to develop standard benchmarks by which to judge performance across the board.

Anne Davies (anne.davies@undp.org) is currently the Vulnerable Groups and IDP Advisor to the UN in the Maldives. This article is written in a personal capacity and does not reflect the views of the UN.

1. www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR24/. IDP%20Supplement/07.pdf

2. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc

3. www.internal-displacement.org – see also p66.

4. Population Movement Committees comprise local officials, NGOs and UN agencies who track the movements of people in crisis areas. In Somalia they produce monthly reports that are consolidated and published by UNHCR, providing indicators such as responses to and gravity of conflict, drought or other catastrophes as well as spontaneous return movements. In DRC they are used more locally but essentially provide similarly useful information.

5. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/documents

Reform in focus: the IFRC perspective

by Robert Mister

Significant effort and resources have been devoted to the humanitarian reform process to date but it remains unclear as to whether it will result in a significant impact on the lives of the vulnerable people with whom and for whom the Federation works.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) takes part in many of the inter-agency groups that are developing or refining aspects of the reform process and actively participates in a number of the global clusters. For example, it has taking an active role in the OCHA-led Task Team looking at the activation and function of the clusters, the Humanitarian Coordination System Strengthening Project and the wider discussions taking place within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

In 2005 the Federation was asked by Jan Egeland, then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, to lead the cluster for emergency shelter following natural disasters. Following extensive discussions with national societies, the Federation agreed to take on a role as convenor rather than leader of the cluster. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Federation and OCHA specifies that the IFRC will be convenor but will not act as a provider of last resort, nor will it be accountable to the Emergency Relief Coordinator. At the country level it designates the Federation rather than the national society to be convenor. The Federation has argued for these exclusions from the normal cluster leadership role in order to maintain the Red Cross and Red Crescent Fundamental Principles, particularly impartiality, neutrality and independence.

The International Federation continues to work with UN agencies – through the IASC – on humanitarian reform, particularly the Cluster Approach. The Federation recognises that reform was greatly needed and that the process is beginning to show results. A number of areas, however, are still in need of reform. There remains a serious gap in humanitarian financing, beyond the CERF, with a need for more predictable and more flexible funding that can be made rapidly available to non-UN agencies and local organisations such as Red Cross or Red Crescent national societies and NGOs.

IFRC recognises the importance of, and is committed to, a process of humanitarian reform that will bring real benefits to vulnerable people affected by natural disaster. We see the need for effective coordination among all stakeholders in a way that promotes the complementary roles of the various humanitarian agencies, avoids duplication and gaps and, as a result, maximises the impact of the Federation's response. But we also recognise that more needs to be done to further develop effective partnership at a country level between the various humanitarian stakeholders. Effective country-level coordination after a disaster needs to include the national society, the Federation and/or the ICRC, if they are playing a key or significant role in the response or with preparedness and risk reduction measures. A coordination mechanism that excludes organisations, whether they are national authorities or the national Red Cross or Red Crescent society, cannot be an effective mechanism.

The focus of current humanitarian reform has been on international assistance. More attention needs to be paid to improving national preparedness and contingency planning, particularly for natural disasters, with the full involvement of national authorities, the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent, NGOs and civil society. Further work is also required by the UN and the international community to strengthen local, national and regional capacities for disaster management.

The International Federation stresses the need to enhance the ability of local communities, civil society and the Red Cross and Red Crescent to deal not only with response but also with extreme vulnerability. This may be the most viable way of reducing the number of deaths, injuries, illnesses and overall impact of disasters, diseases and public health emergencies at a time when climate change threatens increasing humanitarian crises. It is for this reason that the International Federation has worked with OCHA

Floods, Kenya, 2006.

and UNDP to ensure that the IASC develops plans to provide a more risk-informed humanitarian approach. It is also why we stress that global spending on preparedness and risk reduction must be increased dramatically if we are to make real inroads and significantly reduce the impact of future disasters.

Robert Mister (Robert.Mister@ ifrc.org) is Coordinator for Inter-Agency Cooperation at the IFRC (www.ifrc.org).

Integration and UN humanitarian reforms

by Eric Stobbaerts, Sarah Martin and Katharine Derderian

There are serious unanswered questions about how recent humanitarian reforms impact on how humanitarians are perceived in the field and their ability to provide timely and appropriate assistance to those most in need.

The UN and donor doctrine of integration or coherence seems to underpin most current international responses to humanitarian crises. While politicisation of aid is hardly new, increasingly it is now the prevailing doctrine in UN and state-led humanitarian interventions. From the Brahimi Report in 2000[1] to the reaffirmation of the centrality of integrated missions within the new UN 'humanitarian' reforms in 2006, the UN system consistently maintains that humanitarian action must remain subordinate to political objectives. By contrast, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) believes that the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and meeting immediate needs should be the primary goal of humanitarian assistance – a goal that remains independent from and thus often incompatible with political solutions to crises.

Following requests by MSF teams for guidance on how to interact with the recent UN humanitarian reforms, we carried out a field-based study to see how these reforms were impacting humanitarian space and the populations that we serve.[2] We conducted our research from July 2006 to July 2007 in Darfur, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Haiti, Liberia and Ivory Coast with additional interviews carried out in Iraq, Somalia and Uganda.

Our findings suggest that the UN humanitarian reforms represent an extension of the UN's approach to integrated peacekeeping missions with their interlinked political, military and aid approaches. The UN's vision has grown into a highly coordinated system where humanitarian action is structurally subordinated to economic, military, diplomatic and security visions. The UN Secretary-General's 2006 Note of Guidance on Integrated Missions[3] reaffirms the central role of integration for the implementation of UN peacekeeping missions to ensure "efficient coordination between the peacekeeping mission, the UN's operational agencies and non-UN partners", "a clear and shared understanding of the priorities" and "the willingness of all actors to contribute to the achievement of shared objectives". The on-going UN humanitarian reforms follow the same logic, strengthening the reach of integration's momentum into humanitarian response.

While coordination of response can be a positive thing and should theoretically improve effectiveness, one of the main critiques of the humanitarian reforms has been that coordination has become an end in itself. New and parallel 'cluster' structures have multiplied rather than simplified the existing platforms of meetings and exchange. These additional layers have not yet resulted in quantifiable improvements in response, leadership or information sharing. Bureaucratic complaints aside, however, the most problematic intention of the clusters – joint operational and strategic planning between various stakeholders – is of concern as each stakeholder inevitably has a different agenda and mandate.

While long-term efforts towards building states, peace and justice are laudable, they clearly do not always equate to an effective response to immediate humanitarian and emergency needs. From the UN perspective, it appears logical to reconcile what often look like schizophrenic intentions of a multiplicity of actors. But it becomes a dangerous, not to say perverse, exercise when the UN attempts to incorporate independent humanitarian actors with different objectives into the same logic.

The common technical, coordination and funding tools introduced by the reforms in order to increase coherence among the UN, Red Cross/Red Crescent family and NGOs reveal the tension between the requirement to arrive at joint analysis and response, as opposed to the inherent diversity and complementarities of humanitarian action, based on independence of analysis and intervention. In this highly politicised atmosphere, where the UN and donors seek a determining role in the operations and agenda of aid actors, humanitarian principles remain under threat and diverse, independent voices are in danger of being sidelined, to the detriment of meeting needs. The UN humanitarian reforms and their logic of coherence risk compromising humanitarian action that can save and protect the lives of victims.

Clusters, CERF and Humanitarian Coordinators

One innovative aspect of the clusters is the principle that UN agencies serving as cluster leads would be responsible as 'providers of last resort'. Designed to increase accountability of agencies to the different clusters, this concept has caused much confusion and controversy on the ground. Practical questions about its implementation remain open as past problems concerning operational and financial capacities remain unresolved. The clusters have taken on a life of their own, moving from the nine original clusters to multiple sub-clusters in some areas. There has been very little evidence that these proliferating clusters have improved information

sharing and impact at the field level. For example, in Uganda, the UNHCR-led protection cluster has been criticised as 'reductionist' and interested in engaging only in limited sharing of information outside the cluster. In Somalia, apart from a proliferation of coordination meetings and the willingness to share more information, cluster output is negligible primarily because Somalia is a case of virtual coordination from far-away Nairobi; there are too few interventions being implemented on the ground for coordination to have any real meaning. In characteristically bureaucratic style, the clusters have multiplied, with overlapping UN, government and NGO coordination structures, creating – in the words of one person in Liberia – a "committee city" in Monrovia.

Re-launched in 2006, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is a financial instrument to ensure effective and predictable funding for rapid response and under-funded emergencies.[4] The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and OCHA at the global level and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in country lead the process, while priority setting for response may occur through the clusters. In recent years, the number of organisations involved in crisis response has proliferated, with many NGOs depending heavily on institutional funds and acting as implementing partners or service providers on behalf of donors, thereby increasing the risk of politicisation of humanitarian assistance. This dependence comes with limitations on freedom to advocate and to operate, and should, in our view, be of considerable concern to independent humanitarian actors. Save the Children and other NGOs have highlighted the problem that the CERF has been allocated mainly to UN agencies while the majority of field-level aid operations currently underway in most contexts are carried out by NGOs.[5] The ostensible increase in funding through the CERF has not meant an increase in field-level activities or improved access to populations in need. Apart from contexts of natural disaster where the deployment of agencies has been

enormous, there is still a real lack of effective actors working on the ground in most media-isolated and difficult environments like Somalia, South Sudan, Darfur or DRC.

CERF funds, promoted as targeting those most in need, have often been used in an effort to promote the overall (political) objectives of UN country missions. Some programmatic choices are likewise questionable in terms of impartiality. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the first CERF recipient worldwide, programmes covered non-emergency

MSF/Sergio Cecchini

MINUSTAH (UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti), Haiti, 2006

and not strictly humanitarian interventions – including "social events to improve inter-community relations and promote peace culture." MSF field teams are concerned that such 'protection' activities are increasingly becoming a Trojan horse for political objectives to penetrate the sphere of aid and relief within UN integrated missions. Protection activities have taken a variety of forms, mostly disconnected from the spirit of the Geneva Conventions, and can be questioned from the angle of operational relevance. Similarly, 75% of the three CERF instalments in Haiti have focused on infrastructure and rehabilitation projects in politically sensitive and insecure areas, projects that are structural, longer-term and high-visibility and more suited to advancing security interests than fulfilling a humanitarian agenda.

As the primary aid counterpart within a UN mission, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator serves as the hub for decision making for both coordination through the clusters and funding through the CERF. This key position is often 'multi-hatted' i.e. acting simultaneously in a political and humanitarian role as Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) and the Resident Coordinator (RC) and in peacekeeping missions as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG). The strengthening of the central role of the multi-hatted HC/RC/DSRSG in both coordination (clusters) and funding (CERF) risks further conflating political and humanitarian aims. In many missions this is indicative of the UN system's inability to uphold a separate mandate for its humanitarian instruments. This is evidenced by the prominence of political rather than humanitarian considerations in shaping returnee processes in northern Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire and Darfur. In these contexts, donors and policy makers focused on promoting return in the interests of political gains, such as elections, peace agreements, perceived stability and/or international funding, neglecting the ongoing and still evident humanitarian needs.

The new mechanisms put in place by the UN reforms are not ensuring a more effective needs-based response

to assist IDPs but rather promoting the alignment of aid with UN and donor political objectives. The natural tension which exists between short-term, life-saving activities for humanitarian response and longer-term objectives of achieving peace and state building are continually jeopardised by efforts to bring humanitarian issues into line with political aims. The need for an immediate humanitarian response today cannot and should not be driven by the objective of bringing political benefits tomorrow.

In the often volatile and dangerous areas where humanitarian agencies try to deliver aid, neutrality or, more importantly, the perception of neutrality facilitates access and acts as a guarantee of security for both for those providing and receiving aid. While access and security problems for humanitarians pre-date and are not necessarily linked with the UN reforms, it is still an urgent concern for Médecins Sans Frontières. The increasingly invasive politicised concepts of integration and coherence will further erode the already fragile local perceptions of the neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors. Nowhere is this clearer than in contexts like Iraq, Somalia or Darfur where populations perceive humanitarians as pursuing political goals through partial and politicised or regionally biased assistance, rather than as impartial neutral actors working to help those most in need.

MSF made the decision not to participate in the clusters at the 'global' level because of our principles of independence and neutrality. In response to complex field realities and pragmatic needs, information sharing and practical operational exchanges may lead MSF to participate in certain clusters as observers at the capital and field levels. For MSF, independence and neutrality cannot mean isolation and MSF must maintain key bilateral contacts with UN coordination structures. Yet, in the end, the UN-led clusters' insistence on joint analysis and response is incompatible with independent, diverse and innovative humanitarian response, and represents the limits of MSF interaction with these or any other coordination structure. MSF teams must continually monitor how our interaction with other actors, including the UN-led clusters, impacts on the perception of our independence, impartiality and neutrality.

No definitive conclusions can be drawn at this stage as to how the UN humanitarian reforms are impacting humanitarian space, either positively or negatively. While there is no evidence that the reforms directly impact the populations we serve, the enormous time, energy and funding dedicated to the reform process and the prioritising of increased coordination over immediate response represent an indirect impact of lost potential to assist the most vulnerable populations. These reforms are still a work in progress and must be challenged and questioned by all humanitarian actors. By further expanding the logic of coherence and integration, the UN humanitarian reforms pose a threat to the independence of humanitarian actors and the crucial diversity of approaches that MSF believes are key to effective and meaningful humanitarian assistance.

Eric Stobbaerts (eric.stobbaerts@ london.msf.org) is Senior Researcher at Médecins Sans Frontières, UK, Sarah Martin (sarah.martin@amsterdam. msf.org) is the Humanitarian Affairs Specialist at Médecins Sans Frontières, The Netherlands, and Katharine Derderian (katharine.derderian@ brussels.msf.org) the Humanitarian Advisor for Policy Issues at Médecins Sans Frontières, Belgium.

1. www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations

2. The inter-sectional study includes the MSF sections in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, as well as the MSF-Brazil office. The study is not an institutional MSF position on the UN humanitarian reforms. For more information on this study, please note our upcoming article in ODI/HPG.

3. www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/missions/ sgnote.pdf

4. http://cerf.un.org

5. See Blog by Toby Porter (SCF) on http://blogs.odi.org. uk/blogs/exchange/archive/2007/01/18/1591.aspx

Insecure environments: the missing piece?

by Matthew Benson

While current reforms address a number of key issues affecting civilians in conflict, they do not address other, arguably more pressing, issues facing the humanitarian community – such as the provision of humanitarian assistance in insecure environments.

The perceived politicisation of humanitarian assistance – resulting from deterioration of the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence – has led to the targeting of national and international humanitarian personnel and their local partners and may also be contributing to physical insecurity for the very beneficiaries that humanitarians seek to assist.

In today's globalised world, poorly practised humanitarianism risks becoming a liability to all humanitarian actors. Humanitarians ought collectively to take the necessary steps to allow for the continued provision of principled humanitarian assistance to intended beneficiaries in even the most insecure of environments.

Humanitarian action is often synonymous with conflict

environments involving some degree of personal risk for humanitarian staff. Today the stakes may be higher than they have been. Attacks on local and international staff and partners of humanitarian actors have increased. Since 1997 the number of major acts of violence (killings, kidnappings and armed attacks resulting in serious injury) committed against aid workers has nearly doubled.[1] Risks may in certain instances be extending to the beneficiaries of assistance. In Iraq analysts have voiced concerns that intended beneficiaries' association with humanitarian actors may increase their physical insecurity and/or lead to their refusal of humanitarian assistance.

A common response to the lack of access is the adoption of Remote Management Operations (RMOs). These are hardly new. RMOs have been implemented by humanitarians under different guises – 'long arm programming', 'remote control', 'remote support', 'partnership', 'cross-border', 'one-off operations', 'hit and run operations', 'aid on the run', 'give and go operations' or 'windows of opportunity' – in Afghanistan, Biafra, Chechnya, Myanmar, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere. Typically ad hoc, RMOs involve the relocation of international staff to safe areas away from the area of operation, leaving operational responsibilities to national staff or local partners (who are perceived – often without evidence – to enjoy more local acceptance than expatriates). As the article by UNHCR's Andrew Harper and José Riera in FMR's Iraq special issue makes clear,[2] RMOs are not a panacea to the challenges faced in insecure environments. Nevertheless, plausible alternatives to RMOs may include the adoption of what some might call a 'bunker mentality', where security restrictions hamper humanitarians from implementing the work the public expects them to do.

While remote management allows for continued service provision, the ability to remain accountable to intended beneficiaries and donors is in many instances compromised. Dangers for national staff and local partners are great and they

are exposed to greater risk than their international counterparts.

The concern voiced by some humanitarian actors, particularly those from outside the UN, that current approaches to enhanced coordination and leadership may lead to the politicisation of humanitarian assistance must also be addressed in the context of insecure environments. This may require a collective re-examination of the shared utility of approaches such as the Cluster Approach and Integrated Missions, which some humanitarian agencies fear may serve to intensify the politicisation of aid and compound threats to safe humanitarian action.

We need a collective examination of threats to principled humanitarianism in insecure environments and to begin searching for innovative solutions. In insecure environments no individual UN agency or local/international NGO is an island and the conduct of some humanitarian actors may have unavoidable repercussions for all 'humanitarian' agencies in the area of operation. Every humanitarian actor has a responsibility to the beneficiaries they seek to assist to search for common solutions to shared challenges. The recent departure of ICRC and MSF from the humanitarian reform discussion table is a cause for concern.

Those engaged in shaping the humanitarian reform process must:

- examine how to extend protection to intended beneficiaries as well as national and international staff

- draft contingency plans for remote management in countries such as Pakistan and Zimbabwe which are likely to suffer chronic turbulence

- address the concern voiced by some non-UN humanitarian actors that the Cluster Approach and integrated missions may politicise humanitarian assistance[3]

- take care before embarking on high-profile activities which could jeopardise the security of all humanitarian actors – such as branding of humanitarian operations in combat zones

and collaboration on advocacy campaigns in insecure areas

- consider the ethics of transferring security risks from expatriate staff to national staff or local NGOs and provide them with more security training

- consider the human resource implications of dependence on remote management: care must be taken to ensure that national staff have the leadership skills and acquire the necessary training and self-reliance to make difficult decisions in response to the rapidly changing operational realities in insecure environments

- consult closely with donors and beneficiaries to ensure they understand the challenges associated with implementation of RMOs in insecure environments

- relentlessly negotiate and maintain humanitarian space: this may require a collective examination of the relationships humanitarians establish and maintain with non-state actors, state authorities, military actors and peacekeeping operations.

The diversity that enhances the humanitarian sector must not be allowed to lead to rancorous divisions. The humanitarian reform process is taking place in a troubled international context. The loud calls for a more robust UN engagement in Iraq, the world's most insecure environment, highlight the urgent need for humanitarian reformers to take proactive steps towards the collective development of innovative approaches to coordination and leadership in insecure environments.

Matthew Benson (bensonm@unhcr. org or matthew.benson@alumni.tufts. edu) is a research intern working with UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES www. unhcr.org/research/3b850c744.html).

1. Adele Harmer, Katherine Haver and Abby Stoddard, 'Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: Trends in Policy and Operations', Humanitarian Policy Group Report 23, September 2006. www.odi.org.uk/hpg/ aid_insecure_environments.html See id21 summary at: www.id21.org/zinter/id21zinter.exe?a=0&i=s10bas1g1& u=46fa287e

2. 'Iraq's displacement crisis: the search for solutions' www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/04.pdf

3. See preceding article by Eric Stobbaerts, Sarah Martin and Katherine Derderian.

Iraq: towards a field-focused humanitarian reform

by Cedric Turlan

Neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action are threatened in Iraq by blurred distinctions between military, political, commercial and humanitarian roles.

Today Iraq is seemingly lifeless. There is a lack of adequate food, water and electricity, a third of the population is in urgent need of humanitarian aid[1], over four million people are displaced and up to a million civilians may have died since 2003.[2]

International efforts towards reconstruction and security have obviously failed over the last four years. Successive UN Security Council Resolutions have mandated the UN with a political role to support the Iraqi government, which many consider to be a belligerent in some sub-conflicts in the country. The UN's security, transport and logistics are handled by the Multi-National Force in Iraq (MNF-I), also widely considered a belligerent. Many thus question the impartiality and independence of the UN Country Team.

Humanitarian reform measures have taken a back seat in Iraq. OCHA set up an office for Iraq in Jordan six months ago but no office in Iraq itself, there are no inclusive IASC meetings and the clusters in place are internal to the UN, have no NGO representation and are reconstruction-oriented. Humanitarian action in Iraq remains constrained by insecurity, lack of funds, shortages of staff and capacity, and difficulties in accessing affected populations. It does exist, however. NGOs are, with the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, amongst the only genuine humanitarian actors with a physical presence among vulnerable populations across Iraq. It is high time to focus on improving concrete responses to the needs of Iraqis through coordinated structures and synergy between sectors.

As stated by Greg Hansen in the Iraq Country Study of the Humanitarian Agenda 2015[3], "By formally shackling and subordinating the UN's humanitarian role in Iraq to the fortunes and misfortunes of the MNF-I, UN Security Council Resolution 1546 [the new Resolution 1770 has similar humanitarian language] continues to taint UN efforts by association. ... Operationalization of the Strategic Framework for UN humanitarian action in Iraq requires that the UN's top leadership ... be far more proactive and assertive than in the past in safeguarding the UN's integrity as a principled humanitarian actor."

Let us move forward and build on what already exists. Only physical presence and direct involvement in humanitarian action on the ground will demonstrate that a real and inclusive humanitarian response is still possible. In parallel, setting up the humanitarian reform agenda is of course possible. It can even be done relatively quickly, starting by convening IASC meetings, building better and more inclusive partnerships, and replacing agencies or organisations in coordination structures that are absent in the field with agencies and organisation that have a field presence.

The most urgent action needed is to reaffirm the impartiality and independence of humanitarian action in Iraq. This is important in order to regain the respect of the Iraqi people for humanitarian actors and, therefore, improve relief delivery. Impartiality has to be shown and proved through direct action. But this can only happen by creating a genuine humanitarian space within the UN Country Team, by ensuring that the Humanitarian Coordinator becomes a full-time position (without a political role), and progressively ending support services from the MNF-I.

It is essential to adapt the humanitarian reform agenda to the very specific context of Iraq. It demands inclusiveness with all authentic humanitarian actors and, therefore, avoidance of any UN centrism. But, above all, it requires the absolute understanding of and adaptation to how humanitarian action occurs in Iraq – taking a low profile, out of concern for the security of staff and communities.

This approach also requires avoiding western-centric responses. An approach complementing traditional aid and community support systems in Iraq would concretely demonstrate willingness to create an independent and impartial humanitarian working space. Such a process can only be accomplished through the acknowledgment of the NGOs' competencies, presence and expertise in the realities of working in Iraq. This calls for respect for the need for safety of their staff, constant access to affected populations and the independence of NGOs and other actors in the field from the UN system.

Direct field action is the only way to continue to deliver vital humanitarian relief, attract necessary donor support and make a reality of the humanitarian reform agenda in Iraq.

Cedric Turlan (communication@ncciraq.org) is the Information Officer for the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (www.ncciraq.org). For more information about the work of NCCI and Iraqi civil society see FMR29.[4]

1. http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?article1891
2. www.justforeignpolicy.org/issues/iraq.html?directory_KEY=104
3. 'Taking Sides or Saving Lives: Existential Choices for the Humanitarian Enterprise in Iraq', available at: http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/HA2015IraqCountryStudy.pdf
4. 'Delivering is never remote: NGOs' vital role', www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/12.pdf

Strengthening the Humanitarian Coordinator system

by Claire Messina

Humanitarian Coordinators are – or should be – the pivot around which field coordination of humanitarian action revolves. How can we ensure this is always the case?

Calls to improve the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) system have been heard since its inception. Yet for a while the 'HC strengthening' pillar of humanitarian reform lagged behind, mainly due to the lack of an institutional home for it within OCHA. This changed recently, with the establishment of a dedicated unit in OCHA Geneva.

We humanitarian actors want HCs to be among the best and brightest in our community; we want them to mirror our diversity in terms of gender, geographical origins and organisation of origin; we want them to be well-trained; we want them to be provided with opportunities to learn from their peers; and we want them to be evaluated on a regular basis.

We also need to clarify when we want an HC, how we want to select them, what we want HCs to do, how we want to support them and how we want to hold them accountable. Last but not least, if we are serious about strengthening the HC system, we – UN agencies and NGOs – must provide HCs with the support they need to perform their job.

We should not focus solely on HCs. Time and again, we see Resident Coordinators struggling to cope with humanitarian emergencies without having the right experience and support. Most disasters are small-scale, localised events that do not lead to the appointment of an HC. It is therefore essential that RCs are equipped to prepare for and coordinate emergency responses.

Plans

We plan to identify individuals who have the potential to become HCs and develop career paths for them. Someone with an NGO background, for instance, could be placed for a few months in a UN agency or in OCHA to familiarise him/herself with the way the UN functions. Conversely, someone with a purely UN background would be placed in an NGO to understand better how NGOs work. Affirmative action measures could be devised to give priority – at similar levels of competence – to women and individuals from the South. All candidates would be sponsored for the Resident Coordinator Assessment, a skills-based test that is a prerequisite for being considered for RC positions. (Since most HCs are also RCs, it has de facto become a prerequisite for HC positions as well.) If successful, these individuals would be placed in a pool from which candidates for RC/HC positions would be drawn. All these steps would be taken collectively by an inter-agency panel under the auspices of the IASC – with the proviso that, ultimately, the prerogative of designating HCs rests with the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

We also plan to revamp the format of the annual HC Retreat to allow for peer-to-peer exchanges of experience and best practices. Thematic workshops will be organised for groups of concerned HCs on issues such as protection, IDPs, transition and civil-military relations.

For RCs working in disaster-prone countries, we have started holding regional workshops on humanitarian coordination to familiarise them with the role they are expected to play in a humanitarian emergency and to let them know about all the tools and services that are available to them. The first workshop was held in Thailand in October.

OCHA will draft policy papers on key issues relating to humanitarian coordination, based on consultations with IASC member agencies and RCs/HCs themselves, and submit them to the IASC for approval. Issues will include the selection of HCs (we are particularly concerned to ensure transparency and the involvement of all main humanitarian actors – including NGOs – in the selection of HCs); HC support structures in the field; and HCs' role in new funding mechanisms. The Terms of Reference of HCs will also be revised as the current ones are outdated, excessively lengthy and lack any sense of priorities.

The interface between the HC and RC systems is critical, given that the joint RC/HC model has become the preferred option. Yet the role played by the humanitarian community in RC selection, induction, training, appraisal and broader systemic issues is not commensurate to its stake in the system. We will therefore need to step up our engagement in RC system processes.

To help HCs identify and focus on priorities, a 'compact' will be developed between John Holmes (Emergency Relief Coordinator, ERC) and each HC. This sort of personal contract will also provide a documented basis for mutual accountability: of the HC to the ERC, and of the ERC – and, through him, of OCHA and IASC member agencies – to the HC.

Strengthening the HC system is a long-term endeavour that will take several years to come to fruition. It is the collective responsibility of all IASC member agencies to make it happen. An 'HC Group' has been established under the aegis of the IASC and a workplan drawn up. Implementation has begun.

HCs do not belong to OCHA, or even to the UN: they belong to all humanitarian actors. Let us work together to help them do their job better.

Claire Messina (messinac@un.org) is the Senior Coordinator of OCHA's Humanitarian Coordination System Strengthening Project.

Neglect of the third pillar

by Manisha Thomas

The UN-led humanitarian reform is described as having three pillars: clusters, financing and the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) system. Unfortunately the HC pillar has been given the least attention – despite the central role of the HC in humanitarian response – and only recently received dedicated support from OCHA for a longer-term strategy.

Two key components of the HC pillar of reform – the HC pool and improving the appointment process of HCs – need to be moved forward by the UN, and particularly by OCHA under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). This is vital if this pillar is to prove its value, particularly to the NGO community.

The managers of the pool of HCs identified a number of pre-approved UN and non-UN staff who would be ready for deployment in case of a humanitarian crisis. Several NGO candidates were approved for the HC pool, with most preferring to serve as dedicated HCs, not as both Resident Coordinators (RCs) and HCs, so as to focus on humanitarian action. The HC function is, after all, meant to apply to the broader humanitarian community, while the RC function is a UN one.

It is unfortunate that to date only one non-UN person has come through the pool to be deployed as an HC – to Uganda in early 2007. Due to a number of complicating factors, the posting eventually had to be withdrawn. The Uganda experience should not, however, be used as the litmus test for deploying non-UN HCs from the pool. That situation was unique and the lessons identified should be put to use in another non-UN deployment from the pool. Right now, however, the formula of combining the RC and HC functions in one person continues to be the UN's modus operandi, with the result that some NGOs are questioning whether the UN even wants non-UN candidates to become stand-alone HCs.

Having a separate HC, who is not also the RC, would allow for more dedicated leadership of the humanitarian response. When a

person has too many hats to wear, there is a risk that they will have insufficient time to lead efficient and inclusive coordination mechanisms to achieve an effective humanitarian response. There are, of course, examples constantly cited of HCs who wear several hats and can still lead effective humanitarian responses. Two have contributed articles to this issue of FMR.[1] The cases of these exemplary RCs/HCs are, however, few and far between and the ability to juggle their different roles always seems to come down to unique skills and personalities. The support functions provided by OCHA and UNDP for the HC and RC functions, respectively, are also essential in allowing good candidates to be able to better perform their jobs.

The appointment process of HCs – and the way in which more of the exemplary HCs can be identified (whether for a dedicated HC or combined RC/HC position) – continues to be shrouded in mystery. One of the criticisms from the NGO community for years has been that too often RCs, with little (or no) humanitarian experience, are also appointed as HCs. Certain leadership qualities may be shared between the RC and HC functions but in a humanitarian response understanding the basics of humanitarian action is essential. The UN agencies negotiate over who can be put forward as HCs for each country before the question ever reaches the Inter-Agency Standing Committee which is supposed to be consulted by the ERC for HC appointments. The ERC continues to propose HC candidates already agreed by the UN, with the hope that the non-UN representatives will not object to the person – even if s/he has limited humanitarian experience. When

objections are noted, the follow-up by the UN has been minimal.

Until the UN makes the process by which HCs are proposed and appointed more transparent – including with clear criteria measuring the person's ability to lead a humanitarian response in an inclusive manner – and more responsive to non-UN concerns, there will continue to be questions around the HC system.

One other area where more work needs to be done is in terms of the accountability of HCs. A first step is being taken with the proposed 'compacts' between the ERC and HCs. This agreement, of sorts, should be based on discussions with various humanitarian actors (including national and international NGOs in the country), which would then help the HC to identify priorities and the support required of the ERC and OCHA. The compact would provide a means of mutual accountability between the HC and the ERC. How that accountability will extend to the broader humanitarian community needs to be clarified.

HCs play too important a role in the reform process and the overall humanitarian response for this pillar of reform not to be put centre stage. If the HC function is truly meant to apply to the broader humanitarian community, then the UN needs to ensure that the HC pool is used for non-UN deployments and that the processes around the HC system are more transparent and inclusive of the non-UN humanitarian community. Otherwise, there is the risk that this pillar of reform will continue to exist more in name than in reality.

Manisha Thomas (manisha@icva.ch) is the Policy Officer for the Geneva-based International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA www.icva.ch). This article is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily reflect the views of ICVA members. Further information about the HC system is at www.icva.ch/doc00001572.html

1. See articles by Ross Mountain and Toby Lanzer.

Humanitarian reform: a view from CAR

by Toby Lanzer

As the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Central African Republic (CAR), it is my job to ensure that the UN and humanitarian organisations work together to meet needs as efficiently as we can.

The intensity of the debate around humanitarian reform is heartening. It is good to know that the challenges that we face in the field on a daily basis – such as scarce or belated funding and gaps in the humanitarian response and coordination – are being discussed at headquarters and in capitals around the world. The reform process can harmonise approaches to humanitarian action, tighten relations between headquarters and the field and build on best practice. We need to embrace the reform process and give it all we have got.

In this article, I would like to explain how we are putting in place the main elements of humanitarian reform in CAR – funding, partnerships, coordination and strengthened leadership – and lessons that might be learned from the experience so far.

Funding

Money may or may not 'make the world go round' but humanitarian response is impossible without it. This has been noted often, and was an integral part of the deliberations giving birth to Good Humanitarian Donorship[1], and shortly thereafter to the overhaul and conversion of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)[2] from a revolving (loan) to a response (grant-making) fund. In CAR the CERF has helped boost overall humanitarian funding by nearly 17% in 2006-07 and has been a catalyst for rapid response.

In CAR we became aware very quickly that NGOs are disadvantaged by not being able to apply to the CERF. But they can benefit. In CAR's capital, Bangui, UNDP applied for funding on behalf of NGOs and managed its receipt and disbursal. NGOs have told me that the process is working. At the same time, we have created a specific fund, known as the Emergency Response Fund or ERF, designed to cover NGO start-up costs and to cover gaps in response. Four donors have pooled $3.5 million into the ERF, which can disburse up to $250,000 in a matter of days, based on a one-page project proposal. CERF and ERF proposals are vetted by clusters before being submitted to the Humanitarian Coordinator for approval. As such, projects have the

A displaced girl in a temporary school near Paoua, CAR, opened by UNICEF and COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale) in the bush as families are too afraid to send their children back to their home villages, August 2007.

UNHCR/Nicolas Rost

The leader of a small group of IDPs near Paoua, in the north of CAR, August 2007

UNHCR/Nicolas Rost

dual role of meeting critical needs and reinforcing coordination.

The CERF and ERF have been crucial to our work. Without them we would not have been able to deliver the food aid needed to see the displaced people in CAR through the 'hunger gap' between harvests. We would also not have been able to deliver seeds and tools to protect the million people who have been affected by the conflict in CAR from missing another harvest. With this funding we have been enabled to undertake a comprehensive study of the situation and needs of the displaced population, which will dramatically improve our understanding and analysis of the emergency at hand.

Partnerships

Despite the different mandates and cultures of humanitarian organisations, and there are many,

we are bound by our common, stated purpose: to provide succour to people struck by violence or natural disasters, based on the well-founded principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. In essence, we all share a common responsibility to do what we profess. Whether we work for Médecins Sans Frontières, the International Committee of the Red Cross or a UN agency, the universal and timeless principles espoused by international humanitarian law, and our responsibility to abide by them, bind us. Of course there are difficulties in working together; different organisational cultures, sources of funding and bureaucratic politics often hamper the extent to which organisations collaborate. Yet, it really should be possible to work together while respecting our diverse approaches to our task. In CAR, we have established a common forum for discussing the political and

security context, assessing people's needs, elaborating sector priorities and defining a strategy to meet them. The forum, which we call the Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team (HDPT),[3] is informal and based on equality and mutual respect. Our weekly meetings have clear agendas, presentations by different organisations, clear outputs and, perhaps best of all, never last longer than an hour. And for anyone who does not wish to raise an issue or who cannot make the meeting, my door is open for bilateral meetings.

Clusters should be a rather straightforward issue but have suffered from too much discussion and too many reports. I am concerned that words are overtaking action. The Cluster Approach, just like the sector approach that preceded it in the field, is about much more than 'information sharing'. That is just

the start for the goal is a predictable and accountable humanitarian response in all sectors and, on an inter-cluster basis, to make sure that all needs are addressed. What is so hard about that? Regular and well-organised interaction between the key organisations working in the same areas of humanitarian response is possible provided we can address recurring obstacles – competition, egos and poorly-run meetings.

Before rolling out the Cluster Approach in CAR, we took time to review precisely what we expect from cluster leads and cluster participants. More work on this remains, and we review progress regularly. The essence, however, is clear: making sure that people in need get the right protection and assistance, on time. For cluster leads, the notion of 'provider of last resort' can be daunting, especially in an environment like CAR where funding remains relatively scarce and insecurity hampers access. A key challenge for me as HC is to give cluster leads the support they may need to assume their tasks.

Leadership

Raising the quality of Humanitarian Coordinators is vital to improved coordination. The IASC is creating a pool of qualified and pre-approved Humanitarian Coordinators to be deployed in the event of a breaking emergency or, if present in a country already, be appointed without delay.[4] Just before being appointed the UN Resident Coordinator in CAR in June 2006, I was included in the pool of Humanitarian Coordinators. The pool had not yet been used and it was after my arrival in CAR that I was asked to become Humanitarian Coordinator. In the case of CAR, being Resident Coordinator (for development) and Humanitarian Coordinator makes perfect sense for several reasons. First, non-UN entities (whether the government, donors, the Red Cross or NGOs) have a one-stop shop when looking for the 'head of the UN agencies'. Second, in this particular setting the link between humanitarian action and development is strong. Working to meet urgent needs in a deteriorating humanitarian situation, without losing sight of the big development picture, is a central feature of the job. Ensuring both must surely be less complicated if the same person is in charge of each

aspect. If the RC is in charge of UN staff safety and security, it makes sense being the HC as it is precisely the staff engaged in humanitarian action that are most at risk.

There can be problems in being RC and HC. First and foremost, the inherent tension between UN development work where 'government comes first' on the one hand, and humanitarian action which is 'people-based' on the other. In the case of CAR, this tension does not pose a major challenge. Close working relations and much advocacy have helped address the issue. Second, humanitarian coordination is not something that can be done 'on the side' of other tasks. It is a full-time job. This means, of course, that an RC-HC has two full-time jobs. (Or, in my case, three for I am also the UNDP Resident Representative.)

HCs need direct support, which to some extent they get from OCHA. RCs are supported by the UN Development Group (UNDG)[5]. In cases where an RC becomes HC, and is also the UNDP Resident Representative, that responsibility really needs to be handed over to a UNDP country director. It is not only a question of how many jobs one man or woman can do simultaneously but also a question of neutrality. A coordinator, I believe, should not manage an agency which implements programmes, and which therefore has vested interests, on a day-to-day basis. Strong UNDG support for the RC and OCHA support for the HC are indispensable. If that support is given, I am convinced that we will see more and more HCs that make a real difference to the efficiency of humanitarian operations. And, eventually, in some settings we could consider putting aside the 'resident' and 'humanitarian' distinction, and have the 'coordinator' supported by integrated UNDG-OCHA offices. Such a move would also enhance efficiency.

Local buy-in to reform

Humanitarian reform needs to be implemented in close concert with national authorities. This is particularly true in countries like CAR where humanitarian needs are so closely inter-twined with underdevelopment. Maintaining a strong link with the national counterpart is important for two

reasons. First, to ensure that we do not forget that it is essentially the government's responsibility to protect and serve its citizens, and that humanitarian action is short-term help. Second, because humanitarian action should be linked with recovery efforts, which, in CAR's case, will inevitably feed into the government's plans for the long-term development of the country. As one step towards achieving this aim, we are integrating information management on humanitarian and development issues. Working from the Ministry of Planning, the information management team will create a single system for tracking both development cooperation and humanitarian action. This is not a 'sell-out' but a 'buy-in' and it is our hope that this will contribute to the sustainability of the humanitarian work we do in CAR. As the proud wearer of both the Resident Coordinator and the Humanitarian Coordinator hats, ensuring such continuity is high on my agenda.

I am very pleased to see how NGOs, the Red Cross, UN agencies, donors and the government have welcomed humanitarian reform. None of us has been charmed by reform for reform's sake but, while respecting the independence and mandates of each institution, we are working together, better. This is bound to help the most important people in the equation. We must not allow the reform process to become another bureaucratic layer, with pointless meetings or added layers of paperwork. Heavy reporting mechanisms and inflexible implementation of initiatives must be shunned if humanitarian reform is to catch on and stick. Most of this hinges on aid agencies, and in CAR we're making progress. However, money is crucial. This remains a hurdle for us here, and we count on donors to help us overcome it.

Toby Lanzer (toby.lanzer@undp.org) is the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Central African Republic, and a former fellow at the Refugee Studies Centre. This article is written in a personal capacity.

1. www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org
2. http://cerf.un.org
3. www.hdptcar.net
4. See article by Claire Messina on page 23
5. www.undg.org

Humanitarian reform: saving and protecting lives in DRC

by Ross Mountain

The development of synergies between different peace-keeping, humanitarian and recovery actors can improve the impact and effectiveness of efforts to assist the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other countries.

A few weeks ago, a fresh outbreak of fighting brought me back to the Congolese Province of North Kivu. This lush area is home to fertile agricultural land, vast reserves of gold and the famed mountain gorillas. It also harbours extremely violent foreign and local rebel groups as well as rival army factions. I first saw North Kivu for myself in January 2002, when the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo sent more than 200,000 residents of the city of Goma running for their lives. I came then on behalf of OCHA to help respond to the needs of the displaced population.

I returned to DRC three years later in January 2005 as Humanitarian Coordinator, amid armed conflict and acute suffering in the same area. Humanitarian actors were committed to supplying water, food and health care to the tens of thousands of women, children and men affected by the fighting. However it was apparent that above all else the population wanted us to address their pivotal need for security. They wanted to be able to sleep at night without the constant fear of being attacked, seeing their girls and women raped, their homes torched, their meagre belongings looted.

The issue of protection can exemplify the potential of UN reform if we get it right. In order to better respond to complex emergencies such as we are confronted with in DRC, efforts are now being made to apply more coherent and coordinated approaches. Through the creation of Integrated Missions, in essence the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (who also serves as UNDP Resident Representative) is linked with the Peacekeeping Mission structure as one of the (usually)

two Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary General (DSRSG). Additional responsibilities exercised by this DSRSG within Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO) missions differ but they usually include civil affairs, child protection, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), human rights, gender, HIV/AIDS and security responsibilities – in addition to being part of the Mission's Senior Management. There is notionally a cost-saving dimension of this quadruple hatting (quintuple if one includes the security function) but, beyond the workload, this combination of roles can permit the development of synergies between different peacekeeping, humanitarian and recovery actors and can considerably improve the impact and effectiveness of our efforts to assist the people of the countries we serve. This very much applies to the protection of civilians.

The most recent Security Council Resolution continuing the mandate of the UN Mission in DRC (MONUC[1]) states that, while acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, "MONUC will have the mandate, within the limits of its capabilities and in its areas of deployment, to assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo in establishing a stable security environment in the country and, to that end, to: (a) ensure the protection of civilians, including humanitarian personnel, under imminent threat of physical violence; (b) contribute to the improvement of the security conditions in which humanitarian assistance is provided, and assist in the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons."[2] Such objectives are of more than passing interest to humanitarians.

Military and humanitarian synergy

In DRC we have managed to exploit the capacities of the different UN actors without confusing their respective roles – to provide support and protection to civilians under physical threat of violence. Thus, humanitarian workers provide relief supplies and services while UN peacekeepers are deployed to provide area security and to deter attacks by armed men, whereas development partners address linked issues such as demobilising combatants, reforming the structures and management of the military, police and justice system, and root causes of poverty.

A few NGO partners, understandably, retain concerns about associating the operations of humanitarian workers with those of the military. In DRC, OCHA remains a clearly autonomous entity. But if our objective is really to spare the populations from violence, the willingness of the UN military to deploy for civilian protection and to expand security parameters is a major asset and – in DRC at least – more than offsets any negative consequences. Ask the population, especially IDPs, who gather around MONUC bases. This is a very practical way of saving lives and discouraging violence.

The relationship between humanitarian actors and the military – including the UN military – is often a difficult one and, yes, tensions have had to be overcome. At the onset a Protection Working Group was established which drew on UN agencies, the UN military and police, and focused on North and South Kivu, two provinces that were and are most affected by continuous strife and insecurity. This was subsequently transformed into the Protection Cluster led by UNHCR with MONUC support. Early results were realised when 4,000 IDPs living in a camp in Walungu (South Kivu province) felt sufficiently reassured to

return to their villages, after regular MONUC military patrols were introduced into their areas of origin. Such area protection was further extended by the MONUC military in both Kivus – including helicopter-borne patrols and the introduction of community alarm schemes.

Subsequently, humanitarian workers in Mitwaba in Northern Katanga asked for a blue helmet presence to discourage continued harassment of the local population by some 3,000 soldiers of a non-integrated brigade of the national army. A small contingent of South African peacekeepers (later replaced by first Uruguayan and then Beninois troops) was sent to the region and immediately the situation improved. This led to the MONUC Force Commander seeking our advice on the deployment of mobile teams in Katanga to further extend protection. These Mobile Operational Bases – an innovation in the DRC – allowed the military to reassure the populations and create access for humanitarians, who could then deliver assistance to the displaced. In Katanga, this combined effort enabled more than 150,000 Congolese (the majority of IDPs in the province) to return home. Thus human suffering was alleviated and money which would have been required to assist the displaced was saved.

This approach led first to the development of country-specific guidelines on military-civil cooperation and subsequently the issuance to the MONUC military of a comprehensive directive on civilian protection by the Force Commander. The first such instruction in any peacekeeping mission, this commitment of the MONUC Force Commander and his team to transform the ideal of protection of civilians into concrete action has impacted on military deployments and operations across the country.

The approach agreed is based on clearly recognised complementary division of labour between the military and humanitarians. Hence, the UN military protects by patrolling areas by air, land or river, establishing safe areas or buffer zones (sometimes through Mobile Operating Bases), escorting convoys, opening corridors and training the armed forces who, in many regions, are the main perpetrators of violence against civilians. Humanitarian organisations contribute by delivering humanitarian assistance, evacuating the wounded, collecting information on violations and addressing the needs of vulnerable people, especially women and children.

At the same time, one must accept the fact that 17,000 peacekeepers spread across a country the size of Western Europe, with a population equivalent to that of the UK, and barely any transport and communications infrastructure, is woefully inadequate. Kosovo alone – roughly as large as Kinshasa province – had over 40,000 NATO troops. With 90% of its troops in the conflict-ridden eastern DRC,

MONUC has made a difference but it cannot be everywhere.

Tweaking the clusters

In installing the cluster system in DRC we felt it needed to be adapted to local requirements. For the Protection Cluster, we therefore decided to go beyond the protection of IDPs, and to expand the focus to protection against violence for all those who are subject to such attacks. Some ten clusters involving UN agencies, NGOs and in some cases local authorities have been created to coordinate humanitarian efforts. In a country the size of DRC requirements and conditions differ between and within provinces – hence the need to establish provincial-level clusters to be able to identify and respond to evolving crises.

A major support for the cluster system in DRC is provided by common funding mechanisms – the Pooled Fund, augmented by the grant facilities of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).[3] The DRC Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP)[4] – first launched in 2006 to replace the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) which was seen by many as a solely UN-driven document – defines the overall framework for humanitarian action. The identification of project priorities within the HAP is the task of the clusters. At the provincial level, the provincial inter-agency committees (CPIAs) are responsible for translating them into provincial packages. Clusters also need to provide guidance and analysis on

MONUC patrol (with Uruguayan soldiers) in a village in Ituri, DRC, 2006.

MONUC/Martine Perret

the technical feasibility of individual projects to achieve the results desired.

Resources are directly linked to funding priorities identified in the HAP and confirmed in real time by the respective clusters. In 2007, some $175 million, approximately half of the total contributed to DRC, has been directly managed by the Humanitarian Coordinator on the advice of a Pooled Fund Board composed of representatives of donors, cluster leads and NGOs with the aim of improving targeting and maximising impact for the Congolese people.

Reform mechanisms arising from the Good Humanitarian Donorship[5] and other initiatives at the global and institutional level have given us new tools to establish strategic plans based on regional priorities and to better target resources through strengthened coordination. Bringing the military and the humanitarians together to provide protection has made a major difference especially to displaced and vulnerable populations in the east of DRC, while the establishment of common funding and clusters mechanisms backed by the Pooled Fund has helped to improve the response to urgent needs.

While progress has been and is being made, the recurring violence, displacement and human suffering continuously remind us that humanitarian assistance is a temporary measure pending a lasting sustainable solution to the country's problems. This involves elections, security sector reform, extension of state authority, proper public income and expenditure management, expanding infrastructure and employment, and improvement of services to the population. In the meantime, improvements in the structure of international and UN coordination mechanisms have allowed us to improve the impact of the assistance available and reach as many of the millions of Congolese in need as resources allow.

Ross Mountain (mountain@un.org) is the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He also serves as Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator for the DRC and UNDP's Resident Representative. This article is written in a personal capacity.

1. www.monuc.org
2. www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9016.doc.htm
3. For further information on these funding mechanisms, see following article by Nicki Bennett.
4. http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?Page=1504
5. www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

Assessing the impact of humanitarian reform in DRC

by Nicki Bennett

As UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in DRC, Ross Mountain, author of the preceding article, has spearheaded introduction of UN reform initiatives. What impacts have they had on the lives of people at risk?

The original version of this article draws on observations from more than 60 meetings and interviews in Kinshasa, North Kivu and Ituri in late 2006 with donors, international and local NGOs, the UN Mission in DRC (MONUC)[1], other UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Responses below also incorporate more recent developments in 2007.

Have people at risk received more aid?

Two new funding mechanisms, the CERF[2] and the Pooled Fund (PF), have drawn more than a hundred million additional dollars into humanitarian activities in DRC. However, there is very little transparency about how much ends up in the hands of beneficiaries and how much is getting stuck in the new layers of bureaucracy created by these funding mechanisms.

DRC was among the first countries to receive CERF funding. Since DRC's 2006 Humanitarian Action Plan had only attracted around 40% of the money it needed, the HC applied for and received two CERF allocations (worth a total of $38 million) aimed at covering gaps in 'under-funded emergencies'. In 2007, a further $48 million of CERF money was allocated. Most major donors – but not the largest, USAID and ECHO – also increased the amount of funding they usually set aside for UN agencies because of the introduction of the PF. Many donors increased their contributions to DRC substantially after the introduction of the PF – but admitted that they had done so more out of a desire to be seen to be supporting the new funding mechanism rather than as a result of any immediate evidence of its utility.

Most operational actors we interviewed had not seen any significant increases in their annual budgets or programmes. Neither the CERF nor the Pooled Fund are able to channel money directly to NGOs. Funding must flow through a UN participating agency with a minimum administration fee of 5%. Some UN agencies charge substantially more. Many NGOs feel more lives could have been saved and more assistance could have been provided if donors directed these additional resources straight to implementing NGOs. Some have suggested that the five PF donors must therefore explore reforms to the current PF structure to make disbursements more effective and less UN-centric.

Are the new mechanisms flexible and responsive?

Since the PF and the CERF do not earmark any of their funds for

specific sectors or geographical areas, they can respond to needs in a much more flexible way than bilateral donors. However, both mechanisms were criticised for their inability to look beyond short-term horizons and offer predictable long-term funding suited to the protracted nature of the DRC crisis.

Since the October 2006 DRC elections, donors have united behind a common development framework. Seventeen donors, 15 UN agencies and the World Bank joined forces in August 2007 to produce a Country Assistance Framework (CAF)[3] linked to the country's first fully-fledged Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).[4] Unfortunately, no obvious linkages have been made between humanitarian planning and funding mechanisms and the CAF. There is little space for international or national civil society to engage with this framework or influence development priorities.

IRIN/Jane Some

Several respondents feel that vulnerable Congolese are suffering from donor prioritisation of short-term interventions. One INGO gave the example of being able to easily access PF or CERF money for a three-month cholera response in Goma but having few opportunities to access funding for a more substantial public health programme that might address the reality that the collapse of state health services has made cholera an annual occurrence in Goma. Beneficiaries in Ituri were concerned that NGOs had only received funding to support them for the first three months of displacement and that ongoing assistance to enable sustainable return to their villages was uncertain. Some respondents felt that traditional bilateral donor contracts allowed more flexibility to deliver appropriate responses.

Has aid been awarded impartially?

Donor involvement in funding allocations has decreased as donors have begun to relinquish some of their decision-making responsibilities

to the UN HC. The HC is thus the single most powerful figure in the country's humanitarian community, holding formal responsibility for all funding decisions related to the PF and CERF allocations. He is also the figurehead of the cluster system.

UN agencies in DRC operate within the framework of an Integrated Mission, which means that the HC's ability to award aid in an impartial manner can be seriously threatened by the mission's broader military, political or development mandates. While there was near unanimity among respondents that Ross Mountain, the current HC, has taken care not to politicise humanitarian decision making, there is, nevertheless, serious concern about an individual with other (non-humanitarian) mandates holding such enormous power over the allocation of humanitarian aid.

Ross Mountain has managed to build trust and reduce humanitarians' fears of partiality by involving the cluster system in all planning

and funding processes and by decentralising a large part of his responsibility to humanitarian actors in the field. Many would like this decentralisation to be formally acknowledged in the funding mechanisms' terms of reference in order to ensure that future HCs do not challenge its principles.

Has aid become more appropriate and timely?

Despite the fact that the pilot initiatives are all underpinned by an explicit desire to respond more appropriately to the needs of people at risk, very little work has been done in DRC to more comprehensively assess and analyse these needs. Strategic documents and UN planning materials rarely dedicate more than a few sentences to the issue. The 2006 Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP)[5], a 70-page document, mentions needs assessment in a mere three lines. With a few exceptions NGOs have failed to systematically share assessments and donors have not enabled sufficient needs assessments.

NGO staff member verifies details of a group of IDPs waiting to receive food aid at Cagala, Walungu Territory, South Kivu Province, DRC, July 2007.

While some have argued that a decentralised decision-making system should automatically result in a more appropriate and needs-based response, others argue that external and genuinely independent decision makers are needed to protect the system from the conflict of interest that exists in allowing cluster members to influence their own sources of income.

There is a general feeling that it is still too early to know whether or not the Cluster Approach and the new funding mechanisms have allowed for a more appropriate allocation of aid. Despite the well-known challenges that the Cluster Approach has encountered in DRC and in other countries – among them lack of qualified cluster leads and limited participation by international and local NGOs and government authorities – respondents were able to provide a number of example of how the Cluster Approach has allowed them to better harmonise standards, engage in advocacy and hold others more accountable for providing assistance.

A small number of actors continue to reject the general design and principles of the Cluster Approach entirely, perceiving that UN actors are aggressively imposing their decisions on other humanitarians without consultations. NGOs question the added value of UN agencies who assume an automatic role of 'intermediary' between donors and implementing actors, arguing that in the majority of projects this step does not improve overall response and simply wastes money. Furthermore, some NGOs feel that UN agencies do not sufficiently appreciate the need to improve effectiveness and performance of the UN agencies in projects where their role as an intermediary does add value. While NGOs welcomed in principle the mid-2007 UN-led audit of their response capacities, many expressed incredulity that UN agencies saw no need to audit their own response capacity, thereby missing the point of the UN-led reform and an important opportunity to improve the overall provision of humanitarian assistance.

Respondents unanimously agreed that inter-agency coordination has improved and humanitarians are now able to more quickly identify needs. Some felt that priority interventions were now discussed and agreed more quickly than they would have been without the cluster system, while others maintained that more meetings did not always translate into quicker response. A health specialist in North Kivu reported how after a malaria outbreak Médecins sans Frontières decided to proceed unilaterally and distributed mosquito nets in some of the affected areas "while the health cluster's still sitting around the table discussing the issues a few months later."

Since the disbursement of PF and CERF funds (which in DRC primarily aim to fill gaps of the 'underfunded emergency' type rather than a rapid response) can still take up to six months from the time of needs identification until the money arrives in the bank of the implementing agency, most actors identified the UNICEF/OCHA-managed Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) as a tool that was more appropriate to delivering assistance within a shorter timeframe, taking only a few days.

Conclusions

Donors, UN agencies and NGOs alike still find it hard to identify what concrete impact the introduction of the reform mechanisms have had on improving the situation for people at risk. The current response to renewed insecurity and massive displacement in North Kivu province demonstrates that there are still challenges to coordination, response speed and overall coverage. There is a major question as to whether the trend towards multilateral funding mechanisms is affecting the independence of operational NGOs and hence their ability to effectively represent the needs of beneficiaries. It is clear that bilateral funding is decreasing in DRC in proportion to multilateral funding. Several NGOs report an increased reliance on UN agencies for funding and feel that the implications of this could have a negative impact on their response.

The question that should underpin the current assessments of reform mechanisms is what impact the processes are having on the lives of the millions of Congolese at risk. The DRC experience has not yet produced compelling evidence of an impact on beneficiaries but it does acknowledge that the tools hold potential – if and when they address current weaknesses identified from field-based experience.

Nicki Bennett (nbennett@oxfam.org.uk) is Humanitarian Policy Adviser for Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk). The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Oxfam International. A fuller, earlier version is online at: www.humanitarianreform.org/humanitarianreform/Portals/1/H%20Coordinators/HC%20retreat/Day%201/OXFAM%20DRC%20discussion%20paper.doc

1. www.monuc.org
2. http://cerf.un.org
3. www.undg.org/docs/7689/UNDAF%20Final%20(9%20%20August).doc
4. www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2007/cr07330.pdf
5. http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?Page=1350

View from the field

Local NGO PPSSP is actively involved in several of the clusters. Executive Director Mwakamubaya Nasekwa says the Cluster Approach is a useful platform for collaboration. They receive no funding from the CERF and put this down to a lack of information of the application process. However, PPSSP does receive funding from the pooled fund (Common Humanitarian Fund), worth $100,000, and is expecting to receive a further $300,000 – representing a significant year-on-year increase in the agency's budget. Despite this, Mr Nasekwa has serious concerns over future investment which, he feels, currently depends on the humanitarian coordination structure set up by the UN, whose long-term presence in DRC is by no means assured. He suggests that in the future these funding mechanisms should be delegated to a permanent organisation on the ground, which will continue financing emergency action but will also need to develop links with organisations specialising in long-term development. *Mwakamubaya Nasekwa (ppsspcic@yahoo.fr) is Executive Director, PPSSP (Programme for the Promotion of Primary Health Care), Beni, DRC.*

Interviewed by Laure Ayosso (laure.ayosso@gmail.com), Tutor in French and Language Advisor at the Language Centre, Oxford University.

The state of humanitarian funding

by Peter Walker and Kevin Pepper

Is the pot of humanitarian finance able to meet present and projected global humanitarian needs? Does money follow need? Do existing financing mechanisms promote quality, context-specific, timely and evidence-based aid? Is funding going to the right people in the right places in the most efficient way?

For decades an increasing percentage of official development assistance (ODA) has been spent on humanitarian assistance: from around 3% in the 1970s to between 10% and 14% today. In 2005, an estimated $18 billion was raised by the international community for humanitarian assistance. Data suggests that although humanitarian assistance is still increasing it is doing so at a slower rate. If the beginning of humanitarian reforms was in 2004, humanitarian aid is seen to have grown at a much higher average annual rate during the pre-reform period of 2000-03 (55% growth rate) than it did in the post-reform years of 2004-06 (11% growth rate).

Humanitarian assistance is highly concentrated. In 2004, six countries received an estimated half of humanitarian assistance: Iraq (16%), Sudan (11%), Palestine (8%), Ethiopia (6%), Afghanistan (6%) and DRC (4%). The remaining 53% of humanitarian assistance was shared among 148 countries. These patterns of concentration cannot be explained by relative humanitarian need alone. The system clearly has a long way to go before it approaches impartiality, both in terms of how donors allocate their funding and where and how agencies choose to operate.

Food aid commands the biggest share of humanitarian assistance, a great deal of it in the form of tied food aid. The overall value of humanitarian aid falls significantly if tied food aid is taken out. Of Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) appeals between 2000 and 2005,

$8.6 billion (55%) were allocated within the food sector – larger than all of the other sectors combined.

DAC – no longer the only donor club

A host of new donors have added their weight to the traditional pool of wealthy, industrialised countries linked to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). To get the whole picture of humanitarian funding it is necessary to include funds from governments that are not members of the OECD, funds channelled through military forces for humanitarian-related activities, additional diaspora remittances responding to crises, funds raised from the public by NGOs, corporate and foundation contributions and the contribution of affected states and their municipalities. Most of this data is either not collected or not collated.

'Non-traditional,' 'non-DAC' or 'emerging' humanitarian donors are starting to support the joint mechanisms and codes that have recently characterised the traditional humanitarian financing system. During the Asian tsunami and in Lebanon after the Israeli offensive new donors made significant contributions toward humanitarian efforts. Non-DAC donors how represent up to 12% of official humanitarian financing. They focus on humanitarian engagement in neighbouring countries, and maintain a strong preference for bilateral aid, including the Red Cross/Crescent, over multilateral mechanisms.

The largest seven or eight transnational NGOs deliver the lion's share of emergency assistance and in 2004 NGOs were responsible for as much as 45% of all humanitarian assistance. In 2005 approximately one-third of the $8.4 billion state-donor funding ended up flowing to NGOs, directly or via UN agencies. In addition, NGOs received somewhere between $2 and $5 billion in private donations, suggesting that between 48% and 58% of all known humanitarian funding flowed through NGOs.

Foreign military involvement in emergency relief is growing. As an example, Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funding for Iraq and Afghanistan[1] – deployed in the hope of increasing the flow of intelligence to the US military – is set to reach $456 million in 2007. Between 2002 and 2005 USAID's share of US ODA decreased from 50% to 39%, and the Department of Defense's increased from 6% to 22%. As standing armies adjust to fight today's wars, their use of 'hearts and minds' strategies is more likely to grow than shrink. Humanitarian agencies need to confront this reality.

Transaction costs

Funding flows along a chain of varying length with varying percentages of the total being retained at each stage. It is astonishingly difficult to get accurate figures from agencies on these transaction costs. A million dollar grant from a donor may pass to a UN agency, to an international NGO, to a local partner and finally to the beneficiaries, with each actor along the chain taking out a 10% overhead. When the beneficiaries get only $729,000, can one say that the $271,000 in accumulated transaction cost has been money well spent?

The multilayered nature of the humanitarian system makes it extraordinarily difficult to gauge

An American C-130 airdrops relief supplies including plastic sheets, blankets and mosquito nets to the Dadaab camps, Kenya.

UNHCR/B Bannon

overall efficiency, and raises a fundamental question. In a complex system owned by multiple parties, who has final accountability for safeguarding overall standards of efficiency and effectiveness? Concerns for sovereignty, mandate protection, independence and inclusiveness seem to cause donors and agencies to shy away from tackling system-side issues. The donor, UN and NGO reforms of the past decade may have improved individual components of the system but its overall architecture is still inherently inefficient.

Financial managers in the field point to the practical accounting and regulation hindrances which make it difficult to move funds between UN agencies, to administer one rather than multiple auditing systems or to have common standards for financial reporting. In many instances, the barriers to effective reform are administrative rather than conceptual or political.

Recent reforms

Around 10% of official humanitarian aid is now delivered by new mechanisms. Their roll-out has illustrated the complications, and the gains made, in improving the quality of the overall system.

- The Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF)[2] was expanded tenfold in 2005 to provide grant funding, empower UN agencies to respond more rapidly to emergencies and address under-funded crises. The CERF has committed more than $426 million for more than 510 projects in 44 countries. The CERF could be a mechanism for funding forgotten emergencies and crises too small or insignificant to hit the radar screens of bilateral donors and larger NGOs. Yet, so long as only 3% of funds flow through the CERF, its impact will be limited.

- The Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) – piloted in Sudan[3] and DRC in 2006 – is designed

to address a critical flaw in the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). The CHFs were set up to quickly and flexibly provide funds against the CAP and allow the UN Humanitarian Cooordinator to determine resource allocation, working closely with cluster/sectoral leads.

- OCHA-managed Emergency Response Funds (ERFs)[4] seek to offer rapidly available small grants (up to $130,000) to in-country organisations (both NGOs and UN agencies). ERFs have created a more favourable relationship between participating UN agencies and NGOs. ERF advisory boards comprise both UN and NGO representatives. However, disbursement delays have caused frustrations.

Funding according to identified need and in proportion to priority needs is a core principle of humanitarianism, and at the top of the Good Humanitarian Donorship[5] commitments list. Donors, recipient agencies, beneficiaries and humanitarian personnel have flagged a number of key concerns regarding the state of humanitarian needs assessment. There is a critical dearth of hard data, particularly in the early stages of rapid onset disasters, to support dynamic needs assessment. Lack of data creates a self-defeating cycle where needs assessments are under-resourced by donors, agencies are therefore unable to invest in them and they lose visibility for donors. Donors frequently make decisions without consulting each other, and collective efforts to pool funding and make joint decisions regarding needs assessment are viewed as inefficient and inimical to rapid service delivery.

The evidence is not conclusive as to whether new UN financing reform mechanisms will effectively pool funding in an impartial and rapid manner and direct them into priority needs. There is a concern that these new instruments could introduce another layer of bureaucracy and transaction costs without resulting in a clear improvement in strategic needs assessment.

Once again, this takes us back to that fundamental question of agreeing the legitimate response

of the international community to a humanitarian crisis: a band-aid on the symptoms or redress for the causes of those symptoms coupled with a prescription for reform? These are not just issues of definition but intensely political ones and it is by no means clear that the 'humanitarian community' can or should come to a consensus on the answers. With the proliferation of military, commercial, state and humanitarian interests in crisis management this conundrum is growing, rather than decreasing, in importance.

Critical questions

Below are what we believe to be the more critical questions to ask about the humanitarian funding system. For each question we provide what we think the answer is today plus a brief analysis – but not the way forward.

Question 1: Is global humanitarian funding commensurate with global humanitarian needs and do we have an effective methodology for determining humanitarian needs in any one crisis?

Answer: Not really.
In reality, we have no idea what global humanitarian needs are. There are just not enough trained and skilled people in the right places to collect and analyse data. We only know what we can measure, so crises that are unnoticed or contained within a nation state go unrecorded. In addition, what we do measure, we do in a very imprecise way. Our definitions of what constitutes need are based on models where crises are unexpected, time-limited phenomena. An increasing number of crises are open-ended and recurrent, involve previously marginalised communities and constitute a new, if unacceptable, normality. The impact of climate change, migration patterns and the proliferation of small arms will only add to this load. In addition, crises often left off the 'humanitarian table' – most notably Israel/Palestine and Iraq – have not yet been fully addressed by the humanitarian community.

Question 2: Is there enough humanitarian funding available?

Answer: Probably not.
Funding from the DAC donors is well-tracked, as is funding through the UN system. Funding from private donations and foundations into

NGOs (large and small) is poorly tracked outside of each individual agency. Diaspora funding to affected communities and funding from local NGOs and governments of conflict/disaster-affected nations are largely unknown. We may not know how much funding is really available but we do know that in many crises there is not yet enough to allow agencies to reach even the minimum agreed standards.

Question 3: How well do we address the volatility of humanitarian aid flows?

Answer: Sporadically.
We can predict a great deal of the humanitarian load but, unfortunately, most funding is still reactive. As disasters happen, appeals are written and funds allocated. There are exceptions. The US State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration makes large annual largely un-earmarked contributions to ICRC's and UNHCR's relief work. Many other donors also make un-earmarked allocations. NGOs are concerned, however, that the reform mechanisms – CERF, Common Funds and ERFs – put them at a greater distance from the funding source, adding another layer of decision making and unpredictability.

Question 4: Is humanitarian funding timely?

Answer: No.
The reactive nature of funding systems combined with the increased attention paid to financial accountability ensures that funds flow more slowly through the system then we would like. Funding can take up to 40 days to be released.

Question 5: Is humanitarian funding flexible enough?

Answer: No.
The push for greater accountability has resulted in substantial funding being allocated against RFPs (requests for proposals) and in agencies having to work against detailed line item budgets which form part of their contractual agreement with donors. There is some evidence that leading donors are starting to back away from this heavy management approach. The reality is that humanitarian operations, like military campaigns,

deviate from their plans from the day they start. Agencies report that their staff feel constrained to programme along the grant-defined deliverables even if these – on implementation – prove inappropriate.

Question 6: Do funding mechanisms sufficiently serve the differing needs of the various humanitarian assistance agencies?

Answer: Unsure.
Agencies as diverse as ICRC, UNICEF and CARE work to different objectives, timetables and modus operandi. In the search for funding reform and consolidation, donors need to ensure that they retain the ability to fund agencies according to their principles and specific strengths.

Question 7: Are funding mechanisms sufficiently transparent and accountable to their stakeholders, including beneficiary groups and their nation states?

Answer: Getting better.
OCHA's Financial Tracking System has greatly increased the transparency of aid flows. Transparency of decision making involving what is essentially a 'public good' (global humanitarian funding) is less well-developed, although the growing commitment to beneficiary accountability is a welcome move.

We hope that FMR readers will take the next step and suggest practical actions to move forward on each of these issues.

Peter Walker (Peter.Walker@tufts. edu) is the director of the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (http://fic.tufts.edu). Kevin Pepper (kpepper@hq.mercycorps.org) is Senior Program Officer, Mercy Corps, Portland, USA. This article is drawn from a background paper for a meeting of the Good Humanitarian Donorship and Inter-Agency Standing Committee in July 2007: http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/ GHD-IASCFINALPAPER.pdf

1. www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/jfq_pubs/0937.pdf

2. http://ochaonline.un.org/FundingFinance/CERF/tabid/1109/Default.aspx

3. www.unsudanig.org/workplan/chf

4.www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org/emergency%20response%20funds%20final%20review%20report%20Jan%202007.pdf

5. www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

Worlds apart? Muslim donors and international humanitarianism

by Mohammed R Kroessin

The contribution of the Muslim World to relief and development is underestimated.

The principles of charitable giving and compassion enshrined in Islamic teaching through the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad still carry tremendous weight. The redistribution of wealth in the form of charitable giving is an obligation on every believer. The Islamic-based relief and development sector has a 1,400-year-old tradition of wealth redistribution in the form of *zakat* (obligatory charity), *sadaqah* (voluntary charity) and *waqf* (public endowment) that continues to the present day. In many countries state agencies collect *zakat* as part of the public taxation system and numerous NGOs thrive in the Muslim world. According to Saudi government figures, its aid to the developing world, both through unilateral and bilateral funds, places it among the largest donors in the world. With aid levels at $4 billion a year, Saudi Arabia is the second-largest donor after the USA.

However this aid flow is predominantly to the Muslim world, organised through the Jeddah-based Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)[1] and its Islamic Development Bank[2], rather than through the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).[3] In the West this goes largely unrecognised, because of a virtual parallel system in which Islamic donor agencies operate. Despite the amount of aid they provide, the oil-rich countries of the Gulf are not members of the OECD. Islamic donors lack representation and channels of communication to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), the UN-convened forum which is the primary mechanism for global coordination of humanitarian assistance. As a result, public opinion regards Western and Muslim commitments to humanitarianism as worlds apart. The parallel nature of the aid structures in the West and the Muslim world has created a system that does not serve the best interests of those affected by disasters, refugees and IDPs (most of whom are Muslim) or those plagued by poverty.

Concerns about an apparent Western monopoly of humanitarianism have been further compounded in the aftermath of 9/11 as civil society organisations in the Muslim world and to a lesser extent also in the West have been exposed to unprecedented levels of scrutiny, hampering their work and ultimately affecting their beneficiaries.[4]

In order to tackle some of the misconceptions about Muslim donor agencies a number of initiatives have been launched. The Humanitarian Forum[5] was initiated by the British charity Islamic Relief in June 2004 to help foster partnerships and facilitate closer cooperation between donors and NGOs in the West and in the Muslim-majority world. By consulting a wide spectrum of humanitarian stakeholders, an eclectic mix of international non-governmental and governmental agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement has been brought together to help bridge the perceived gap between the West and the Muslim worlds.[6]

The Forum supports NGOs in the Muslim world with assistance in capacity building, advocacy for a legal framework for greater transparency, promotion of humanitarian principles and standards and improving communication and cooperation. As a first step, the Forum has set up Executive Committees in partnership with governments and civil society in Yemen, Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Kuwait. The cooperation of governmental aid agencies from the West and the Muslim world is a first for the international humanitarian community, which has thus far been separated along the OECD-OIC dividing line.

More needs to be done to bridge the real and imagined gap between the West and non-traditional donors. Questions need to be asked as to why we have a parallel international aid system. Fears about the politicisation of aid or proselytising need to be addressed and the debate about universal humanitarian values ought to be renewed. The Humanitarian Forum is a step in the right direction but more must be done to ensure all forms of official development assistance are recognised and coordinated. We need a broader humanitarian reform process than the one currently being discussed in order to help forge a more honest and open partnership between the West and the Muslim world.

Mohammed R Kroessin (mohammed. kroessin@islamic-relief.org.uk) works with Islamic Relief's Policy and Research Unit (www.islamic-relief.com) and is a Research Associate to the Religions and Development Research Programme (www.rad.bham.ac.uk) at the University of Birmingham.

1. www.oic-oci.org

2. www.isdb.org

3. www.oecd.org/dac

4. See Kroessin, R 'Islamic charities and the 'War on Terror': dispelling the myths', Humanitarian Practice Network www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2890

5. www.humanitarianforum.org

6. Current members include: British Red Cross; UK Charity Commission; UK Department for International Development (DFID); International Islamic Charitable Organization (Kuwait); ICRC; IFRC; IHH (Turkey); Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation; EMDAD; Mercy Corps; Muhamadiyyah Foundation (Indonesia); National Rural Support Programme, Pakistan; Near East Foundation; Oxfam GB; Qatar Charity; Qatar Red Crescent Society; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; and World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

Cluster approach – a vital operational tool

by Allan Jury and Giammichele De Maio

Many of the problems encountered in cluster implementation in the field derive from a misunderstanding of the key operational nature of clusters.

The true value of clusters lies in their ability to boost operational capacity and effectiveness, rather than in their procedural aspects. Misunderstanding about this fundamental nature of clusters has led in some cases to a proliferation of meetings, overemphasis on funding issues, unnecessary clusters at country level, involvement of non-operational actors and additional bureaucratic layers. This is not what the Cluster Approach should be about.

At the global level, the Cluster Approach aims to strengthen system-wide preparedness and coordination of technical capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies by ensuring that there is predictable leadership and accountability in all main sectors. At country level the aim is to strengthen humanitarian operational response by demanding high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership in all areas of activity.

The Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on UN system-wide coherence on development, humanitarian assistance and the environment issued its final report – 'Delivering as One'[1] – in November 2006. The panel included many senior government figures, including Josette Sheeran who subsequently took office as the eleventh Executive Director of WFP in April 2007. The HLP has largely endorsed the direction of ongoing UN humanitarian reforms, reinforcing the will of all players to proceed with their implementation, both at global and country levels. All major emergencies since then have seen the international response organised following the Cluster Approach.

The IASC has repeatedly urged flexibility when applying the Cluster Approach. It should not necessarily amount to an overturn of existing structures. The Cluster Approach should bring about operational improvements, preserving effective mechanisms that are already in place and concentrating on providing effective services in areas where further capacity is required.

WFP plays a significant role in the cluster system, acting as the lead agency for the Logistics Cluster and co-lead for the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, as well as being an active participant in the nutrition, protection, education and early recovery clusters. The IASC reconfirmed WFP as the global lead in food aid, a sector recognised as already meeting standards set for the cluster system.

For WFP, clusters are an operational tool whose aim is to improve operational response in all areas of emergency intervention. The implementation of the cluster system should strengthen predictability, comprehensiveness and quality of humanitarian response in any specific humanitarian situation. Cluster structures at country and global levels should therefore be simple and results-oriented, focusing on operational gap filling, and include all organisations with real operational capacities in the sector. Mapping existing operational gaps should be the first activity of a newly-formed cluster followed by the development of shared, realistic plans to address them.

The Cluster Approach should respect the mandates and nature of all participating organisations, including national and local actors, as well as recognising the level of commitment to the cluster's activities that each can afford. It is important to clarify the commitment of each cluster member at the country level as soon as possible to enable a transparent and effective distribution of labour, thus ensuring predictability and accountability in responding to the needs of the people whom we all serve.

Cluster approach in action

In Guinea, imposition of martial law in April 2007 prompted the UN to raise security levels and evacuate all non-essential staff. As the UN was ill-equipped to handle the unexpected security deterioration – and humanitarian workers'

FITTEST/ Pierre Petry

Ozdzan Hadziemin of WFP's Fast IT & Telecoms Emergency Support Team (FITTEST), UAE, installing VHF base radio antenna on tower in Guinea.

safety was endangered by lack of proper communication tools – the Humanitarian Coordinator made a request to WFP as the leading entity in the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) in Guinea.

We responded by sending an assessment mission to five operational areas in the country and developing a proposal to address identified weaknesses in the system and ensure compliance with the UN's minimum security standards. After review by the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Country Team, funds were made available from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).[2] WFP immediately mobilised staff who worked round the clock. Within three months they had significantly improved radio coverage in the capital, Conakry, and in other operational areas and had trained UN and NGO staff in the use of the new communications equipment. An inter-agency telecommunication working group is maintaining the upgraded infrastructure. The upgraded system is alleviating risks in an unstable environment and helping humanitarian workers as they carry out their mandate of caring for affected populations.

This example of successful inter-agency cooperation, made possible by the humanitarian reform process, demonstrates both the importance of stronger partnerships between UN agencies, NGOs and other key stakeholders at all levels – to bring together diversity of expertise and comparative advantages of different partners to achieve common objectives – and the essential value of clusters as an operational tool.

Allan Jury (allan.jury@wfp.org) is External Relations Director and Giammichele De Maio (giammichele. demaio@wfp.org) an External Relations Officer with the World Food Programme (www.wfp.org).

1. www.un.org/events/panel/resources/pdfs/HLP-SWC-FinalReport.pdf
2. http://cerf.un.org

Early recovery from disaster: the Pakistan earthquake

by Andrew MacLeod

In October 2005 Pakistan suffered a massive earthquake that left an unprecedented humanitarian need. Although a brutal Himalayan winter was only six weeks away there was no second wave of deaths. Civil-military cooperation and the Cluster Approach have had significant success.

The earthquake killed at least 73,338 including 18,000 schoolchildren. Over 128,000 people were injured and 3.3 million displaced. Over 600,000 houses, 6,400 km of road network, 6,298 education facilities, 350 health facilities, 3,994 water supply systems and 949 government buildings were destroyed. The size of the IDP population and the number of houses destroyed were significantly greater than the Asian tsunami despite the death-toll having been lower.

The Pakistani military launched a massive response, supported by US, British, NATO and Australian military forces, amongst others. Coordination was an enormous challenge, as it always is for a host government in the aftermath of a disaster. This was particularly the case for a military lacking experience in working with NGOs and unfamiliar with the humanitarian principles they defend. It was thus necessary in Pakistan to use a model of 'non-interfering coordination' in which the military shared an open and honest assessment of needs with the humanitarian community and allowed NGOs to choose what operations they would undertake and where. In this model, gaps in humanitarian delivery are 'back-filled' by the army and government agencies.

UNHCR Representative in Pakistan Guenet Guebre Christos being briefed by military officials in charge of relief operations in Mansehra, Pakistan.

UNHCR/V Tan

As Pakistan had no designated national disaster agency at the time of the earthquake, the Federal Relief Commission (FRC), the ad hoc structure created to deal with the aftermath, decided to structure itself using the recently created Cluster Approach. This resulted in a series of key personal contacts between the national and international coordinators. Whilst there have been critics of the Cluster Approach in Pakistan, the facts speak for themselves:

- A million tents, six million blankets and 400,000 emergency shelters were provided.

- 350,000 IDPs were housed over winter, with 95% returning in the first year after the relief.

- There was no second wave of deaths: medical statistics showed an improved rate of cold-related infections compared with normal years.

- All schools and hospitals were restored to functionality.

Problems were overcome cooperatively as the Cluster Approach enabled a structure for overall engagement between national and international actors, humanitarians and the military.

Moving into recovery

Even whilst relief was continuing, early recovery planning had to begin. One of the first tasks for the Early Recovery Cluster was to convince decision makers, including the FRC's successor body, the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA[1]), that the matter was not quite that simple. Whilst the experience of most countries in post-disaster recovery shows a severe drop in momentum following the immediate relief period, Pakistan had to be convinced that planning was required so that no such loss of momentum would occur. The Heads of Clusters had to ensure that all interlocutors understood the Early Recovery concept whilst the Early Recovery Cluster ensured that all clusters did the detailed transitional planning. In essence, the Heads of Clusters also became a 'network' of early recovery planners for each of the clusters, as well as performing the advocacy tasks regarding early recovery on behalf of all clusters.

Guiding principles for recovery

The Early Recovery Framework is guided by a set of 10 rights-based principles to be applied during planning and implementation of early recovery interventions:

1. focus on the most vulnerable

2. restore capacities

3. rebuild people's livelihoods

4. secure human development gains

5. reduce disaster risk

6. engage the private sector

7. independence and self-sufficiency

8. transparency and accountability

9. subsidiarity and decentralization

10. coordination

Once the government had bought into the concept of early recovery it instructed provincial and state governments to work with the clusters and coordinate proposals for the Early Recovery Plan (ERP)[2]. Provincial and state clusters fed draft plans into national-level clusters (that critically included donors and were chaired by UN and government representatives). The national-level clusters then drafted sectoral plans to be reviewed by the government and the Heads of Cluster forum to ensure suitability and coherence and to ensure that cross-cutting issues such as gender issues were incorporated.

As clusters had never been tried before, no one knew what to do with them after a relief operation. A discussion paper on 'Transitioning Clusters' was circulated and went through 17 major revisions and significant changes in direction before it was finalised. The clusters were closed in Islamabad once the relief phase was declared ended and early recovery started but OCHA staff kept clusters operational at field level. Later, recognising this as an error, the Islamabad clusters were re-opened as 'working groups', effectively the 'new' clusters, a role they continue to this day to support ongoing reconstruction.

The final cluster transition paper probably left more divisions within the UN system than common decisions. This is not anyone's fault but is demonstrative of how confusing it was to move out of relief when the structures used for relief were implemented in an ad hoc manner.

Funding success

Donors supported the ERP because:

- Despite the passage of several months, the earthquake was still fresh in donors' minds and HQs were still receptive to more funding.

- Donors were treated as real and genuine partners: it is important not to be afraid to admit to mistakes/difficulties or ask them to be part of the decision-making process.

- The cluster structure allowed nobody an escape clause or reason to argue that funding of early recovery should be left to somebody else.

The Cluster Approach, although sometimes difficult and hard to fathom, did improve both relief and early recovery. The timing of the earthquake meant that the clusters were tried in an ad hoc experiment, were 'transitioned' into recovery and are now coming to an end, also in an experimental way. Early recovery is harder to understand, harder to plan and harder to fund than relief. But whilst relief may keep people alive, it is early recovery that gives back their livelihoods and builds their futures. It is important that adequate thought and planning go into early recovery as soon as possible after a disaster – and preferably during disaster preparedness and risk reduction stages as well.

Andrew MacLeod was Chief of Operations for the UN Coordination Centre set up in response to the 2005 Pakistani earthquake. OCHA's real-time evaluation of the Cluster Approach to the disaster is at: http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&docid=1005901

1. www.erra.gov.pk

2. www.undp.org/rbap/Reports/ERRA-UN.pdf

The education cluster in Pakistan

by Brenda Haiplik

The 2005 Pakistan earthquake had devastating effects across all sectors, including education. Recent floods have presented additional challenges for the education cluster which has coordinated the response and recovery activities of most education-focused agencies

During two recent emergencies, the October 2005 earthquake in the North-West Frontier Province and Pakistan-administered Kashmir and the June/July 2007 floods in Balochistan and Sindh provinces, the Cluster Approach was activated, both in the capital city of Islamabad and at the field level in five humanitarian earthquake 'hubs' and in two locations in the flood-affected areas. In mid 2006 earthquake emergency clusters closed and then re-opened as sectoral working groups which are active to date. During the current floods emergency many clusters are active, both in Islamabad and in Quetta, Balochistan and in Karachi, Sindh.

Earthquake response

Education is an important sector within humanitarian response as it provides psychosocial, physical and cognitive protection to children, adolescents and youth and facilitates/catalyses a return to normalcy. Key activities of the cluster have included promotion and application of the Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, Chronic Crises and Early Reconstruction[1]; development of Pakistan-specific guidelines for emergency education; and partnering with Pakistan's Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority (ERRA)[2] to draft designs for primary school reconstruction.

Around 18,000 students and teachers died and two thirds of schools in affected areas were destroyed. The goal of ERRA is to 'Build Back Better' – to construct seismically-safe schools with well-trained teachers, well-managed schools and active parent-teacher councils.

UNICEF chaired the Islamabad cluster, regularly supported by UNESCO. INGOs with head offices in the capital frequently attended cluster meetings, particularly during the emergency and early relief phases of the response. In mid 2006 ERRA's education programme team created the Education Core Group, a federal-level body responsible for education policy issues. At the request of ERRA, field-level clusters became education working groups, chaired by government and supported 'from behind' by UNICEF.

The overall aims of the field-level clusters were: to ensure coordination of emergency education programmes and activities among the partners engaged in the emergency education response; to facilitate effective sharing of information and data among education cluster partners and across other sector clusters; and to facilitate the exchange of ideas, data, guidelines and solutions to outstanding issues. Members of field clusters included Save the Children (US, UK and Sweden), the Norwegian Refugee Council and the International Rescue Committee. Many national NGOs participated in the cluster system, both during the emergency phase and well into the current reconstruction phase. Education activities within government-run IDP camps continued to receive support from cluster members/partners who were running the remaining camps after the cluster officially closed.

The emergency response through the Cluster Approach helped to bring over 26,000 first-time students to school and enabled parent-teacher associations to become community-based participatory bodies promoting primary education. Cluster coordination showed provincial and local governments that positive change could occur, that teachers could be trained in psychosocial skills and prepared to mitigate future emergencies and that the capacity of local education departments could be enhanced

As the education sector moved into the recovery and reconstruction phase after March 2006, there was an even greater need for effective coordination but, unfortunately, coordination has not been as effective. Agencies constructing schools are isolated at the field level, often electing to bypass education working group meetings. ERRA's limited capacity to both compile data and communicate it has resulted in duplication of school site allocation, contractors demanding exorbitant prices and overall general confusion about who is doing what where. The education Core Group has only met three times since its formation and has been unable to tackle the large issues of school construction. ERRA and equivalent-level provincial/state bodies do not effectively share information. UNICEF has facilitated several school construction meetings which have assisted in improving coordination. In future emergencies it might be helpful to ensure that effective post-cluster mechanisms are in place. Coordination must continue well into the reconstruction phase.

Floods response

In late June 2007 Cyclone Yemyin swept across southern Sindh and Balochistan provinces causing major flooding. In response, the cluster system was again reactivated in Pakistan. Looking back, many feel this was premature and done without the full support of the government. UNICEF continues to co-chair the education, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), nutrition and protection clusters with the provincial governments of Balochistan and Sindh. The education cluster is

made up of many of the same individuals and organisations who are working in the earthquake response. Valuable experience gained during the time of the earthquake by 'old cluster hands' was immediately put to use during the early days of the floods response.

The frequency of meetings and levels of participation have varied. Clusters were meant to be more strategic in nature, planning and coordinating the response, not just collecting and sharing information. Many cluster heads and participants complained that there were too many meetings, thus over-burdening existing staff performing multiple functions. The floods response did not see an increase in technical personnel arriving in country which meant that many education experts, already fully occupied with heavy earthquake programme responsibilities, had to take on extra, time-consuming flood-related work. The flash appeal process was flawed and the process of reducing project amounts was seen as lacking in transparency. This damaged the credibility of the clusters, particularly among NGOs. Once it was evident that the clusters had no funds to disperse, several NGOs and other agencies lost interest and stopped attending cluster meetings. The assessment process organised through clusters took too long. Again, many organisations went off on their own to conduct more rapid assessments in their geographic areas of interest. Some of this information was shared with clusters but some was not.

As a cluster lead one takes on a huge responsibility and associated secretariat duties – calling cluster members about upcoming meetings, managing the 3W matrix[3], producing minutes etc. In both the earthquake and floods responses the cluster co-leads, both in Islamabad and in the field, are UNICEF programme managers, responsible not only for their technical clusters but also

UNICEF/Brenda Haiplik

for managing large and ambitious sectoral programmes. Moreover, wearing the 'two hats' of cluster lead and organisational representative at cluster meetings is a challenge. There is a potential conflict of interest while seeking resources for one's agency on the one hand and, on the other, impartially facilitating and coordinating a number of different agencies and NGOs. A cluster lead must therefore be trained to function with two hats, a skill that is very much personality-based rather than acquired through training.

The cluster has become responsible for being the 'conveyer/conduit of information' between both the government and education sector players. Unfortunately, 'big fish' donors such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have by-passed the cluster system. Provincial governments must take 'the driver's seat' in decreasing duplication, identifying gaps and dictating where funding would be most useful. This has not been easy. Pakistan is a strong sovereign state going through a tense political period and developing new emergency response institutions.

A cluster is a collective entity and its effectiveness can only be gauged

by the collective agreement and interaction of its members. One of the biggest differences between the earthquake and floods clusters has been the nature of engagement. The earthquake was very much about information sharing and coordination whereas the floods has largely been an issue of access to resources from the flash appeal. Many agencies that are independent in terms of resources have remained outside the cluster information flow and this is where the skill of the coordinator is fully tested, given that the only currency which s/he has to trade is coordination.

The OCHA engagement with clusters has to mature as the clusters develop and their leads gain more experience. Training courses cannot provide OCHA staff with the quality training that on-the-job opportunities offer, yet we cannot afford to be training OCHA staff placed to coordinate any given emergency. OCHA might consider having its new staff assist in emergencies, leaving actual coordination to experienced OCHA staff.

Lessons learned

Follow-up to findings and recommendations of the 2006 Real Time Evaluation of the earthquake

UNICEF-supported transitional shelter school in Sindh province.

response would have aided 2007 floods clusters in performing more effectively. Cluster leads – ideally sectoral technical experts – gain support/legitimacy and authority from cluster members through their ability to build and manage consensus among disparate yet equal partners to better ensure quality and effectiveness of response. If roles, responsibilities and accountabilities for cluster heads, government officials and UN and non-UN agencies had been more clearly established early on in the floods response, the effort could have been much more effective and efficient.

Flexibility and adaptation are required when implementing the Cluster Approach. What works in one emergency might not work so well in another. There is no blueprint for effective cluster use.

Support is needed in the identification and development of national cluster leads, those individuals who will lead the clusters 'where the action is' in the field, not in a capital city. National officers are around for the long haul, unlike the majority of international cluster leads who arrive en masse during the emergency phase and whose numbers then gradually decrease.

Pakistan is a One UN pilot country. UN reform created a significant additional stumbling block, particularly during the floods response. The UN is currently navigating new waters (e.g. one leader, one programme) making it difficult to respond 'as one' when no new modality or system has yet been created and/or is in place for either development or emergency settings. The process to date has been one of learning by trial and error in the midst of responding to a new emergency in a politically volatile part of a troubled country.

Brenda Haiplik (bhaiplik@unicef. org) is the Emergency Education Earthquake Rehabilitation Program Focal Point in UNICEF's Pakistan Country Office in Islamabad (www.unicef.org/pakistan).

1. www.ineesite.org/standards/MSEE_report.pdf
2. www.erra.gov.pk /
3. 3W: Who does What Where. See www.humanitarianinfo.org/IMToolbox/web/02_SP.html

Gender and reform: getting the right data right

by Henia Dakkak, Lisa Eklund and Siri Tellier

The international community has been mandated to mainstream gender into humanitarian response ever since the landmark Beijing conference in 1995. The current humanitarian reform process provides unique opportunities to accelerate this integration.

Taking gender issues into consideration in planning and implementing emergency responses is not only a question of protecting the human rights of the persons affected. It is also a means to make emergency aid more effective. It is thus natural that ensuring gender-sensitive responses should be at the heart of humanitarian reform.

Gender has been identified as a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed into the Cluster Approach. The IASC Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance has been transformed into an IASC Sub-Working Group (as of December 2006), expanding its mandate to become more operational.[1] This includes promoting the Five Ways to Strengthen Gender Mainstreaming in Humanitarian Action:[2]

1. developing gender equality standards in a field-friendly handbook

2. ensuring gender expertise in emergencies

3. building capacity of humanitarian actors on gender issues

4. getting the right data – using sex and age disaggregated data for decision-making

5. building partnerships for increased and more predictable gender equality programming in crises.

This article discusses the background to and challenges presented by the fourth of these 'Five Ways' – that in order to make humanitarian action more gender-responsive and efficient it is imperative to strengthen the work of collecting, analysing, disseminating and using data by age and sex. A recent UNFPA review – which assessed more than 80 evaluation reports, academic literature and interviews – found that gender issues are still often falling between cracks in emergency responses. This is mostly due to lack of capacity, time and resources constraints, vagueness about roles and lack of political will. There is no accountability system specifying who is responsible for gender mainstreaming.

Lack of disaggregated data

Another striking result of our survey was the lack of data by age and sex. We know that it is vital to identify and learn from good practice how the use of data by age and sex can contribute to more effective emergency responses. Although there are rich and detailed accounts of how women have been disproportionately hit by disasters and unfairly treated during recovery, such information is almost exclusively anecdotal.

When we looked for data on gender disparities in disaster mortality, data from only two disasters in recent times were available. In the 2004 tsunami, between 1.2 and 2.1 times more women than men died. The 1991 floods in Bangladesh killed four times as many women as men among the age group 20-44. The main reason the gender disparity was so marked was the fact that early warnings were predominately passed on by men in the public arena, only belatedly reaching women. Furthermore women were expected to stay in the house waiting for their husbands to arrive back home before leaving the house. Although the reasons for women being more vulnerable to death than men were complicated, the relief worker community took action to address one aspect of the vulnerability of women. In order to mitigate the impact of future disasters, radios were distributed to all households. People were then told that, in an emergency, warning messages would be broadcast and women should leave the house regardless of whether there were male relatives around or not. Although it is hard to isolate the impact of this new warning system, subsequent flooding did not cause as many fatalities, suggesting that it was at least partially successful.

While we found little evidence of the use of sex and age disaggregated data in emergency responses – a marked contrast to their more routine uses in development interventions – there is one example where existing demographic data was used to plan for relief and support to disaster-hit populations. After the 2005 Pakistani earthquake, one of the immediate needs was to provide reproductive health (RH) services and supplies for women. Being viewed as a typical 'women's need', RH issues are often ignored in emergencies even though lack of such services can lead to serious illness, complications, abuse and even death. In order to make support more effective, data already available from demographic and health surveys was used to estimate the numbers of adolescent girls and boys, lactating mothers and pregnant women. Data on contraceptive use and prevalence was also used to estimate the unmet need, which often becomes even larger in the aftermath of crises as couples want to postpone childbearing. Based on these data, hygiene kits consisting

UNFPA Pakistan

of soap and towels were distributed to women to ensure their dignity and mobility, safe delivery kits were supplied, and contraceptives, including condoms, were made available to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Stereotyping gender disparities

In the early 1990s it was common for those advocating on behalf of female refugees to argue that 80% of refugees were women and children. This was based on loose estimates. Since then, more systematic data has shown that women account for approximately the same number as men among refugee populations. This is also supported by a recent preliminary compilation of the availability of data on IDPs by age and sex made by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Most IDP populations have sex compositions that are relatively balanced.

It should be noted, however, that out of 50 countries with internal displacement problems, only 20 reported on the estimated number of IDPs. While 19 of them disaggregate IDPs by gender, only two countries systematically do so by sex and by age cohort. The disaster literature often mixes different sources, definitions and indicators. An interview with an expert in the field of nutrition revealed that data is systematically disaggregated for children under five but not by sex and for other age groups. The lack of agreed set of indicators and methodologies is a major impediment during assessments, making data from different sources incomparable.

Gender concerns reduced to women's concerns

Whereas there is increasing recognition of the fact that women and girls are more vulnerable than men and boys in emergencies, there is sometimes lack of clarity as to why this is so. Most of women's vulnerabilities both during emergencies and the recovery phase are attributed to gender inequalities, rooted in socio-economic, political and cultural power imbalances, putting women in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis men. To mention a few, those include poorer health status due to less access to nutrition and health-care services, low literacy levels, limited mobility due to gender norms and stereotypes, mobility restrictions keeping women out of public spaces and restricting dress codes (such as long skirts/saris and high-heeled shoes, which impede flight from danger).

We reviewed the appeals in the 2007 Consolidated Appeals Process[3] and found that none have data disaggregated by sex although some have specific indicators for women. There is a problem with universally categorising women without paying attention to age, class, caste, ethnicity, income, education, religion and other variables. Talking about women's issues may thus conceal more than it reveals. For example, there is limited attention to the specific needs, vulnerabilities and capabilities of older persons and young people.

Men and boys may also have particular vulnerabilities, related

Woman receiving UNFPA hygiene kit after the 2005 earthquake, Pakistan.

to gender norms and expectations, which put them at risk. Recent literature has also pointed out that the socio-psychological wellbeing of men is often ignored due to the perception that men are strong and independent. However, men's vulnerability was barely elaborated on in the reports and evaluations we reviewed.

Very few organisations have clarified roles and divisions of labour and who is responsible for the provision of timely and accurate data by age and sex in emergency situations. Terms of Reference for players in the field on data collection is very rare and few evaluations have specific outputs related to assessing the impact of the emergency operation from a gender point of view.

Recommendations

UNFPA suggests the urgent need to:

- disaggregate all relevant data by age and sex

- develop indicators that are sensitive to gender and age differences

- collect data in gender-sensitive ways (e.g. using enumerators of same sex when needed, paying attention to what time and location is more suitable to women and men and girls and boys)

- analyse data from a gender perspective, by people who have gender analysis skills

- involve partners in utilising, analysing and disseminating data by age and sex

- feed results into planning, implementation and evaluation of activities

- strengthen cooperation between emergency aid actors to ensure harmonisation of definitions, indicators and methodologies

- set up accountability systems, including terms of reference, to ensure timely availability of data by age and sex

- be practical: identify ways to implement existing policies, guidelines, tools and checklists.

Henia Dakkak (dakkak@unfpa.org) is a senior technical advisor in UNFPA's Humanitarian Response Unit in New York and co-chair of the IASC Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance. Lisa Eklund (Lisa.Eklund@soc.lu.se) is a consultant at the UNFPA Geneva office which is directed by Siri Tellier (tellier@unfpa.org).

1. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_gender/default.asp?bodyID=1&publish=0

2. http://ochaonline.un.org/humanitarianappeal/webpage.asp?MenuID=8187&Page=1412

3. http://ochaonline.un.org/humanitarianappeal

Funding challenges for the CCCM cluster

by Jane Wanjiru Muigai

Camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) is one of the new clusters which have grown out of the humanitarian reform process. UNHCR is cluster lead in the case of conflict-induced displacement but are other agencies expecting too much of it? Can NGOs obtain the funding required to ensure CCCM improves the lives of IDPs in camps?

As the Humanitarian Reform process evolves, there is much debate and uncertainty about the role of a cluster lead agency. There is an emerging consensus that being a cluster lead does not mean being 'the cluster provider' but, instead, means coordinating support and working with various stakeholders to improve humanitarian response for displaced people. However, in the case of the CCCM cluster, there is an emerging trend expecting UNHCR to be more than a coordinator. In several conflict situations it is uncertain where funding for the management of camps is to come from. If NGO partners and host governments continue to be unable to access funding, there are serious doubts about the sustainability of the cluster's partnership approach.

The main focus of the CCCM cluster is improvement of the lives of IDPs living in camps. Since its inception the cluster has identified three distinct but related areas of camp response – camp administration, camp coordination and camp management. The three components are complementary but require three different actors: camp administrator (the national government), camp coordinator (the lead agency) and camp manager (an NGO). These three actors form a triangular CCCM partnership. None of the three components can stand on its own without the other two.

National governments are responsible for ensuring systems are in place for designation of camps or sites to host IDPs, oversight and supervision of all relief efforts, provision of security, registration and issue of civil documentation to camp residents on an equal basis as other non-displaced national citizens, and clarification of land tenure issues for the designated sites. In discharging its responsibilities, the government is expected to designate a camp administrator for each camp to take charge of these functions and create

the necessary interface and linkage with the other CCCM actors.

UNHCR is lead agency for camp coordination in conflict-induced displacement and IOM in displacement resulting from natural disasters. Other agencies may be designated as a lead for a particular operation – such as in Darfur where OCHA has played the role of cluster lead/camp coordinator since 2004. In its camp coordination role, the lead agency is responsible for all camps in which IDPs are hosted. Its main functions are to support the authorities, ensure humanitarian space is kept open and international standards observed, designate camp management organisations for each camp, set up information management systems and work with partners to collate and share information on humanitarian services and gaps in camps.

In a few cases, organised groups of camp residents have assumed the role of camp management. Much more commonly, however, this function is carried out by NGOs. It is important to have a single designated entity to act as the focal point within a camp and to ensure that all humanitarian activities are based on IDP participation, coordination and consistent information sharing on protection and assistance needs, provision and gaps.

CCCM partnership in practice

Although as a new sector the CCCM is yet to be fully understood by all practitioners, there is increasing awareness that it is contributing to better coordination. It has added momentum to initiatives to build capacity of field practitioners and broaden awareness of the new sector and its role in improving the humanitarian situation in IDP camps.

There is greater evidence of collaboration between the lead agency and NGOs than there is between them and local government authorities. While partnerships at field level vary from one operation to another, coordination by a lead agency and management by NGOs show more consistency while administration by local authorities has tended to be more ad hoc.

Responsibility for mobilising resources for CCCM activities is more and more falling on UNHCR. In the cluster roll-out in Uganda and Liberia, UNHCR assumed the lead role for camp coordination and devoted resources to this function but the international NGO partners on the ground lacked the necessary resources for camp management activities. In eastern Chad, UNHCR has recently funded two international NGOs to implement camp management in IDP camps. CCCM implementation crucially hinges on the ability of NGOs to mobilise additional funding:

- Donors must ensure that resources available for CCCM are disbursed on an equal basis to the cluster lead as well as NGO partners.

- NGOs involved in camp management need to reach out to new funding sources.

- UNHCR and its co-cluster lead, IOM, need to urge donors to provide timely funding for NGO partners.

Jane Wanjiru Muigai (muigaij@unhcr.org) is Senior Policy Officer in the Division of Operational Services at UNHCR HQ charged with support of the global CCCM cluster. For more information, see: http://ocha.unog.ch/humanitarianreform/Default.aspx?tabid=78

Camp Management Toolkit

CAMP MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

The Camp Management Toolkit is a manual compiled and published by the member organisations of the inter-agency Camp Management Project: UNHCR, OCHA, IRC, DRC and NRC. It contains essential information on most aspects of camp operations, such as camp planning and closure, community participation, camp committees, registration, protection, prevention of SGBV, distribution, water and sanitation, security, physical and psychosocial health, education, coordination and information management.

The Toolkit is applicable in both refugee and IDP situations resulting from either conflict or natural disasters. It complements existing sector guidelines and standards such as the SPHERE Handbook, UNHCR's Handbook for Emergencies and other technical handbooks. The Toolkit defines the roles and responsibilities of a Camp Management Agency within each of the defined sectors. It also includes tools (checklists, monitoring forms and guidelines) and lists of essential reading and references.

The CM Toolkit has been used in the field since 2004 by several hundred individuals and organisations: UN agencies, international organisations, local and international NGOs, national authorities, universities and research institutions, camp residents and community leaders. Countries where the Toolkit is being used or has been used include Liberia, Sudan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Burundi, Uganda, DRC, Kenya, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Georgia, Lebanon, Ethiopia and the Philippines.

The coordinating focal point for the CM Toolkit and the inter-agency CMP is the Norwegian Refugee Council in Oslo. For further information, please contact veit.vogel@nrc.no

You can download the Toolkit from www.nrc.no/camp or order a print copy from: Norwegian Refugee Council, PO Box 6758, St Olavs Plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway.

Managing environmental issues: a case for substantive reform

by Andrew Morton and David Jensen

Over the last two years, UNEP, Care International and various other partners have been assessing the status of environmental concerns in humanitarian response and advocating the need for change. Given that present practices within the international humanitarian community are often both environmentally unsustainable and resistant to change, we face a formidable challenge.

Not only is environment considered a cross-cutting priority issue for the IASC Cluster Approach but 'improved integration of environmental issues' is formally identified as a goal of reform in the Appeal for Building Global Humanitarian Response Capacity.[1]

Bolengo IDP camp in DRC is located only 700m from Virunga National Park. Its population of 10,000 requires 600 tonnes of fuelwood per week.

The humanitarian community is faced with several linked environmental and social challenges. Key issues include: 1) the impact of land degradation and climate change as a contributing cause to humanitarian crises; 2) the provision of sustainable fuelwood and shelter materials; 3) the management of aid-generated waste; 4) the sustainable management of ground and surface water; and 5) the environmental impact of refugee returns and the development of sustainable livelihoods. Addressing these challenges will require more than guidelines and ad hoc activities: it will entail a wholesale cultural and institutional change across the humanitarian community. Rather than being addressed in a fragmented and peripheral manner, environmental issues should be a core consideration of how response is delivered, so as to comply with the overarching principle of 'do no harm'. Such a change was at the heart of the IASC Cluster Approach – but is it actually happening on the ground?

In the case of fuelwood, the answer is not yet. While the need for energy is as fundamental as the need for food, water and shelter, it continues to fall through the cracks of the humanitarian response system. Despite the reforms, the issue of energy provision appears to be

UNEP

essentially ignored in the great majority of humanitarian operations, which focus almost exclusively on the provision of food, shelter, water and medical care. Finding wood to meet energy needs is often left to the displaced people themselves, based on the optimistic assumption that such resources are infinite, free and self-regenerating.

During the month of September 2007 alone, four new IDP camps were established near the city of Goma, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). WWF has estimated that the four camps,

which are located near the boundary of Virunga National Park (one of the last two places on earth where mountain gorillas still live), require 600 tonnes of fuelwood per week. As these needs are not being met by the humanitarian agencies, WWF is providing emergency supplies of fuelwood from local areas of privately owned woodland to prevent the park from becoming the major source of supply, as it did during the influx of two million refugees in 1994. This interim measure cannot be sustained, however, and UNHCR needs to consider more durable solutions as part of its camp planning and management process.

A similar situation has unfolded in Darfur, where massive internal displacement has led to severe deforestation around the larger camps as inhabitants are forced to collect timber and fuelwood in the surrounding areas for energy as well as livelihood strategies like brick-making. The scale of displacement and the particular vulnerability of the dry northern Sudanese environment could make Darfur the most significant case of its type worldwide.

Failure to consider longer-term environmental impacts is becoming increasingly untenable for relief operations in many regions, particularly for operations based in arid and/or environmentally degraded regions in Africa and the Middle East. Short-term interventions lead to longer-term environmental problems that threaten livelihoods, increase vulnerability to disasters and can contribute to renewed humanitarian crises. In short, the ideals of 'do no harm' and 'build back better' cannot

be achieved if environmental issues are not integrated into the overall humanitarian response. At the same time, the unsustainable use of natural resources to meet humanitarian needs can lead to conflict with local communities over access to resources, damages and compensation.

While numerous technical guidelines and case studies have been published on these issues, progress overall has been very limited. In UNEP's opinion, the adequate and permanent resolution of these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including:

UNEP

Camp residents in Western Darfur cut wood chippings from a fallen tree for cooking fuel.

■ **Cultural and institutional change:** In the first instance, the international community must acknowledge these environmental issues and tackle them in a systematic way. In institutional terms, this entails developing standards and guidelines, and – more importantly – allocating funds, senior management time and staff resources. The recent establishment of the IASC Taskforce on Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy in Humanitarian Settings[2] is a positive step but monitoring change at field level will be critical. The revision of the Sphere guidelines also provides an important opportunity to address environmental standards.

■ **Incident-specific energy response strategies:** The response strategy for each medium to large humanitarian incident should include a component on energy provision; the overall responsibility for this element should be allocated and embedded into the Cluster Approach.

■ **Energy efficiency improvements:** Technical and organisational responses to improve the efficiency of fuelwood utilisation (e.g. via fuel-efficient stoves or solar cookers) can provide significant benefits and are an obvious quick win.

■ **Local fuelwood resource management:** In acknowledgement of the fact that the impact of the humanitarian response extends well beyond camp boundaries, agencies need to intervene in local fuelwood resource management. To be effective, this requires both technical expertise and a participatory approach.

■ **Imported energy supplies:** In cases where local fuelwood supplies are inadequate, or the use of local resources is illegal and/or untenable (e.g. for camps in or near national parks or desert oases), the only real alternative is to import energy supplies, generally from other parts of the country on a commercial basis.

Together with its partners, UNEP continues to work to integrate environmental concerns into the humanitarian reform process, identifying gaps at policy level and providing guidance to humanitarian actors in the field.[3]

In addition, UNEP is seeking to effect change and improve the situation on the ground. For example, in Darfur – where the deforestation problem is so severe that displaced populations resort to digging under the earth for roots to burn for fuel – a two-year project has just been initiated in cooperation with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to assist displaced populations and conflict-affected communities to obtain and use fuelwood in a sustainable manner. As a first step, the project aims to expand the use of fuel-efficient stoves in IDP camps. Made from a combination of water, mud and either donkey dung or grass, these stoves require much less fuel than traditional three-stone stoves. In the longer term, UNEP/FAO will work to establish community forests around IDP camps and other areas in Darfur, as a means of providing a local supply of wood for fuel, fodder and construction. The project will also explore the possibility of introducing alternative energy techniques, such as solar, wind and natural gas.

To make significant progress on the integration of environmental concerns in humanitarian action, however, it will be necessary to create a broader 'coalition of the willing' by re-engaging donors, major UN agencies and other NGOs on these issues.

Andrew Morton (andrew.morton@ unep.ch) is Programme Development and Assessment Coordinator and David Jensen (david.jensen@unep.ch) is Policy and Research Coordinator at the Post-Conflict & Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB – http://postconflict.unep.ch) of the UN Environment Programme. PCDMB is the focal point for these activities within UNEP.

1. http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage. asp?Page=1566

2. www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/ tf_SAFE/

3. See the newly released UNEP-OCHA brochure on 'Humanitarian Action and the Environment', available at http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/IASC_leaflet.pdf

Elephants in the humanitarian room

by Tim Morris

Several of the preceding articles reflect optimism about humanitarian reform and cite successes of the Cluster Approach. However, many within the humanitarian community – practitioners, donors and analysts – harbour doubts, often not publicly aired, which they shared with FMR during the preparation of this issue.

Many have expressed concern at the speed of roll-out of the Cluster Approach, given the perceived shortage of suitably qualified Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) to provide leadership and of adequately trained cluster leads with experience in logistics and coordination. There are worries about the Cluster Approach proving to be overly labour intensive. Some cluster leads have struggled to cope with the numbers of grants, partnerships, guidelines, memoranda, groups, sub-groups, meetings and minutes spawned by humanitarian reform. Donors are concerned at the costs of the eleven clusters and unwillingness of lead agencies to absorb them from their own regular budgets. Mechanisms by which cluster leads are accountable to HCs or procedures for HCs to mediate between competing clusters remain unclear.

Clusters seem to be making some UN agencies anxious. UN staff may not have grasped what clusters are or understood their new responsibilities. The tendency for UN agencies to start talking about 'firewalls' – to demarcate activities they will undertake separately from their responsibilities as clusters members/ leads – is a worrying impediment to the comprehensive approach.

Is the Cluster Approach globally applicable? John Holmes, the UN's Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), has described it as "the way we now do business". However, many doubt whether its mechanisms should be deployed in all humanitarian operations. Should it be rolled out only where gaps in provision have been identified or governments lack response capacity? A recent UNHCR evaluation of the Cluster Approach recommended that it is premature for the Cluster Approach to become the standard response mechanism.[1]

NGOs are frustrated by slow disbursement of funds channelled through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF[2]). Donors are worried by the high level of CERF administrative overheads. INGOs are rankled by inability to directly access CERF funding or get information about disbursement procedures.[3] CERF may have given UN agencies access to more flexible and predictable funding but at a price of imposing new burdens on their international and local partners. UN agencies can take months to sub-contract, in effect diverting funds dedicated to saving lives into bureaucracies. Non-UN actors with field capacity to intervene now have to wait longer for funds. A recent independent review notes that UN transaction costs have increased and finds no indication that CERF has succeeded in its declared goal of improving coordination between UN and non-UN humanitarian actors.[4] In fact, it may have driven them apart as they now compete for the same humanitarian funds. By reinforcing the role of UN middlemen, is CERF at odds with the UN's move to embrace business-like efficiency?

Among other questions being asked are:

- In practice, how does the Cluster Approach differ from sectoral coordination systems?

- Is the reform process impeding UNHCR's ability to address IDP issues?

- Why is nutrition, but not food, a cluster?

- What exactly is a POLR – provider of last resort? After several years of high-level commitment to guarantee protection and assistance – and use of the Cluster Approach in eight chronic humanitarian crises and six sudden-onset emergencies – there is still no coherent definition of this key concept of the reform process.

- Is the Early Recovery cluster clear in its objectives? Several agencies lament the lack of agreed financing mechanisms at the field level for early recovery programming and coordination.

- Are the drivers of humanitarian reform doing enough to engage with host authorities, civil society and other local actors?

- Is the UN sufficiently involving national governments in the Cluster Approach or tweaking cluster responsibilities to fit with pre-existing structures created by governments?

- Are some UN agencies dragging their feet in actualising commitments set out in the Global Humanitarian Platform's 'Principles of Partnership'?[5]

- Is humanitarian reform making it harder to accommodate diverging traditions and practices?

Encouragingly, UN staff are talking more about the need to consult with other agencies and refer more frequently to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Unprecedented efforts are being made to ensure that debate about humanitarian reform is in the public domain, and not confined to the corridors of humanitarian power in Geneva and New York.[6] However, a much wider range of humanitarian actors must be engaged to make sure there is genuine coherence between all four areas of the humanitarian reform package – partnerships, financing, clusters and HC strengthening. All could be mutually reinforcing.

Tim Morris (tim@timmorris.info), former FMR Co-Editor, is now a freelance consultant/editor.

1. www.unhcr.org/excom/EXCOM/46d586782.pdf

2. http://cerf.un.org

3. eg Save the Children Alliance: www.savethechildren. net/alliance/media/newsdesk/2007-01-31.html

4. http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha &docId=1073098

5. www.icva.ch/pop.html

6. Many documents are available online: see: www. humanitarianreform.org and www.icva.ch/doc00001560. html

Hard questions for the future of the humanitarian enterprise

by Antonio Donini

How can we make humanitarianism 'of the world' rather than 'of the North'? Fundamental humanitarian values are shared by all cultures. Not so, however, the baggage, the cultural differences and the power relations that come with the Northern-dominated humanitarian relationship.

The humanitarian enterprise, which spends on average some US$10bn per year, remains a select club in which the rules are set by a rather peculiar set of players who are generally far removed from the realities of the people they purport to help. While much good is done by the enterprise, its functioning is dictated by the interests of actors who sit in government, international organisations and civil society in the North, including, increasingly, the boardrooms of the private sector and the situation rooms of the military.

Like it or not, humanitarian action is part of global governance, if not of global government. It lives in parallel with, and is sometimes subordinated to, processes of economic governance, political containment strategies and military action that are functional to the interests of the 'global North'. And this despite the fact that the vast majority of aid workers and many humanitarian agencies are not of the North.

Unlike the UN, where all countries have a vote, there is no such 'democracy' in the humanitarian realm. Countries that do not belong to the established donor club have little opportunity to influence the functioning of the humanitarian enterprise and even less to scrutinise the destination of its funds. At the UN, all countries have a stake in peace-building operations and must contribute to them but the purse-strings and the reins of UN humanitarian activities are by and large the sole purview of the North. The UN has a Peace-Building Commission[1] and a Human Rights Council[2] but no Humanitarian Council.

To a greater or lesser extent, the public in the North has an opportunity to influence government aid policy through elections, public hearings and the like. But much of the private (and private sector) aid escapes such scrutiny. The workings of militarised 'relief' are even more obscure.

Furthermore, the contributions of non-Northern humanitarian players don't normally make it to the donor hit-parade. Yes, we now recognise India, China and some of the Gulf States as players but the contributions of the informal humanitarian sector – *zakat* and other tithes, remittances from diasporas, the contributions of affected countries and communities – are nowhere recorded. We are even more loath to recognise the life-saving contributions of elected entities such as Hamas or Hezbollah who practice their own varieties of succour to the most vulnerable.

The perils of institutionalisation

Seasoned humanitarian workers may recall with nostalgia those pre-email and pre-satphone halcyon days when important messages from remote field outposts were passed through crackling radios and unreliable telex machines. When neither worked, which was often the case, communication was dependent on hand-written notes entrusted to a truck driver. For all the advances in technology, the training in management, the 360 degree exercises and the contingency planning workshops, how well has the massive institutionalisation of the past 15 years of conflict and crisis improved the effectiveness of the sector? Are the 250,000 humanitarian aid workers of today doing a better job than those who battled for access and space in Biafra?

Undoubtedly, the unprecedented growth of the enterprise and the development of standards, procedures and techniques have allowed us to respond more promptly and more effectively. The institutions of coordination, good donorship and complementarity of action have served the system well: there is more predictability in emergency response, though problems remain in terms of proportionality and timeliness. But haven't some of the flexibility and spontaneity that the enterprise was famous for been lost in the process? Has the quality of our mercy improved?

Institutionalisation has resulted in strong pressures on NGOs to act like businesses and like governments. Not surprisingly, senior staff and CEOs increasingly rotate between these different realms. Humanitarian assistance has become less flexible, less able to address the unexpected. There is an intense pressure to programme according to the deliverables defined in grants and in timeframes that are often unrealistic. The short – 6-12 month – duration of grants discourages innovation and risk taking. As organisations have grown and resources mushroomed, controls have become tighter and decision making increasingly

distant from the field. Humanitarian work used to have a connotation of 'voluntariness' – and indeed this remains a key Red Cross principle – but it has now become a career. It is defined by management objectives, standard operating procedures and human resource development tools. Though necessary in any 'business', it has created structures and organisational patterns that tend to stifle innovation and the questioning of the status quo. Indeed, promotion itself means that the most highly experienced, respected, trained (and paid) aid workers are removed from the frontlines and are hunkered down in meeting rooms!

Preparing for the unpredictable

The humanitarian enterprise is still based on Cold War and post-Cold War assumptions of what constitutes a crisis. We are getting better at addressing last year's crises and perhaps today's. But is the enterprise adapted to the challenges that are likely to come our way in the coming decades? There are two areas where we are particularly ill-equipped and where urgent adaptation is required:

- the new asymmetrical wars as in Iraq and Afghanistan (but also now Somalia, Lebanon and perhaps tomorrow Chad or Nigeria or Pakistan) where humanitarians are perceived as taking sides

- the emergence of catastrophic events or unending chronic situations where the system has to deal with compounded threats and vulnerabilities framed, in some cases, by conflict but also by natural hazard events, climate change, technological disasters, environmental displacement, pandemics, etc.

Conflict, in fact, may well be a lesser source of vulnerability than we are accustomed to. In Zimbabwe today, about 3,500 people are dying every week of HIV/AIDS in the midst of a deepening economic, social and political crisis. In many parts of the world threats of old and new varieties tend to combine and compound. Our traditional humanitarian approach is inadequate in such settings.

Trying to predict the crises of tomorrow is not a very useful exercise but investing in prepared-ness is – making organisations more adaptable to shocks, strengthening partnerships at all levels and thinking outside of our humanitarian box.

While we can certainly applaud the improvements in the functioning of the humanitarian machine, there is no cause for resting on our laurels. Our research findings confirm that the humanitarian enterprise is vulnerable to manipulation by powerful political forces far more than is widely understood. Its practitioners are more extended and overmatched than most of us realise. Failure to address and reverse present trends will result in the demise of an international assistance and protection regime based on time-tested humanitarian principles. If the disconnect between the perceived needs of intended beneficiaries and the assistance and protection actually provided continues to grow, humanitarianism as a compassionate endeavour to bring succour to people in extremis may become increasingly alien and suspect to those it purports to help.

The humanitarian project is in more serious trouble than is widely understood or acknowledged. The current love affair of the international community with humanitarian action is currently based on two notions: a) that humanitarian action is functional to the security interests of the countries that are its traditional major contributors and therefore shape the humanitarian enterprise and b) that the current political economy of humanitarian action – the humanitarian marketplace – will continue to be dominated by like-minded Northern and Western-driven values, behaviours and management styles. Should either of these assumptions prove to be untrue, either because climate change or other risks force a paradigm shift in the North's security concerns or because the Northern humanitarian monopoly is challenged by other players who do not accept 'our' rules of the game, the current humanitarian enterprise may find itself in dire straits.

Meanwhile, humanitarianism, as traditionally framed and implemented, may well come to occupy a smaller place on the international screen, relegated to crises with low political profile in which the strategic interests of the major powers are not perceived to be at play. The assistance and protection challenges of the Afghanistans, Iraqs and Darfurs will continue to pose major assistance and protection challenges. However, the situation in high-profile conflicts seems likely to be addressed increasingly, if at all, by an array of non-traditional actors, including international military forces, private contractors and non-state actors rather than by 'official' humanitarian agencies.

Over the past decade and a half, the humanitarian agenda has expanded to encompass activities such as advocacy, rehabilitation and peace-building, and development. Some would say that it has drifted away from its traditional humanitarian moorings. An evolution toward a more modest humanitarianism – delimited in scope, objectives and actors – would not be an entirely negative development. It would reflect a realisation that current global trends and forces that generate a need for humanitarian action can be neither redirected nor significantly contained by the humanitarian enterprise itself. This does not mean that humanitarians are uncommitted to a more secure, just and compassionate world but rather that they are realistic in recognising that their first obligation is to be effective in saving and protecting lives that are in imminent danger.

Antonio Donini (antonio.donini@tufts.edu) worked for 26 years in the UN in research, evaluation and humanitarian capacities. He is Senior Researcher at the Feinstein International Center (http://fic.tufts.edu), Tufts University where he heads the Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Project (http://fic.tufts.edu/?pid=19#HA2015). This article is extracted from 'Looking Ahead: Making our Principles Work in the Real World', July 2007: http://fic.tufts.edu/downloads/PrinciplesWorkinRealWorld.pdf

1. www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding
2. www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil

Iraq: growing needs amid continuing displacement

by Andrew Harper

Seven months after over 100 country representatives gathered in Geneva to address the Iraq displacement crisis, the humanitarian situation has markedly deteriorated. Expectations that highlighting the burdens of Iraq's neighbours would result in financial and political support have been dashed. Support provided – relative to humanitarian needs – has been negligible.

Every hour, around 50 to 100 Iraqis are being forced to leave their homes. UNHCR believes that some 4.5 million Iraqis – one in six of the population – have now left their homes, up to half a million of them since the Geneva meeting. Regional asylum states, particularly Syria which hosts some 1.6 million Iraqis, have become disenchanted with unfulfilled assurances. Following a number of threats, Syria introduced a visa regime for Iraqis in October. This decision, the first time that Syria has taken such an action against a fellow Arab state, has effectively closed the last remaining avenue of escape for desperate Iraqis.

Internal flight is also becoming harder. Relatively safe provinces have now exhausted their capacity to absorb more IDPs. Most of Iraq's 18 governorates are imposing informal and formal restrictions on IDP entry and residence, denying entry to civilians trying to escape the fighting or denying them aid once they have arrived. Local authorities or, in some cases, non-state actors are applying movement restrictions and denying many new IDPs access to subsidised food assistance, fuel and basic protection. Recent outbreaks of cholera have strengthened the resolve of many authorities to deny entry to 'outsiders'. Internal displacement is taking on a more permanent and increasingly desperate character. The

sale or abandonment of property and the departure of entire families and, in some cases, communities indicate that this population movement is likely to be long-term.

UNHCR/ M Bernard

The long queue inside the immigration centre, Syria 2007.

Shi'ites from western Baghdad are replacing Sunni families in eastern Baghdad. Sunnis from the south are moving to the north or are fleeing Iraq altogether. Shi'ites from Sunni strongholds are moving to the southern regions. Kurds and Christians are fleeing to the north. The predominant trend in displacement is, and is likely to remain, movement from highly

insecure areas in Baghdad toward neighbourhoods with improved services and security, as well as to locations with family, ethno-religious or tribal links outside the city. However, movements are not purely toward homogeneous areas, due to mixed marriages and increasing formal and informal restrictions on movement which limit the options available. As Iraq's neighbours impose more restrictive entry requirements, there is likely to be more pressure on internal displacement toward the north and those governorates offering better security and basic services.

Most IDPs reside with family and friends but, due to the increased restrictions on IDP movement and growing social and economic vulnerability, IDP camps and self-built shelters have appeared. There are more and more makeshift camps in abysmal conditions, with terrible sanitation and water supply, very little or no health care and no schools. While only 1% of IDPs are now living

In a cramped basement in Syria's Saida Zeinab neighbourhood, Iraqi and Syrian volunteer teachers give free catch-up classes to Iraqi school children in the hope that they will be able to join Syrian students at the start of the school year.

UNHCR/M Bernard

in tented camps, an additional 20% are estimated to be in other types of collective settlements ranging from disused army barracks and warehouses to slum-like spontaneous dwellings. Often, IDPs are forced to move multiple times as they again become caught up in the cycle of violence or as local authorities force them to move out of public buildings or away from urban areas. Some IDPs who have been encouraged to return following a lull in the level of violence, or who have been attracted by financial incentives, have found their homes occcupied or ruined and have been forced to move on again. While the government has reported the return of over 3,000 families to Baghdad, and thousands more from abroad, this may have been triggered not only by a perceived improvement in security but also by a lack of options.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)[1] estimates that 15 million Iraqis are extremely vulnerable. Twenty-three per cent of children in southern Iraq are chronically malnourished. Nineteen per cent of

refugees registered with UNHCR in Syria report having significant medical conditions and 14% of those registered in Jordan have been identified as having special needs. Many displaced Iraqis have been exposed to terrifying experiences of terror and violence, with approximately 22% of Iraqis registered with UNHCR reporting personal traumatic events. This, compounded by the difficulty of daily life, has led to high rates of psychological fragility and distress.

Iraqis in neighbouring countries

The countries neighbouring Iraq, particularly Syria and Jordan, have demonstrated remarkable generosity in receiving such large numbers of Iraqis, despite already hosting hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees for over 60 years. UNHCR is fully aware of the strain that large numbers of Iraqis hosted by Syria and Jordan has put on their economy, resources, infrastructure and social structures. The massive influx of Iraqis into urban centres has overwhelmed the absorption

capacities of the infrastructure and social services of the host countries.

UNHCR has now interviewed some 140,000 Iraqis in Syria. Despite having more than 30 registration staff, the massive demand on UNHCR has meant that Iraqis wishing to be interviewed still face a five-month wait. Including those waiting to be interviewed, UNHCR Damascus has registered over 200,000 Iraqis. In Jordan, following the introduction of strict entry restrictions in late 2006, which reduced the flow of Iraqi refugees, the waiting period has been reduced to two weeks. The number of Iraqis registered is close to 50,000. In Egypt and Lebanon, which also have strict entry requirements, UNHCR offices have registered 10,000 and 9,000 Iraqis respectively.

Key characteristics of the registered Iraqi refugee population are:

■ Over 80% originate from Baghdad.

■ Over half are Sunnis, with Shi'ites representing less than 25% of the total in Jordan and

Syria: in Lebanon, by contrast, close to 60% are Shi'ites.

- There is a disproportionately high proportion of Christians.

- The average case size has increased in recent months as entire families flee.

- The number of vulnerable people has increased: UNHCR is identifying larger numbers of severe medical cases, survivors of torture and trauma, and women at risk

Iraqis now represent almost 10% of the populations in Syria and Jordan. As a consequence of this surge in populations, the prices of basic – often state-subsidised – commodities such as food, fuel and water have increased significantly. Electricity generation capacity in certain parts of Damascus cannot cope with the added refuge-imposed demand. Already overcrowded schools now have up to 60 students per class. Many Jordanian and Syrians can no longer rent or buy apartments due to price increases. Medical and health care facilities in some areas in Damascus cater for more Iraqis than Syrian nationals. Both host communities and state security agencies are aware that Iraqis are changing the character of their societies and fear that their presence may ignite sectarian and ethnic conflict. It is imperative that the international community does not ignore the increasing plight of the most vulnerable who, without adequate assistance, may have no other option but to return to Iraq, become increasingly destitute or be drawn towards extremist causes.

Both Syria and Jordan have estimated the costs of hosting the Iraqi refugees at some $1 billion per year. Despite the lack of substantive assistance, Jordan, for the first time, opened up its public schools to Iraqi children in September 2007. Syria continues to allow Iraqis to access its education system. It is hoped that, by the end of the school year, some 100,000 Iraqi children in Syria and another 50,000 in Jordan will be enrolled.

From discussions with government officials, it is understood that Iraqi refugees currently living in Syria will not be forcibly returned to Iraq.

The most pressing concern for Iraqi refugees at present is what they should do when their visas expire. In the past, they would visit the Syrian border to renew their visa for three months. UNHCR hopes Syria can establish centres within the country where refugees could renew their visas. The Syrian government has made it clear that the visa restrictions have been imposed due to the massive pressure it faces hosting Iraqi refugees. The challenge will be to ensure that Syria and other regional states receive significant bilateral support so that they can continue to support the Iraqi refugees living in the country – and, it is to be hoped, offer refuge for those Iraqis who need to flee Iraq in the future.

Surviving with little or no outside aid

Despite UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies putting in place assistance and protection programmes, the vast majority of refugees continue to survive with little or no assistance from the international community. In conjunction with partners, UNHCR in Syria has provided 50,000 Iraqis with food assistance and 140,000 have been treated at UNHCR/Syrian Red Crescent-supported health clinics, 100 schools have been renovated and the number of Iraqi children attending school has doubled to 60,000 (leaving an estimated 340,000 other school-age refugees still lacking schooling). In Jordan, UNHCR programmes target and prioritise vulnerable individuals and families, persons with specific needs or who are considered to be at 'heightened risk'. It is intended that by the end of 2007 around 70,000 Iraqis will directly benefit from the UNHCR assistance programmes which include food, non-food items, cash, psychosocial counselling, education assistance and health services. Given the needs, this remains far too little. The primary providers of assistance remain the Syrian and Jordanian governments, supported by their respective Red Crescent movements.

The only durable solution being pursued for Iraqis is resettlement. While resettlement programmes represent a valuable and high-profile demonstration of international burden sharing, fewer than 5,000 out of the 20,000 referrals that UNHCR will make are likely to

benefit from it before the end of the year. At least 15% of cases referred for resettlement are women at risk, with another 10% being survivors of torture and trauma. For the over 99% of Iraqi refugees who are unlikely to benefit from resettlement, long-term assistance and protection programmes in their countries of asylum are urgently required.

The international community – and not just neighbouring states – has a responsibility towards the huge number of displaced, impoverished, alienated and disenchanted Iraqis who have been displaced by an international conflict but left largely to fend for themselves. An effective humanitarian response needs to be all encompassing and with a long-term perspective, taking into account the needs of not only those displaced but also their host communities. On a positive note, the UAE has announced a $10 million contribution to UNHCR's programme for Iraqis in Syria – roughly the equivalent of the combined contributions from all Gulf States to UNHCR over the past decade. Brazil's decision to accept over 100 Palestinians stuck in a desolate camp on the Jordanian-Iraqi border for over four years is another concrete example of a non-traditional partner recognising the extent of the humanitarian catastrophe in Iraq and coming to the fore to assist. Sadly, despite persistent appeals by UNHCR and other agencies, around 10,000 Palestinians remain trapped in Baghdad and in grave danger from hostile militias.

If the displacement situation in Iraq and the strain on neighbouring states are to be stabilised, and possibly reversed, it is critical that the international community give the same level of attention as it afforded the post-2003 invasion reconstruction and development phases. Responses to the assistance and protection needs of the millions of displaced Iraqis need to be immediate and massive. Given the lack of durable solutions, they may also have to be long-term.

Andrew Harper (harper@unhcr.org) is the head of UNHCR's Iraq Support Unit. The article was written in a personal capacity. For latest news of UNHCR's response to the Iraq crisis, see www.unhcr.org/iraq.html

1. www.uniraq.org

Iraqi refugees in Egypt

by Lynn Yoshikawa

Egypt is host to an estimated 150,000 Iraqi refugees. Initially arriving with high hopes of resettlement, their resources are now depleted, they are unable to work, their children are out of school and their community is fractured by divisions.

Escaping death threats, torture, kidnappings and military attacks, thousands of Iraqis have settled in the Cairo suburbs, Alexandria and smaller governorates. The handful of Iraqi refugees that had been arriving in Egypt since 2001 quickly turned to a flood following the Samarra bombings in February 2006. Early arrivals immediately following Saddam's fall were mostly Sunni but now include significant numbers of Iraqi Shi'ites and Christians.

Some transited via Jordan and Syria, moving on in the expectation that the cost of living in Egypt would be lower. All hoped that Egypt would simply be a transit stop. Human traffickers have begun exploiting their desperation, allegedly charging $14,000 per person to reach Europe. UNHCR and existing refugee NGOs in Egypt were ill-prepared for the unexpected influx and Iraqi asylum seekers were initially turned away and asked to wait.

A signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, Egypt does not allow refugees to work without a permit and access to services is severely limited. Entry for Iraqis is becoming harder as Egypt now requires in-person interviews which are only available in Amman or Damascus. Changing visa restrictions have split families and have prevented Iraqis from returning to collect salaries or sell their assets to support themselves in exile.

Egyptians generally regard Iraqis as well-off educated professionals, an impression reinforced by the number of Iraqi restaurants, coffeehouses and internet cafes in neighbourhoods in 6th of October City (some 20km southwest of Cairo). However, resources are running out and some families have chosen to return to Iraq, despite the enormous risks. The inability of refugees to work legally causes enormous distress among Iraqis. The only significant niche in Egypt's informal labour market is domestic work, something their wives are completely unaccustomed to doing for others. Although government decrees allow refugees to access state schools, in practice most are generally barred from government schools. Most Iraqi children are not in school as private education is costly. Any money Iraqis may have had on entering Cairo is fast disappearing in Egypt's inflation-ridden economy.

Sectarian tensions at home have spilled over into the Iraqi community in Egypt. Mistrust between segments of the Iraqi population is hampering the development of self-support networks that are lifelines for the many other refugee communities in Egypt. With children out of school, parents unable to find jobs and support families and memories of violence experienced in Iraq so powerful, mental health problems are growing.

Iraqis arrived with high expectations for resettlement. However, UNHCR's resettlement strategy prioritises vulnerable cases with immediate health and/or protection needs. As of September 2007, UNHCR had registered 9,562 Iraqis. Recognised on a prima facie basis, they are given a 'yellow card' which grants them legal residence in Egypt but which must be renewed every six months. UNHCR refers them to Caritas and Catholic Relief Services, two implementing partners, for limited financial, medical and educational support.

UNHCR and its partners all face budget constraints in addressing refugee needs. UNHCR has reduced the wait for registration documents to two months but the office remains understaffed and personnel overworked.

The local population has been generally positive towards the Iraqi refugees and sympathetic to their plight. Their ability to blend in has eased their adaptation to Egyptian society compared with African refugee groups but there are reports of some discrimination on religious grounds. Shi'ites, for example, are barred from praying in Sunni mosques and denied permission to build their own by a government which does not officially recognise their sect. Foreigners in Egypt are generally subjected to higher rents than locals and the stereotype of Iraqis as wealthy had led some to blame them for high inflation.

Syria and Jordan have been shouldering the lion's share of the impacts of the refugee flows caused by the 2003 invasion with little support from the states responsible. The danger is that Iraqis hosted by Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt will be ignored. The Arab League has rejected requests for assistance to Iraqis in the region, citing a 'lack of consensus'. The Iraqi embassy in Cairo has not yet provided any assistance for their nationals despite pledges of $25 million from the foreign ministry. The Iraq crisis has created the largest displacement in the Middle East since 1948 and deserves the concerted action of all actors to uphold refugees' rights.

Lynn Yoshikawa (lynn.yoshikawa@gmail.com) is a guest researcher at the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Department at the American University in Cairo. She is completing her Master's thesis in International Humanitarian Assistance at Uppsala University.

Darfur debated

by Roberta Cohen

Bruising debates within the human rights and humanitarian communities have centered on the numbers who have died in Darfur, the use of the term genocide, the efficacy of military versus political solutions and the extent to which human rights advocacy can undermine humanitarian programmes on the ground.

Essential to effective planning in an emergency is knowing the scope of the disaster, the number of civilians who died, and from what cause. Yet in the Darfur emergency it has proved particularly difficult to affirm with any certainty the number of people who have perished and in what way. The principal obstacle has been the government of Sudan. Itself directly involved in ethnic cleansing, it has prevented compilation of credible mortality statistics. While the loss of life from the Israeli-Hizbollah conflict of 2006 was precisely determined, thus allowing families and communities to mourn, there has been a systematic effort by the regime of Omar Hassan al-Bashir to cover up the death toll in Darfur. The government of Sudan has claimed that only 9,000 have died. The UN, however, says that more than 200,000 have perished whereas Amnesty International estimates 300,000 (95,000 killed and more than 200,000 dead from conflict-related hunger or disease) and the Save Darfur Coalition, an umbrella group of NGOs,[1] places the total at 400,000.

This wide range of estimates has generated intense disputes about how the statistics have been developed, time frames used and whether all causes of death (killings as well as starvation and disease) have been included. Deliberately underestimating the numbers can contribute to international inaction but, on the other hand, exaggerating death tolls in order to raise the alarm can undermine credibility and put into doubt all statistics. It can also make constructive dialogue more difficult and lead the Sudanese regime to put further obstacles in the way of aid deliveries since it makes no distinction between advocacy groups and relief suppliers.

The debate over numbers points up the absence both of standardised data collection and of an authoritative international body with the mandate and authority to collect and disseminate mortality and morbidity data in emergencies. Without such a body, different actors, whether governments, UN agencies, NGOs or experts will continue to make their own ad hoc estimates of mortality in emergencies, with the result that nobody really knows the scope of the crisis.

In 2007, a Health and Nutrition Tracking System was set up at the World Health Organisation (WHO) with the participation of UN agencies, NGOs, donors and experts in an effort to establish standardised mortality and nutrition indicators. However, establishing an authoritative body within the UN is problematic. WHO has been pressured by governments, particularly Sudan, about its mortality studies and has also been criticised for not including violent deaths and malnutrition-related deaths in its Darfur estimates and for failing to make guesstimates for areas to which it has been denied access. The international community urgently needs an independent centre free from political influence that would collaborate with the UN and build on the work done by SMART (Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions),[2] which has been formed by a network of humanitarian actors to bring consistency to the methodology used to collect data on mortality.

Genocide

Not unlike the dispute over statistics, whether or not genocide was committed in Darfur will be debated for a long time to come. Those who remain unpersuaded that Sudan has committed genocide against its African tribes generally focus on the legal issue of whether it was Sudan's 'intent' to destroy in whole or in part a particular ethnic or racial group, as required by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.[3] They note that the UN International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur[4] did not find that Sudan committed genocide (although the commission did not rule it out and emphasised that the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed "may be no less serious and heinous than genocide"). Nor has the International Criminal Court (ICC) accused any Sudanese to date of genocide although it has charged two with war crimes and crimes against humanity.[5] Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have generally refrained from using the term genocide. The complexity of the legal issues surrounding the term constitutes the main obstacle for many international lawyers. They point to the International Court of Justice's tortuous 2007 ruling that Serbia did not commit genocide in Bosnia because there was insufficient proof that Bosnia's Serbs acted under Serbia's direction and that the murder of 8,000 men and boys at Srebrenica was planned by Serbia. As a result, Serbia did not have to pay damages, although it was found guilty of not preventing genocide or punishing those who committed it.

For many NGOs and experts, particularly in the US, there is little doubt that the government of Sudan and the Janjaweed have committed genocide by means of deliberate killings, deportations, rapes and destruction of livelihood. Physicians for Human Rights has found "direct evidence of genocidal intent" and "strong circumstantial evidence upon which genocidal intent may be inferred."[6] The US government concluded in 2004 that genocide had been committed while the Parliament of the European

Union has called what happened "tantamount to genocide."

For many American groups, the use of the term genocide has proved an effective mobilisation tool. Indeed, NGO coalitions and student groups have found their voice by focusing on genocide, and many of the steps taken by the US government have been the result of their pressure. But the term continues to be contested, most recently by the argument that it no longer captures the reality on the ground, which more closely resembles anarchy than genocide. The conflict, it is argued, is no longer solely between Sudanese military and the Janjaweed on the one hand and African rebel groups

on the other. Fragmented rebel groups as well as Arab tribes and militias are now fighting amongst themselves, with alliances constantly shifting, banditry spreading and violence spilling over into Chad (although others counter that Sudan is promoting the chaos).

The use of the term genocide has also been called a political liability, with relief groups criticising human rights advocates for undermining humanitarian operations on ground. The term has been said to make the rebels, as well as the Sudanese government and the Arab militias, more intransigent. In fact, sometimes to facilitate negotiations with the government

of Sudan, UN officials have downplayed the ethnic component of the conflict, emphasising instead its environmental roots – desertification, ecological degradation and water scarcity.

The debate over genocide has detracted from the most salient issue – the need to protect people when atrocities are committed, whatever their legal categorisation. It has enabled Sudan and its supporters to make it appear that the crimes committed are not so serious since genocide has not been officially determined. Francis Deng, Special Representative to the UN Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities,

A refugee from Darfur seeks shelter from a sandstorm near the Chadian border town of Tine.

UNHCR/H Caux

persuasively argues that when a situation involves massive suffering and death like Darfur, attention should not be focused on labels and legalities but rather on what should be done to stop or prevent this.

The disarray over the use of the term genocide suggests the need to explore whether it is feasible to set up an expert body under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide to help with determinations on whether or not genocide is occurring. The mandate of the Special Representative does not allow him to make such determinations and, unlike other international human rights treaties, the 1948 Genocide Convention contains no implementation machinery. The ICC can find individuals guilty of genocide after the fact but a body of recognised experts, aided by satellite technology, could be tasked with making speedy determinations of what is occurring, monitoring the state's actions and providing guidance on the obligations of other states under the convention. To be sure, adding a protocol to the convention or reopening the text would come with considerable risks. But the experiences of Cambodia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda and Darfur, with the debate and uncertainty over the use of the term and the steps states should take in response, point to the need for establishing an authoritative mechanism.

Military vs. political solutions

Many commentators, politicians and humanitarians have called for military action. They point out that over the past four years Sudan has broken every pledge to halt the violence and understands only one language – the credible threat or use of force. Without armed intervention, they argue, lives will continue to be lost in Darfur, while Khartoum, awash with oil revenue and arms, will continue on its criminal path. Former Clinton Administration officials – mindful of their failure to prevent the 1994 Rwanda genocide – are at times at the forefront of those urging the US to take military action.

Opponents of military action often point out that due to its tainted international reputation the Bush Administration could not credibly

introduce no-fly zones, air strikes and non-consensual NATO forces into Darfur without significant political fallout in the Islamic world and elsewhere. In any case, they argue, military operations can achieve only limited results when the problem is primarily political. For many relief organisations, coercive intervention could provoke a backlash and expulsion of humanitarian workers, resulting in large-scale deaths. Proponents of more robust action concede that a more proactive approach might incite retaliation but maintain that it would improve security in the long term. Acquiescence by relief groups to government-imposed conditions is already risking lives; the Sudanese government has been regularly impeding relief deliveries and tolerating or inciting increased attacks on aid workers.

Whatever the merits of the case, it has become clear that neither the UN nor a coalition of willing states is likely to undertake coercive military action in Darfur to oblige the government of Sudan to disarm the Janjaweed and halt its own military operations. Darfur is not a national security priority for any Western state. The US military is overstretched in Iraq, NATO is engaged in Afghanistan, and Sudan can rely upon China, Russia and the Arab League to shield it from robust international action.

A more realistic option

Far better than debating military action would be to mount a broad-based diplomatic offensive to secure the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1769. Unanimously adopted at the end of July 2007, SCR1769 provides for a 26,000 strong African Union-UN force (the African Union/UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur – UNAMID), to protect IDPs, civilians and humanitarian workers.[7] Although not the robust international force originally called for, UNAMID's Chapter VII mandate[8] should – if countries pledge sufficient military personnel and funding – be an improvement over the current small AU force of 7,000 with its weak protection mandate. The lack of resources available to the current African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS)[9] was tragically evidenced

in September by the death of ten AMIS soldiers whose base at Haskanita in South Darfur was overrun by unidentified militias.

The time frame for deploying UNAMID needs to be speeded up, equipment and training provided, and flexibility introduced with regard to Sudan and the AU's insistence on predominantly African troops and police. Since the resolution includes no sanctions in the event Sudan should obstruct deployment, a coalition of governments, including African and Arab states and regional bodies, is needed to systematically prod Sudan with both sanctions and incentives to allow in the force and, most importantly, to reach a political agreement with the rebels, as called for in the resolution. China will need to be encouraged to use its leverage with Sudan, while rebel groups will need to be pressed to negotiate and compromise as well. After all, the much-touted responsibility to protect (R2P) means not only military action but also a series of diplomatic, humanitarian, political and economic steps to take prior to coercive action. One small step forward would be to strengthen the offices of the soon-to-be-appointed Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect and the Special Representative for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. Both need staff, resources and political support, from outside and inside the UN, in order to map out and raise awareness of the steps needed for prevention and to operationalise R2P both for Darfur and other serious situations.

Roberta Cohen (rcohen@brookings.edu) is a Non Resident Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, Senior Adviser to the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement and Senior Fellow at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of International Migration.

1. www.savedarfur.org
2. www.smartindicators.org
3. www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/p_genoci.htm
4. www.un.org/News/dh/sudan/com_inq_darfur.pdf
5. www.icc-cpi.int/cases/Darfur.html
6. http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/sudan
7. http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3806701.html
8. The section of the UN Charter setting out the Security Council's powers to authorise the use of military force to maintain peace.
9. www.amis-sudan.org/index.html

Year of displaced people's rights in Colombia

by Marco Alberto Romero

A Campaign for the Rights of Displaced People in Colombia, launched in 2007 by UNHCR, Colombian NGO CODHES and the Catholic Church, has tried to raise awareness in Colombia and the international community about the severity of the country's displacement crisis and its failure to guarantee the rights of displaced people.

CODHES and the Episcopal Conference of Colombia calculate that over 3.8 million people have been displaced in the last 20 years. Accurate figures are difficult to come by as official records suffer from gross underreporting. Studies indicate levels of underreporting of over 30% and various surveys show that, additionally, around 20% of displaced people have never requested registration as displaced. Furthermore, according to the Constitutional Court, official records do not cover forced displacement within the same town, city or village.

Institutional responses: contradictory and deficient

Colombia's current government refuses to acknowledge the existence of a politically-motivated armed conflict and tends to characterise the situation in Colombia as that of a democratic nation threatened by terrorism. This failure to acknowledge the true situation sidetracks the government from developing programmes for prevention and protection. The Colombian government also displays a profound inability and unwillingness to respond to the needs of those who have been forcibly displaced.

Act 387, passed in 1997, recognises a series of special rights for the displaced population: emergency humanitarian aid, access to health services, education, housing, generation of income and participation in the development of public policies. Similarly, the government is obliged to protect the life, integrity and dignity of all displaced individuals. In 2004, Colombia's Constitutional Court declared the existence of a State of Unconstitutional Affairs *(Estado de Cosas Inconstitucionales – ECI)* in a bid to highlight the contradiction between the government's formal recognition of these rights and the lack of financial and political resources that would ensure effective access to them. Three years later, the Court has stated that this ECI still exists and that there are serious breaches in provision of access to social services and long-term solutions.

Analysis of the government's response, in light of the official statistics released, indicates that access to emergency humanitarian aid has increased (80%) but that there is still a deficit of over 60% in terms of effective access to health services and education, while only 4% of families have obtained any assistance to buy a home and only 16% have received training grants or microloans to help generate employment and income. Furthermore, the government has acknowledged that close to 40% of displaced people do not have any official means of identification, which makes it even more difficult for them to access assistance.

Act 975 – the Justice and Peace Act (Ley de Justicia y Paz) – came into force in 2005 and aimed to facilitate dialogue between the Colombian government and the extreme right-wing paramilitary groups, which have been partially demobilised. This new law establishes major impunity benefits for members of these groups but also formally recognises the rights of victims to truth, justice and reparation. However, no sentences have yet been passed and, in the meantime, 17 displaced community leaders have been murdered.

According to official calculations, several million hectares of land have been violently expropriated in Colombia, and the inhabitants forced to leave their homes. Without the restoration of land and property, and without proper security in these regions, people will be unable to return to their homes. For the time being, the displaced population continues to live a life of marginality in ever deteriorating living conditions in the country's major cities.

The 2007 Campaign for the Rights of Displaced People in Colombia has been urging the government to face up to these challenges and to its responsibilities. The campaign calls on the international community for support as it struggles to foster a culture of social responsibility to help Colombia resolve the ongoing war that is blighting the country and its people's lives.

Marco Alberto Romero (marcoromero@codhes.org) is the president of Codhes (Consultoría para los derechos humanos y el desplazamiento www.codhes.org).

On 29 July 2007, the main square in Bogotá, Colombia's capital city, was transformed by thousands of flowers and plants, left in homage to Colombia's displaced. The event, 'Siembra y canto en la plaza' (planting and singing in the square), attracted some 20,000 people to the Plaza Bolivar to show solidarity with the thousands of Colombians who have been forced to flee the countryside for the cities. The event was part of the 2007 Campaign for the Rights of Displaced People in Colombia, and included music, theatre and dance by both professional artists and displaced persons.

Resettlement for Bhutanese refugees

by Christer Lænkholm

The US offer to resettle 60,000 of the 106,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal might offer a solution to this protracted refugee situation. Resettlement may not be a perfect solution but after 16 years of exile refugees may well choose it as the best option available.

Bhutanese Hindus of Nepalese origin – an estimated one sixth of the population of Bhutan – were arbitrarily stripped of their nationality in the early 1990s and either were forcibly expelled from the tiny Himalayan kingdom or fled in order to escape the enforcement of restrictive citizenship laws and other forms of institutionalised discrimination.[1] The Bhutanese live in seven camps in the Jhapa and Morang districts in southeastern Nepal, close to the Indian border, frustrated by 15 fruitless rounds of bilateral negotiations between the governments of Nepal and Bhutan and the failure of the international community to secure durable solutions to their displacement.

The Nepalese authorities have consistently seen the refugees as the responsibility of the Kingdom of Bhutan and have pressed for resettlement and repatriation as a solution, not integration. Host communities have expressed concern over the refugees' adverse effects on local communities, citing over-exploitation of water and forest resources, damage of roads by transport vehicles serving the camps and competition for employment as the refugees drive down wages. There are reports of increasing rates of crime and sexual and gender-based violence.

The Bhutanese refugees are restricted to the camps and prohibited from engaging in income-generating activities, even within the camp confines. As a consequence, they are entirely dependent on the support of the international community for their survival. With the passage of time the support system in the camps has come under increasing strain as

a result of donor fatigue. Budgetary constraints facing UNHCR and the World Food Programme have necessitated cuts in the provision of essential services, including food, fuel, medical care and shelter materials. Some services which used to be extended to all refugees have now been limited to the most vulnerable.

Human Rights Watch reports that donor substitution of kerosene by less expensive briquettes has led to respiratory and other health problems. Without kerosene the camps now have no lighting at night, with impacts on young people's studies. Women complain that conditions in the camps, with large numbers of people being forced to live together in close confinement in deteriorating circumstances, are not conducive to creating a safe environment for women and girls.

The Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are thus trapped between their forced dependency on international assistance and the increasing reluctance of the international community to keep providing for their needs. While the resettlement offer has given hope to many, the lack of clear information from the US authorities or about the prospects for other durable solutions – repatriation to Bhutan or local integration in Nepal – has resulted in increasing anxiety and tension among the refugees. The fate of the remaining 46,000 refugees and of up to 45,000 unregistered refugees in Nepal and India remains unclear. Organisations working in the camps have expressed concern that the unofficially announced resettlement offer may attract new refugees, as well as local Nepalese economic migrants.

Many refugees see resettlement as tantamount to defeat and a means to absolve the Bhutanese government of its legal and moral responsibility to make amends for the blatant violation of their rights. Some opponents of resettlement have threatened refugees who speak out in favour of resettlement, leaving many refugees fearful of expressing their thoughts on their future. Having been residents of a refugee camp for up to 16 years, many young people have never known or cannot remember life in Bhutan. Understandably, few have much enthusiasm for repatriation. The US offer has widened the generation gap between parents wishing to return and children favouring resettlement.

A survey conducted in 2002 and 2003 found that 80% of the refugees chose repatriation as their most desired solution but in the context of bleak prospects for repatriation and an offer for facilitated resettlement in one of the richest countries in the world, this is likely to change. UNHCR estimates that up to 80% of the population will apply for resettlement.

There has been much speculation about why the US announced in October 2006 its willingness to resettle refugees. Cynics have pointed to the desire of the Bush Administration to be seen to fulfil their refugee resettlement quota by absorbing a group of politically unthreatening refugees. Unofficially it has been announced that vulnerable persons and families will be given highest priority for resettlement but civil society groups have voiced concern that selection will be based on language and educational skills, leading to a brain drain in the camps, especially among teachers and health workers, and a further deterioration in conditions for those remaining. There are also fears among the refugees that the offer might be withdrawn at any time and without warning. Refugees want reassurance that a decision on their

Bhutanese refugee distributing food to other refugees, Timal camp, Nepal

Christer Laenkholm

asked to choose between a future in the US and their right to return to their own country.

It is essential that the refugees' right to self-determination is respected and that they are empowered to make well-informed decisions about the various consequences of all three durable solution options. They may be forced to make some pragmatic decisions. At the moment repatriation is not a realistic prospect; the human rights situation of the remaining ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan is highly precarious despite announced moves towards democratisation

part to accept the offer of resettlement does not extinguish their right to return to Bhutan. Despite Bhutan's intransigence, refugees have not given up hope that one day they will be allowed to return home. Some refugees now fear that they are being

in the Buddhist kingdom. In the absence of a UNHCR presence in Bhutan and given Bhutan's unwillingness to entertain the idea that UNHCR could facilitate and monitor voluntary repatriation of the refugees, there can be no guarantees

of a secure legal status for any returning ethnic Nepali refugees.

Thus for many refugees the 'next-best choice' might be the best option for their and their children's future. Realistically, a lot of the refugees may end up getting low-skilled and low-paid jobs and finding difficulties integrating in the USA – but they will be able to offer their children the possibility of a better education and job prospects than would be possible if they stay languishing in the refugee camps.

Christer Lænkholm (chl@dca.dk) is a Relief Officer for DanChurchAid (DCA www.dca.dk). DCA is a long-time partner of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF www. lutheranworld.org) which has worked with Bhutanese refugees in Nepal since they arrived in 1991.

For further information, see the April 2007 report of Human Rights Watch, 'The Need for Durable Solutions for Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal and India' (http://hrw. org/reports/2007/bhutan0507).

1. For the background to the Bhutanese displacement, see FMR7 (www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR07/fmr7.7.pdf); FMR10 (http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR10/fmr10.18.pdf); FMR19 (www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR19/FMR19update.pdf); and FMR25 (www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR25/FMR2545.pdf).

Bulgaria's treatment of asylum seekers

by Valeria Ilareva

Asylum seekers face appalling treatment at the immigration detention centre in Bulgaria. Treated as undocumented immigrants, they are penalised and deported – in blatant violation of Bulgarian law and Refugee Convention obligations.

Alfred is a 16-year-old unaccompanied asylum seeker from Kosovo. Frightened and confused, he looks even younger. He has been detained at the immigration detention centre in Sofia since May 2007, held under the same regime as adults. No officials from the State Agency for Refugees[1],

who come to the detention centre to interview asylum seekers, have visited him. On 14 September 2007, I visit him for a second time, having advised him the week before to submit a second asylum application. He says he cannot do so but I give him a sheet of paper and ask him

to write the application in front of me in his language, Albanian. He writes it. I accompany Alfred to find an official to witness receipt of his asylum application. The official starts shouting that Alfred has already presented an asylum application. When I try to explain that Bulgaria's Law on Asylum and Refugees obliges state officials to receive asylum applications and forward them for consideration to the competent body, she berates me for telling her how to do her job. We are startled by her

hostility and do not know how react. I now understand what Alfred meant when he said he couldn't submit another application. But what can we do? There is a deportation order against him, a product of impossible circumstance in which Alfred was kept unaware of appeal deadlines and the content of the order itself.

This is just one example of the treatment meted out to asylum seekers in Bulgaria, most of whom come from Afghanistan, Iran or Iraq and have entered Bulgaria from Turkey.

According to Article 31(1) of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees – which Bulgaria has ratified and whose rulings Bulgaria is therefore obliged to uphold – refugees should not be penalised for illegal entry if they have come from a territory where their life or freedom is threatened. In international law there is no such thing as 'illegal entry' with regard to asylum seekers and refugees. It is not illegal for an asylum seeker to enter any Convention country, regardless of method, loss of papers, etc, as long as the intention is to claim asylum.

Additionally, the Bulgarian Penal Code exempts refugees from prosecution for 'illegal' entry. As a member state of the European Union, Bulgaria has also transposed the EU directives regarding the rights of asylum seekers, the most important being the right to stay in the territory of the host country while the asylum application is being considered. Under Bulgarian law, asylum seekers who are minors must automatically be released from detention.

The law is one thing; the way it is practised is quite another. In order for the protection prescribed in law to function, one needs to be recognised as an asylum seeker. This happens with the registration of an asylum application. In Bulgaria the time between submission of an asylum application and its registration has no restriction, resulting in tremendous hardship for asylum seekers as many are obliged to remain indefinitely in detention without legal recourse while awaiting 'registration'. The large margin of discretion given to state officials regarding the time to register an asylum application has opened the door for corruption.

Those relatively fortunate asylum seekers who are not detained are required to go to the State Agency for Refugees and beg for a date simply in order to begin the asylum process and receive basic and much-needed assistance and protection. Those detained for entering Bulgaria 'illegally' wait for months in detention until their applications are registered. Applications are sent regularly in the hope of receiving official attention but are not considered unless they

are personally submitted by the director of the detention centre.

The most dangerous consequence for asylum seekers is the imminent risk of deportation *(refoulement)*. Asylum seekers who have entered Bulgaria 'illegally' are issued deportation orders and their embassies asked for cooperation in facilitating their return. Deportation orders are usually issued with a ruling of their preliminary execution, meaning appeal against them has no suspensive effect unless an asylum application is registered. As a result, the State Agency for Refugees may arrive at the detention centre to register and interview an asylum seeker only to find that the individual has already been deported as an 'illegal immigrant'.

Those who are not summarily deported face prolonged and unlimited detention, regardless of strict requirements under the EU Reception Conditions Directive stating that "Member States shall take into account the specific situation of vulnerable persons such as … persons who have been subjected to torture … or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence."

Khaled, a Chechen asylum seeker, was twice detained and tortured in Russia by the Federal Security Service. The second time he 'disappeared' for seven months during which he was interrogated daily and subject to electric shocks, suffocation, injection of 'panic-inducing' substances, squeezing of his legs between metal presses and other acts. After entering Bulgaria 'illegally' at the end of October 2006, he was detained. He submitted a written asylum application on 1 November 2006 (and later repeatedly re-sent it) but it was not registered until 31 May 2007 and then only after he had shouted at officials. For punishment he was – like many other inmates – placed in solitary confinement, in a room called 'the isolator'. The isolator is a cell with nothing in it but a camera. After a quick interview from within the isolator building, his asylum application was rejected without any medical examination as to his torture claims. His prolonged solitary confinement, which still continues, falls under the definition of torture set out in the 1984 UN Convention against Torture.

Busmanci detention centre for undocumented immigrants in Sofia.

By bureaucratically postponing 'official' recognition of asylum seeker status, Bulgaria is wrongly applying domestic legislation regarding undocumented immigrants to persons who should be exempted from such treatment. The Bulgarian authorities are prioritising the administrative convenience of officials from the State Agency for Refugees over the rights and lives of asylum seekers.

Valeria Ilareva (valeria.ilareva@ gmail.com) is a lawyer at the Legal Clinic for Refugees and Immigrants (LCRI www.lcri.hit. bg), based at the Law Faculty of Sofia University. Themba Lewis assisted with this article.

1. www.aref.government.bg/?cat=2

Does the world of international aid need a watchdog?

by Asmita Naik

Five years on from the scandal of sexual exploitation of West African refugee children by humanitarians, has enough been done to ensure that the system of international humanitarian assistance really does the good it is intended for?

In 2002 the humanitarian community was shaken out of a complacent acceptance that international aid 'does good' into a recognition that it can also 'do harm'. The West Africa sex-for-aid scandal exposed an entrenched pattern of sexual exploitation of refugee children by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers, graphically illustrating how even such meagre aid supplies as biscuits, soap or tarpaulins can be used as a tool for oppressing the most vulnerable victims of conflict. The case represented a failure of accountability at all levels: a gross misuse of donor aid on the one hand and a heinous abuse of beneficiaries on the other.

The allegations in the UNHCR/Save the Children report spawned a flurry of activity. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse was promptly set up as a forum for UN agencies and NGOs to jointly tackle the problem. The UN Secretary-General issued a bulletin on 'Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse'[1], in-country focal points and networks were established and training, guidance and support are now available to help stamp out such abuses. Much has been achieved at the policy level by genuinely committed individuals. Some of the most radical ideas – such as routine DNA testing of humanitarian workers and compensation for victims – have come from humanitarian insiders.

Despite all this, progress on the ground remains achingly slow. A Save the Children report in 2006 found little had changed and that sex between underage girls and humanitarian workers/peacekeepers continued openly in the refugee communities of Liberia[2]. Similar allegations have been made in Nepal, DRC, Sudan and Haiti, raising real questions about the international community's commitment to enforcing these policies at the grassroots.

Symptomatic of wider failures?

There is little doubt that the culture of evaluation has become more ingrained. A proliferation of initiatives have emerged dedicated to increased accountability and improved performance in the development world. These include: the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), Coordination Sud/Synergie Qualité, the Emergency Capacity Building Project, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), InterAction, Management Accounting for Non-Governmental Organisations (MANGO), One World Trust's Global Accountability Project (GAP), the People In Aid Code of Good Practice and the Sphere Project – to name but a few.

In view of this explosion of interest and activity in improving performance, it is disappointing to find age-old criticisms being made about aid operations in the two major inter-agency tsunami evaluations. Both the Clinton-led NGO Impact Initiative[3] and the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition[4] noted duplication, waste and a lack of accountability and

Relief supplies from around the world pour into the airport at Banda Aceh, Indonesia, following the tsunami.

UMNS/ACT International/Mike DuBose

professionalism as key concerns, critiques very similar to those made in the 1996 evaluation of the humanitarian response in Rwanda.

Clearly, an accountability gap remains and international organisations continue to operate in something of a vacuum, far from the scrutiny of their countries of origin and in places with weak democratic and legal systems. Accountability to those they serve (beneficiaries) and to those who pay (the developed world's taxpayers and individual donors) is very weak compared to recourse available to users of publicly or privately funded services in developed countries. Service users in the developed world who receive poor treatment from public institutions (for example, if they suffer abuse/neglect at the hands of service providers) can sue through the courts for negligence, file a criminal case, lobby parliamentarians, raise public awareness through campaign groups or the media, complain to regulatory bodies or call for public enquiries or inspections. These remedies may be imperfect but mechanisms do at least exist. None of these options are open to the beneficiaries of aid. They live in countries which simply do not have these kinds of democratic and legal processes and international organisations have not provided them with adequate substitutes. The plethora of existing training and capacity-building initiatives, self-regulatory measures or evaluations cannot make up for these deficits.

Accountability with bite

There is an increased energy and enthusiasm for improved performance which must be welcome. Efforts aimed at self-regulation, certification, training, learning and capacity building all have a central role to play in moving the agenda forward. However, they alone are not enough and external pressures are needed. This can only come from an independent international watchdog/ombudsman mandated to carry out independent investigations and evaluations. Internal mechanisms can never be completely impartial – even when they bring in external consultants – as long as they are managed by the very organisations they are set up to evaluate. Only an independent body can systematically and transparently

investigate abuses which currently only surface in an ad hoc, chaotic way.

Such an institution could instigate legal action against organisations and their officials either in countries of incorporation or operation for liability in negligence. Aid agencies are required to exercise a duty of care that is reasonable in the given circumstances to avert damage that can reasonably be foreseen but are rarely held to account for this in law. More can be expected from them. Organisations often fail to make a distinction between what they can and cannot change, focusing on wider societal problems instead of matters under their control – their own ability to educate, monitor and discipline staff about sexual exploitation, for instance, or their responsibility to coordinate with other agencies effectively and selflessly to avoid waste of donor funds. Clearly, international agencies are working in difficult circumstances. They cannot be held absolutely liable but they can be required to do their best.

The office of an ombudsman could establish a league table of agencies based on measures of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, drawing on lessons learned from initiatives such as the American Institute of Philanthropy's charity rating guide[5] or the One World Trust's Global Accountability Index.[6] This would help ensure beneficiaries receive the assistance they need by enabling money to go to organisations able to deliver quality services. Taxpayers and individual donors would have greater confidence that their money is being used wisely. Institutional donors would be able to make decisions based on objective criteria, thus opening up the possibility of genuine competition between agencies based on the quality of their work.

The idea of an independent 'ombudsman' was mooted following the humanitarian response to the genocide in Rwanda but an organisation with the types of functions suggested above has not been trialled. It is a vital and missing piece of the accountability armoury which would serve to boost and promote other efforts aimed at self-regulation and learning. The idea appears to be gathering

momentum among some donors through whom a significant amount of international funding is channelled.

> We need to do more to increase accountability. Maybe we should look to create an independent body to report on the performance and effectiveness of the humanitarian system.
>
> Hilary Benn, former UK Secretary for International Development[7]

Obligations to donors and beneficiaries are often presented as polar opposites pulling in different directions but they need not be. Donors and beneficiaries have a common interest in effective, efficient programmes in which they have a say, especially given that billions of dollars are at stake.[8] The onus is on donor governments and foundations as trustees of monies held by them to call for greater accountability for beneficiaries and taxpayers alike rather than using aid funding for political leverage. While they must drive the setting up of an international watchdog, the body must be completely independent of them and they themselves must be subject to its scrutiny.

Images of aid agency inefficiency and non-transparency can only serve to undermine and detract from the good and dedicated work that does take place. If humanitarian organisations are to be effective standard-bearers leading the way for better government and corporate behaviour, they need to do the utmost to retain the high moral ground themselves. The time has come to raise the stakes and to finally give accountability some bite.

Asmita Naik (asmita99@yahoo.co.uk) is an independent consultant.

1. http://ochaonline.un.org/OchaLinkClick.aspx?link=ocha&DocId=1001083

2. BBC, 'Liberia sex-for-aid widespread', 8 May 2006 at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4983440.stm

3. www.refugeesinternational.org/content/publication/detail/9607

4. www.tsunami-evaluation.org

5. www.charitywatch.org/aboutaip.html

6. www.oneworldtrust.org/?display=index_home

7. *Guardian*, 'Benn to attack UN over disaster response', 23 January 2006

8. A 2002 estimate of the operating expenditures of non-profits in 37 countries was $1.6 trillion (equivalent to being the fifth largest economy in the world): *Newsweek*, 'Where the money is', 5 September 2005; $13 billion Tsunami donations were made – US$5 billion from private sources according to the NGO Impact Initiative, 2006, ibid.

Beyond presence: protection interventions on the ground

by Rosa da Costa

As concepts and practice change in the context of the new collaborative mandate for IDPs, protection is increasingly understood as a cross-cutting issue affecting other clusters and their lead agencies.

'Protection through presence' has become a popular term to describe a situation whereby an international humanitarian presence provides humanitarian assistance and possibly deters abuses of human rights. However, what does it mean in practice to provide protection in conflict-related displacement situations, including for actors concerned with the provision of humanitarian aid? And how does one continue providing some measure of assistance and protection in contexts where states have shown themselves unwilling or unable to stop human rights violations? The interventions described below highlight the protection impact these activities can have, as well as the particular challenges and risks they pose.

Family unity and reunification

Humanitarian actors understand that the family is a critical protection tool in crisis situations, and know that unaccompanied children are at risk of exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence. As such, when children cannot be immediately reunited with their family, child protection officers conduct best interest determinations, find suitable care arrangements, continue tracing procedures and ensure follow-up with regard to the child's welfare and needs.

In the context of conflict-related displacement, protection officers must also be aware of and respond to other protection risks brought about by the separation of family members. For example, men who have been separated from their families are more likely to be suspected of political or military activities, and thus subject to arbitrary arrests, forced recruitment and human rights violations by the different parties to the conflict.

Similarly, unaccompanied boys and girls are vulnerable to recruitment by armed factions as porters, sex slaves or fighters. Protection officers and others working in the field must also remain conscious of the risks their family reunification efforts may entail. Tracing procedures for separated family members demand greater awareness of confidentiality and security issues.

Protection, data collection and registration

Reliable information on the numbers, location and condition of IDPs – disaggregated by age, gender and other key indicators – is essential for improving the protection of IDPs. However, in conflict-induced IDP situations, even an apparently mundane activity such as gathering information through registration or profiling can hold unexpected challenges and protection implications. IDPs can be difficult to identify and reach, especially when they disperse into large urban areas, are living with host families or have been forced to flee into areas controlled by rebel forces. Persons or communities who have been internally displaced as a result of human rights violations and persecution will often wish to hide their identity and location and thus be virtually inaccessible for the purposes of data collection.

Traditional approaches to gathering data on IDPs, as well as profiling and registration, have to be reconsidered to take account of security risks since the availability of this data can have serious implications for the safety of displaced individuals or groups. IDPs may chose to live in anonymity in order to escape persecution by armed state and non-state actors. Alternatively, IDPs may feel it is not

in their best interests to be identified as a 'special group' for fear of backlash from a host population which is not receiving aid supplies. Involving protection officers and the displaced communities themselves in assessing these risks and selecting the appropriate methods for collecting and using this data will help ensure that this information does not inadvertently jeopardise the safety or the longer-term interests and rights of IDP communities.

Protection and humanitarian assistance

Over the last decade much progress has been made to improve protection through humanitarian assistance activities. Useful approaches have been developed to: help ensure that we deliver assistance better; understand and respond more effectively to specific protection risks; and improve the way we work with communities. Rights- and community-based approaches, age, gender and diversity mainstreaming and participatory assessments are tools which can help us ensure that humanitarian assistance and other services and programmes are sensitive to the specific protection needs and capacities of different groups. Moreover, when implemented through a protection lens humanitarian aid can have an important impact that goes beyond protecting IDPs more effectively from the immediate risks of displacement, such as the lack of food, shelter and other basic human necessities. Significantly, assistance programmes can also:

■ protect IDPs from secondary protection risks associated with displacement, such as disease, exploitation and having to engage in undignified or dangerous survival strategies, including various forms of survival sex

■ prevent IDPs from having to return prematurely to unsafe conditions or from undertaking dangerous

secondary displacements in search of water sources or other essentials

- strengthen the capacity and incentives of host communities to help protect IDPs by including them in assistance or development programmes.

In addition, humanitarian assistance programmes often provide a convenient entry point for establishing an international presence and for undertaking 'protection' work. 'Presence through assistance' provides an opportunity to assess protection needs, gradually engage the relevant actors on related issues and develop protection programmes specific to the situation. This is especially important when access for explicitly protection-related activities is controversial and initially hard to negotiate.

A rapid intervention through humanitarian aid in the early phases of displacement can also act as a mitigating measure even when it cannot prevent displacement from taking place. It can help ensure safer or more viable camp sites and avoid secondary movements further afield to larger urban areas or more inaccessible areas which might prejudice chances of return to places of origin. When assistance is provided too late into the displacement process, it can mean that IDP communities have already dispersed, are difficult to access and can no longer act together to advocate for their rights or conditions for return. A rapid presence through humanitarian assistance

can provide timely opportunities as well, including to: negotiate rules for co-existence early on; appease tensions with host or neighbouring communities; and help preserve a vigorous and healthy community by ensuring that its stronger members or leadership do not have to leave in search of basic necessities – but can instead contribute to more energetic community-based solutions and initiatives.

At the same time, care has to be taken to ensure that an international presence through assistance activities does not inadvertently prolong the displacement or render it permanent. For this reason, the planning of food distribution in contested areas should be done carefully and with the participation of local leaders. Food can attract attacks by rebels, while situating food distribution points too far from villages can create permanent displacement as populations may be too weak to make the trip back to their village on a daily basis, opting instead to remain near the distribution area.

Similarly, maintaining assistance infrastructure – such as camp structures, medical tents and food distribution points – for too long can extend or consolidate displacement by encouraging affected populations to remain where essential services are available. Cutting assistance, however, may result in premature returns to unsustainable and unsafe conditions, or in secondary displacements. This underscores the importance of carefully coordinating humanitarian relief around areas

of displacement on the one hand, and early recovery, development and livelihood programmes in areas of return on the other.

Providing a legal framework and impetus to these protection activities, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[1] are an important tool around which we can work with national governments (e.g. national human rights institutions, the judiciary, police forces, the military) as well as domestic civil society and affected communities to raise awareness of the rights of IDPs and strengthen systems to protect them.

It is short-sighted to define protection only or primarily in relation to measures we can take once displacement has happened. IDP protection work should be also about protection from displacement. Displacement is a symptom which is often connected to the key drivers of conflict – disregard for humanitarian law and human rights, poverty and marginalisation.

Initiatives seeking to create conditions which protect both the rights of returning populations and the civilian population more generally, such as investments in the rule of law, governance structures and sustainable livelihoods, should be part of a broader IDP protection strategy.

Rosa da Costa (rdacosta@ austcare.org.au) is the Senior Protection and Humanitarian Policy Advisor (Geneva) with Austcare (www.austcare.org.au).

1. www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/gp_page.htm

IRIN/Euan Denholm

WFP food distribution in Moroto, northeastern Uganda, March 2007.

Profiling IDP populations: new guidelines

by Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer and Tom Delrue

The lack of reliable IDP information has long hindered effective responses to internal displacement situations. The 'Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons' is a new tool designed to assist humanitarian actors in conducting IDP surveys.

Obtaining reliable data on IDPs is challenging. In most countries affected by internal displacement, existing data on IDPs and the conditions of their displacement is incomplete, unreliable, out of date or inaccurate. This presents a serious obstacle to effective advocacy, improved IDP protection and the design of targeted assistance programmes.

In recognition of this, in June 2004 the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Working Group agreed on the need to develop an inter-agency framework of system-wide collection and analysis of IDP-related information. It later became clear that guidance in data collection methodologies was also required in order to systematise data collection in the field.

In summer 2007, the Global Protection Working Group endorsed the Guidance on Profiling Internally Displaced Persons developed by NRC's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and OCHA's Displacement and Protection Support Section with the support of UNHCR. The process leading to the finalisation of the Guidance included a series of broad consultations with stakeholders at the headquarters levels and practitioners in the field.

IDP profiling

Profiling IDPs is an important means of improving the availability and quality of information on IDPs in order to obtain a figure through a collaborative process that can be used both for country operations and global statistics. Timely and reliable data can lead to a better understanding of an IDP situation in a particular country or area within a country. This should improve the quality of advocacy and programming on their behalf, in turn leading to better resourced and more targeted means to protect and assist them.

An IDP profile is an overview of an IDP population that shows, at a minimum:

- the number of displaced persons, disaggregated by age and sex (even if only estimates)

- their location/s .

Wherever possible, additional information could include but is not be limited to: cause(s) of displacement; patterns of displacement; protection concerns; humanitarian needs; and potential solutions for the group/individual, if available.

Who is the Guidance designed for?

This Guidance is primarily designed for senior technical-level UN and NGO decision makers at the country and sub-regional levels. It is also designed to help those tasked with conducting a profiling exercise who, although they may be experts in conducting demographic surveys, may not necessarily know much about IDPs or their salient characteristics. They will need to understand whom they are profiling and be aware of possible pitfalls. In addition, this Guidance will be useful for government officials, civil society groups and others who work to advocate, raise awareness and mobilise resources on behalf of IDPs.

National authorities have primary responsibility for providing protection and assistance to IDPs within their jurisdiction. As such, wherever appropriate, the national authorities should lead a profiling exercise, with international agencies playing a supporting role if necessary. Where the national government is unable or unwilling to assume this responsibility, it is the role of the UN Resident and/or Humanitarian Coordinator to initiate a profiling exercise, in consultation with the Country Team. The main point is that profiling should be a commonly agreed process among the various actors involved, although this does not rule out conducting separate needs assessments by different agencies for their particular purposes.

Steps forward

A core group of UN and non-UN agencies engaged in IDP profiling was formed in 2007 to support IDP profiling exercises in the field and to promote the implementation of the Guidance. Based on recommendations made after consultation with UN agencies, NGOs, academic institutions and donors in March this year, the group is currently exploring possibilities for establishing an inter-agency IDP profiling support service. An international workshop is planned for April 2008 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to take stock of recent profiling exercises and discuss best practices. It is also planned to establish a broader network of organisations and institutions working on profiling-related issues.

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer (jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch) works for the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (www.internal-displacement.org) and Tom Delrue (delruet@un.org) for the Displacement and Protection Support Section of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (http://ochaonline.un.org).

The IDP Profiling Guidance is available free of charge in print from IDMC (address on p72) and online at www.internal-displacement.org/profiling. A French version will also be available in 2008.

Role of the private sector in humanitarian response

by Soraya Narfeldt

All companies are in business to make a profit - but it's how a company makes a profit that counts. They should be encouraged to see the many benefits of supporting humanitarian response and operating in an ethical fashion.

Dubai-based RA International specialises in re-establishing infrastructure in shattered communities. Like all companies, we are in business to make a profit but we are committed to humanitarian causes, ensuring a return to the communities in which we work, and we encourage other companies to do likewise. By offering humanitarian aid, private companies can develop sustainable long-term relationships with local people. This helps gain a foothold in the community, facilitating the company's efforts in doing business in the area.

We help communities by recruiting staff locally and offering them salaried, vocational on-the-job training. The company then either employs them or helps them set up businesses on their own and then enters into partnerships with them. We foster the growth of community-based NGOs that add value to their communities. By giving people the means to set up their own businesses and associations we foster trust between our company and the local communities. This goes a long way to facilitating a good business environment while breaking down barriers on all sides.

We supply camp services, catering, waste management, procurement and logistics, power generation and engineering and construction in countries around the world, and have sponsored many community projects in countries such as Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Kenya.

In the field of waste management RA International currently operates the majority of NATO contracts within Kabul and also has waste management operations in Mazar-e-Sharif, Gardez and other areas of Afghanistan. Instead of setting up our own wastewater treatment plants, we work with the Afghanistan government and build treatment installations with Afghan ministries, thus adding to the government's infrastructure. Whilst using these installations, RA also pays fees for the service, further adding revenue to state coffers. We also operate waste management contracts in Juba, Sudan, working closely with the Government of South Sudan to establish environmental guidelines. We provide Portaloos, as well as emptying and cleaning them, for two girls' schools in Kabul. We have provided food for orphanages in Kabul and given the finance ministry essential office equipment. In Juba, we have supplied free offices and accommodation to Médecins Sans Frontières and supplied a community of lepers with food and drink. In Sierra Leone we have provided materials to build two schools and installed a number of handpumps now supplying water to schools around the country.

It is doubtful if many similar projects and their ensuing benefits would have taken place without private sector funding. Of course it's our business and we reap profits – but by paying attention to how we work and with whom, we can help ensure that local populations benefit more and in the longer term.

In Meynemah, north-western Afghanistan, we have worked with the Norwegian Provincial Reconstruction Team on a major hygiene project for the regional hospital on which over 1.1 million people depend. The Norwegian army donated a ventilator which enabled the hospital to undertake more complex life-saving surgery. It was soon realised, however, that hygiene standards were poor. A local nurse approached RA International for help and we agreed to provide funding to train and employ local men and women to disinfect operating theatres and surgical wards and assist doctors to scrub up and gown prior to surgery.

One should never underestimate the power of private companies who offer aid. Companies are almost always focused on efficiency, good negotiation, building their reputation (their brand) and getting things done on time and on budget. The basic rules of capitalism that work for the good of the communities they aid can in turn aid them in business and ultimately help post-conflict societies to recover and progress.

We see humanitarian response as a way of helping communities grow stronger. When they see that we want to give back to the communities we serve, it becomes easier to operate there. We urge other private sector operators to consider the ethics of how they operate and to ensure that their operations bring wider benefits to all.

Soraya Narfeldt (info@raints.com) is Chairman of the Board of Directors of RA International (www.raints.com) and a former UN Volunteer.

RA International is an active member of the International Peace Operations Association (http://ipoaonline.org/php). IPOA is a trade association whose mission is to promote high operational and ethical standards of firms active in the peace and stability industry; to engage in a constructive dialogue with policy makers about the growing and positive contribution of these firms to the enhancement of international peace, development and human security; and to inform the concerned public about the activities and role of the industry.

Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies   RAISE

Challenges of collecting baseline data in emergency settings

by Jennifer Schlecht and Sara Casey

Although the humanitarian community acknowledges the need for good quality data in programme design and monitoring, the challenges and demands of field settings have too often led to the argument that "we just don't have time" or "it is too difficult". Yet without the allocation of time and resources to the collection of baseline and monitoring data, project activities cannot be grounded in strong evidence from programme evaluation.

Very real concerns exist – such as those relating to ethics, physical security, political implications of activities in rapidly changing environments, logistical difficulties and the technical challenges of working with mobile populations and populations with unusual demographic compositions.[1] Yet our experience with the Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies (RAISE) Initiative[2] has demonstrated that, with improved commitment to data collection, evidence-based programming in crisis settings is possible. Although the collection of baseline data requires time and resources, it can help ensure efficiency and success in the longer term as well as provide data for advocacy purposes.

All projects supported by the RAISE Initiative implement a baseline study composed of a facility assessment and a population-based survey. RAISE provides technical support to the projects, ensuring that data collection follows standardised methodology while building the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity of project field staff. To date, RAISE and its partners have implemented facility assessments in five projects in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), northern Uganda and South Sudan and population-based surveys in three projects in Darfur and northern Uganda. These experiences illustrate ways in which challenges to collecting data can be overcome in conflict settings.

Preparation

Appropriate preparation for baseline activities is critical, especially in emergency settings. Before conducting a study, it is imperative to consider the potential direct and indirect effects the process could have on the implementing agency, the beneficiaries and the agency's ability to continue to work in a given setting.

One of our first steps in planning for baseline studies was to obtain the support of partner organisations' management. Surveys require significant commitments of finances, human resources and time. RAISE found it essential to ensure that the implementing agencies had a complete understanding of this and fully supported the baseline process before moving forward. This support should include the identification of an individual to coordinate the study from the first day of training to the last day of data collection.

Next, projects obtained approval from the local and national authorities, relevant ethical review boards and local leaders for the proposed study, their support being crucial for smooth implementation. In addition, key stakeholders, such as Ministry of Health (MOH) officials, NGO staff and local leaders, were involved in the early planning and implementation stages. Local leaders proved critical in mobilising community members to participate in study activities. Collaboration with relevant authorities was beneficial across all RAISE settings.

Study tool adaptation

Projects will often be able to adapt existing study tools whose success has already been demonstrated in similar settings, which also allows project staff to compare findings with other similar data. RAISE partners implemented a tool adapted from the Averting Maternal Death and Disability Program (AMDD) Emergency Obstetric Care Facility Assessment,[3] and a survey questionnaire adapted from the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Reproductive Health Assessment Toolkit for Conflict Affected Women.[4] Together, these tools provide information on the facility side of reproductive health (RH) services (e.g. equipment, supplies and staffing), the use of services and the current RH status of women served by the project.

Partners then adapted the tools to their local context. Translation is a critical step which is particularly important for survey tools; sufficient time must be allocated for translation,

back translation and review. Although this can be a lengthy and complicated process, especially where multiple languages are involved, data team supervisors can be involved early in the baseline process to establish ownership and encourage investment in outcomes.

Sampling

Sampling is one of the most difficult tasks when conducting surveys in conflict settings. One reason for this is that reliable population numbers are rarely available in such settings. Outbreaks of fighting in Darfur, for example, meant that IDP camp and village populations changed routinely, while in northern Uganda people had begun moving out of camps and into resettlement areas. Frequently, the agency responsible for food distribution possessed the most current numbers but these were reportedly inflated to increase the rations families received. As a result, clarification of numbers of family members as listed on ration cards was very sensitive – and ultimately avoided. RAISE partners worked closely with local leaders to overcome these obstacles. In Darfur, for example, local sheiks in the camps or villages were able to provide RAISE partners with data regarding the number of individuals or families under their leadership.

Recruiting a data collection team

Early identification and recruitment of a strong data collection team are central to study implementation. Data collectors can be recruited from various groups, including local university students, community members and MOH staff. Establishing relationships with members of these groups may lead to secondary programme benefits. For example, RAISE facility assessment data collection teams included NGO and MOH staff, thereby contributing to an improved collaboration with the local MOH. However, during the population-based survey, the involvement of MOH staff introduced new challenges where the local population mistrusted the government and would probably have refused to participate in the survey if MOH staff had been involved in data collection. In such cases, MOH officials were asked to participate in alternative tasks, such as data entry and analysis.

There are a number of other considerations in the selection of a data collection team. In some countries, ethnic and political sensitivities restricted the ability of some to travel or affected respondents' willingness to be interviewed. Varying language proficiencies, where multiple languages and dialects are spoken, led to new challenges. Literacy skills were challenging to assess, especially in places where languages or dialects are rarely written. Education levels impacted the time needed to complete training activities. Data collection required a significant time commitment; it is important to ensure that all team members understand the time demands when they agree to participate.

Training to increase local capacity

Data collection teams were trained by RAISE partners, with technical assistance from RAISE staff. Training of data collection teams lasted three to four days for facility assessments and seven to ten days for population-based surveys. Flexibility in the time allocated for training was necessary to allow for variations in the groups' starting knowledge and skills.

RAISE developed the trainings with partners to ensure good quality data and to build the capacity of partners and the individuals involved (see case study overleaf). As much as possible, project staff and supervisors led the planning, facilitation and training activities. This level of involvement resulted in stronger knowledge and confidence in the tools, improved leadership and increased quality of supervision and data collection. RAISE provided ongoing technical support throughout the process, such as standard presentations that could be adapted for trainings, making leadership by field staff a less daunting prospect.

Implementation

It is important that implementation of baseline assessments adheres to the approved methodology even in turbulent circumstances. Once samples are selected, survey implementation may be affected by rapidly changing security and road conditions. One RAISE survey team in Darfur had to suspend data collection because of fighting near the survey area that cut off access to the target population but resumed collection when the area became safe again. In northern Uganda, a number of villages which had been selected for the RAISE sample became inaccessible due to rain; teams modified transportation options when possible and, in rare cases, selected additional clusters.

During any study, but especially in insecure environments, it is essential to consider the safety and security of the data collection team and respondents. Good training provides data collection teams with guidance on how to respond to unexpected or potentially dangerous events. In addition, teams should have adequate means of communication and transportation in case of an emergency and should obey local travel restrictions. Establishing good relationships with local leaders and informing them when data collection will occur are integral to ensuring safety and security. During the RAISE surveys, local leaders provided up-to-date information about security and facilitated communication and transport.

Regarding the safety of respondents, confidentiality and privacy must be strictly maintained by all involved in study activities. This was emphasised throughout training and implementation. In northern Uganda, the survey included questions about the respondents' experiences with gender-based violence. The RAISE survey team established a protocol of referral for counselling, which each interviewer practised prior to beginning interviews.

Data entry, cleaning and analysis

To make the data most useful to those who work in the field, RAISE supported field partners with training to enter, clean and analyse the data.[5] This training gave local staff the opportunity to develop their analytical skills which they were then able to apply to the analysis of routine monitoring or other study data. In some areas, data entry presented challenges due to lack of local capacity. Individuals with computer skills were often not available for short-term work for a variety of reasons. Some projects partnered with MOH or university staff for data entry. RAISE provided standardised databases adapted for each project.

Local capacity for data analysis often tends to be quite low, so RAISE organised workshops with partner agency staff on analysing the data, using the findings for programme improvement and advocacy and planning for data dissemination. Field staff learned new skills in extracting useful information from the database.

Case study: northern Uganda

During the implementation of the population-based survey in northern Uganda, more than 1,400 women were interviewed in six areas, including IDP camps, rural villages and urban populations. Previous survey experience indicated that varying resettlement rates in each IDP area, combined with the onset of the harvesting season, would affect response rates and the ability to identify respondents. During site visits prior to the survey, the RAISE team was repeatedly told that women would not be at home either because they were living part-time in adjacent resettlement areas or worked in the fields during the day.

Training therefore required flexibility on the part of the interviewing team, and the ability of supervisors to meet the challenges of empty households, dual residences, women in the fields and low response rates. Rather than following the traditional methodology of dividing the tasks of interviewers and 'locators' (who identify houses and select participants in accordance with the protocol), flexibility was maximised by training the strongest members of the team in both skills. This proved to be tremendously valuable, as supervisors could decide the most efficient division of tasks according to the given circumstances.

For example, when a team learned that women were home only in the afternoons, 15 individuals could be divided so that 10

Locators/ interviewers in action: (from left to right) Judith, Anna and Yvonne

RAISE/Jennifer Schlecht

people identified women for interviews early in the morning. Those remaining stayed in the central location to interview the few women arriving in the morning. The 10 locators could identify up to 50 women from surrounding clusters, and then shift back to interviewing in the afternoon to accommodate the influx of women later in the day. This system allowed the team to be responsive to each situation (including notifying women up to two days before the interview would be needed) and ensured that human resources were not underutilised.

Those who had been trained in both interviewing and locating reported that it had been more rewarding. As one interviewer/ locator noted, "it was interesting and better to know more than one skill so that we could have variety in our job."

The combination of increased competence on the part of supervisors and varied skills among data collection teams gave them the flexibility needed to respond to the majority of challenges which arose. Ultimately, the teams achieved a response rate in excess of 85% in areas where previous surveys had reported less than 70%. Such flexibility is an asset to successful survey completion, as these scenarios are common in any survey and even more so in conflict situations.

Conclusions

Evidence-based programmes are essential to the provision of good quality RH services in humanitarian emergencies, and our experience with the RAISE Initiative has shown that collection and use of data in unstable settings – though challenging – is not impossible. The recent implementation of successful baseline studies by RAISE highlights the importance of:

■ building the capacity of field staff to take on leadership roles in data collection

■ flexibility in responding to changing situations

■ involving stakeholders, in particular government and local leaders, at multiple stages

■ building local staff skills in data analysis and use.

These elements ensure good data collection in any setting but are especially important in areas of conflict and instability.

Jennifer Schlecht (jls2006@columbia. edu) and Sara Casey (sec42@ columbia.edu) are Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Officers for the RAISE Initiative, both based in Columbia University.

1. For example, the ratio of men to women may be different as men may be away fighting or have been killed.

2. www.raiseinitiative.org

3. This tool will shortly be made available on the RAISE Initiative web site.

4. www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Refugee/ ToolkitDownload.htm

5. Data was entered in CSPro (www.census.gov/ipc/www/ cspro/index.html) and cleaned and analysed with EpiInfo (www.cdc.gov/epiinfo/).

Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

Towards a research agenda on internal displacement

by Elizabeth Ferris

The Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, together with the Institute for the Study of International Migration at Georgetown University, convened a meeting of academic researchers working on issues related to IDPs in Cairo, Egypt, from 8-9 March 2007. The meeting, hosted by the American University in Cairo, was called to take stock of current and planned research in the field, to identify gaps and overlaps and to brainstorm about a future research agenda on internal displacement. The 20 participants, from all regions and many academic disciplines, discussed methodological issues, possibilities for strengthening institutional partnerships, funding possibilities and issues where further research is needed.

Participants identified methodological problems in both data collection and field research and raised questions such as:

- Why and how can data be collected on IDPs who are not in camps, who are not registered and who have good reasons for not wanting to identify themselves?

- What are alternative methodologies for collecting information on IDPs and what mixture of methodologies is most effective in particular cultural situations?

- Can a common operational definition of IDPs be developed to facilitate comparative work?

- Recognising the importance of longitudinal studies and their high cost, can cross-sectional data be a substitute for longitudinal work?

- Do methods for studying IDPs differ from those used for studying refugees, other conflict-affected or undocumented migrants? What can be learned from methodologies employed in studying those groups?

- How can the risk to people being interviewed be minimised and how can confidentiality in the data be assured?

- How can academic researchers develop better linkages with policy makers?

In discussing a future research agenda for internal displacement, participants identified the following priority issues for future work:

1. Strengthening the conceptual understanding of internal displacement

- The context in which displacement is taking place, particularly the way in which understandings of sovereignty and globalisation affect internal displacement.

- Causes of displacement and particularly the relationship between different causes of displacement – for example, between conflict- and development-induced displacement.

- IDP frames of reference, including the IDP category itself and questions about the value added of expanding the definition to include all those who are forced to move; the relationship between internal and external displacement; the relationship between IDPs and economic migrants; and the points of comparison between people displaced by conflict and those who remained behind.

- Protection, including questions about mainstreaming protection, protection at the field level, the relationship between assistance and protection, and the particular protection needs of women, children, indigenous, the elderly and other groups.

2. Strengthening systems to respond to IDPs

- Institutional responses to IDPs, including the relationship of national and international responsibility for IDPs, the impact of humanitarian reforms on IDP protection and assistance, and the responsibility to protect.

3. Specific IDP groups or situations

- Urban displacement, including the need for basic information on urban IDPs or, more generally, IDPs who do not live in camps or who are 'out of view' and the relationship between urban displacement and urbanisation.

- IDPs as agents, including the role that IDPs exercise in finding their own solutions and serving as change agents in their communities.

- Protracted IDP situations, including the factors that create long-term IDP situations and conditions which lead to their solution.

- Non conflict-displaced, including development-induced displacement, environmental/ecological displacement and trafficking.

The meeting was productive and challenging – although it raised more questions than answers – and the group agreed to meet again, with other interested scholars, during the annual meeting of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration to be held in January 2008 in Cairo. The full report of the meeting is available at http://www3.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/conferences/2007_Cairorpt.pdf

Elizabeth Ferris (eferris@brookings.edu) is Co-Director of the Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (www.brookings.edu/projects/idp.aspx)

The Cluster Approach in northern Uganda

by Jessica Huber and Nina M Birkeland

NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) strongly believes that the Cluster Approach holds promise for improving the international response to internal displacement. The approach represents a serious attempt by the UN, NGOs, international organisations and governments to address critical gaps in the humanitarian system. We want this reform effort to succeed and to play an active role in northern Uganda to support the work of the clusters and improve their effectiveness.

The introduction of the Cluster Approach in Uganda must be recognised for the role it has played in maintaining focus on the humanitarian crisis that continues to affect a significant proportion of the population across northern Uganda. The Cluster Approach has resulted in a more coherent and consistent policy response from the UN and humanitarian community, working to balance the priorities of ensuring freedom of movement and freedom of choice for IDPs and continued provision of assistance to people in camps. The challenge that remains will be to see how the Cluster Approach develops in line with the improving situation on the ground, most notably responding to movement from humanitarian relief to transition and early recovery, and ultimately to a post-conflict environment. Investment and support for the transition to a post-conflict environment must be done in such a way to ensure protection and assistance to IDPs and refugees throughout the region, regardless of their location.

Awareness and leadership

Effective implementation of the clusters depends largely on the ability of the cluster leads, headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, to hold the Government of Uganda (GoU) accountable for its actions. To date the linkages between the cluster leads and the Humanitarian Coordinator remain tenuous, with weak leadership as a result. The unsuccessful introduction of a stand-alone Humanitarian Coordinator for Uganda was a disappointment.

To ensure better implementation, cluster leads and members must have a better understanding of the process, particularly with regard to tools, planning and strategic planning. The GoU must be brought on board, informed about the process and, where possible, included in coordination mechanisms.

Coordination

Despite the proliferation of coordination mechanisms, led by the UN, NGOs and the GoU, coordination still remains insufficient. As a result, many feel that little real decision making and follow-up take place in the clusters. Furthermore, local government officials lack clear understanding of the roles in the clusters and how they can push for action. A key challenge remains the capacity of the clusters to be all-inclusive (involving not only the UN and international NGOs but also national NGOs and, at district level, local NGOs and community-based organisations) and to establish clear linkages with the GoU and local government. Lastly, the clusters continue to fail to recognise that coordination amongst all actors will be most successful when it respects and reflects the priorities set by communities as well as by local and national government bodies. If the Cluster Approach is to be successful, a participatory approach must be the basis for coordinated interventions across northern Uganda.

Clusters in the context of transition

At this moment of cautious optimism in Uganda, the Cluster Approach should prioritise working towards a gradual and smooth transition from humanitarian aid to long-term development assistance. NRC looks forward to supporting the important role UNDP is beginning to play in developing and implementing the Early Recovery Cluster. For many actors in Uganda, it continues to be unclear that UNDP is responsible for this cluster; it is also unclear how it relates to other sector working groups and especially to clusters where there appears to be significant overlap in activities e.g. food security, non food items and protection.

Conclusion

The Cluster Approach is now at last actively working to improve humanitarian response and coordination in Uganda. We have seen improvements in coordination, service delivery and protection of IDPs and returnees in northern Uganda. However, much work is still needed to realise the full benefits of an inclusive Cluster Approach where all relevant actors are included as partners. With more attention to and progress on leadership and coordination, inclusiveness and the transition to early recovery by the clusters, we expect the rights of IDPs to be better met.

Jessica Huber (PAA@nrc.or.ug) is Protection and Advocacy Adviser and Nina M Birkeland (Nina. Birkeland@nrc.or.ug) is Programme Director for NRC Uganda.

The Great Lakes Process: new opportunities for protection

by Jesse Bernstein and Olivia Bueno

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (IC/GLR) has created a new regional mechanism to promote peace, security and development. Will it provide space to protect the rights of the displaced?

The region has set out on the path to peace and development. Peace agreements have been concluded in Burundi, southern Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Negotiations to end the war in northern Uganda are ongoing. Large numbers of refugees have been able to return to their homes in Angola, Burundi, southern Sudan and, to a certain extent, northern and eastern Uganda.

The outbreak of peace has not always, however, brought with it sustainable solutions to the plight of the forcibly displaced. Even as refugees and IDPs return home, they and their families encounter considerable obstacles to reintegration, from social and property conflicts to a lack of infrastructure and opportunities to create sustainable livelihoods. Furthermore, as new and ongoing conflict in the region continues to force hundreds of thousands into flight in Darfur and eastern DRC, millions remain in precarious displacement in northern Uganda and in lesser known IDP situations in Kenya, Rwanda and the Central African Republic. The eleven states of the Great Lakes region continue to host nearly two million refugees and ten million IDPs.

The IC/GLR[1] brought together 11 states – Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. In December 2006 in Nairobi, their leaders signed a Pact on Security, Stability and Development. The Pact acknowledges that addressing the situation of refugees and IDPs is integral to ensuring sustainable peace. It includes legal protocols, projects and programmes of action which are relevant to the protection of the forcibly displaced – including protocols on the protection of IDPs and property rights of returning populations and arrangements to promote the security of host and displaced populations.[2]

The Protocol on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons – which may become the world's first legally binding international instrument devoted to IDPs – focuses on implementing the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement[3] at the national level. The Protocol adapts the Guiding Principles to the regional context by explicitly defining the responsibilities of states towards those who are displaced by large-scale development projects and by providing for the creation of a regional mechanism for monitoring the protection of IDPs.

The Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons creates an innovative framework for addressing conflicts over property and land by utilising both formal and traditional mechanisms to resolve disputes. It provides for the establishment of a property registration scheme which recognises both customary and statutory land tenure systems.

The Pact was formulated through a process in which its instruments and programmes were developed with the specific challenges of the region in mind and debated at length by the region's governments and civil society. The Pact will enter into force only after eight ratifications; currently three member states have ratified or are nearing completion of the ratification process. As efforts proceed to ensure ratification, the Pact and its accompanying protocols present opportunities to engage national authorities on issues related to displacement. In nations where there is no domestic legal framework for the protection of IDPs – such as Kenya, CAR and DRC – the IDP Protocol and the model legislation which accompanies it can be used by advocates to encourage member states to acknowledge the plight of IDPs and to provide increased protection.

Recognising the potential of the Pact, in January 2007 the IDMC and the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)[4] initiated a project to support civil society advocacy to leverage the IC/GLR for the protection of refugees and IDPs. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have a unique role to play in ensuring that commitments undertaken by states are translated into effective national law and policy, improving the lives of the displaced.

In April 2007 the IDMC and IRRI brought together local CSOs, experts on forced migration, UN agencies and the IC/GLR Secretariat to discuss a plan of action for advocacy using the Pact. Participants expressed enthusiasm about using the IC/GLR tools. The IDMC and IRRI are in the process of preparing a guide which will assist all stakeholders, including CSOs, to productively engage with the IC/GLR to advocate for the rights of the displaced.

The efforts of civil society to promote national responsibility using the Pact must be complemented by UN agencies and donor governments. Member states of the IC/GLR should be encouraged to ratify the Pact, and all stakeholders should use the protocols in formulating protection strategies and policies. While it is states that have a primary role in implementing the Pact, the international community and civil society have a vital role to play in ensuring that its commitments are recognised and honoured.

Jesse Bernstein (J.M.Bernstein@lse.ac.uk) was until recently IDMC's Kenya and Uganda Country Analyst. He is now studying human rights at the London School of Economics. Olivia Bueno (olivia. bueno@refugee-rights.org) is the Research and Communications Coordinator at the International Refugee Rights Initiative (www.refugee-rights.org).

1. www.icglr.org

2. The Pact and other documents are online at www.internal-displacement.org/greatlakes and at the IC/GLR document library www.icglr.org/F_END/docLib.asp

3. www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/gp_page.htm

4. www.refugee-rights.org

The challenge of humanitarian reform: linking scholarship to policy and practice

by Roger Zetter

During 2007 the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) has been celebrating the 25th anniversary of its foundation in 1982. We have been using the anniversary to highlight the rich variety of the Centre's achievements and activities and its unique contribution in pioneering the study of refugees and forced migration. Our celebrations include a special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on methodologies of refugee research,[1] Forced Migration Online[2] podcast interviews with iconic founding figures in the field of refugee studies, exhibitions and workshops, and an international conference in December entitled 'An Unsettled Future? Forced Migration and Refugee Studies in the 21st Century'.[3]

For three interlinked reasons, this special issue of FMR, with its theme of humanitarian reform, is especially appropriate to celebrate our 25th Anniversary.

First, from its inception, the RSC has promoted humanitarian reform. At first, it courted controversy by challenging the accepted model and practice of humanitarianism represented by the assistance programmes of mainly northern NGOs, intergovernmental agencies and donors in the refugee crises of the 1970s and early 1980s in Africa, South East Asia and Central America. The RSC's early work questioned the uncritical acceptance of 'humanitarianism', even for those millions of forcibly displaced people on the margins of survival and in need of protection, by demonstrating the often negative impacts of assistance – refugee dependency, powerlessness and loss of autonomy, stereotyping refugees as helpless victims, undermining local coping capacities and civil society structures, and generating inefficient and often unseemly competition between northern agencies in the humanitarian aid 'industry'.

However, the RSC's critique of humanitarian practice at that time was not just a privileged academic exercise in itself. A fundamental objective of the RSC – and this highlights a second reason for the relevance of this special issue – has been to use rigorous scholarship to improve the lives of millions of the most marginalised people in the world by shaping and influencing academic agendas in ways which can inform and enhance the policies and practices of agencies and practitioners in the field. Since the precepts of humanitarianism lie at the core of all our work, whether as academics or practitioners, the current theme of humanitarian reform and our response to those in need of humanitarian assistance reinforces the RSC's sustained contribution to these vital debates. Today, forced displacement is, if anything, more violent and widespread than it was a quarter of a century ago. Yet refugee participation, empowerment and 'agency', enhancing local capacity, the importance of accountability by those providing humanitarian assistance – highly controversial proposals when the RSC was conceived – are all now embedded, without question, in current humanitarian practice. In this respect humanitarian reform in general has been a sustained objective of the RSC. Humanitarian reform in the present context – as debated in this issue – builds on these essential achievements whilst addressing new challenges and structural requirements.

Translating these lessons into practice required new and innovative means of communication and this highlights the third reason why this special issue resonates so closely with the RSC's work. Our reputation has been built on a strong commitment to developing clear and effective ways of connecting independent scholarship and research with the world of practice. We have prioritised global outreach, dialogue and cooperation between the worlds of academe and practice in unusual and effective ways. FMR, the most widely read publication in the field of refugees and forced migration, powerfully reflects our commitment to engage the world of policy making and to respond directly to the needs of local civil society organisations, international NGOs and intergovernmental and government agencies.

The past 25 years have witnessed an enormous growth in forced displacement, devastating the lives of millions of people and indirectly touching the lives of millions more. But, as much as the increasing numbers, it is the growing complexity of the social, political and economic causes and consequences of forced migration which pose profound challenges to states, international organisations and NGOs seeking to reform the ways in which they provide humanitarian assistance. Responding to these challenges demands continuing dialogue between good scholarship and practice – which the RSC and FMR will continue to deliver.

Roger Zetter (roger.zetter@qeh. ox.ac.uk) is Director of the Refugee Studies Centre (www.rsc.ox.ac. uk) at the University of Oxford.

1. For more information on this special issue, see: www.oxfordjournals.org/page/2967/1

2. www.forcedmigration.online

3. www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/PDFs/unsettled.pdf

2008 International Summer School in Forced Migration

30 June – 18 July 2008
Refugee Studies Centre,
University of Oxford

The RSC's International Summer School in Forced Migration offers an intensive, interdisciplinary and participative approach to the study of forced migration. It helps people working with refugees and other forced migrants to reflect critically on the forces and institutions that dominate the world of the displaced. The course is designed for experienced practitioners involved with assistance and policy making for forced migrants and graduate researchers intending to specialise in the study of forced migration.

The course is residential. Maximum number of participants: 72. Teaching is conducted in English. Fee: £2800 (£2600 before 31 March).

A limited number of bursaries are offered on a competitive basis.

"The course exceeded my expectations in expanding the dimensions of my thinking beyond purely legal regimes to include other social, psychological, cultural and economic aspects of forced migration." Ahmed Mohsin, Assistant Protection Officer, UNHCR, Egypt

For further information and an application form, please visit www.rsc.ox.ac.uk, email summer. school@qeh.ox.ac.uk or write to the International Summer School Administrator at the Refugee Studies Centre, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK. Tel: +44 1865 270723. Fax: +44 1865 270297.

Master of Science in Forced Migration

Refugee Studies Centre,
University of Oxford

The MSc in Forced Migration is an interdisciplinary degree taught by leading experts in the field of forced migration. The nine-month course enables participants to explore forced migration through a thesis, a group research essay, and a range of courses. The degree exposes students to cutting-edge scholarship while allowing them to tailor their studies to suit their own particular interests.

Required courses:

- Introduction to forced migration
- International refugee and human rights law
- Asylum and the modern state
- Research methods

Optional courses (students choose two):
- International human rights and refugee law
- Movement and morality
- Theory and practice of humanitarian intervention
- Forced migration, transnationalism and livelihoods
- International relations and refugees

- Dispossession and forced migration in the Middle East
- Rethinking Africa and forced migration
- Dynamics of displacement in Asia

Applicants should have, at a minimum, a 2.1 degree (US equivalent GPA of 3.7 or higher), a demonstrable interest in forced migration, and strong letters of recommendation attesting to academic ability.

"I met some exceptionally talented and dedicated individuals who inspired me, both academically and personally. It was a pleasure and a challenge to study with people of such high calibre." Karin Afeef, 2005-06

For more information, please contact the MSc Coordinator, Refugee Studies Centre (address opposite). Email: rscmst@qeh.ox.ac.uk. Tel: +44 (0)1865 270272. www.rsc.ox.ac.uk

Prospectus/application form available from: Graduate Admissions Office, University Offices, 18 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD, UK. Email: graduate.admissions@admin. ox.ac.uk. Tel: +44 (0)1865 270059. www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gsp

FMR International Advisory Board

Although the Board members' institutional affiliations are listed below, they serve in an individual capacity and do not necessarily represent their institutions.

Paula Banerjee
Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group

Amelia Bookstein
Save the Children UK

Nina M Birkeland
Norwegian Refugee Council

Mark Cutts
OCHA

Henia Dakkak
UNFPA

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer
Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

Rachel Hastie
Oxfam GB

Arjun Jain
UNHCR

Khalid Koser
Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement

Erin Mooney
ProCap/UNHCR

Bahame Tom Nyanduga
Special Rapporteur on Refugees, IDPs and Asylum Seekers in Africa

Dan Seymour
UNICEF

Jeremy Stickings
DFID

Richard Williams
ECRE

Roger Zetter
Refugee Studies Centre

Are you a former RSC student or Visiting Fellow?

We are keen to re-establish contact with former RSC students and Visiting Fellows with whom we have lost touch over the years. We'd love to know what you're doing and where you've been working. Our new alumni network will also enable you to contact other former students and/or Fellows.

Please get in touch! Contact Amelia Richards at amelia.richards@qeh.ox.ac.uk or write to her at: Refugee Studies Centre, Department of International Development, University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK. Tel: +44 1865 270720. Fax: +44 1865 270721.

IDPs in a Humanitarian Zone in Chocó, Colombia

Resisting displacement: IDPs in Colombia

In Colombia, private companies cultivating African palm oil for use as biofuel are preventing displaced communities from recovering their land.

In the north-western department of Chocó, near Colombia's border with Panama, Afro-Colombian and indigenous groups of IDPs have established 'Humanitarian Zones' on small patches of collective land in a desperate bid to protect themselves, hang onto their land and livelihoods, and remain in their area of origin. Forced to leave their homes originally as a result of a major military campaign launched by the Colombian army and paramilitary forces against left-wing guerrillas in 1996, those who have more recently returned to reclaim their land are facing a new source of persecution and displacement.

In the communities of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó, private companies cultivating African palm for the production of biofuel started to establish plantations on the land soon after its inhabitants were displaced. The Colombian government has provided political and financial support to the development of African palm plantations as part of its effort to eradicate illicit crops, promote regional development and, reportedly, to provide economic incentives for paramilitary combatants to demobilise in line with the country's legal 'Justice and Peace' framework. However, according to the Ombudsman's office in Colombia, the African palm companies have commissioned paramilitary groups to forcibly displace the original Afro-Colombian and indigenous

owners of the land who have since returned. This has been corroborated by the IDPs themselves who have documented not only forced displacements but also other grave human rights violations, including massacres, death threats, torture and forced disappearances.

In response, the IDPs have established Humanitarian Zones both to demonstrate their determination to regain their land and to better protect themselves from attacks by paramilitaries and the guerrillas. The Humanitarian Zones consist of delineated areas where the members deny access to arms and armed parties and actively insist on neutrality, refusing to pass on information to the armed groups or to provide them with logistical support. In addition, many have established warning mechanisms – involving national and international networks – in case of threats or violations against their members. Signs by the barbed wire fencing surrounding the Zones indicate that the land is collectively owned by the communities and protected by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

As of November 2006, there were five Humanitarian Zones in

the districts of Jiguamiandó and Curvaradó, hosting an estimated 400 out of the 2,125 people who lived in the two districts before the counter-insurgency operation began in 1996.

"It is better to die from a bullet at home than from hunger and desperation in a municipal centre." Colombian IDP leader

For more information, see the IDMC's report 'Resisting Displacement by Combatants and Developers: Humanitarian Zones in North-west Colombia', online in English and Spanish at www.internal-displacement.org/countries/colombia To read or hear the life stories of people displaced in Colombia, visit www.idpvoices.org.

Memorial sculpture in honour of 83 community members killed or disappeared in Cacarica, Chocó, since 1997.