

Executive Summary

In 1998, some 32 million people needed humanitarian assistance because they were caught up in complex emergencies (armed conflicts or civil wars as distinct from natural disasters). That is triple the number of a typical year from the early 1980s. Most of these people are refugees or internally displaced persons. About 40 percent reside in Africa. The value of humanitarian assistance worldwide has typically been less than 2.0 percent of official development assistance (ODA). But in 1994 it jumped to 6.8 percent (\$4.3 billion) owing to the crisis in the Great Lakes region of Africa. It fell to an estimated 5.7 per-cent of ODA in 1998 but is likely to peak again in 1999 owing to the Kosovo and East Timor crises. The fact remains that humanitarian assistance has more than doubled since 1990 despite diminishing foreign assistance.

In 1990, U.S. ODA totaled nearly \$13.6 billion in real terms (1998 dollars); by 1997, it had fallen by half to \$7.0 billion, the lowest level since World War II. By contrast, U.S. humanitarian assistance has in-creased. In 1990, it was \$263 million (1.9 percent of ODA). In 1994 it peaked at \$1.2 billion (11.4 percent of ODA). By 1997 it had gradually decreased to \$344 million (4.9 percent of ODA), but in 1998 it more than doubled to \$898 million (10.2 percent of ODA). Although U.S. ODA as a percentage of total ODA has been falling steadily since the 1970s, the United States continues to be a generous provider of humanitarian assistance. USAID's Food for Peace Office, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and Office of Transition Initiatives are primarily responsible for administering U.S. emergency assistance.

This evaluation seeks to assess the effectiveness of U.S. humanitarian assistance in nations afflicted by complex emergencies. It addresses three principal questions: Did U.S. emergency assistance save lives and alleviate suffering? Did it affect social tensions and political hostilities? Did it contribute to long-term economic development? The findings are based on field-work carried out in three countries (Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda) as well as on evaluation results in other countries.

Evaluating relief programs in the context of armed conflict or civil war introduces politically sensitive issues concerning sovereignty, international law, the appropriate balance of aid between opposing sides, and donors' foreign policy interests. This assessment treats the political effects of humanitarian assistance independently of U.S. foreign policy considerations. Nevertheless, these and other issues peculiar to complex emergencies made the evaluation methodologically more difficult.

Complex emergencies are typically political in nature, characterized by violent conflict (often war) and a breakdown of institutions. But their underlying causes vary. Predatory governance was the principal cause of Haiti's complex emergency. By contrast, ethnic and ideological factors were pivotal in Mozambique and Rwanda. In all three countries, poverty was a contributory factor. In Haiti, per capita income was \$250 in 1994; in Mozambique, \$80 in 1986, the lowest in the world. Poverty was just as severe in Rwanda. Moreover, the distribution of income and wealth was highly skewed in all three countries. Haiti's 200-year history has been characterized by oppressive governments that favored the rich at the expense of the poor. Mozambique was characterized by a highly dualistic economy. In Rwanda, where the proportion of people living in poverty increased from 40 percent to 70 percent during 1990-93, a winner-take-all mentality has benefited a tiny elite at the expense of the poor majority.

Civilians in all three countries suffered widespread and systematic human rights abuses. Tens of thousands of refugees fled Haiti (often as boat people). Millions fled Mozambique and Rwanda to escape indiscriminate terror. Hundreds of thousands were the victims of wholesale massacre or, in the case of Rwanda, genocide.

Donors, including USAID, responded with increased emergency assistance, both food and nonfood (water, seed, farming tools, medical supplies). Nongovernmental organizations were the main implementers of the humanitarian response. In Haiti, the international community was feeding 1.3 million people—one in seven Haitians—each day, with the United States providing 68 percent of the food. In Mozambique in 1989, an estimated one third of the population of 16 million depended on food aid for 60 to 70 percent of their food needs; again, the United States provided about 60 percent of total food aid during 1987–95. In Rwanda 1.3 million beneficiaries received emergency food aid in 1996–97.

What were the results? The assessment concluded that emergency assistance programs funded by USAID and implemented by U.S. nongovernmental agencies (NGOs) clearly helped save lives and alleviate suffering—which, after all, is their overarching objective. Except for Haiti, though, data collection and monitoring were not done (or were done poorly), so it is difficult to quantify results. In fact, most evaluations of humanitarian assistance tell a “mission accomplished” story but are unable to substantiate that story with hard data.

Distributing relief supplies was a problem to some extent in all three countries. Food aid, in particular, was highly valued and became a source of violent competition—not only for its value as food but also as a source of political power for those controlling access. There were reports of corruption, theft, and political or personal favoritism in food aid distribution. And target populations did not always receive timely and sufficient food. NGOs addressed these problems with varying degrees of success. In Haiti they were highly successful in limiting diversion to 5 to 10 percent. In Mozambique, leakage was typically 30 percent when the government was in charge of distribution, and at one point reached 50 percent. But after the NGOs took over, losses fell to under 5 percent. In Rwanda the military and former political leaders controlled much of the relief distribution. They were able to divert substantial quantities of food (more than is usually the case in complex emergencies) from the intended beneficiaries for their own purposes.

While no aid is apolitical, humanitarian assistance, in particular, can result in substantial and unpredictable political effects, since it is provided in the context of conflict. Though designed to relieve suffering and promote peace, it sometimes, inadvertently, fuels, sustains, or worsens complex emergencies by making more resources available to warring parties. This is because aid does not just keep people alive in a political vacuum but affects the local power structure and environment in which it is given. In Haiti, massive quantities of emergency food aid reduced the probability of food riots during a period of political and economic stress and may have had a dampening effect on political tensions; but it also may have contributed to a political status quo that enabled the de facto military regime to stay in power longer. In Mozambique, external military assistance provided by the Soviet Union and South Africa fueled the civil war; food aid, by comparison, had relatively little effect on the country’s political dynamics, although food diverted to soldiers may have contributed to the war effort. In Rwanda, genocidal killers were mixed with legitimate refugees in camps; targeting became problematic, and substantial quantities of

food aid were diverted by Hutu extremists and militia resident in the camps. That had the unintended effect of prolonging the conflict.

The notion that relief assistance can be made more developmental in the context of ongoing armed conflicts is problematic. Unlike with natural disasters, during complex emergencies there is no institutional framework to provide physical security and political stability—both of which are necessary preconditions for economic development. On the contrary, complex emergencies are often characterized by a total breakdown of state institutions and social and economic structures.

Nevertheless, emergency assistance programs can help shape the pattern and direction of subsequent economic development. In Haiti, Mozambique, and Rwanda USAID and the NGOs not only provided immediate relief (food, medicine) but also agricultural inputs (seed, tools) and household goods to encourage refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their villages, resume food production, decrease their dependence on food aid, and maintain their livelihoods.

They also implemented food-for-work programs in all three countries. These and other programs created short-term jobs and helped rehabilitate productive infrastructure (roads, irrigation) needed for economic development. The development-oriented objectives were clear: to restart subsistence agriculture and to restart the rural economy.

The assessment offers 4 management-oriented recommendations (summarized below) and 18 recommendations specific to the Kosovo crisis as of May 1999 (annex D).

Monitoring and evaluation.

Establish a central monitoring and data collection unit to serve all donors during the early weeks of a complex emergency. This is needed, among other things, to help managers identify appropriate kinds of emergency relief, target its distribution, evaluate its effectiveness, and enhance donor coordination.

Adverse political consequences.

Be alert to potential undesirable political or social effects that relief aid may cause. Control of the distribution of food aid, in particular, can reinforce the power of local authorities or political factions; it can also facilitate their self-aggrandizing, often exploitive, behavior toward the intended noncombatant beneficiaries.

Reducing dependency.

Give refugees incentives to return home, and impose disincentives on those remaining outside their country of origin. After populations have been repatriated and are settled, the agricultural base begins to be reestablished, dependency on free food drops, and long-term food security is enhanced.

Capacity building.

Train technocrats to manage the post-conflict economic transition, and train others in skills for which there is employment demand. Economic recovery requires a cadre of high-level technocrats with management and conceptual skills; it also requires the unemployed (especially demobilized soldiers) to be trained in marketable skills.

Finally, however one assesses the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in response to complex emergencies, one thing cannot be emphasized too strongly: it is far better to prevent complex emergencies from occurring in the first place than it is to respond to victims needs afterwards.