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Humanitarian assistance in conflict and complex emergencies: conference report and background papers

Conference report

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Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict and Complex Emergencies

June 2009 conference report and background papers



World Food Programme

Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict and Complex Emergencies

Conference report and background papers June 2009



World Food Programme

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Disclaimer: This report captures the substance of discussions over two days, research studies and reflection papers. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

Foreword

The World Food Programme (WFP) convened a two-day conference on **Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict and Complex Emergencies** in June 2009, inviting United Nations officials, academics, thinkers and practitioners to join senior staff and country directors and consider how WFP can meet the needs of vulnerable communities in the shifting humanitarian context of conflicts and complex emergencies.

The conference was organized as a follow-up to WFP's 2001 Food Aid in Conflict workshop, which had sparked a lively internal debate as to how WFP responds to complex emergencies and was an important step in shaping WFP's policy and operations in difficult environments.

The settings in which WFP operates have changed significantly since 2001. The 2009 conference was therefore a valuable opportunity for WFP to re-examine strategies for reducing hunger and achieving food security in complex emergencies. It also provided an opportunity to seek guidance on operationalizing the tools and instruments outlined in the WFP Strategic Plan (2008–2011).

The conference opened on 24 June, the 125th anniversary of the Battle of Solferino, which led to the founding of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements and the Geneva Conventions. This made it a fitting anniversary for humanitarian actors to reflect on new challenges to the principles of neutrality and impartiality and new risks to their safety and security. Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Pakistan and the Sudan, which are among WFP's largest and best-funded operations, all provide stark examples of the complexity of the working environments in which humanitarian actors are engaged. To give only one example, WFP worked with the military in Pakistan to respond to the massive earthquake in Kashmir in 2005, a relationship that today generates serious reflections about the perception of our neutrality as we work in the country's war-affected frontier areas.

The objectives of the June 2009 conference were threefold:

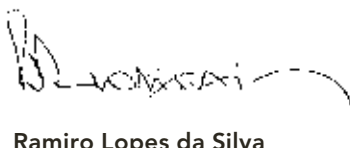
- to take stock of trends and cutting-edge theory on the nature of conflict and complex emergencies;
- to examine humanitarian responses to operational and programmatic challenges in conflict settings; and
- to identify strategies for WFP and the humanitarian community for enhancing humanitarian action and advocacy.

A series of presentations in the first part of the conference under the title Overview of Theory and Trends was followed by a debate about the implications for WFP's programming and operations. The second part of the conference — Critical Areas of Engagement and Operational Effectiveness — consisted of discussion groups. The groups discussing critical areas of engagement tackled the following issues: (i) United Nations and integrated missions, and their impact on humanitarian space; (ii) non-state actors and security, and their impact on humanitarian space; and (iii) protection, the rights agenda, principled humanitarian action and advocacy.

The groups discussing operational effectiveness focused on: (i) understanding and reaching out to communities; (ii) planning, preparedness and response in complex emergencies; and (iii) programming in protracted crises, including sustainability issues and exit strategies.

In preparation for the conference, WFP commissioned the Humanitarian Policy Group of the Overseas Development Institute to conduct a literature review of current conflict trends and the implications for WFP programming. External experts and WFP staff also conducted a review of WFP's policies and programmes in protracted crises from 2000 to 2009, and carried out in-depth case studies of WFP's operations in complex emergencies. These documents form the subsequent chapters of the Report of the Conference. Please note that views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official position of WFP.

We wish to express our gratitude for the generous funding of the Institutional Support Partnership Grant of the United Kingdom Department for International Development, which made the conference and the case studies possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramiro Lopes da Silva', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ramiro Lopes da Silva

WFP Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Director of Emergencies

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The conference on Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict and Complex Emergencies generated two days of rich discussions, culminating in a set of actionable steps and ways forward.¹ This summary outlines the thematic debates and gives an overview of the main recommendations.²

The increase in civil conflicts in the post-Cold War era has led to a dramatic increase in death and suffering among civilians. This shift in the profile of victims of war, along with the expansion of peace-keeping and peace-enforcement operations, has brought humanitarian workers out from the periphery and into the heart of conflicts. The dynamics of international intervention around the world shifted in the wake of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terror. One outcome of this shift has been increased targeting of humanitarian workers: not only are humanitarian actors working closer to conflicts — they are now being intentionally targeted and the humanitarian space is consequently diminished. A consensus emerged during the conference that humanitarian actors must apply more innovative thinking and approaches in their work to establish a wider and more predictable humanitarian space.

In the context of these changes, the new modes of engagement of the United Nations have favoured integrated missions. Although they have a stabilization purpose, these missions pose constraints — real or perceived — on humanitarian agencies in areas such as adaptability, neutrality and coherence of messaging. The four-fold objectives of the United Nations

— humanitarian, developmental, political and human rights — can be difficult to align and are sometimes uncomfortably squeezed together in an integrated agenda. Several participants argued that the flexible approach adopted by the Secretary-General of “integration when feasible” or “integration when desirable” or “integration adapted to the setting” may be possible in theory, but it has yet to be implemented.

Conference participants emphasized that engagement in today’s complex emergencies, with their socio-political and cultural dynamics, has a profound impact on the perceptions of agencies and personnel on the ground. At the same time, recipient and donor states have become increasingly sophisticated in creating anti-humanitarian space by manipulating humanitarian personnel, making access for humanitarian groups selective and controlling the flow of information to humanitarian actors and the media. States are quick to subordinate humanitarian agendas to political agendas, for example in the now partially discredited “war on terror.” And on the humanitarian side, agencies are often too willing to concede on humanitarian principles or muffle their advocacy to ensure continued access to vulnerable areas — a strategy that may yield immediate benefits but be harmful in the long term.

The conference also focused on the multiplication of humanitarian assistance actors. An increase in western and non-western donors

1 The conference was held under Chatham House rules: the report therefore does not ascribe opinions or statements to individual participants.

2 The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

and major organizations, along with emerging political powers, has made coordination of common messaging more complex. It has also allowed host governments to benefit by playing groups off against one another. And the fragility of some states in complex emergencies has led to an increase in negotiations with non-state actors, which further reduces consistency of approach and demands unique strategies to balance various interests.

A number of major recommendations for WFP emerged during the conference:

- Develop guidance on delivering humanitarian aid in politically charged environments, including clarity as to the application of humanitarian principles. WFP should take into account the political constraints in each of its complex operations and strive to define the minimum acceptable conditions for its interventions and develop guidance to help country offices to identify the range of tools available — from negotiating access, to various levels of advocacy, to withholding assistance — to ensure that such conditions are maintained.
- Enhance analytical abilities at the field level to understand the causes behind crises and the regional and local contexts in which WFP works. Feedback loops — in particular utilizing information from operations, staff and partners — should be used to keep the context analysis current, and ensure clear and consistent understanding of the dynamics of a crisis, the actors involved and their agenda. Context analysis is necessary to shape approaches and types of assistance in the event of sudden-onset emergencies; it becomes even more crucial in cases of persistent conflict.
- Reiterate WFP's commitment to the protection of its beneficiaries and their communities, for example by explaining how protection relates to its hunger mandate and by defining the limits of its potential contribution to the protection of civilians. Develop best practices and clear guidance on ways to institutionalize protection in WFP's programming, for example by giving more training to staff and senior management.
- Work more closely with national non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and religious leaders, and encourage them to take part in programming and decision-making. Recognize in practice that organizations have their own capacities, identities and flexibility, and refrain from building them into the image of the United Nations and WFP.
- Determine the degree to which WFP prioritizes participation in an integrated approach, because such participation can impact perceptions of neutrality and independence. WFP should consider when and how it might be appropriate to "de-brand" itself from United Nations or other political and military missions. Reflect further with other dual-mandate partners on the extent to which this is possible for a United Nations agency and how it might be achieved.
- Develop a broader approach to programming that involves more investment in humanitarian preparedness, including response to climate change.

Conference Report

Challenges of Humanitarian Action in Conflicts and Complex Emergencies³

Trends in Conflict and Complex Emergencies⁴

The conference opened with a session on the geo-politics of the last decade and the accompanying rapid shifts in the humanitarian context, notably in complex emergencies and conflicts. Today's internal conflicts are mostly motivated by struggles for control of power and resources rather than the more historical goals of state-building and state control over resources. With more and more civil wars relative to international wars, the number of internally displaced people has significantly increased; and the majority of deaths in these new wars are civilian.

Humanitarian assistance will continue to be shaped by civil conflicts among a proliferation of armed groups. Presenters predicted that insurgencies — groups vying for the support of civilians and control of territory — and their tactics, which include the burning of villages, forced migration and terror tactics such as suicide bombing — will become more common in the future, particularly in fragile states.

New drivers of conflict such as climate change are also likely to emerge. The international system will struggle to respond to more frequent sudden-onset emergencies caused by extreme weather, but the cumulative effects of climate change — resource scarcity such as

decreased availability of water for agricultural production, and disease and mass migration — could be more detrimental, for example through kindling or exacerbating conflicts, even if they are less immediately perceptible.

The consensus among the presenters was that the need for humanitarian action will be greater in the future and that humanitarian actors will need to be better prepared for the combination of conflict and natural disaster and the increasing complexity of conflict.

Humanitarian Space and Humanitarian Action

The changing nature of conflicts has immediate repercussions for the humanitarian operating environment. As one presenter noted: "... gone are the days of the pristine emergency such as the famines in Ethiopia and Sudan in the mid 1980s: we're now in what one could call second-generation emergencies that are complex in every sense."

In the context of these new complex emergencies, the presentations highlighted three factors that have contributed to the shrinking of humanitarian space, including: i) the sophisticated strategies of governments and rebel groups in carving out anti-humanitarian space; ii) the subordination of humanitarian activities to political agendas; and iii) the shortcomings of humanitarian agencies in defending their space.

States and rebel groups are increasingly adept at manipulating humanitarian aid by controlling humanitarian workers and the flow of

³ This section summarizes the three thematic presentations of the conference and the plenary discussions that followed. The themes, presenters and panellists can be found in the conference agenda on page 135.

⁴ The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

information by giving selective access, offering only selected bits of information and playing humanitarian agencies off against each other. Presenters argued that there are lessons to be learned from these tactics, for example those used by the Government of Sudan in Darfur, and from Israel and the United States as to how information is shaped.

Humanitarian assistance is also at times hijacked by political and security agendas. Governments have used the rhetoric of the “war on terror” to gain political and financial support: for example Sri Lanka presented its actions against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as part of the war on terror and also claiming its actions were in defence of national sovereignty. Governments are also less reliant on aid from the West: Asian countries, China in particular and increasingly the Gulf states, offer alternative economic resources without the ties of traditional donors, which include calls for adherence to humanitarian principles.

At the same time the humanitarian community has not been prepared to defend its own space, making it easier for national governments to stage-manage the system. Even in complex conflict environments, humanitarian assistance continues to be approached in many cases as a technical problem following a natural disaster model that calculates needs and shortfalls — but neglects their socio-political roots.

Applying Humanitarian Principles: General and Operational Challenges

Humanitarian actors trying to apply the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and to defend humanitarian space confront numerous dilemmas. At the broadest level, the morality and value of adhering to the principles — in particular a “purist” humanitarian approach — is being challenged, especially in the context of “with-us-or-against-us” rhetoric and the tactics of terrorism and anti-terrorism.

A more operational and persistent dilemma is the inner tension between adhering to humanitarian principles and serving the hu-

manitarian imperative, particularly in relation to access. Agencies are confronted with different situations: denial of access when not perceived as neutral, as in Darfur; compromising neutrality and impartiality to gain access, as in Sri Lanka; and trading advocacy for access in dealing with governments, as in Myanmar.

A general dilemma identified by participants arises from the increasing integration of military and political issues and aid approaches in the United Nations under its integrated mission policy and in the policies of major donor countries and organizations such as the North Atlantic treaty Organization and the European Union. Peace-building and nation-building are by nature political processes, and the participation of humanitarian actors in those processes — especially United Nations organizations and NGOs with dual humanitarian and development mandates — can according to some jeopardize humanitarian objectives. The question was also discussed in the session on “One UN” and integration, covered below.

Applying Humanitarian Principles: Immediate and Operational Dilemmas

Aid agencies also face immediate dilemmas when attempting to apply a human-rights or protection approach. In this respect, one presenter argued that agencies not only undermine their neutrality but also fail to act disinterestedly when they trade advocacy on human rights or a protection-centred approach in exchange for access, which can bring resources and visibility for example. This sends signals of unhealthy compromise internationally and locally and becomes dangerous for humanitarian actors. It was also noted that lessons are learned by abusive actors, often more quickly than by humanitarian groups. Ultimately, it was argued, the humanitarian community needs to assess the signals it is sending out and the repercussions of those actions on future negotiations. One contributor remarked that the moral authority of agencies has weakened as a result of failings to defend their stated principles; this includes

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations organizations whose agendas are perceived to be too comfortably aligned with the interests of major donors.

Others positioned the value of neutrality for agencies at a global level. It was argued that relief agencies must think beyond analysis of their present behaviour in a given country and their need to be perceived as neutral in that context. Agencies should adopt a more nuanced understanding of how they are linked to and associated with other actors and events and how those linkages will have repercussions well into the future and across continents. The invasion of Iraq, for example, harmed perceptions of the West and those associated with the West and their legitimacy by creating the impression among many that they do not abide by international law.

Other participants offered a more utilitarian perspective on the value of neutrality. In reality, humanitarian principles do not determine whether humanitarian actors are granted access: the key factor for determining humanitarian space is in fact a humanitarian actor's usefulness. The service or commodity provided by the relief agency must be perceived as being beneficial to those who grant access or control boundaries: these include medical services and food for combatants and their families, salaries, provision of cars or taxis, and the legitimacy afforded to governments or non-state groups with whom negotiations are carried out. For principles to be pursued, relief agencies must first be perceived as useful — a prerequisite for dialogue with armed groups as to access. The challenge is to find an acceptable compromise between the political or economic interests of those who control access and the policies of delivery.

Some participants asserted that humanitarian principles are not goals in themselves, but rather a means to attain safe and secure access in order to serve the greater goal of the humanitarian imperative. In view of this, neutrality should be constantly pursued; but failure to achieve it fully should not be an impediment to

action. It was also noted that it is unlikely that the objective of humanity can be served for long in a conflict context without the principle of neutrality.

Perceptions of Humanitarian Workers

The greater numbers of attacks on humanitarian workers in recent years has led to greater reliance on remote implementation of aid through local contracts while United Nations staff remain in fortified offices or housing complexes or in neighbouring countries. This "bunkerization" is characterized by humanitarian actors retreating from places declared risky by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security. As a result, according to one presenter: "... the United Nations is failing in its attempts to be known. But likewise, the United Nations is failing to know the social and local environments in which it works." This distance from communities may also be contributing to the perception in some insecure countries that the United Nations is too much associated with a Western political agenda. Unfortunately, the humanitarian system has too infrequently compensated for its loss of staff presence with adequate investment in enhancement of the capacities of its local partners or to listening to the agendas of local and regional actors.

Some participants also expressed concern that the perception of humanitarian workers is suffering as a result of their association with "coalition" forces and/or United Nations integrated missions.

One-UN and Integrated Missions

Participants revealed a wide range of views on and understanding of United Nations integrated missions. According to a number of speakers, political agendas, compromises or agreements supported by the leadership of a United Nations mission may trump needs-based, humanitarian decision-making. According to this argument, the humanitarian agenda often loses out to the political agenda, neutrality is compromised and, ultimately, humanitar-

ian actors have less access and are less effective in delivering aid and saving lives. Some participants argued that United Nations integrated missions exemplify this subordination of the humanitarian agenda; others countered that integrated missions can be an opportunity to enhance humanitarian work, and that harm to the humanitarian agenda as a result of United Nations integrated missions is exaggerated or not supported by evidence.

There was some disagreement as to whether the United Nations Secretary-General's two guidance notes on integrated missions tend to advance integration as a goal in itself rather than as a means to an end. The expulsion of aid agencies from the Sudan was cited as an example that political and relief objectives are not always compatible. The United Nations, according to this argument, has four basic instruments that it can bring to bear in a complex emergency: (i) political/military; (ii) humanitarian; (iii) human rights, and truth and justice; and (iv) development. It was stressed that although there are examples where these instruments reinforce each other as in Sierra Leone and Liberia, they sometimes are not fully complementary. The four components are in a very unstable relationship with one another, especially within the confines of conflict. It was therefore argued that integration should not be an overarching goal or the default setting, but rather one of several possible configurations that should be considered.

Moving beyond United Nations integration, one participant discussed the negative impact of the coherence agenda more generally, citing the example of hearts-and-minds tactics in military campaigns. The exchange of material or relief goods for information and political support has, according to this argument, endangered humanitarian actors. In Afghanistan, for example, the delivery of food assistance by some foreign military forces in civilian clothing has blurred the lines between humanitarian actors and the military.

Others advocated coherence, arguing that those involved in aid, politics, trade, diplomacy

and military activities should work towards common interests of peace, stability and development, and that coherence is the most effective way of achieving long-term stability. Recent United Nations reform provides an opportunity for agencies such as WFP to benefit from being part of a coherent overall United Nations strategy that could ultimately increase the efficiency and effectiveness of each agency's assistance. Good coordination brings with it coherent division of labour, enhanced information flows and sharing of lessons learned and good practices.

There was, however, some scepticism with regard to coherence and coordination. Some participants pointed out that the United Nations has a tendency to create mechanisms for the "coordination of coordination bodies" — most recently with the cluster system. The useful idea of coordination instead becomes a fashionable buzzword, duplication of roles ensues and, in certain cases, a collective "de-responsibilization" is the final outcome. Integrated missions also present difficult challenges in terms of inter-agency communication and coordination.

The practice of absorbing advocacy for human rights and the protection of civilians into humanitarian and peacekeeping agendas was also questioned. Some humanitarian actors believe that advocacy for human rights can threaten the core agenda of humanitarian action by closing the door on political alliances necessary for access and delivery.

The need for better evidence as to the impact of integrated missions on humanitarian action was noted, as was the need for better communication to dispel existing biases and false perceptions. Operational actors urged more accessible decision-making processes at United Nations Headquarters on integrated missions, including greater access for country offices of the operational agencies, so that an organization such as WFP might properly integrate its mission with New York. At present, the United Nations Secretariat mission processes require a degree of staff commitment that operational agencies have trouble maintaining, especially

those not headquartered in New York: this in turn makes it difficult to bring in the views of operational actors on the ground.

Critical Areas of Engagement: Proposed Tools and Strategies in the Face of New Challenges — Breakout Sessions of the Conference

- Prioritizing local engagement.
- Applying the protection lens.
- Engaging state and non-state actors and the humanitarian principles.
- Effective recovery programming.

Prioritizing Local Engagement

Because of its financing model, the absolute quantity of aid that WFP can deliver has over the years been an important institutional incentive. It may also be a factor in WFP's decision to invest more in increasing its logistics capacity than its programming approaches and quality. A majority of participants emphasized the drawbacks of a logistics-driven approach by WFP, which has resulted in relatively weak analysis of the context of its operations, an inability to reach out more to communities as part of its programming process and a lack of understanding of the linkages between food assistance and protection.

NGOs and community-based organizations are essential to effective WFP programme implementation and presence. And yet across different remote-management modalities in complex emergencies, WFP has not invested enough in enhancing the capacities of its partners. Some participants argued that insufficient attention has been placed on the agendas of local actors and partners. This knowledge gap limits WFP's understanding of how assistance is perceived and used by different actors on the ground.

Much of the discussion during this session centred on the opportunities and challenges of partnering with Islamic organizations and community leaders. Partnering with Islamic organizations can help with local acceptance, build the capacity of the organizations and enhance

the security of relief workers. However, as with all partners, a nuanced understanding of their political agendas and their capacity to ensure accountability is necessary.

In complex settings with access constraints, listening and reaching out with local cooperating partners is especially important and can yield significant benefits for humanitarian outcomes. The example of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar was cited, in which international actors faced severe access constraints; local and national actors, however, were empowered with international resources and were thereby able to deliver adequate assistance. Local partners are often brought into planning processes — in part to demonstrate transparency — but these same organizations often complain of “being used” to satisfy minimal donor and agency policies. Instead, their existing strengths should be understood and deployed, and more systematic efforts should be made to increase their capacity. Efforts to enhance the capacities of local cooperating partners remain predominantly un-coordinated.

A recurring theme of the session on local engagement was that humanitarian actors can achieve their objectives better by being better listeners. And although listening well has long been a staple of standard humanitarian policy, it nevertheless still requires a shift in organizational culture in many major humanitarian organizations. An important component of a “listening culture” is understanding more clearly how humanitarian actors are perceived by communities and adjusting our operations and assistance accordingly.

Real local engagement is also a prerequisite for understanding contexts and people's vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms, and is a potentially crucial tool in ensuring the safety of aid workers.

Applying a Protection Lens

In recent years, WFP has been increasingly engaged in improving its capacity to contribute to the protection of civilians in the context of its

food assistance programming. The nature and dimensions of this “protective assistance” was discussed. There was a general consensus that, at a minimum, there is a need to enhance qualitative programming by engaging more with communities and by stressing “do no harm” when engaged in food assistance. There was also agreement that the provision of food can serve as significant leverage to influence actors positively and help to ensure that beneficiaries are treated in a safe and dignified manner.

It was suggested that a protection approach for an assistance agency is generally consistent with a rights-based approach — one that advocates for the realization of people’s rights and recognizes and tries to mitigate violations and threats to rights, for example by helping states to meet their obligations. A protection approach such as this, integrated into programming, sends clearer messages to state and non-state actors, thereby shielding people and communities from abuses more effectively. Protection activities can also link beneficiaries closer to agencies and help to establish downwards accountability for humanitarian actors.

Conference participants concluded that a greater effort should be made to clarify WFP’s role in protection — also with regard to the protection-mandated agencies — and that WFP’s potential contributions to protection as well as its limitations should be better documented. Participants also suggested that a clear definition of protection for WFP should be accompanied by guidance on how and to what extent a protection approach should be utilized in different contexts. Such guidance should take into account the risks and tensions that come with engaging in protection issues, particularly possible consequences for access and staff security, especially national staff. Some participants also cautioned against re-inventing tools while adopting a protection lens; rather it was suggested that existing tools such as participatory methods be merged into a protection approach. There was a strong recommendation among participants that WFP should continue and expand its

ongoing training programme on protection and that efforts should be made to include country directors, other field managers and senior Headquarters staff. Better sensitization on the ground should also be accompanied by the development of clearer guidance on how to institutionalize protection in WFP’s programming.

To enhance protection in programming, a number of participants proposed the idea of forging better linkages between livelihoods and protection in conflict environments. Complementary livelihoods and protection work would mean that people’s economic vulnerabilities and their political vulnerabilities are addressed. It was also pointed out that this approach would allow WFP to operate at multiple levels: addressing or preventing violations that affect the protection and livelihoods of the population as well as responding to the consequences of the violations through direct assistance.

Engaging State and Non-State Actors and the Humanitarian Principles

Participants discussed the ever-present programmatic tension between adhering to humanitarian principles and serving the humanitarian imperative, with some speculation that principles are increasingly being compromised. According to WFP participants and others, WFP’s actions in this dilemma are inconsistent: humanitarian principles tend to be overruled by the short-term humanitarian imperative of food delivery. But important exceptions exist: for example WFP’s work to maintain a position of neutrality in Somalia was cited. Several of the senior WFP staff called for further clarity on existing policies and programming and especially on the extent to which principled stances taken in the field will be supported by WFP leaders at Headquarters.

A sense among participants of increased instrumentalization of aid by state and non-state actors highlights the need to understand and employ humanitarian principles in advocacy and negotiations. It is necessary to identify bottom lines and minimum operational standards in negotiating access, because failed threats to

withdraw and withhold assistance can negatively impact the credibility of the United Nations. Better understanding of the spectrum of leverage available to humanitarian actors will further assist in negotiations.

The reality of WFP's work makes establishing and sustaining a perception of neutrality difficult, for example in: i) transporting food over long distances through insecure areas, which often requires an armed military escort; and ii) WFP's dual mandate of relief and development — the latter links WFP with government objectives and programmes.

Non-WFP participants emphasized the importance of WFP engaging on issues of humanitarian principles, stressing its strong political leverage. WFP has a special role to play in taking a principled approach, given its size and influence. One participant stressed that it matters to governments if WFP is “in the room, or outside the room.”

No consensus was reached as to whether or not WFP should distribute food where principles such as impartiality and neutrality cannot be met. Some argued that this should be addressed at the policy level to determine the extent to which conditionality can be used while negotiating access; others stressed that a uniform policy was unlikely to be practical. Participants did agree that the decision to use WFP's leverage to push for principles has to be context-specific; they also agreed that it matters to WFP's long-term credibility to do so when appropriate. It was also noted that there are institutional drivers such as the tonnage-based approach to funding that make it difficult for WFP to take a principled stance.

With regard to United Nations integrated missions and humanitarian principles, some participants felt that the implementation of integrated missions threatens to weaken the added value that United Nations humanitarian agencies can bring to a volatile situation, and — which is important — adversely affect the efficient deployment of their various resources. Other questions were raised about the feasibility

of humanitarian agencies simultaneously pursuing the two goals of: i) working as effective members of integrated missions; and ii) enhancing their international “brand” as principled humanitarian actors, for example by reaffirming their core mandates.

It was suggested that WFP develop a more nuanced approach to United Nations integration and educate WFP staff more fully about the objectives, flexibility and options in a United Nations integrated approach. In particular, WFP should consider when and how it might be appropriate partially to “un-brand” itself from United Nations or other political or military actors and reflect further with other dual-mandate partners on the extent to which this is possible for a United Nations agency.

Effective Recovery Programming

Despite success in averting famine, there are still major weaknesses in emergency operations and in recovery strategies. Current analyses of crises tend to emphasize the magnitude of a crisis but do not always consider the causes or the risks associated with intervention. A broader programmatic approach informed by power and wealth realities is fundamental to understanding where vulnerabilities lie and why.

Assessments and analysis in emergency, rapid-response and protracted engagement need to be improved, but there were also suggestions that WFP should carry out honest assessments of its own capabilities and to be modest in its recovery programming when appropriate. Realistic dialogue, planning and collaboration are hindered by unrealistic expectations in upstream and downstream programmes — early warning and hand-overs — and the characteristics of certain programmatic categories such as an assumption of recovery being linear and a lack of secure medium-term and longer-term funding in the protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) category.

Contextual analysis of needs and capacity is best understood through the medium of relationships. Approaching communities without

an agenda and listening to their voices are an important way of reaching out. Too often, humanitarian actors are quick to offer solutions or set up focus groups without exploring whether there are groups or local capacities already in place. This approach of listening, watching and working with community structures enhances understanding of and integration with local authority and the development of common agendas of mutual co-existence between local and international organizations. To some extent, however, United Nations staff security restrictions on personnel movements curtail this manner of interaction with communities and make it difficult to develop a coherent understanding of local dynamics and build up longer-term relationships.

Other areas for improvement were highlighted such as: i) improved targeting in transition situations in order to continue to meet acute needs but not undermine people's own recovery mechanisms; ii) the need to encourage the process of state ownership; and iii) better monitoring of the changing role of local authorities and the dynamics of local power. Another crucial area of engagement highlighted as a frequent weakness in recovery situations is sufficient and medium-term support for returning or integrating displaced populations while taking the needs of host communities into account.

In conclusion, it was recommended by the participants that WFP review its programme categories, the PRRO category in particular, because they rely on assumptions that do not play out in reality; the situation in eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was cited as an example. In particular, WFP needs to re-think hand-over strategies in the light of realities on the ground, including capacity, rather than be pressured by donors and sometimes by programme governments to move too quickly from relief to recovery. Again, it was recommended that greater investment be made in context analysis and that recovery interventions be designed that address underlying socio-political dynamics.

Recommendations for WFP Emerging from the Conference

One main WFP objective in hosting the Conference was to seek recommendations from its partners and international experts for the Programme's work in conflicts and complex environments. Participants from the plenary and various breakout sessions were asked to synthesize discussions and translate the talk into tangible future actions for WFP. The resulting recommendations are summarized below:

- Develop guidance on delivering humanitarian aid in politically charged environments, including clarity as to the application of humanitarian principles. WFP should take into account the political constraints in each of its complex operations and strive to define the minimum acceptable conditions for its interventions and develop guidance to help country offices to identify the range of tools available — from negotiating access, to various levels of advocacy, to withholding assistance — to ensure that such conditions are maintained.
- Enhance analytical abilities at the field level to understand the causes behind crises and the regional and local contexts in which WFP works. Feedback loops — in particular utilizing information from operations, staff and partners — should be used to keep the context analysis current, and ensure clear and consistent understanding of the dynamics of a crisis, the actors involved and their agenda. Context analysis is necessary to shape approaches and types of assistance in the event of sudden-onset emergencies; it becomes even more crucial in cases of persistent conflict.
- Reiterate WFP's commitment to the protection of its beneficiaries and their communities, for example by explaining how protection relates to its hunger mandate and by defining the limits of its potential contribution to the protection of civilians. Develop best practices and clear guidance on ways to institutionalize protection in WFP's pro-

gramming, for example by giving more training to staff and senior management.

- Work more closely with national non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and religious leaders, and encourage them to take part in programming and decision-making. Recognize in practice that organizations have their own capacities, identities and flexibility, and refrain from building them into the image of the United Nations and WFP.
- Determine the degree to which WFP prioritizes participation in an integrated ap-

proach, because such participation can impact perceptions of neutrality and independence. WFP should consider when and how it might be appropriate to “de-brand” itself from United Nations or other political and military missions. Reflect further with other dual-mandate partners on the extent to which this is possible for a United Nations agency and how it might be achieved.

- Develop a broader approach to programming that involves more investment in humanitarian preparedness, including response to climate change.

WFP's Work in Complex Emergencies and On-Going Conflicts: A Discussion Note

The purpose of this note is to frame the debate on the World Food Programme's strategic priorities and investments for more effective engagement in conflict situations. Drawing on a set of case studies on the role of WFP in complex humanitarian crises,⁵ the note highlights some of the current problematic areas of operations and programming with a view to outlining the possible short and long-term consequences of WFP's strategy.⁶

WFP faces four major challenges in adapting to the humanitarian environment of the 21st century, as described briefly below:

Adhering to the Humanitarian Principles.

WFP continues to maintain a reputation for professionalism and rapid delivery. But in conflicts such as those in Sudan and Sri Lanka, WFP is regularly confronted by the tension between its obligations to meet urgent humanitarian needs and its commitment to adhere to the overall principles of the humanitarian agenda, including rights and protection. A familiar pattern emerges in the humanitarian interventions in which WFP is a major actor: arguments for adhering to humanitarian principles are consistently trumped by the need to meet the humanitarian imperative, to provide lifesaving aid when conflicts erupt into violence. Gradually, the principled space that initially did exist for WFP and other humanitarian actors erodes overtime. Throughout the evolution of the conflicts, WFP is frequently hesitant, and, at times, ill-equipped to punch at its weight and strongly advocate. The ramifications of WFP's propensity

for "delivery first" — sometimes at the expense of neutrality or impartiality — have yet to be thoroughly understood.

Operationalizing Coordination. The organization's leadership in the logistics cluster has been praised by NGOs and donors as an example of the positive benefits of effective coordination, as WFP has been able to facilitate common services and improve delivery conditions for the wider humanitarian system. The same cannot be said of coordination within the wider conflict management system. WFP's strength as a hands-on, operational agency has not always melded well with new initiatives based on UN integrated missions or on the "One UN." Common criticisms by WFP staff include inefficiencies in coordination mechanisms and, more importantly, the marginalization of the humanitarian agenda to security or political concerns. Formulating strategies to negotiate for the prioritization of humanitarian concerns in these settings remains a continued challenge in many of WFP's operations.

Creating Relevant Programming. A large field presence provides WFP with the opportunity to generate humanitarian space, not only for its own operations but also for other agencies in the delivery of aid and the promotion of rights and protection. However, the organization continues to face challenges of

5 Thomas Gurtner and Catherine Bellamy consultants for WFP, drafted this note based on a literature review of WFP policies, needs assessments, targeting and key evaluation reports, and a set of reflection papers and research studies on Afghanistan, Sudan (Darfur), the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Somalia and Sri Lanka conducted in March to June 2009.

6 The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

effectively assessing needs, linking assessment to programming, and monitoring the outcomes of activities. Its operations also risk becoming static in the context of recovery and relapsing conflicts, underscoring problems in defining the vulnerable, integrating development elements into humanitarian interventions, and generating livelihoods. Shortcomings in understanding the dynamics of the conflict and the local and national players further contribute to the problems of developing effective programming in such complex and fragile environments. Furthermore, in these situations, WFP must often implement remotely through partners with varying capacity — creating considerable challenges for programme quality and overall accountability.

Confronting Staff Security. WFP can rapidly reach the most remote and turbulent places. But these operations put the staff in risky security situations. And in many cases, the risk is transferred to national staff or implementing partners. Capacity deficiencies of the UN Department for Security and Safety, including problems in adapting to WFP's needs in the field, have been regularly noted by WFP country offices. WFP itself is investing heavily in staff security — including through the deployment of significant numbers of international and national security officers. Despite large system-wide and WFP investments, the conditions for the free and safe movement of staff appear to be worsening in many settings.

Despite these constraints, WFP is experimenting with new tools under its recently approved strategic plan,⁷ including the use of cash and vouchers and the introduction of new nutrition products in humanitarian settings. Recent innovations in leveraging WFP's presence and field knowledge to contribute to protection concerns demonstrates how principles for humanitarian assistance can be translated into real, if modest, improvements in the safety and dignity of affected populations. This, in turn, is enhancing WFP's

ability to engage in national contexts and on the international stage in discussions on humanitarian principles and international law, including protection strategies. WFP could further exploit its deep reach into the field for the benefit of the wider humanitarian system through more systematic analysis of conflicts in real time. While WFP could continue to give almost exclusive priority to the humanitarian imperative, it could also become more assertive and systematic in orchestrating advocacy for the humanitarian principles with parties to the conflict and national authorities, the UN country team and mission, and with the Security Council and donors.

Humanitarian Principles

Continued compromises with Governments such as Sudan and Sri Lanka have placed WFP in an untenable situation. The reduced set of options can be illustrated by the expulsion of the NGOs from Darfur in March 2009. As the humanitarian community continued to make concessions in its dealings with the Government of Sudan, it is not clear what WFP's advocacy at that precise moment would do on its own to ensure that the NGOs continued their operations. Similarly, while WFP is highly praised for efficiency and professionalism in Sri Lanka, it has also been criticized for acting as an implementing arm of the government — to the detriment of upholding humanitarian principles.

And yet, sidestepping or delaying the promotion of humanitarian principles for the sake of rapid access does not appear to always return the desired results. Several of those interviewed in Sri Lanka think that the prioritisation of delivery over advocacy ultimately had adverse affects for the protection of target populations, and accomplished little to enhance staff security or even the ability to deliver relief goods and services.

While WFP's relief convoys in 2008 were laudable from the perspective of humanitarian access, it also appears that the Sri Lankan Government as well as the LTTE used this as cover for military manoeuvres. The Government

7 WFP Strategic Plan (2008 — 2001). WFP/EB.A/2008/5-A/1/Rev.1, 19 May 2008.

also employed a variety of tactics to stall or prohibit humanitarian practices. It used visas, travel permits, compulsory evacuations, written agreements, and various kinds of intimidation to ensure that damaging information was not leaked through the activities of aid agencies. The Sri Lankan government has also used the broad rubric of 'security issues' to impose very far-reaching restrictions on the medical supplies, water and sanitation and food that have been directed at the Vanni region.

It can be argued that in Sri Lanka, advocacy was most crucial at an early stage. For example, pressure to ensure IDPs' rights at the point when the scale of their movements was relatively small may have been more effective. With a mass influx, the perception of 'humanitarian imperative' may make advocacy and pressure on protection issues more difficult. There is a strong belief that concessions to the Government on various humanitarian principles had emboldened the government in its relationship with the humanitarian community. One source said the humanitarian community had been reduced to begging rather than negotiating.

It is not clear whether the Sri Lankan Government was subject to any significant consequences for its various attempts to restrict humanitarian space. Aid agencies' were reluctant to speak publicly on sensitive issues and withheld the results of nutritional surveys. They weakly protested the ejection of aid agencies from the Vanni in September 2008 and Government shelling and aerial bombardment during the intensified military push. In general, aid agencies — whether in the UN system or NGOs — appear to have been very much on the defensive in a context where any action could easily be turned against them, notably in a media subject to significant government control.

While WFP is reluctant for the various factors outlined above to engage in what some view as a form of political pressure, there are anecdotes of successful advocacy by WFP. Many are purposefully done behind closed doors and involve personal dynamics and decision-making

processes, making documentation difficult. However, interviews with Country Directors have revealed that WFP can more effectively utilise its weight to ensure the protection of humanitarian principles and access. For example, when the Government of Sudan said it was to shut down warehouses of NGOs operating in Darur, WFP's threat to stop delivery of food was enough to reverse their course.

The strategy of advocating for humanitarian principles is not an easy one: it can require pushback against donors, when the priority is to deliver regardless of the conditions, and entails effective coordination with other actors to ensure that the withholding of aid generates sufficient weight. The Government of Sri Lanka enjoyed abundant options for international support, which implies that advocacy on the humanitarian front would have been, on its own, insufficient and so would require orchestration. Exploitation of WFP's leverage in securing the access and upholding impartiality depends in part on the leadership of the Country Director, and his or her relationships with the Government, donors or other parts of the UN system.

Coordination

WFP has been able to generate humanitarian space for the wider humanitarian system through the use of coordination mechanisms in several ways. WFP operates the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in many conflict-ridden countries. In the context of Sudan, it serves 100 destinations (mostly in Darfur) and provides support for medical evacuations and relocations, for which NGOs constitute 60 percent of users. In the south-central zones of Somalia, WFP is for the first time establishing five medical stabilization centers that will provide emergency assistance as a common service. Donors often praise WFP's leadership in the logistics cluster as an innovative method for effective delivery and for engaging NGOs in the field. Furthermore, WFP and humanitarian actors in DRC have ral-

lied around implementing the strategic priorities of the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAC).

WFP's experience in emergency response coordination with other parts of the UN system and with the military has been mixed, however. The WFP country team stressed the positive cooperation with the Haitian military during the first emergency phase of the floods in August and September 2008. However, humanitarian agencies remain weary of the military's role as operations continue. There are also tensions between MINUSTAH and the UN country team — including WFP — on the ground, and a limited understanding of their respective roles in supporting Haiti to become a more viable state. In the DRC, interviews with WFP staff in the field indicate that MONUC has told WFP where to deliver food and prioritized transport for military personnel.

In some instances, WFP disagrees with other parts of the UN system on the humanitarian imperative. In Somalia, WFP has continued to directly engage with authorities on the ground, including insurgent groups such as the Al-Shabaab, to assist the most vulnerable. WFP believes that the affiliation with the UN-backed TFG would threaten the safety and security of staff, as well as the perception of humanitarian neutrality.

Conversely, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Somalia has criticized humanitarian organizations, and primarily WFP, for undermining political objectives by negotiating for humanitarian access with Islamic insurgents, and charged that the UNCT is irresponsibly 'funding the war' through high value commodity imports and logistics contracts. Meanwhile, shortcomings in coherence extend to headquarters. The Security Council approved the Secretary-General's proposal to establish a Joint Planning Unit in the office of the SRSG to facilitate effective and efficient implementation of the integrated strategy. Over one year later, the Joint Planning Unit has still not been established — in part as a result of scepticism of headquarters understanding of the situation on the ground.

Programming

While no comprehensive study has been completed, there is also anecdotal evidence that WFP has provided a protective presence in its delivery of aid, in places such as Myanmar and Colombia. In both cases, WFP dedicated resources to protection, either through the form of a protection officer or by investing in understanding the local social networks and coping mechanisms.⁸

Programming brings with it its own set of challenges. On the one hand, WFP continues to struggle to ensure that food gets into the right hands and does no harm. On the other hand, WFP is attempting to integrate humanitarian and development practices in order to manage complex crises, such as Haiti and the DRC, as the conflicts evolve. As a 2007 report by ODI concluded, WFP's progress in initial needs assessments had not been matched in the lifespan of projects and failed to integrate a wider set of response options beyond food aid. "WFP often lacks the necessary information to predict and gauge the evolution of a food crisis; and to implement its responses in a way that is sensitive to changes in the external environment."

The design of appropriate humanitarian and development responses in DRC requires a nuanced assessment of the complex overlaying of acute and chronic vulnerability. DRC is characterized by an extraordinary extent of chronic vulnerability, evidenced in chronically high levels of mortality, morbidity and acute malnutrition. This coupled with constant exposure to violent insecurity results in a situation where *crisis* — in the sense of a dangerous deviation from the norm — is no longer an adequate term. Pockets of crisis (or 'emergencies') can be identified within the prevailing norm. Neither humanitarian nor development approaches as normally understood are well adapted to this kind of context. This also raises the challenges

⁸ James Darcy, Stephen Anderson and Nisar Majid *A Review of the Links between Needs Assessment and Decision-Making in Response to Food Crises Study* undertaken for the World Food Programme under the SENAC project, 2007.

of programming for early recovery and livelihoods. In DRC, sourcing the food locally would require major investment in transport for farmers. Constraints on WFP activities have excluded exploring options, such as cash or vouchers, beyond the delivery of food.

Haiti is in a situation of protracted complex crisis shaped by urban violence, natural disasters, and the impact of the global economic crisis. Following the April 2008 riots caused by high food prices, WFP scaled up its operations to reach an additional 1.5 million people in need of food assistance. This was complemented by an emergency operation to assist up to 800,000 people for a six-month period until the end of April 2009, in response to the three consecutive hurricanes and the tropical storms between August and September 2008. Interventions in Haiti are now aimed at food insecure populations and disaster preparedness while attempting to support the longer-term goals of rebuilding of vital economic and social infrastructure.

In addition the challenge of addressing relief and recovery, WFP continues to grapple with ensuring that food distribution is not vulnerable to political manipulation by local structures and actors. Experiences in targeting and registration illustrate the urgent need for understanding local dynamics. For example, in parts of Sudan, WFP assistance becomes instrumental in shifting power from traditional leaders to younger leaders, without much community support — further generating problems with impartial distribution. In West Darfur, some sheiks held 200 to 300 fraudulent rations cards and used them to collect additional food to sell in the market. In Kalma camp, the largest IDP camp, WFP supplied food to 160,000 beneficiaries; but in a surprise headcount in 2005, using three different methodologies, identified only 90,000 beneficiaries.

Afghanistan provides another example of the need for adequate targeting. Challenges arise from a complex mix of factors related to: 1) the reliability and capacity of partners and the Government at all levels and across sectors; 2) the set-up of Community Development Coun-

cils and their ability and willingness to represent the interests and needs of the overall community; and 3) WFP's ability to exercise quality control over the whole process, from assessment to monitoring and evaluation, thus reducing the potential for shortcomings. Separate considerations should be made for traditional community structures such as *shuras* and *jirgas*, which can offer a higher level of reliability and trustworthiness. In fact, while governmental bodies generally suffer from lack of capacity and widespread corruption, these bodies still uphold the interests of the communities they represent, and therefore are "relatively" less subject to manipulation and corruption. This again, requires rigorous and consistent understanding of local dynamics and structures.

With security constraints and limited access, WFP in Afghanistan must rely heavily on data and analysis provided by cooperating partners. WFP's ability to exercise quality control over the whole distribution process, from assessment to monitoring and evaluation, is also hindered. Though this is happening across the whole spectrum of WFP's activities, WFP staff reported more difficulties in relation to general food distribution, mainly due to magnitude of food distributed and number of beneficiaries targeted. In Afghanistan, WFP has taken a number of measures since 2007, including outsourcing its assessment and monitoring activities in UN "no-go areas" to a third party (international private organizations), to minimize these risks and improve the overall management of projects on the ground.

Ultimately, WFP's capacity to effectively engage authorities and the international system on humanitarian principles may endanger programming objectives. To return to the case of Sri Lanka, protection failures included civilian casualties resulting from the war; the internment of hundreds of thousands of displaced people; and the lack of clear timelines for screening or resettlement. There also seemed to be a perceived lack of openness about the inadequate quantities of food reaching the north, which in the end was problematic.

Staff Security

The violent targeting of white cars — traditionally associated with humanitarians — is perhaps the greatest symbol of the deteriorating shield for humanitarian workers. In response, some organizations and agencies have taken to renting cars or mini-buses or using pink cars. In Afghanistan, humanitarians underline the differences between the black UN (UNAMA cars) and blue UN (humanitarian agencies'). At the same time, incidents of the military using white vehicles to manipulate its neutral representation for different purposes have been reported. Beyond the dilemma of the popular perception, the shifting humanitarian environment and safety of humanitarian workers raises important issues about daily operations, coordination, capacities, and principles of engagement.

WFP has implemented a variety of measures to address such security constraints. For example, the WFP fleet in Darfur is equipped with GPS, enabling each vehicle to be tracked in real time for more effective protection of the staff. The establishment of more warehouses (and in different locations) in Darfur has allowed WFP to pre-position food supply equivalent to three to four months of projected needs and to reduce the impact of pipeline breaks. In Afghanistan, it appears that the call of the SRSG not to attack the UN has seen some decrease in attacks, especially against WFP convoys.

In response to the murder of two national staff in Somalia, WFP created a "Re-engagement Strategy" with local authorities at the beginning of 2009. Operations in south-central zones were halted until communities could provide assurances for safe and secure access. WFP has also prioritized outreach to the Somali community to explain its objectives, garner support, limit potential threats, and develop a network of allies with community elders.

Serious challenges exist within the coordination and capacity of the UN system to promote the safety of its staff. The UN Department for Safety and Security has been criticized for not being context-specific in its analy-

sis and judgment of security measures, and as a result too cautious. UNDSS is also short on resources and capacity. For example, tight security guidelines in Haiti prevent WFP from moving as freely as it would like. At times WFP continues to rely on its own security mechanisms, for example in Somalia.

At times WFP staff are frustrated by the limitations imposed on its operational capacity and what it views as constraints in acting as part of a UN country team or integrated mission. Common criticisms are the lack of payoff for heavy investments in time, while humanitarian priorities and WFP's voice tend to lose out in the Resident Coordinator/UN country team structure. As mentioned previously, there are also disagreements about security measures.

Effective security and programming requires a rigorous understanding of the background and evolution of the conflicts including the political dynamics between local actors and their perceptions of WFP and aid agencies. Contextual understanding and analysis remains a gap for WFP. The violence against WFP staff and cooperating partners IOM and SC-US during a 2005 re-registration exercise in West Darfur demonstrates the importance of understanding community structures and effective communication. Initial rumours were that the registration was part of the Government's attempt to repatriate IDPs, and local leaders who feared losing their multiple ration cards lashed out against the staff.

Another serious dilemma is the security of national staff, the most frequent victims of targeting. Time and resource constraints often mean that little is invested in the capacities of national staff, so that when internationals withdraw the security infrastructure left behind is seriously impaired — further endangering the national staff.

The targeting of humanitarian actors also raises the issue of what some argue is the relationship between the deterioration of the security of staff and the failure to rigorously adhere to humanitarian principles. For example,

some of the WFP staff in Darfur believe that the pressure to achieve results and deliver may have ultimately endangered the staff.

Organizations and donor countries may have the capacity to generate some leverage in shaping the action of national and local authorities, which could ultimately improve the perceptions of humanitarian work and the security conditions for humanitarian workers. Of course, some actors will target an international presence, and associated national staff, regardless of the approach of the humanitarian actors — making the decision of when to deploy and capacity of national staff all the more crucial.

Points for Further Discussion

Priorities and Investment

Consistent analysis could promote more effective delivery of services and improve the safety of the staff. Such analysis could also provide the wider humanitarian system with an improved understanding of the conflict and political dynamics as they evolve, especially as viewed from WFP's large and deep field presence — a unique perspective in many situations. The challenge is to strengthen the capacities of national and international staff and to ensure that this knowledge is captured so that it informs WFP's strategic planning.

Building on the examples of creative innovations in programming would require significant commitment and investment. But this will also hinge on: 1) the capacity of WFP to assess needs and options as crises evolve, and 2) how WFP manages the challenge of adhering to humanitarian principles while negotiating access and meeting the humanitarian imperative.

While each complex emergency entails a unique set of circumstances and constraints, WFP will continue to be pressured by benefi-

ciary and donor Governments, who wish to demonstrate their good intentions or pursue their political objectives. As WFP adapts its operations and programming to meet the needs of humanitarian crises in the 21st century, the leadership of WFP will have to confront the question of whether its present staff, practices and systems for delivering assistance — and its strategy for balancing principles and humanitarian needs — are adequate in a world of more complex humanitarian environments.

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Trends In Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance: A Review of Literature, Policy and Practice

Undertaken by the Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute

Introduction

This paper represents a summary of a review of trends in conflict and humanitarian assistance undertaken by the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI on behalf of the UN World Food Programme, in preparation for the conference “Humanitarian assistance in conflict and complex emergencies” held in Rome, 24 -25th June 2009. The review was based primarily on literature and recent research, with a focus on humanitarian policy trends and implications.⁹

The review focused primarily on the following topics:

- General trends in conflict and displacement
- Trends in international engagement in conflict & protracted crisis
- Operational security and “humanitarian space”
- Trends in finance and the range of humanitarian actors
- Emerging threats and potential causes of future conflict

The main points arising under each heading are summarised here. For fuller analysis and references to relevant literature, please consult the full Review paper.

General Trends in Conflict and Displacement

There are different ways of approaching the question of trends in conflict. One is to look at the numbers involved. The 2005 Human Security Report attempted both to identify trends in battle related deaths, and to correlate this with key causal factors. In broad terms, it concluded that the incidence of civil armed conflicts was in a downward trend since the early 1990s (an 80% decline); that conflicts were becoming less

deadly; and that both trends could be attributed in large part to successful international (particularly UN-led) interventions. This analysis is open to critique on a number of grounds. The concept of “civil war” is ambiguous, both in failing to take account of international dimensions of conflict, and in failing to take account of the spectrum of violent instability from communal violence and widespread banditry to full-scale armed conflict. Perhaps most significantly, in concentrating on battlefield deaths, this approach fails to take account (as the authors’ acknowledge) of both non-battlefield deaths and the indirect effects of conflict. In contexts like Cambodia, Rwanda and DR Congo, to name just three, this is highly misleading. Here, non-battlefield casualties and the indirect casualties of conflict (particularly through disease and malnutrition) have far outweighed what could be classed as battlefield deaths.

Reliable statistics are hard to come by. Retrospective mortality surveys such as those undertaken on behalf of IRC in DR Congo face problems both of quantification and causal attribution. The results nevertheless confirm the significance of indirect effects of conflict on levels of excess mortality.

Another way of looking at conflict trends is to consider the nature of the conflicts that are occurring and the implications for civilians and

⁹ The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

for humanitarian interventions. Commentators suggest that current warfare has changed and “new wars” no longer conform to the warfare of classical modernity in which there were clear distinctions between governments, armies and civilians (Kaldor, 1999). It is argued that processes of globalisation and the demise in cold war patronage have weakened state authority, consequently redefining the goals, methods and financing of warfare (Ibid). State incumbents and other strongmen now seek self-preservation and the accumulation of wealth through the trans-border and parallel trade (Duffield, 2001). Terrorising civilians through immiseration and displacement have become strategies of this new mode of warfare and territorial boundaries have become increasingly meaningless (Hoffman and Weiss, 2006). Civilians rather than military now suffer the greatest casualties (Kaldor, 1999). These “new wars” are more akin to organised crime, in which warlords and state actors engage in “the violent extraction of resources and stripping of assets as a commercial enterprise” (De Waal, 1997); “a continuation of economics by other means” (Keen, 2000).

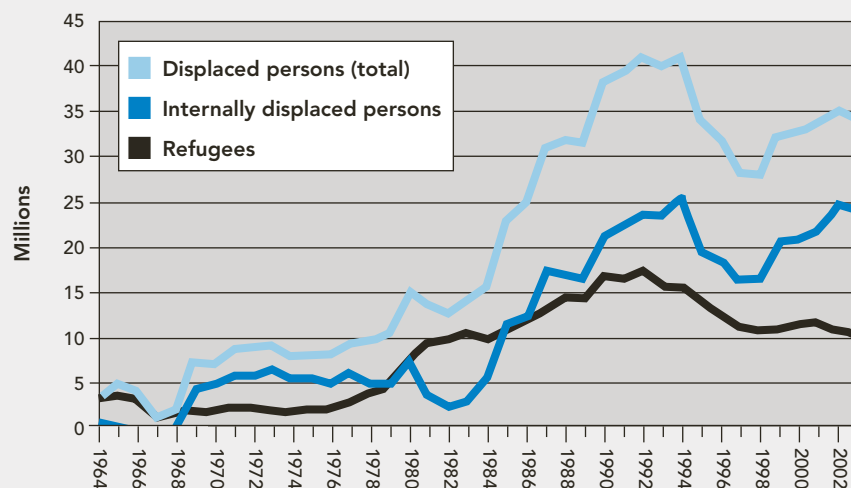
This analysis has important policy implications. Traditional humanitarianism and its sole concern for alleviating the symptoms of crises

is construed as inadequate in confronting the challenges of modern conflicts and in some circumstance actually creating more harm than good. The “new wars” are deemed to require more comprehensive solutions than the simple provision of relief (Hoffman and Weiss, 2006).

Trends in conflict-related displacement are better documented, though here too there are problems of classification — including the question of who counts as forcibly displaced, and how much is attributable to conflict. While numbers were almost certainly underreported in earlier years, the upward trend in displacement over the past 40-50 years is striking (see figure 1). Within this, the most obvious trend is the increase in numbers of internally displaced persons relative to refugees. That ratio has changed somewhat since 2003 with the exodus from Iraq and with significant refugee flows elsewhere. Nevertheless, the trend is marked.

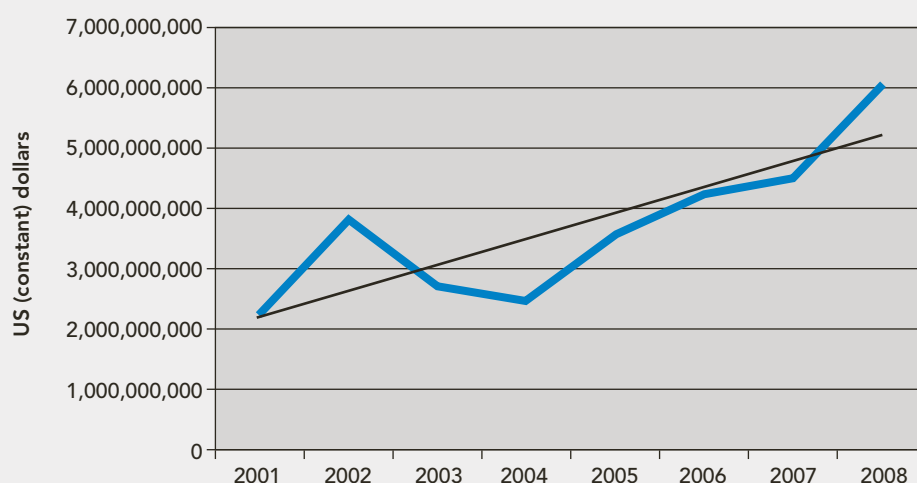
There appear to be multiple causal factors behind this trend. Some are related to changes in international asylum policy, which has become increasingly restrictive in both developed and developing countries (Collinson, 2009). Policies of “containment,” “internal flight options” etc. and other have contributed

Figure 1: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 1964–2003



Source: Philip Orchard, 2004

Figure 2: General Trends in Humanitarian Funding



Source: Abby Stoddard. Figures compiled from OCHA Financial Tracking Service at 16 March 2009

to a climate in which internal displacement is deemed by international policy makers preferable to asylum, despite the absence of effective means of protection. UNHCR has now been tasked with leading efforts to protect and assist IDPs but acknowledges that it is struggling with this new remit. The implications for other humanitarian actors are considerable. Reaching IDP populations is often problematic, particularly where they are dispersed amongst local host populations. Numbers are hard to determine, the impact on local communities is often severe but unquantified, and the problem spans both rural and (increasingly) urban contexts.

General Trends in Humanitarian Funding

These trends should be set against trends in official funding for international humanitarian assistance. This has been on a generally upward curve since 2000, even if funding for Iraq and Tsunami are discounted (Figure 2 above excludes funding for these two crises).

The great majority of this increasing humanitarian expenditure is accounted for by humanitarian responses in protracted conflict situations or complex emergencies. Almost half of all expenditure is accounted for by humani-

tarian responses in Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan. Overall, the available figures suggest that between 70-80% of all humanitarian response expenditure goes towards protracted, conflict-related crises.

Trends in International Engagement in Conflict and Protracted Crisis Situations

The Search for Policy Coherence

Shifts in the geopolitics and political economy of conflicts have led donor governments to pursue new modes of engagement in conflict and crisis contexts. Trans-national threats such as terrorism, organised crime, illicit markets and weapons proliferation are increasingly seen as linked with state fragility and violent conflicts. Attempts at managing these sources of instability have given renewed impetus to a "stabilisation" agenda among Western governments and, increasingly, within the UN, based on a growing consensus that there is a need to go beyond the provision of relief to include more robust and coherent international engagement in such contexts. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 pushed this agenda centre stage.

Development, security and humanitarian action are increasingly viewed as mutually reinforcing components of stabilization, with donor governments pushing “whole of government” approaches — variously labelled “3Ds” (defence, development, diplomacy), “3Cs” (coherent, coordinated, complementary), “integrated” or ‘comprehensive’ approaches. These involve greater cooperation and policy coherence between defence, foreign policy and development ministries and departments (Hioyos and Muggah, 2009) and have led to the creation of new offices and departments designed to specifically link different policy spheres, including humanitarian assistance (e.g. in the US, UK and Canada). In some contexts, these changes have led to increased interaction between military/security and civilian actors at the operational level. In Afghanistan and Iraq, for example, civilian and military actors work together within Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to provide relief and reconstruction as part of the Western coalitions’ stabilization and counter-insurgency efforts.

These “integrated” approaches have come in for particular criticism from a number of humanitarian agencies for the threat they are argued to pose to the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian assistance, and the risks of “instrumentalisation” of humanitarian relief in support political objectives. This unease reflects a deeper tension between mainstream “relief assistance” conducted by specialised humanitarian institutions and the involvement of political and military actors or intervention in efforts to protect or assistance outcomes. The protection failures of the 1990s in Somalia, former Yugoslavia and the Great Lakes exposed the limitations of the relief-focused or “assistance-first” model of humanitarian action; although humanitarians remain at best ambivalent about the involvement of others in the humanitarian agenda. The need to “join up” political and humanitarian strategy was underlined by the 2000 *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (the Brahimi report) which proposed the estab-

lishment of “integrated” UN missions. But the tensions involved in this attempt continue to played out in the field.

A great deal still needs to be done to work out the institutional implications of the search for policy coherence. These comprehensive approaches consist of a wide array of interventions including conflict prevention, counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, humanitarian assistance, early recovery, peace-keeping, post-conflict reconstruction, state-building and peace-building. Considerable problems are associated with setting appropriate strategic and operational objectives and sequencing these, particularly given the multiplicity of actors and institutions involved and competing objectives, mandates and interests. Policies remain torn between narrow definitions of security interests, which would focus action on combat operations against direct threats, such as terrorist networks, and a broader definition focused on wider stabilization efforts, including human security, peacekeeping and state-building.

The US, UK, Canada, Australia and their key allies are most prepared to lead enforcement action in areas where their own interests are most directly at stake, usually in association with a key regional organization. Yet it is left largely to the UN and regional organisations to handle crisis situations of lesser strategic importance and to lead in the more difficult and protracted business of “post-conflict” recovery and reconstruction. The consequence is an inconsistent and constantly shifting landscape of international stabilisation engagement.

The UN, Integrated Missions and Peace Enforcement

The integration of UN missions, the creation of the Peace-building Commission and Peace-building Fund and the drafting of a new doctrine for UN peacekeeping operations (the so-called “Capstone Doctrine”) are all indicative of a strengthening stabilization agenda within the UN, albeit one that is not explicitly labelled as such. Yet the nature of new institutional

structures to support the UN's stabilization engagement varies significantly according to the political and strategic significance and nature of the contexts concerned. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the UN presence has been very closely integrated with the coalition forces, and NATO has been mandated by the Security Council to undertake peace-keeping operations on behalf of the UN (Donini et al, 2008). In less strategically sensitive contexts, the Security Council has shown a willingness to mandate stabilization-type engagement, but Western governments have been far less keen to contribute militarily to these efforts. DR Congo is one striking example of this.

Considerable normative and operational uncertainty and inconsistency surrounds the UN's engagement in international stabilization efforts. Whereas traditional UN peacekeeping rested primarily on impartiality and consent (Chapter VI operations), the growing involvement of the UN in complex internal conflicts since the Cold War has meant that the UN is increasingly acting on mandates that sit closer to Chapter VII "peace enforcement," in which its neutrality cannot be maintained. Tensions surrounding the impartiality of both humanitarian assistance and UN peacekeeping have been aggravated by a serious and persistent lack of funding and capacity. There is a risk of failure in eastern DRC, Darfur and elsewhere, with key problems including "overstretch" and an absence of international consensus to support the UN's mandates and objectives in these contexts. UN SG Kofi Annan warned that these operations "will stretch to the limit and beyond the capacity of the United Nations to respond."

Pervasive doubts about the capacity of the UN system to address the international stabilization "caseload" is reflected in a growing international emphasis on the importance of regional responses to conflicts and associated political and humanitarian crises. However, serious questions also surround the capacities and likely effectiveness of regional institutions in pursuing stabilization objectives. NATO

lacks the legitimacy and political leadership of the UN, and is stretched militarily. In Africa, increased interest in pan-African defence cooperation has centred on the AU's 2004 Common African Security and Defence Policy and the creation of an African Standby Force. Since 2002, the AU has undertaken a number of civilian and military crisis management and peacekeeping operations. But the AU's missions in Darfur, particularly, have highlighted its limitations, including weak mandates and forces too small and ill-equipped to be effective. The record of ECOWAS and SADC in peacekeeping intervention and related humanitarian activity is mixed at best. Without a significant increase in troop contributions by Western states to UN and regional peacekeeping operations, AU and other regional peacekeeping will continue to be hampered by insufficient numbers and capacities of available troops.

In light of these developments, national counter-insurgency campaigns, such as those in Pakistan, Colombia and Sri Lanka, are likely to find at least tacit support from the leading Western powers, particularly where it chimes with trans-national security agendas, or where these powers lack political leverage with the regimes concerned. In doing so, they face domestic public and international outcry over the humanitarian consequences on the ground when these become particularly acute and reach the attention of the international media.

Evolving Civil-Military Relations

Related to the trends noted above, the military is increasingly asked to go beyond its traditional war fighting activities and engage in a range of tasks linked to humanitarian and development goals (Wheeler & Harmer, 2006). Various factors lie behind this, including the post-cold war search for a new role for military forces, perceived shortcomings in deployable civilian capabilities, evolving counter-insurgency doctrine and association of the new "responsibility to protect" doctrine with military humanitarian intervention. The result is an increase in the number

of contexts and agendas where military and civil institutions (including humanitarian agencies) find themselves operating alongside each other.

This increasing coexistence is also due to the idea that civilian agencies are limited in their ability to work in insecure environments, and that the military, while playing a significant role in creating “humanitarian space,” need meanwhile to carry out non-military activities, including relief provision. This has led to a trend in which militaries are increasingly institutionalising civilian capacity, with civil-military relations no longer viewed as the poor cousin of war fighting but an integral part of territorial and population control.

In response to these trends, humanitarian actors have developed a series of guidelines to manage their engagement with militaries, which will mainly consist of information-sharing around security conditions and humanitarian operations. Although most humanitarian agencies recognise the importance of the role of the military in humanitarian contexts, there is divergence around how agencies should engage with such institutions, particularly in contexts where there the military is an active belligerent.

There has also been an increasing interface between humanitarian agencies and the military in the area of protection. Protecting the safety and dignity of conflict-affected populations has long been a humanitarian concern, but in the past fifteen years there has been a rapid expansion in engagement on protection by humanitarian actors (O’Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2006). This has seen a growing number of peace operations with mandates for civilian protection; with the phrase “protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence” becoming an integral element of almost all UN mandated peace operations (Harald Sande Lie, 2008). Furthermore, the Security Council has become increasingly willing to agree to the use of force under Chapter VII to respond to human rights and humanitarian crises. While some commentators indicate that the growing engagement of peacekeepers in protection is delivering benefits for civilians un-

der threat (Grono, 2006; Holt, 2005), there are a number of notable cases where the positive impact has been limited at best (DRC, Darfur).

While such forms of military engagement may be welcomed in principle by humanitarian agencies — not least because they lack the means themselves to provide physical protection — the engagement of humanitarian actors with military protection (whether through advocacy of active coordination) has raised concerns about neutrality (O’Callaghan, 2007). This is particularly true in situations where military actors are engaged in peace-enforcement and other explicitly political roles. The current collaboration between MONUC and the government of DRC in counter-insurgency operations in eastern Congo is one such example.

Protection of Civilians and the Pursuit of Justice

The Responsibility to Protect

The growing trend of deployment of military forces with protection mandates reflects broader shifts in thinking about protection in the political, military and human rights spheres. The 1990s was a decade in which external military intervention for human protection purposes was asserted by the international community, in particular the US and UK, to justify intervention in Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo. The concept of “humanitarian intervention” has been criticised by some as a threat to the notion of state sovereignty, by others as a dangerous conflation of humanitarian and political agendas. The “Responsibility to Protect” doctrine turns the issue on its head, placing the sovereign state at the centre but insisting on sovereign *responsibility* to protect as central to state legitimacy. First articulated in 2001 (ICISS), R2P gained political momentum at the 2005 UN World Summit where governments agreed that when a state “manifestly fails” in its responsibilities to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing,

the international community must take action, including collective use of force authorised by the Security Council under Chapter VII (World Summit Outcome Document). While some argue that the recognition of R2P and its subsequent endorsement by the UN Security Council has meant that the concept has become an emergent international norm. Others claim that the debate has shifted from whether there is a *right* to intervene to the *nature* of the intervention (Wheeler, 2005; Grono, 2006).

Amid the various debates about the interpretation of the R2P doctrine, its status and legal foundations, perhaps the most serious challenge it faces is to overcome the unwillingness of states to expend military or political capital to address mass human rights abuses in other countries. Darfur, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka (amongst other situations) demonstrate that the challenges to it becoming established practice. Yet the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has stressed that he will spare “no effort to operationalize the responsibility to protect” and in early 2009 issued a report aimed at providing doctrinal, policy and institutional life to the doctrine.

Human Rights and Protection: Balancing Peace, Security and Justice

The 1990s was marked by a re-energising of the human rights movement, which led to a raft of new international instruments and “soft law” such as the IDP Guiding Principles. These normative developments have been underpinned by the operational expansion of human rights actors in conflict settings, most particularly the expansion of OHCHR, which is increasingly present and active in conflict contexts. The Security Council has become more active in the establishment of international accountability mechanisms such as the ad hoc tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, but the most significant development was the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to prosecute those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

The ICC has a global mandate, yet its activities to date have concentrated on African countries — stirring African sensitivities about sovereignty, as well as charges of hypocrisy that the actions of Western governments in Iraq and Afghanistan are not subject to the same level of accountability. The Court can only investigate crimes committed after the Rome Statute took effect in 2002, hence the court has been drawn into contexts where conflicts are still active, or barely concluded (Waddell and Clark, 2008) and conflict mediators are concerned that this reduces options for conflict resolution. Tension between justice and peace has become all too evident in the context of northern Uganda and Sudan (Flint and de Waal, 2009; Hovil and Lomo, 2005). Concerns that the activities of the ICC may affect ongoing humanitarian access in conflict settings has led the ICRC to assert its immunity against provision of testimony and MSF to issue statements to the press indicating non-cooperation with the Court (DuBois, 2009). This tension was all too evident when an arrest warrant was issued for President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, following which 15 international and national organisations were expelled from northern Sudan or closed on grounds of alleged cooperation with the ICC. HPG researchers suggest that the expulsions are not only detrimental to the needs and protection of communities in conflict-affected areas of Sudan’s north, but may also have implications for the multiple peace processes in the country (Pantuliano et al). It is still too early in the Court’s jurisdiction to know whether concerns regarding its impact on conflict are outweighed by accountability and deterrence.

Protection in Humanitarian Practice: Expansion and Specialisation

Among humanitarian agencies there is increasing recognition that protection is a core component of humanitarian action. An increasing number and diversity of international and national agencies are now engaging in protection, joining the cadre of agencies with specific

mandates to protect (ICRC, UNHCR, UNICEF and OHCHR). Protection is now one of the 11 “Clusters” that coordinate specialised humanitarian action globally and in the field. The result of this increased activity has been the development of new approaches and technical capacities, much of it from the non-mandated actors working at community level (O’Callaghan and Pantuliano, 2007).

This rapid growth in thinking and practice is not without its difficulties. Alarms have been repeatedly raised about the “internationalisation” of the protection agenda with humanitarians substituting for more robust and effective action, as a consequence of both transferral of responsibilities by other actors and exaggerated claims by humanitarians (DuBois, 2009; Pantuliano and O’Callaghan, 2006; Aeschlimann, 2005). There has been criticism of the quality of protection work, including the deployment of inexperienced staff, breaches of confidentiality of affected populations and inconsistent knowledge and application of relevant laws (Bonwick 2006; Pantuliano and O’Callaghan, 2006). Finally, there have been concerns that there has been an imbalance of attention to some issues (such as IDPs) to the detriment of others. Despite the expansion of interest, refugee protection and its core tenets (*asylum, non-refoulement*) seem largely to have slipped off the humanitarian agenda.

Various initiatives are underway to address some of the challenges outlined above and to further develop the sector, including efforts to develop standards in protection. There are also some lines of research and thinking about protection. One of these concerns the linkages between protection and livelihoods. This work is premised on the understanding that the threats that people face to their protection and livelihoods are frequently interrelated. The direct targeting of civilian populations and their assets is often a deliberate war tactic. Violence has major implications for people’s livelihoods because it can disrupt basic services, limit access to employment, markets and farms, and

even undermine social networks (Jaspars et al, 2006). Protection and livelihoods are also connected in the way people respond to these risks. Research by HPG in Darfur, Chechnya, Sri Lanka and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) shows that people carefully calibrate costs to their safety and dignity against their economic status (Jaspars and O’Callaghan, 2008; O’Callaghan et al, 2009).

Humanitarian and Development Interventions in Protracted Crises

Protracted Crisis

The available figures suggest that somewhere between 70-80% of all humanitarian response expenditure goes towards protracted crises; that is, to situations of protracted humanitarian concern typically involving a combination of violent political instability, forced displacement and human rights abuse, and weak or absent governance and service provision. The fact that so much of humanitarian expenditure occurs in such contexts raises fundamental questions about the proper role of humanitarian assistance in relation to other “fragile states” agendas, particularly with regard to development. Relief assistance often provides an (inadequate) substitute for welfare safety nets, providing patchy access to the most basic requirements for health and subsistence. Much of the policy concern with situations of this kind lies in identifying the appropriate combination of approaches and instruments to tackle the combined effects of acute and chronic vulnerability.

New Types of Relief, Livelihood Support and Basic Services in Conflict

Conflict affects all aspects of livelihoods. War strategies often deliberately undermine livelihoods and war economies may develop, where a powerful elite benefits from war by using violent or exploitative practices. War directly impacts on livelihoods through the destruction, looting and theft of key assets,

and indirectly through the loss of basic services and access to employment, markets, farms or pastures. As a result, most people's livelihood strategies become extremely restricted and may involve considerable risks to personal safety. Contemporary conflict is frequently protracted, and risks to livelihoods thus persist for long periods of time.

While food aid remains the dominant mode of tackling food insecurity in these environments, agencies have increasingly explored a range of other food security and livelihoods support interventions to help meet basic needs and reduce protection risks in both acute and protracted phases of conflict. These have included interventions that reduce expenditure, such as fuel-efficient stoves and grinding mills; vouchers or grants to increase access to a range of goods or services; cash for work e.g. for road rehabilitation; and cash grants to meet basic needs or assist livelihood recovery. Agencies have also examined the potential for incorporating and utilising lessons from social protection programming.

Social Protection

Social protection involves "public actions taken to respond to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society" (Norton et al., 2001). Considerable overlap exists among humanitarian assistance, social protection, wider livelihoods promotion and food security interventions, which share similar goals in relation to reducing vulnerability, risk and deprivation (Harvey, 2009). Social protection holds new potential for the long-standing challenges that the international community faces when responding to conflict. Recent thinking has begun to explore the potential for the provision of regular social protection as a way to address the needs of the millions living in difficult environments (Harvey, 2009; Harvey et al 2007; Darcy 2004). At a programmatic level however, social protection in fragile states and in situations of conflict remains largely uncharted

territory, with traditional forms of humanitarian assistance often continuing to be the predominant mode of engagement. National systems for longer-term social assistance are generally perceived as a distant goal.

Social protection, traditionally a concept applied to "better performing" environments where the state may be willing and able to provide some form of long-term assistance to its citizens, requires some adaptation if used in conflict situations. Here, a social protection agenda needs to take into account the fact that the range of risks and vulnerabilities that people are confronted with has as much to do with threats from violence as with threats deriving from income poverty (Darcy, 2004). The concept of social protection in these contexts will need to encompass "threats of violence and persecution, coercion and deliberate deprivation, as well as protection against loss of entitlements and economic vicissitudes" (Ibid: 2). The acts and measures designed to protect people in these environments may in some cases be limited to sustaining life and alleviate immediate suffering. In these contexts, there are clear overlaps between social protection and humanitarian assistance where both agendas share similar objectives aiming at reducing risk and vulnerability (Harvey, 2009).

The obstacles to delivery are often formidable. Devereux describes the "Catch 22 of social protection" where "the greater the need for social protection, the lower the capacity of the state to provide it" (Devereux, 2000). In this regard, social protection has been considered as an agenda that can strengthen the legitimacy of the state and support social and political stability. For example by allowing the state to re-shoulder its responsibilities for the welfare of its citizens social protection can be considered an important way for revitalizing the political contract between the state and citizens (Christoplos, 2004).

Applying the notion of social protection to situations of violent insecurity, fragile states and protracted crisis also begs the question of who

is responsible for its delivery. In these contexts, even if in legal terms the state remains ultimately responsible for the welfare of its citizens, the weakness or disruption of state institutions, the lack of capacity and/or willingness to provide for all or part of the population, means that the state often cannot or will not play the leading role in owning and advancing a social protection agenda. Non-state actors, such as local civil society actors and international humanitarian service providers, will often acquire a central role in providing for the welfare of the population in these situations (Darcy, 2004). Moreover, communities themselves will also be key social protection actors for example through extended family networks (e.g. hosting of IDPs) or through financial support such as remittances or *zakat* in Islamic communities.

Cash-Based Responses

Cash transfers and vouchers — i.e. providing cash to people affected by crisis in the form of unconditional or conditional grants, Cash for Work or redeemable vouchers — are increasingly used to meet needs in crises as an alternative or complement to providing goods in-kind in response to crisis. Since the close of the 1990s the number of cash-based responses has surged. Discussions among humanitarian agencies have evolved from *whether* they can be an appropriate response mechanism to how, when and where organisations, donors and governments can best programme and support cash transfers. Cash transfers are seen as providing flexibility to aid recipients and also supporting local economies. While few donors have explicit policies on cash, certain donors (e.g. DFID) have been generally supportive of their use. It is nearly impossible to determine percentage of cash-based responses compared as a portion of total humanitarian programming, because of the unreliability of financial tracking data and the fact that aid agencies and donors rarely disaggregate their assistance into cash and in-kind categories.

Early Recovery

The current international aid architecture, instruments and modes of engagement struggle to address the range of strategic, capacity and financing needs of countries experiencing (or emerging from) protracted conflict. The international community has long been concerned with the need to strengthen the synergies between humanitarian and development assistance and improve programming in the immediate aftermath of conflict, often with the focus on a “transitions” — from war to peace and from relief, recovery and ultimately longer-term development. “Early recovery” has been gaining momentum, particularly in policy circles, as a framework to better address needs and promote recovery in humanitarian and transitional settings.

The meaning of early recovery is still very much in discussion, in particular the extent to which it should include security and security sector reform objectives. UNDP is currently leading global efforts to promote early recovery, with a focus on the promotion of a self-sustaining, nationally-owned process for post-crisis recovery, building on life-saving interventions in conflict-affected environments where and when appropriate. In conflict settings, there are concerns about potential trade-offs between meeting immediate needs and promoting eventual recovery. Here there are often major questions about whether the conditions exist under which effective recovery can be expected. Others conceive early recovery more broadly, as overlapping with peace-building and stabilisation. The extent to which early recovery approaches will influence and improve programming in conflict-affected areas will depend in no small part on how UN agencies, NGOs and donor governments define and fund early recovery activities in humanitarian settings. This agenda is both flexible and rapidly evolving.

Basic Service Delivery

The surge in attention to fragile states has coincided with a growing interest in basic

service delivery in these contexts. Distorted or broken lines of accountability, weak or non-existent sectoral policy frameworks at the national level, and poor monitoring and control systems often create a highly fragmented service delivery patterns. Severe governance deficits and the breakdown of social order through conflict often translate into the systematic exclusion of certain groups along ethnic, religious, political and gender lines, thus seriously challenging effective provision of services — such as health care or water supply — premised on norms of universality, equity and participation.

The modes and instruments of engagement in service delivery should reflect the type and context of state fragility and the characteristics and dynamics of the specific service delivery sector (OECD, 2007; Ranson et al., 2007; OECD/OCDE, 2006). Despite this widely agreed principle of engagement, humanitarian and development actors wanting to support service delivery initiatives in fragile states continue to face a range of technical, security and political hurdles in pursuit of goals that may be hard to reconcile. These include finding the appropriate balance between responding to the immediate health and other needs of crisis-affected populations and building state capacity to ensure eventual sustainable service provision. It also requires a balance between engaging with the state and non-state providers; and between working through central state institutions to promote basic service interventions and supporting decentralized modes of delivery which use lower level institutions (e.g. local government).

New Actors in Humanitarian Response

The picture of international intervention in conflict settings is growing more complex with the advent of significant new actors, including non-DAC donors and private sector companies. While much attention has been placed on reforming the humanitarian system from within, the wider economic and geo-political environment and changing dynamics of humanitarian intervention have meant that the international

humanitarian “system” now comprises a greater diversity of actors than ever before. From as few as a dozen government financiers just over a decade ago, it is now commonplace to have up to 50 or 60 donor governments supporting a humanitarian response reflecting the fact that humanitarian action is not only the occupation of rich, and industrialized western nations. In addition, there is a growing engagement of for-profit enterprises as donors, private contractors and partners in the provision of humanitarian relief and service delivery in crisis-affected countries.

Both trends raise opportunities and challenges for traditional humanitarian actors including UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross Movements. With an increasingly limited capacity to respond, added resources and expertise are likely to play a central role in contributing towards humanitarian outcomes. But the role of these actors in humanitarian action remains poorly understood. Recent research by HPG has tracked the growing role of non-DAC donors (Harmer and Martin, 2009) and the evolving role of private sector actors in crisis contexts (Martin, forthcoming). In both cases, trends are hard to determine, with contributions that are often less significant in absolute financial terms than in political and other terms.

Operational Security and “Humanitarian Space”

Trends in security incident data show a pronounced rise of the rates of attacks against aid workers, mainly driven by a few extremely insecure contexts (Stoddard, Harmer, DiDomenico, 2009). Although attacks on humanitarian operations seem to have levelled off in most parts of the world since 2006, in a small number of the most highly contested operational environments the violence has worsened and taken on an increasingly political orientation. The fabled “humanitarian space” has not merely shrunk in these environments, but the very concept has been rendered meaningless, as aid workers and their material assets have been treated as appropriate and desirable targets for hostile ac-

tion. United Nations security personnel and others have noted a “paradigm shift” in the threat environment, in which personnel are politically targeted even when they are attempting to engage in neutral humanitarian action. Insecurity leads to constraints on access to beneficiaries, which increases *their* vulnerability.

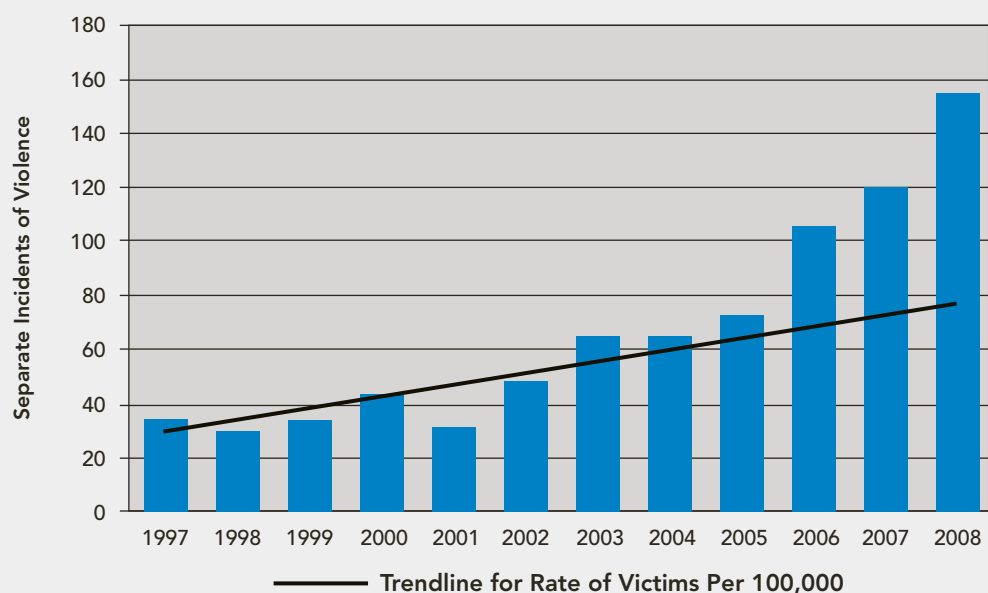
Globally, violence against aid workers has risen significantly over the past 12 years (the period for which data has been systematically collected). The absolute number of major security incidents involving aid workers — defined as killings, kidnappings, and attacks that result in serious injury — has risen four-fold over the time period, with the largest jump occurring in the past three years. The average number of incidents per year in 2006-2008 was up 177 percent from the annual average of prior recorded years. While this must be understood against a background of rising numbers of aid workers in the field, the number of attacks has unquestionably outpaced the steadily growing population of aid workers, resulting in a 61 percent rise in attack rates for the same period. In 2008 alone, 260 aid workers fell victim to deliberate

violence — a rate of 9/10,000. Of these, 122 lost their lives.

The jump in security incidents was mainly driven by the extremely insecure operational environments of Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan (Darfur), which together accounted for more than 60 percent of the total attacks on aid workers. Importantly, when controlling for these three extreme cases, the attack rates for aid workers in the rest of the world appears to be stable, even slightly declining. This would suggest that advances in operational security management among many humanitarian organisations, including more sophisticated methodologies for risk assessment and mitigation, have seen positive results for aid providers in all but the most violent settings. However it is in such settings that the humanitarian needs will often be greatest, and agencies engaged in lifesaving relief assistance need to find a way to sustain vital operations.

Although intentionality is notoriously difficult to ascertain in security incidents, the best available data indicate that a greater proportion of aid worker attacks are now politically motivated (ibid). The international aid system, UN

Figure 4: Absolute Numbers of Aid Worker Attacks — Trend in Rates Per 100,000



Source: Stoddard, Harmer, DiDomenico, 2009

and INGO components alike, has been effectively painted by armed opposition groups as an instrument of a Western political agenda. As one UN security professional observed, humanitarian aid has come to be seen as a manifestation of the Western nations' "state-building" project to extend their power. Attacks against aid operations are a strike back against that power extension — "anti-state-building."

There is a divergence between the victimization rates of UN agencies and NGOs. In terms of aid workers overall, the rate of international staff victims, long seen to be declining relative to the rising national staff victims, spiked suddenly in the past three years. In keeping with this finding there was a 350 percent rise in kidnappings — a type of attack that traditionally favours international targets for their higher symbolic and ransom values. This global incident pattern does not hold true across all types of aid organisations, however. When attacks on UN agencies were looked at separately, the casualties were still seen to be heavily weighted toward national staff, particularly contractors, suggesting that as security worsens a greater reliance on

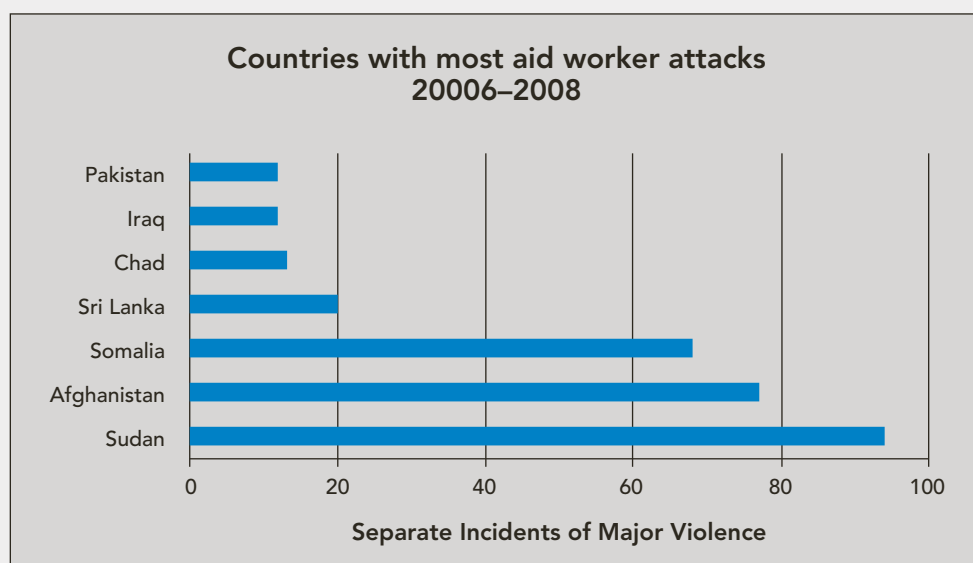
programming through local entities has shifted the risk burden to these individuals, many of whom have neither the resources to enhance their own security nor the economic wherewithal to turn down the opportunity of work. The ethical problems with this are manifest.

When contracted drivers are included, the data show that WFP has had more than three times the number of workers killed in attacks while on the job than each of the other UN humanitarian agencies and the largest NGO federations. WFP's casualties are also more heavily borne by national staff than is the case with its fellow organizations

Operational Security — Developments in Policy and Practice

Within the humanitarian community, the security domain has significantly professionalised over the past five years and security budgets have increased. Agencies have established formal security posts at headquarters, regional and field locations. Security policies and procedures have been developed emphasizing a programme-led approach to risk management, and

Figure 5: Highest Incident Countries, 2006-2008



Source: Stoddard, Harmer and DeDominici (2009)

investments are being made in security audits to analyse whether practice on the ground reflects organisational priorities. The UN has played an active part in this policy shift, and WFP has been one of the leaders in this. However the UN suffered a significant setback with a large scale, targeted attack against the organisation in Algiers in 2007. Efforts to establish a UN-wide incident reporting mechanism, and encouraging greater collaboration between aid actors on the ground through the Saving Lives Together initiative have also fallen short of their original goals.

The strategy of “acceptance” — cultivating relations with local actors and communities — is still seen as a key approach to security, particularly for NGOs. But UN humanitarian agencies, including WFP, face wider security challenges as they form part of a larger entity with a clear political identity and role. It is inherently more difficult for UN agencies to cultivate acceptance as independent humanitarian actors. In some of the most insecure contexts, such as Somalia and Afghanistan most security managers — NGOs and UN alike — acknowledge that acceptance is increasingly not a viable security strategy.

Many agencies have also reinforced their adherence to humanitarian principles, in particular the principle of independence. Humanitarian practitioners see independence as increasingly vital to their ability to negotiate access and to their overall level of security. This is done primarily by reducing the agency’s reliance on institutional funding, especially if a potential donor is negatively perceived by the host community. How effective this is in maintaining the security of staff is, however, debatable. The ICRC has had some success in regaining the acceptance that its unique mandate bestows, but the UN and NGOs have suffered increasing attacks irrespective of their funding and partnerships.

Remote Management and the Transfer of Risk

Security incidents have a significant impact on an aid agencies programming approach. Strategies such as remote management are

increasingly employed to ensure that aid continues to reach the beneficiary population. The organisation withdraws or limits the movements of its international staff, while shifting more responsibility to national staff or local partners and / or contractors. This approach is generally based on the assumption that local actors face a lower level of risk than international entities or personnel. However, this assumption is frequently false, and simply shifts the burden of risk to those who often have fewer security resources and less training.

Remote management, though intended as a short-term expedient, can have a series of knock-on effects which make it difficult for the agency to re-engage later through more traditional means. These effects include reduced ground-level information, less credibility and lower levels of trust in the agency, as well as increased risks for local implementing actors (Rogers, 2006). Recognising this dilemma, agencies have increased their investment in national staff capacities in recent years. Most also acknowledge, however, that more needs to be done.

Security-Related Constraints on Access

As security worsens, aid operations are often scaled back or withdrawn, affecting both the quality and quantity of assistance beneficiaries receive. Measuring access is, however, a challenging pursuit and there are as yet no robust means to assess claims that access is declining. While the overall footprint of the international assistance community might have shrunk in a given country, some agencies may have maintained or even increased their operational presence in response to the withdrawal of other agencies. ICRC, for example, maintains that it has increased its operational engagement in some very insecure contexts, and has done so with international staff and without armed escorts, armoured cars or military protection. WFP argues that the increased number of suspensions has partly come about because the organisation has pushed deeper into the heart of conflict environments.

OCHA has developed a tracking system to monitor and report access constraints, and this is currently being piloted in six insecure contexts. In his 2009 report to the UN Security Council on the Protection of Civilians, the Secretary General highlights that the most marked deterioration of humanitarian access is evident in the striking increase in attacks on humanitarian agencies. In delivering food to Somalia, Afghanistan and Darfur, WFP, for example, has suffered repeated attacks on convoys, including killing and kidnapping staff and contractors. In Afghanistan, in the first half of 2008, 800 tonnes of food aid were lost in attacks. In Darfur, Sudan in the same year more than 100 trucks were hijacked, forcing the organisation to reduce the rations of up to three million people by 50%. Somalia, in turn, provides some particularly stark evidence of the impact of insecurity on access.

Emerging Threats and Potential Causes of Future Conflict

Urbanisation, Conflict and Humanitarian Crisis

The rapid and uncontrolled process of urbanization in the developing world is threatening the well-being and the development opportunities of millions of city dwellers. The threats that they are confronted with are in many cases “no less severe than some situations described internationally as “humanitarian emergencies” (IRIN and UN-Habitat, 2008). Despite the scale of the challenge, both humanitarian and development actors are ill-equipped to deal with the complexities posed by such rapid and unplanned urban growth. The graph on the next page shows the historic and projected trends for urban and rural population growth to the year 2030. Almost all of the projected growth between now and 2030 is in urban centres in developing countries.

While urbanisation is a global phenomenon, it affects less developed countries disproportionately. Over the last two decades the urban population of the developing world has grown an average of 3 million people per week

(UN-Habitat, 2008). It is estimated that by the middle of the 21st century, the total urban population of the developing world have doubled; with Southern cities absorbing 95% of the urban and Africa demonstrating the highest rates.

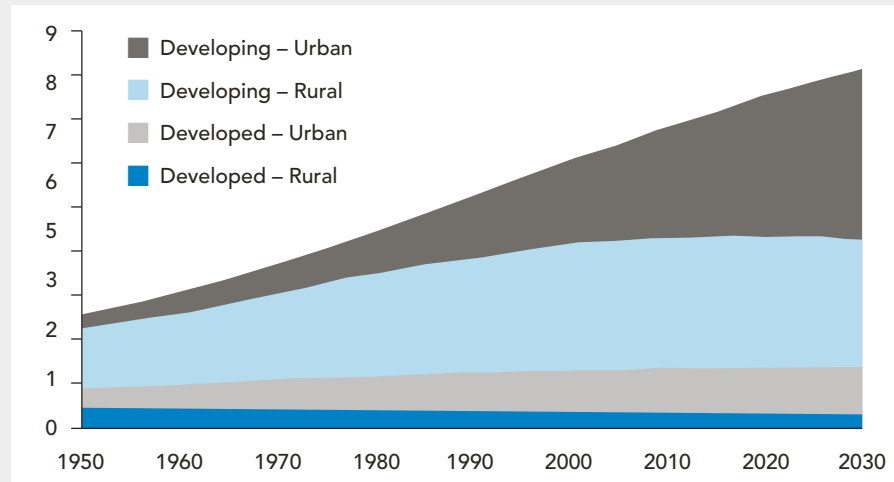
The rapid growth of urban centres has been accompanied by an increasing trend in various forms of violence, as well as being affected by its consequences. Research by the Crisis States Research Centre (CSRC) on Cities and Fragile States has shown that cities can become theatres of regional and international conflicts and often experience the effects of large scale displacement due to civil strife. Cities are also regularly characterised by segregation and fear that is a result of violent crime and conflict. Different forms of urban violence, such as armed conflict, gang warfare, organized crime and riots pose serious threats to the lives of urban residents and expose them to ongoing protection threats (ICRC, 2008).

In addition to the range of structural problems facing the urban poor, recent developments such as the food, fuel and financial crisis, and global processes such as climate change are inducing new types of risks and represent potential triggers for urban humanitarian crises. Urban populations were the worst affected by the global food crisis in many contexts (High Level Task Force on the Global Food Crisis, 2008).

Youth Radicalisation, Political Islam and Transnational Drivers of Conflict

At the heart of much urban insecurity is urban unemployment. Cities in fragile states in particular suffer from high levels of population growth which exceed their capacity to generate jobs and livelihoods (CSRC, undated). Unemployment rates are usually particularly high amongst the youth, engendering frustration and resentment which in turn often leads to violence and conflict. The role of social exclusion, poverty, inequality, power and powerlessness in explaining urban social violence and youth militancy in many urban contexts has been long documented (DFID, 2007). These elements in

Figure 6: Historic and Projected Trends for Urban and Rural Population Growth



themselves do not however always lead to conflict. Extensive research by Stewart (2006) has shown that it is a combination of strong cultural affinities, charismatic or organised leadership and exclusionist government policies that tend to turn latent grievances into actual protest, which may become violent.

A current strong manifestation of youth radicalisation is to be found in Islamic contexts. In these contexts the link between poverty, inequality and violence associated with radicalisation or extremism is not straightforward. The traditional backbone of Islamist political movements has not been provided by the very poor, who are generally too preoccupied with their struggle for daily survival to be suitably mobilized (Lieven, 2008). Islamist militants often come from economically advantaged backgrounds and young men in particular are often radicalized by considerations of job and status (Lieven, *ibid.*). A comprehensive literature review for DFID on conflict, state fragility and social cohesion (SDD, 2008) illustrates how the limited links between terrorism and income poverty, underlining that radicalization and extremism appear to be more a response to political conditions

and long-standing feelings of indignity, and frustration at lack of opportunity. Poverty and illiteracy tend to still be important motivating factors to recruit militants at the lower levels of extremist organizations (SDD, *ibid.*). The situation however varies greatly depending on the contexts and the country, making it very difficult to draw general conclusions.

Transnational forces often play a key role in influencing conflict dynamics within a country. Mary Kaldor (1999) has shown wars are frequently embedded within complex transnational networks. This includes the role of diasporas in financing and providing political support as well as the trading in arms and conflict commodities such as natural resources through illicit trafficking networks to finance war (SDD, 2008). Transnational networks tend to be more effective if the state is weak. In the case of Bangladesh, government authorities have admitted being unable to control unregulated flows of money and lacking capacity to identify organisations who engage in funding activities of radicalized and extremist groups (Munizzuraman, 2008). Many states have been unable to regulate the inflow of money from the Gulf or the Middle East to national NGO's.

Diaspora groups originating from Muslim countries have become increasingly radicalized and they are seen as not only financing *salafi* groups, but also as bringing radical thoughts to the countries in question. The stereotypical image of militants being forged in the *madrasas* of Pakistan is becoming rapidly outdated. Militants are increasingly using the internet and social networking to access radical thought and reach other groups across the world. National counter-terrorist units in Bangladesh and Pakistan are studying the Facebook-generation to see how young militants are shifting radical thoughts from country to country.

Natural Resource-Based Conflicts

Although some studies have overemphasised the role of natural resources in war (see Collier 2000), the political economy of contemporary armed conflicts highlights the importance of economic agendas and natural resources in shaping the causes, duration and character of violence. Loot-able resources are thought to prolong conflicts as they can disproportionately benefit insurgents thereby avoiding their defeat. They can create internal discipline problems with many soldiers preferring conflict to peace (Ballentine and Nitzschke 2003). In eastern DRC, for example, different armed actors have established a lucrative system of economic profit and power through the exploitation of natural resources that is dependent on the ongoing conflict. Non loot-able resources such as oil or deep shaft minerals tend to favour governments in their attempts to secure rapid military victory, though the struggle for control over such resources may be a dominant agenda for all sides in a conflict.

These economic agendas can also change the character of a conflict. Conflicts become complex and fragmented as economic motives come to the fore, which can lead to more indiscriminate predation of civilians as armed actors no longer feel the need to cre-

ate consent and accountability (Leader 2000). This can have substantial effects on people's livelihoods as armed actors destroy or steal key assets such as houses, land, food supplies and livestock, often forcing civilians to flee. Local institutions or governance structures central to safeguarding people's livelihoods may be destroyed or manipulated for personal or political gain. Many civilians may also be forced to seek coping mechanisms within war economies that in turn can further sustain the conflict (Jaspers and Maxwell, 2009).

Climate Change, Pastoralism and Conflict

Climate change may contribute to natural resource scarcity such as declining access to water or to land, and competition over increasingly scarce resources can lead to violent conflict. There is a growing awareness that climate change and the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events can increase the risk of conflict and may further exacerbate current conflicts (FMR, 2008; Brown et al. 2007; Smith and Vivekananda, 2007). The effects of climate change and violent conflict can be seen as mutually reinforcing processes. In conflict-affected states the interaction of climate change with violent conflict is seen as creating a vicious circle where conflict further constrains adaptive capacity and climate change increasingly deepens the conflict. In countries where poverty, political marginalization, weak governance and institutional systems are already entrenched, the consequences of climate changes are likely to interact with other processes to increase the risk of violent conflict (Smith and Vivekananda, 2007).

Direct and indirect consequences of climate change — such as natural resource scarcity or displacement — will interact with other factors including governance and institutions, political and economic stability, thus making it difficult to predict whether or how violence will break out in any given context (Crisis Group, 2008). Therefore rather than seeing climate change as the key driver of conflict, climate change and its consequences should be seen

as increasing the risk and likelihood of violent conflict in already fragile social and political environments which often lack the capacity to adapt, respond and recover (Smith and Vivekananda, 2007).

The climate of the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) in the Horn of Africa is characterised by high temperatures, low and erratic rainfall and cyclical droughts. Pastoralists have developed sophisticated and dynamic livelihood strategies, including building up herd sizes as insurance against times of hardship, accessing and managing natural resources, and maintaining high levels of mobility across large tracts of land (Desta et al, 2008; HPG, 2009; Markakis, 2004). During the past few decades however, the climate of the ASALs has become more variable and less predictable and droughts have increased in frequency and magnitude. Pastoralist livelihoods have become significantly under strain and their adaptive capacity to resist and recover from drought-related shocks has been progressively undermined. Although the causal factors are complex, it is important to consider how climate change interacts with and deepens existing problems (HPG, 2009). The adverse effects of climate change in this region have been associated with the exacerbation of phenomena such as forced migration, environmental degradation, social breakdown and conflict.

In recent years conflicts over natural resources and access have increased significantly together with the intensification of recurrent climate shocks. Pastoral groups resort to migration as a climate adaptation strategy and move over larger tracts of land in search of available grazing land and water. This movement increases population pressure, accelerates environmental degradation and leads to fierce competition over scarce resources, often triggering conflict between different communities, both nomadic and settled.

Land as Key Issue in Future Conflict

A critical issue in many of current and future conflicts is the access, ownership and use

of land. Land is central to people's livelihoods, particularly in rural societies, and inequities or antagonisms in land tenure coupled with the institutional failure to resolve disputes can lead to violent conflict. In Colombia, a key grievance of the insurgency is the inequities in land tenure that resulted from tensions between large landholdings and small scale farming (Elhawary 2009). In the DRC, a gradual erosion of customary systems of land access due to colonial and state policies of appropriation and patronage led to increasing conflicts over land (Vlasenroot 2008). These tensions in land tenure are often the result of the development process, as changes in agrarian societies often create tensions around land use and labour as it requires communities to shift to a different form of political, economic, social and institutional organisation. For example, subsistence farming and customary ownership of land will often contrast with the need for land and a sufficient labour supply on large mechanised farms or in cities. Similarly, the livelihoods of sedentary groups will often contrast with those of mobile pastoralists. Mining concessions will also often affect people's access to land and consequently their livelihoods. If institutions (formal or informal) are unable to peacefully manage the antagonisms that arise from such transitions, the process is likely to be violent.

Land relations can be aggravated by conflict itself, particularly when there is large scale displacement of populations and/or land becomes a key resource of conflict. Land can often be used to reward key allies in conflict. For example, in Darfur, the government offers its allies land in return for engaging in the conflict, which consequently affects people's livelihoods and creates tensions around land tenure (de Waal 2009). Control of land is also a means to gain important resources that may lie beneath the land. For example, in eastern DRC, control of land by armed groups is central to acquiring mineral wealth and profiting from its trade. Similarly, in Colombia, paramilitary groups have sought to acquire large areas of land as a means

of wealth accumulation. Forced displacement can further aggravate land conflicts. Refugees or IDPs will often occupy land in their areas of refuge and others, sometimes opportunistically and other times out of necessity, will often occupy land in areas of displacement.

These issues also come to the fore in the post-conflict period, especially if the importance of land in the conflict has not been recognised or addressed in the peace process. Despite formal agreements between belligerents, conflicts over land will often persist particularly when there has been large scale and protracted displacement. Land grabbing often occurs in the transition period, the land administration is often dysfunctional or corrupt, people have lost or had their documentation destroyed, returnees often bring new ideas, technologies and capital that can alter land relations, some will have a vested interest in maintaining land tenure insecurity and land policy will often lack relevance in a context of rapid change (Huggins 2009, Alden Wily 2009). Frequently the response to displacement in the post-conflict period is to return IDPs and refugees to their areas of origin, yet changing dynamics during the conflict, particularly around land tenure means that this process is often fraught with tensions as land is occupied by others or returnees might not have had land in the first place. For example, in Rwanda, the return of around 600,000 Tutsi refugees by the late 1990s and the return en masse of Hutu refugees in 1996 and 1997 led to increasing tensions over land access. In Afghanistan, it was estimated between March 2002 and May 2004 that 60% of returnees were landless, while 60% of those going back to rural areas were dependent on land as a means of survival (UNHCR figures cited in Ozerdem and Sofizada 2006). The centrality of land in conflict and post-conflict situations means that ignoring these issues can lead to missed opportunities to support people's livelihoods or worse feed into tensions or create conflict between different groups seeking access to land.

Implications of Conflict Trends for WFP

Responding to Current and Future Challenges

Many of the challenges facing WFP in working in conflict situations are already apparent in its current programmes: how to assess changing patterns of need in protracted crises; finding forms of assistance appropriate to these contexts; striking the right balance between relief and recovery assistance; maintaining secure access to affected populations; and managing complex and expensive logistical operations, for itself and others. Some of the challenges relate to principles: how to work with governments or even other UN bodies — particularly in integrated missions — whose agendas are overtly political, while maintaining neutrality and impartiality? Some are about strategy and coordination: how best to configure WFP's approach alongside those of others (particularly FAO) to achieve the best combined result? All of these raise questions about the proper role of WFP and how its new strategic plan (2008-11) should be interpreted in situations of protracted crisis, violent instability and weak governance. The aspirations in that plan face huge challenges in these contexts, yet these are the setting for a large proportion of WFP's global programming.

It is worth re-stating here the 5 strategic objectives in the 2008 Strategic Plan:

- Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies
- Prevent acute hunger and invest in disaster preparedness and mitigation
- Restore and rebuild lives and livelihoods in post-conflict/post-disaster/transitions
- Reduce chronic hunger and malnutrition
- Strengthen the capacities of countries to reduce hunger

Each of these poses challenges in conflict situations that have yet to be adequately addressed, and which require rethinking and adaptation of approach. Some of the best think-

ing is emerging from country programmes, though many are struggling with the reality that “country ownership” (a principle stressed in the strategic plan) may be a mixed blessing in conflict settings, and sometimes an unrealistic goal in the short to medium term.

While some good innovation can be found at the field level, the parameters and scope for action are to a large extent set in Rome, New York and donor capitals. More flexibility of approach is certainly required: the old business model cannot cope with these challenges. The aspirations outlined in the strategic plan can only be achieved if each the contexts in which WFP operates is understood in its own terms, and realistic programming objectives are set. Blueprints are unlikely to succeed.

The challenges above will continue for the foreseeable future, but they need to be seen against the backdrop of the likely future trends noted in this survey. These have implications for the kinds of food insecurity — and the operating environment — that WFP and others will face in coming years. Some of the specific challenges (current and future) are considered below.

WFP and Safety Nets

Given the scale of its operations and the extent of its reach in the field — unique among the UN agencies — WFP finds itself required to deal with a wide spectrum of acute and chronic food insecurity. In the absence of alternative mechanisms, it is likely to retain a key role (perhaps *the* key role) in providing safety nets in protracted conflict situations. Planning for the alternative, i.e. government-provided safety nets, forms the rationale behind strategic objective 5 above and is necessary and appropriate; but it will depend on the political realities of each setting. Current WFP approaches to safety nets (Food For Work, vulnerable group feeding), may be difficult to sustain in conflict situations. In any case, more innovative thinking is required if WFP is to continue to provide effective safety nets in conflict settings.

Alternatives to Food Aid

The WFP strategic plan recognises the importance of developing alternative ways of providing food assistance and food security support, including the use of cash and vouchers: *WFP will continuously assess and align its approaches to changes in the external operating and funding environments, and develop its range of tools in order to meet hunger and humanitarian needs in ways that are as sensitive as possible to local conditions, for example by using vouchers and cash when appropriate, as an alternative or addition to food commodity responses.* (SP 2008-11 para 12).

This has a particular significance in conflict settings, not only because approaches other than food aid may be a more appropriate and efficient way of transferring value; but also because they can provide both safer ways of programming and a way of maximising the impact of food aid (e.g. reducing the need to sell food aid in the market). One example of this with direct links to food aid is the provision of vouchers for milling.

WFP has taken important and innovative steps in this area, piloting and implementing cash-based responses primarily in response to natural disasters but also to conflict and insecurity (e.g. Darfur, Occupied Palestinian Territories). Given the greater flexibility of unconditional cash transfers compared to food vouchers (allowing people to determine their own priorities), this is preferable in principle; though vouchers may be more appropriate for security reasons in many conflict settings. Unlike NGOs that are largely confined to mounting smaller-scale programmes and pilots, WFP has the opportunity to promote large-scale cash-based responses. As other UN agencies like UNICEF and UNHCR are using cash and vouchers for basic needs, resettlement/reintegration, and education, WFP should explore options for collaborating with them in the field on joint projects that use cash transfers to achieve the various objectives of different agencies.

Assisting Recovery

The strategic plan identifies a role for WFP in both assisting recovery at the household level and in helping bridge the gap between conflict and peace at the macro-political and economic level. The PRRO model — which now applies to the majority of WFP's programming — is premised on the idea that WFP can help people recover. But the challenges to this in many conflict settings are immense. DRC is one example among many where the "recovery" part of the programme is particularly problematic, and where the objectives set out in the PRRO look unrealistic, at least in terms of timeframe. They are premised on both prevailing security and on growing state-led assistance and investment. In short, the planning assumptions that underlie PRROs in conflict settings need to be reviewed.

WFP maintains involvement in early recovery through the Cluster process, but it faces its own challenges in recovery programming. In particular, it needs to consider how best to programme food assistance — including questions of targeting — in areas transitioning from conflict to peace in a way that provides for acute needs while not undermining people's own recovery mechanisms, the process of state ownership and the changing role of local authorities. There is a specific challenge in supporting reintegration of former displaced populations in ways that take proper account of the needs of host communities.

Working Effectively and Accountably in Conflict Settings

WFP needs to better understand the relevance of local institutions (formal and non-formal) to people's food security. These institutions may play a benign or a damaging role. WFP has to find ways of determining the most appropriate way of distributing food or other items in situations of conflict which ensures *both* that most vulnerable are reached *and* that the risk of diversion, manipulation and corruption are minimised. It is not alone in facing this challenge, though the international environment has perhaps become more risk averse in this respect.

Related to this is the question of programme monitoring and programming quality. This is an area where WFP is felt by some to lagging somewhat in comparison to others, partly a function of the scale and complexity of its operations. There is no doubt that the flexibility and needs responsiveness that WFP aspires will depend in part on its ability to monitor more than tonnage delivered. Country-level staff need to be given greater incentives to ask questions about continued programme relevance and quality, and to take remedial steps where necessary.

Policy Coherence and Civil-Military Relations

When working alongside governments, donors and other UN agencies that are pursuing wider political and security objectives, WFP needs to understand the political economy of the particular context in order to determine whether and how to engage. Collaboration with the military, for example, has to take into account local sensitivities around legitimacy, since it can negatively affect humanitarian access and WFP staff security (see below). This relates to wider dissonances between different agendas in integrated approaches. Principles, objectives, priorities and mandates often differ between actors and careful consideration has to be given to compatibility. This is particularly important in light of recent events in Darfur where efforts to seek justice for human rights abuses have hindered the ability of agencies to respond to immediate needs.

Engagement with the State

The role of the state in conflicts, and increasingly with counter-insurgency or stabilisation operations, raises serious questions for WFP about whether and how to engage with the government. Operational humanitarian agencies tend to by-pass the state mechanisms, concerned about their neutrality; but given WFP's size and mandate, strategic engagement is often called for. It is well positioned to sup-

port the capacity of state in providing services and ensuring food security. Advocacy is important in this regard but public criticism may be counter-productive. Understanding the nature of governance in these contexts is central in defining this engagement. There is often scope to work productively with certain elements of the state even when there are other elements that present blockages.

Protection and Livelihoods

WFP have been increasingly engaged in developing a role in the protection of civilians. These efforts could be furthered by integrating livelihoods and protection in conflict environments. Complementary livelihoods and protection work means that they not only address people's economic vulnerability but also engage questions of political vulnerability. It would allow WFP to operate at multiple levels: addressing violations that affect the protection and livelihoods of the population as a whole; specific measures that impact on communities or individual's livelihoods and protection; as well as responding to the consequences of the violations through direct assistance. It also expands the nature of the approach from pure response to potential prevention.

Operational Security

WFP is considered a leader in the humanitarian security domain. As the largest of the UN agencies, it manages and supports complex food assistance operations in highly insecure environments. As a result, security issues have been at the forefront of WFP's operational approach. Its requirements are significant and can't be met by UNDSS alone. WFP has 53 professional security staff in the field in 14 countries (by comparison, UNDSS has 250 people in the field for the whole UN family). Due to frustrating time lags, WFP has also pushed ahead with initiatives that were originally designed to be coordinated, UN-wide exercises. But this has implications. Adequate security provision for humanitarian operations requires a commonality of purpose and

coordinated action across the humanitarian community. As a lead agency in the field, and one whose operations are highly dependent on the effectiveness of its partners and contractors, WFP should advocate for increased incident reporting, tracking and sharing, and for the establishment of additional field-level security services in all insecure contexts.

WFP's attempts to be perceived as a neutral and independent humanitarian actor are challenged on a number of fronts. First, WFP's main enterprise and operational model — that of supplying food aid which often has to be transported significant distances means it is a highly visible and easily targeted entity. As a result it more heavily relies on escort — often military and armed — to facilitate the movement of convoy operations. While this can facilitate secure access to populations, it may undermine any perception of neutrality and independence of WFP and its partners and reduce their acceptance on the part of all parties to the conflict and among local populations. Secondly, WFP, like many UN agencies and NGOs, attempts to uphold a dual humanitarian and development mandate, which results in it being perceived as a highly visible *political* actor as well. This perception is heightened in the UN's drive for coherence, where Integrated Missions and One UN approaches makes it hard to differentiate between WFP's mandate and principles. For WFP, maintaining an active *acceptance* strategy in these contexts — and supporting its partners' efforts in this regard — should be a priority.

This needs to be distinguished from a more worrying trend. Attacks against aid workers in some of the most highly insecure contexts are on the increase, and increasingly politically motivated. Attempting to be neutral and independent will not necessarily provide protection to WFP, or its partners and contractors. It is vital WFP seeks security solutions for operating in these most dangerous contexts, particularly for those it contracts to undertake

the riskiest work. This must involve active steps to protect staff and programmes, not simply efforts to secure acceptance.

Responding to Future Challenges

The classification of conflict into neat categories such as “old” and “new,” civil or international, “greed” or “grievance” driven, denies the complexity, multifaceted and evolving nature of war and violence. Most conflicts such as those in DRC, Colombia, Somalia, Afghanistan and Sudan are protracted in nature and are subject to significant changes in intensity over time. The intersection of different agendas — whether economic opportunism, climate or resource-based tensions or youth disaffection — with violence is not homogenous and results in different effects for different contexts and groups. The potential to exacerbate violence through ill-informed, poorly targeted or inappropriate responses in such environments is high. This suggests the need for WFP to underpin its responses with strong, timely contextual analysis where the different motivations for violence are examined; the distribution of power and wealth between different groups is explored; and the implications for people’s livelihoods and food security understood.

Youth Radicalisation

Youth are of particular concern in driving violence associated with radicalisation due to their relative receptivity to ideological narratives and as such, any conflict assessment must ensure a strong focus on this group. WFP may be in a position to respond in contexts demonstrating strong linkages between extremism and vulnerability, but in others, this will be beyond the organisation’s remit. In many such environments, anti-terrorist legislation may hinder WFP’s ability to form partnerships and access particular groups. However, WFP should remain alert to the security implications of international organisations becoming associated with anti-Western sentiments in particular contexts and be particularly attuned to the potential of being

perceived as an agent of conflict through the provision of assistance to certain social, ethnic or religious groups.

Responding to Chronic Vulnerability

The growing significance of resource-based conflicts in the context of increased climate change, population growth and food shortages underscores the necessity of livelihoods interventions in many of these conflict contexts. Whilst there is increased recognition amongst humanitarians of the significance of livelihood support in conflict, biases in the system — political, financial, institutional — tend to result in a preponderance of short-term relief interventions. Experience with pastoralist communities highlights the risks associated with short-term interventions in contexts of longer-term vulnerability, where over-dependence on ex-post food assistance in particular has been detrimental to pastoralist livelihoods. Whilst food aid will remain an important means of meeting emergency food requirements, WFP interventions in the context of protracted vulnerability associated with climate and resource-based conflicts should form part of coordinated interventions aimed at meeting basic needs, protecting livelihoods assets and supporting livelihoods strategies. Guarding against centralised, camp-based distributions in such crises is important to help support the continuation of livelihoods strategies and the maintenance of assets. WFP has significant experience to draw from in this regard; for example from Darfur, which demonstrates how food assistance in rural contexts can help farmers to retain access to land.

Urban Crises

Humanitarian actors have been slow to recognise the trend towards urbanisation. While the recent food crisis and other global processes demonstrate the potential for urban vulnerability to serve as a trigger for future conflicts (food riots etc.), the predominance of the elite rather than the impoverished in youth radicalisation highlights how urban con-

flicts cannot be pinned to poverty alone. But humanitarian agencies are faced with a range of institutional and operational difficulties in responding to the needs of urban communities; not least the identification and targeting of (often hidden) vulnerable groups, and devising interventions appropriate to urban environments. Methodologies, approaches and tools to address associated risks for vulnerable groups are still in their infancy, although IDMC and Tufts have made headway in developing profiling tools and HPG is undertaking new research exploring the different humanitarian interventions in urban settings. Cash- and voucher-based interventions are particularly relevant in urban contexts and as a result, there is an opportunity for WFP to play a significant role in both the refinement of approaches and the development of tools.

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Case Study: Sri Lanka *(Field visit, April 2009)*

Compromise or Capitulation: Report on WFP and the Humanitarian Crisis in Sri Lanka

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Introduction

A major humanitarian disaster has been unfolding in Sri Lanka. The message in official pronouncements and most of the national press is that this is a disaster that the government has been trying to ameliorate. Defence Minister Gotabaya Rajapakse described the situation as “the world’s biggest hostage rescue operation.”¹¹ Sri Lankan officials have described the government’s military push as a “humanitarian” operation. Simultaneously, it has been presented as part of a war on terrorism. With the military defeat of the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam], according to the Sri Lankan government, “The President’s dream of creating an environment in which all citizens can live in harmony and liberty is now being realised.”¹²

Significantly, the Sri Lankan government’s discourse has found significant echoes within the international community and within the UN system. Most strikingly, the UN Human Rights Council rejected a draft statement that was critical of the Sri Lankan government and on 27 May 2009 put out an alternative statement that was very uncritical, with one clause “Welcoming the conclusion of hostilities and the liberation by the Government of Sri Lanka of tens of thousands of its citizens that were kept by the LTTE against their will as hostages, as well as the efforts by the Government to ensure safety and security for all Sri Lankans and bringing permanent peace to the country.”¹³

Helping to give some degree of plausibility to official accounts of the recent “humanitarian rescue operation” have been the

extremes to which the rebel LTTE Tigers have been prepared to go in their violence against civilians, including the coercion of supporters. Having enjoyed some degree of civilian support in espousing a separate state for the Tamils, the rebel Tigers became increasingly unpopular with much of the Tamil population. In line with patterns observable elsewhere,¹⁴ this seems only to have reinforced the abuses of the Tigers against the civilian population: the support that they could not garner voluntarily was increasingly secured through the use of force (including forcible taxation) and this in turn seems to have helped to generate a “vicious circle” in which the increasing antipathy felt by civilians generated greater levels of coercion.

Although a great many Tamils are disillusioned with the Tigers, a countervailing tendency is also important to note. This is the tendency for government abuses to *reinforce* support for the Tigers — not least within the Tamil diaspora.

¹⁰ The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

¹¹ Ranil Wijayapala, “New 24 hour ultimatum to LTTE,” Daily News, 21 April 2009.

¹² ITN News, UK, April 26 2009.

¹³ Ranil Wijayapala, “New 24 hour ultimatum to LTTE,” Daily News, 21 April 2009.

¹⁴ See, for example, David Keen, 2005, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Currey.

Even from the outset, the LTTE's use of force included violence against rival Tamil organisations. It was extended to forcible recruitment, including the recruitment of children.¹⁵ Human Rights Watch noted in December 2008 that the LTTE had dramatically increased its forced recruitment practices.¹⁶ In addition to abuses against the Tamil population they claim to represent, the LTTE Tigers have — as is well known — have carried out numerous acts of terrorism against the Sri Lankan population more generally, including government officials and ordinary members of the public. A December 2008 Human Rights Watch report noted:

... the LTTE has brutally and systematically abused the Tamil population on whose behalf they claim to fight... the LTTE bears a heavy responsibility for the desperate plight of the civilians in the Vanni¹⁷... The LTTE has frequently targeted civilians with bombs and remote-controlled landmines, killed perceived political opponents including many Tamil politicians, journalists, and members of rival organizations, and has forcibly recruited Tamils into its forces, many of them children.¹⁸

During the recent government military push from September 2008, the LTTE has used civilians as a human shield — forcing large numbers who were under its control to move eastwards to a narrow strip of land in the north-east. This action seems to have been undertaken in the hope that the presence of civilians would prevent a government assault from destroying

the Tiger forces in the north, a hope that has turned out to be misplaced.

Not every element of the humanitarian disaster can be pinned on the Tigers, however, and it is important to consider a radically different interpretation of the unfolding humanitarian disaster from the one presented by the Sri Lankan government. According to this alternative view, the disaster has been actively produced by the combined agendas of the most powerful actors. It is worth recalling that for many years responses to conflict-generated emergencies around the world were inhibited by a model of disaster and disaster-response that was based largely on *natural* disasters.¹⁹ This model tended to produce a pattern of response (and an accompanying discourse) that was essentially technical in its orientation: it was based primarily on counting the numbers of displaced in various locations and shipping out a corresponding quantity of food (and sometimes other relief supplies) without asking too many questions about official obstruction of relief or about the processes by which the target population had become displaced or had arrived at a condition of extreme deprivation. This model was subjected to increasing criticism, not least because of an awareness of the devastating famine among internally displaced people in Sudan in the late-1980s (and periodically through the 1990s) and because of the critiques of international efforts to channel relief to Rwandans in Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania in circumstances where the initial humanitarian disaster (the 1994 genocide) had been largely ignored.²⁰ It is worth stressing that an apolitical and technical discourse around humanitarian disasters often

15 I use the word children here to mean those under 18.

16 Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Trapped and Mistreated: LTTE Abuses against Civilians in the Vanni," December, p. 3). Internally displaced people reported LTTE recruiting children as young as 12, and sometimes four or five from the same family (BBC, 6 April 2009, in IDMC [International Displacement Monitoring Centre], "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 10).

17 This is sometimes written as "Wanni."

18 Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Trapped and Mistreated: LTTE Abuses against Civilians in the Vanni," December, pp. 2-3.

19 For example, Mark Duffield, 1994. "The Political Economy of Internal War," in Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi, (eds.) *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*. London: Zed Books and Save the Children, UK; David Keen, 2008, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-89*, Oxford: James Currey (first published, 1994, Princeton University Press).

20 Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996, Copenhagen: Danida.

exists — and flourishes — in circumstances where disaster is politically-generated and where both national and international actors have strong political or geopolitical agendas. For national governments, a technical discourse may have the advantage of obscuring their own role in generating a disaster. This may also suit powerful international actors. For example, in the context of the Cold War, international quietude over government abuses in Sudan in the 1980s was closely related to a desire not to embarrass a “friend of the West” (as well as a bureaucratic interest in insisting that aid money had been well spent).²¹

Even in contexts where conflict has clearly been driving a humanitarian emergency, there has been a tendency to blame every ill on some vilified rebel group — for example, the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the Hutu extremists in the Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] — without giving adequate attention to the role of society as a whole (and, in particular, government actors) in helping to generate or at least to sustain a particular conflict.²² Naturally, the actual abuses of these vilified rebel groups (whether these are amputations in the case of Sierra Leone, recruitment of children in the cases of Sierra Leone and Uganda, or prior involvement in genocide in the case of Rwanda/DRC) will tend to give a degree of plausibility to these discourses. Even when looking at the causes of natural disasters, it is unwise to concentrate exclusively on an “external factor” (for example, a drought, a flood, an earthquake or a tsunami) without giving adequate attention to the internal — or one might say social — factors (markets, political inequalities, the location and structure of residences and so on) that

mediate the external shock and determine the human impact of the disaster. In conflict-related emergencies, this danger is redoubled since political factors tend to determine not just how a shock is mediated but the nature of the shock itself. In these circumstances, blaming a vilified rebel group can easily distract attention from ways in which the wider society and elements of the government itself may be helping to generate or sustain an emergency. Indeed, this quality of distracting attention has often been part of the function of such a pattern of blame.²³

Despite many years of criticism of the “natural disaster model,” it is striking that in Sri Lanka the old “natural disaster” model of emergency response has retained a great deal of influence. In particular, the response (and accompanying discourse) has been largely technical in orientation, and based mainly on counting (or estimating) the numbers of displaced in various locations and shipping food to them. As in many earlier crises, there has been a lack of interest — at least at the level of public discourse — in the processes by which people have become displaced or otherwise deprived, whilst publicly available descriptions of the official obstruction of relief have been very scarce. Contributing to these omissions — as in earlier crises — has been the humanitarian community’s tendency to adopt relatively short-term time-horizons. As one senior aid worker in Sri Lanka put it, “The decisions of humanitarians are reactive — ‘There are 40,000 people here, what to do?’” As in many earlier crises, a rather apolitical discourse has flourished within a national and international context that has been intensely political — notably, a civil war that has been framed as part of a wider international “war on terror.”

21 David Keen, 2008, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-89*, Oxford: James Currey (first published, 1994, Princeton University Press).

22 David Keen, 2005, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Currey; David Keen, 2008, *Complex Emergencies*, Cambridge: Polity.

23 I discuss these dynamics at greater length in: David Keen, 2005, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-89*, Oxford: James Currey (first published, 1994, Princeton University Press); David Keen, 2005, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Currey; David Keen, 2006, *Endless War: Hidden Functions of the “War on Terror”*; and David Keen, 2008, *Complex Emergencies*, Cambridge: Polity.

Experience in a range of countries strongly suggests that the most needy groups will tend to be unable to stake a claim to relief within the administrative structures of their own country for precisely the same reasons that they were exposed to deprivation in the first place — because they lack political clout within those institutions. If this applies even in natural disasters, it is likely to be even more applicable in wartime: those who cannot stake a claim to physical security may also be unable to stake a claim to relief. It is striking that in Sri Lanka the government has made at least some effort to direct food aid at areas where the rebels are strong. Quite how far Sri Lanka deviates from the norm in a great many other conflicts will be explored in what follows.

This report tries to take a very broad look at the provision and manipulation of international assistance in Sri Lanka, asking what have been the opportunities — taken and not taken — for improving the delivery of relief and the protection environment more generally within this context. It focuses primarily on 2009 but also includes significant information on humanitarian access in preceding years.

The interviews in Sri Lanka included discussions with aid workers and government officials in Vavuniya (on the periphery of the conflict zone). They included interviews with military and civilian officials and with international and national aid agency staff. Unfortunately, while we would have liked to have much more extensive contact with the designated “beneficiaries” of humanitarian interventions, interviewing displaced people inside the camps in Vavuniya was virtually impossible. The Sri Lankan military do not just surround the camps but they also have a heavy presence inside them. Even at a major aid coordination meeting in Vavuniya, it was striking how many uniformed and armed soldiers were lining the sides of the room. It is notable, too, that Vavuniya is the headquarters of the government security forces for the Vanni region. We were told that paramilitary groups (many of them anti-LTTE) also have a significant

presence in the camps and in Vavuniya town more generally.

Aid workers emphasised strongly that interview material should not be attributed to them or their organisations, and national staff were particularly fearful of official or paramilitary retaliation if they were perceived as leaking “dangerous talk” to international researchers.²⁴ Certainly, Sri Lanka is a dangerous place for aid workers. The worst incident was the killing of 17 local staff of the French NGO Action Contre La Faim in Muttur in August 2006. Based on number of attacks on aid workers in 2006-8, Sri Lanka ranked fourth worst in the world.²⁵ Aid staff (and researchers/consultants like myself) also face severe travel restrictions, and the great majority of aid workers have to operate on the edge of the conflict zone. Even for representatives of major government and bilateral donors, getting access to Vavuniya cannot be taken for granted (let alone access to those areas undergoing active hostilities). As is well known, there are also very far-reaching government restrictions on journalism in the country as a whole and the north in particular; clearly, this limits the quality of accounts in the press.

Some Significant WFP Successes

Many of those we interviewed gave WFP a great deal of credit for getting large quantities of food to the Vanni in extremely difficult circumstances, particularly when the war intensified from September 2008. As one NGO worker put it:

WFP was the only organisation still useful for the people of the Vanni in

24 Some interviewees said the camps had numerous paramilitaries. The International Crisis Group noted that killings and disappearances in Eastern Province have apparently been committed by government security forces and/or their allies in the anti-LTTE Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP) (International Crisis Group, 2009, “Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province,” April 16).

25 Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Victoria DiDomenico, 2009, “Providing aid in insecure environments: 2009 update,” HPG Policy Brief 34, ODI, London, April.

November-December-January [2008-9]. It was the only UN organisation still doing something in the Vanni... WFP was sending food on convoys and now [that is, April 2009] they're sending food to the no fire zone. They've been heroic in terrible circumstances.

Along similar lines, a Sri Lankan aid worker noted: "WFP dispatched food to the Vanni. When we compare with other agencies, WFP did a good thing. IDPs [internally displaced persons] told me they really depend on WFP food, especially during the "high time" from September 2008." In a context where advocacy and protection work could easily provoke some kind of backlash, delivering food represented a concrete and knowable benefit. An aid worker who travelled with several of the WFP food convoys from October 2008 said simply: "When you see the people [receiving food], you are really happy." Even before this period, WFP was a key provider of food for the north. When the beneficiaries of various schemes (general food ration for IDPs, school feeding, supplementary feeding, food for work, food for training) were asked in 2006 about who was providing the food, their answers suggested that 60 per cent came from WFP, 18 per cent from the government, and 8 per cent from NGOs.²⁶

A local NGO worker stressed that WFP had had considerable success in ensuring an unbroken food pipeline, notably to the Vavuniya area, and that the pipeline for the displaced seemed to be in good shape for the immediate future. He added, "Of all the agencies, WFP seems to be able to be better prepared on the ground." Another local NGO worker said, "When the situation was very urgent, WFP contacted us to feed those IDPs and worked with them [WFP]. The security forces appreciated it. We had a strong partnership with WFP." A third local NGO worker said, "WFP has done a commendable job to respond to such a large displace-

ment. It managed in the most difficult period."²⁷

Many interviewees stressed that WFP had had to overcome a great deal of obstruction from government authorities, most notably the military. One WFP worker with extensive experience of aid delivery said: "The government doesn't want any help [in the Vanni], even food, because they want people out." He said that in these circumstances the WFP country office had had to make a huge effort to get the food into the north, and had done really well. Along similar lines, a WFP worker with several years of experience tracking deliveries to the north commented, "WFP had a very good working relationship with the government and we managed to coax them to deliver some food. But it was always a struggle, especially for the IDPs [internally displaced persons]."

WFP was seen as having reacted flexibly and with ingenuity in its logistical operations. Several examples are notable.

First, the practice of purchasing food locally was a useful tactic in the face of security concerns and official obstructions. As one local aid worker noted: "There were many obstructions from the SLA [Sri Lankan army] side. We bought high quality rice locally. So that helped us a lot. There was a surplus and they cannot sell to this side [that is, south of the Vanni] because of transport and other things." Some support for livelihoods in agricultural communities also resulted from this policy of local purchase.²⁸ Clearly, the problem of rising food prices indicates a need to guard against fuelling such price rises with local purchase and the need for substantial *inputs* of food into the north in particular. It would also be a mistake

27 One local NGO worker said other agencies circulate a hard copy of previous minutes before the meeting, adding that WFP only circulated these at the meeting itself. The result, he said, was that senior management of other aid agencies do not get a chance to prepare any follow-up to the previous meeting.

28 Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, Sri Lanka 10756.0, 2008, Projects for Executive Board Approval, agenda item 8, 27-30 October, p. 9. There were some delays in delivery of locally purchased rice (WFP, "Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Project 10067.1," n.p.).

26 WFP, 2006, "Emergency Food Security Assessment," Vanni, Sri Lanka, October, p. 24.

to suppose that local purchase made up for the shortages in deliveries from outside the region.

A second example of flexible operations was the practice of sealing trucks under military supervision. Although this infringed the principle of not allowing military personnel in WFP compounds, sealing trucks helped to make relief convoys more acceptable to the government by reducing the perceived risk of supplies reaching the LTTE via the convoys. One logistics worker said of the sealing practice: "We agreed the military could check the trucks, doing sealed loadings. It breached the principle of not having arms in the compound, but it does work."

Third, the use of the logistics hub at Vavuniya, with significant storage in place there, helped to give WFP at least some degree of operational autonomy. In addition, fourteen mobile storage units were deployed to areas close to conflict-affected populations in the Vanni. WFP also had 30 of its own trucks.²⁹ Assessing operations in 2008, one WFP report noted that "Special Operations trucks and buffer stocks in the humanitarian hub close to conflict-affected areas negated delays [in delivery to the Vanni] by the end of the year."³⁰ WFP staff on the ground emphasised these advantages, but stressed the importance of adding to the amounts held in storage: "In September last year, we had up to two-and-a-half months buffer stock. At present, I can give full ration for 9.51 days for 100,000 people... We should say we need this food in stock."

A fourth example of flexibility was WFP's role in organising large-scale transportation of food by sea (under an ICRC flag) after road convoys became impossible in January 2009. However, it is notable that there were severe shortfalls in the delivery of food to those displaced in Mullaitivu, particularly in February and March 2009.

29 WFP, "Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Augmentation of Logistics Preparedness Capacity," n.p.

30 WFP, "Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Project 10067.1," n.p.

WFP seems to have been successful in cultivating a good image with the Sri Lankan government. During the research, mention of WFP drew a favourable response from civil and military officials alike. Within WFP's country office, there was a sensitivity to the fact that the Sri Lankan government is a highly sophisticated and capable entity administering a middle-income country with a development record that is in many respects a strong one. As one senior staff member put it: "Coming in with a condescending attitude is not right, or talking about capacity building." A local NGO worker said. "WFP has been good in accepting other points of view, very participatory, more so than other UN agencies. Some of these are very bureaucratic. They stick to their mandate and use it as an excuse rather than having real participation, and many want only to work with their traditional partners while WFP are flexible and look at who will deliver the goods." WFP's sensitivity can only have been a major asset when it came to the very difficult task of negotiating access for food convoys in the Vanni. There also seems to have been a good level of tactical awareness within WFP when it came to getting food delivered — evidenced, for example, by the emphasis that staff placed on the need to discern which parts of the government were most receptive to WFP goals and to work in close cooperation with these actors.

The close relationship with the government has had a more worrying side, however. A high degree of official favour and goodwill may have been fostered by an emphasis on avoiding public criticisms, notably of the government, and by a pattern of relief provision that was largely consistent with — and even actively helpful for — the government's political and military objectives. Many of those we interviewed expressed concerns along these lines. A fuller assessment of the impact of WFP — and of aid agencies more generally — is best approached via an analytical narrative of the unfolding emergency, and this is attempted below.

Analytical Narrative

Government Manipulation of Relief and the Risk of Complicity

Manipulation of relief by the LTTE has been significant, and international assistance undoubtedly helped in consolidating LTTE administrative capacity in the north. The focus here, however, is primarily on government manipulation — a phenomenon emphasised by most of those we interviewed. If relief operations in the north of Sri Lanka have been largely subordinated to the government's military and political agendas, many of the mechanisms involved are quite familiar from past emergencies. Such manipulation, whilst extremely regrettable, should not be surprising. During civil wars elsewhere, it has been much more the rule than the exception. Nor is this kind of manipulation anything very new in the Sri Lankan context. For example, in the late 1990s the Norwegian Refugee Council was reporting claims that the government had deliberately provided food at below the level of need of IDPs, and had deliberately delayed assistance.³¹ It can be argued that the long years of war in Sri Lanka, combined with long experience of humanitarian operations, have made both sides in the war very good at manipulating relief.³²

A key strategy in Sri Lanka — also familiar from Ethiopia and Sudan, for example — has been using relief to weaken populations linked to the rebels and ultimately to promote the depopulation of areas of rebel strength. Many aid workers pointed to a set of policies and practices on the part of government actors that have had the predictable effect of debilitating, displacing and ultimately interning a very substantial portion of the Tamil population. In practice, the Sri Lankan government has used the broad rubric of "security issues" to impose very far-reaching restrictions on the medical supplies, water and sanitation and food that have been

directed at the Vanni region. As one UN worker put it, "The government uses aid to control the movement of the population, to dictate the course of military operations."

A second technique in Sri Lanka has been using relief as cover for military manoeuvres, notably when it came to the aid convoys from October 2008 (discussed below). Again, the use of relief as cover for military activities has a long history, and includes Nigeria/Biafra³³ and Sudan; in the latter case, many relief trains to the south in the late 1980s carried military supplies for government forces as well as relief food and commercial food.³⁴

A third mechanism in Sri Lanka has been using visas, travel permits, written agreements, compulsory evacuations, impediments to land convoys, and various kinds of intimidation to minimise the damaging information leaking out via the activities of aid agencies.

A fourth mechanism in Sri Lanka (clearly in some kind of tension with the previous three) has been to use the existence of humanitarian operations in order to demonstrate the government's good intentions and "humanitarian credentials." This practice has provided important legitimacy for the government even as that government has contributed to humanitarian crisis in important ways. As several aid workers stressed, the Sri Lankan government has been taking full credit for WFP deliveries as "government" food. Together with the government's own relief convoys, this process of "taking credit" appears to have been useful in sustaining a degree of internal legitimacy. Moreover, the government's involvement in — and acqui-

33 During Nigeria's civil war in 1967-70, the Nigerian government tried to starve out the Biafran rebels; partly to secure relief and partly for military reasons, the rebel Biafran administration mixed relief flights with those bringing in military supplies and insisted on night-flights to impede Nigerian government interceptions (see, for example, John Stremmler, 1977, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Dan Jacobs, 1987, *The Brutality of Nations*. New York: Knopf.

34 David Keen, 2008, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-89*, Oxford: James Currey (first published, 1994, Princeton University Press).

31 WFP, 2007, "WFP Sri Lanka: Food Assistance for Protection and Peace-Building," 18-23 March, p. 11.

32 See, notably, Nicholas Crawford, "Sri Lanka: Principles and Protection in Programming," draft, n.d.

escence in — food deliveries to the north may have helped to give the impression internationally that this has been a relatively “humanitarian” war and a relatively well-intentioned government. For example, one very senior aid worker noted: “It’s a relatively civilised war, with channelling food through to enemy territory.” Again, there are many precedents for using relief as a source of legitimacy.³⁵

A fifth mechanism in Sri Lanka has been using the existence of relief operations as a kind of “leverage” over the international community: agencies have in effect been encouraged to accept quietude in return for access. In several earlier crises, an implicit deal has arguably been struck in which the international community sacrifices strong pressure on protection issues for the ability to carry out high-profile relief operations. This dynamic came into play in Bosnia, as Mark Cutts has shown.³⁶ In relation to Sudan in the 1990s, Alex de Waal suggested that the UN’s Operation Lifeline in Sudan from 1989 became an end in itself, more important than addressing the underlying human rights abuses, and that this preoccupation with securing access for relief gave the Sudan government important leverage internationally.³⁷

Whilst we have seen that WFP’s relatively close relationship with the Sri Lankan government facilitated a number of important food deliveries to the north, many interviewees stressed their concern that WFP, in effect, had fallen in line with government priorities that were damaging to large elements of the Sri Lankan population. One aid worker within WFP

said the organisation “risked becoming the logistics arm of the government.” Concerns around cooption extended well beyond WFP, and one experienced aid worker commented, “The UN has been relegated to being a sub-agency of the government.”

The mechanics of organising convoys underlined that danger of becoming a “logistics arm.” One experienced WFP worker said: “When there’s an influx of IDPs, sometimes the military dictate to the line ministry [the MN-BEID] and they [the ministry] then contact WFP and say we need a convoy.” Many of those interviewed stressed that strong control over relief operations has been exercised by the government and by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Defence in particular. For example, one aid worker commented: “The Ministry of Defence is in control of everything. What they say goes. So that’s another element of challenge.” The dangers of serving as a “sub-agency of the government” were clearly enhanced in a context where the government has manipulated humanitarian aid for political and military purposes.

To a very large extent, the Sri Lankan government has dictated terms to the international community when it comes to humanitarian aid and protection issues. The government has been able to — and has been permitted to — control the information environment to a very high degree. Several sources expressed the belief that the Sri Lankan government has learned lessons about information control from other contemporary crises (including Afghanistan, Sudan and Israel/Gaza) — and indeed that other governments may well learn lessons from Sri Lanka. One UN worker noted, “This is the training ground for any state that wants to behave like this. Fifteen years ago the UN was stronger and principles weren’t up for negotiation to that extent.”

Shortage of Relief for the Vanni from 2006 to the September 2008 Evacuation of Aid Agencies

One 2007 paper looking at protection issues noted, “Questions of bias (eg favouring

35 A good example is Operation Lifeline Sudan in the 1990s.

36 Mark Cutts, 1999, *The Humanitarian Operation in Bosnia, 1992–95: The Dilemmas of Negotiating Humanitarian Access*, Working Paper 8, *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Geneva: UNHCR.

37 Alex de Waal, 1997, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey. See also Ataul Karim, Mark Duffield et al., 1996, “OLS: Operation Lifeline — a Review.” Geneva: Department for Humanitarian Affairs, July. Human Rights Watch, 1999, “Famine in Sudan, 1998” *The Human Rights Causes*; Marc Lavergne and Fabrice Weissman (eds.), 2004, *In the Shadow of “Just Wars”: Violence, Politics and Humanitarian Action*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

government-controlled areas or government-declared return areas at the expense of LTTE strongholds) on the part of GOSL [Government of Sri Lanka] in the prioritization of WFP food deliveries have been raised.”³⁸ There is indeed evidence of such a bias. Regionally-disaggregated figures for quantities dispatched and tonnages called forward were obtained for WFP’s PRRO relief operations in 2006. When the tonnage dispatched is expressed as a percentage of the tonnage “called forward,” the figure for the north (Killinochi, Mullativu, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Mannar, Vavuniya) was 26.38 per cent, whereas the corresponding percentage for other districts of Sri Lanka was roughly double that — at 53.33 per cent. Strikingly, the LTTE-controlled areas of Killinochi and Mullativu fared the worst with only 14.9 per cent of the tonnage “called forward” actually dispatched, and Jaffna had a figure of only 16.65. Yet tonnages called forward — as well as evidence available from other sources — suggest that needs in Killinochi, Jaffna and Mullativu were particularly severe. Note that these are not tonnages delivered but tonnages dispatched.³⁹

In addition to security obstacles and government obstruction, also significant were truckers’ anxieties about delivering to the north.⁴⁰ But such reluctance can be countered with financial incentives if the will is there. One aid worker who has tracked deliveries to the north over many years said government obstruction was a key reason for low delivery to the north. A local staff worker with WFP commented:

Our assistance reached the people with great difficulty. It needed approval

from the Ministry of Defence, especially after August 2006. So we couldn’t get the approved amount of food for our beneficiaries — IDPs, food-for-work, school feeding, and mother and child nutrition. We couldn’t get sufficient food for these. The increasing fuel price led to some difficulties.

A food sector coordination meeting on 24 July 2007, which included UN and NGO representatives, noted of the Vanni: “All agreed the region was not receiving much attention compared to the East.”⁴¹ A WFP report noted, “The lack of a clear UN-government agreement to establish humanitarian corridors and facilitate the passage of humanitarian aid and staff through security checkpoints was a bottleneck for the movement of assistance.”⁴² Given the scarcity of relief reaching the north, programmes like food-for-training and food-for-work took a back seat to relief feeding for IDPs.⁴³

Needs in Jaffna were significant, and one June 2007 report noted, “All 600,000 inhabitants of Jaffna district are in one way or the other directly or indirectly affected in their livelihoods.”⁴⁴ The closure of the A9 road by the government in August 2006 had led to severe shortages of food, fuel and electricity in Jaffna.⁴⁵ But the displaced in Jaffna were not getting much international attention.⁴⁶ At a Food Sector Coordination Meeting on 24 July 2007, it was noted that WFP had been targeting 120,000

38 WFP, 2007, “WFP Sri Lanka: Food Assistance for Protection and Peace-Building,” 18-23 March, p. 3.

39 Calculations from monthly figures in WFP records. Mother-and-child nutrition programmes for Mullativu district were very badly hit in the period April-July 2006 (WFP, 2006, “Emergency Food Security Assessment,” Vanni, Sri Lanka, October, p. 10.)

40 Interview with WFP worker. See also WFP Sri Lanka, “Special Operation SP 10539.0, Augmentation of logistics preparedness capacity,” 1 September 2006-31 January 2007, p. 3.

41 Food Sector Coordination Meeting, 24 July 2007, p. 2.

42 WFP, “Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Augmentation of Logistics Preparedness Capacity,” n.p.

43 WFP, 2006, “Emergency Food Security Assessment, Vanni, Sri Lanka, October, p. 12.

44 World Food Programme, 2007, Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment, based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June (p. 39).

45 Newsweek, 16 October 2008, in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 7.

46 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 7.

people in Jaffna, but that “Shipping remains a problem, as commercial shipments appear to take priority ahead of humanitarian ones.”⁴⁷ A WFP report noted that “... movement of commodities to Jaffna was dependent on government-managed shipping.”⁴⁸ Another noted that relief to Jaffna had been impeded by “refusal to allow WFP to directly charter vessels.”⁴⁹ A third WFP report observed: “The Government has promised to arrange ships to transport WFP food but so far this has not happened. Currently WFP only has 200 tons of food in Jaffna district, compared to a potential monthly requirement of almost 3,000 tons.”⁵⁰ A UN aid worker said there had not been a full ration for IDPs in the north since February 2008, estimating deliveries at 50 per cent of those that would provide a full ration. A global trend of rising food prices was compounding the rising fuel prices and obstruction from both sides of the conflict — with all these factors helping to prevent adequate deliveries. One worker closely involved in food distributions for WFP said, “From the beginning of 2008, with global prices, our budget meant we could no longer provide enough. Plus, there were [government] controls at Omanthai and controls on the LTTE side.” In addition to the effect of restricting supply, prices were also boosted by the costs involved in unloading and reloading at checkpoints.⁵¹

An NGO worker in Vavuniya emphasised the inadequacy of food deliveries to the north, particularly before the September 2008 evacuation of aid agencies: “When we could work in the Vanni, WFP was providing basic food and there was slow registration with the government. Food sent till September 2008 to the

Vanni was not enough to feed all the Vanni.” He said deliveries actually increased from September 2008: “When we had to leave, with the trucks [convoys from October], more food went into the Vanni.”

There were also significant concerns about distribution systems. For example, a food sector coordination meeting on 24 July 2007 noted, “All agreed that the registration system is inadequate and with 3 overlapping systems in place (President’s Secretariat, UNHCR/MNBD and Special Task Force) it is very hard to monitor.”⁵²

Some Government Concerns in Relation to Relief for the North

By contrast with the many aid workers who criticised a neglect of the north over a significant period, government representatives stressed that the government was trying to meet needs throughout the country, whilst donors were unreasonably *targeting* the north. As one official at the Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development put it (MNBEID): “Some donors restrict only for the north. It’s not helpful. We don’t have anything for the east. If anything, they should say conflict-affected areas, not the north.” The relative scarcity of nutritional data for the north (and the suppression of important nutritional data that *has* been collected) adds to the difficulty of lobbying for deliveries that are in proportion to need, including the prioritisation of deliveries to the north.

Officials at the MNBEID told us that restrictions on deliveries to the north were due to security concerns and not to anything else. Certainly, the government has had significant security concerns, and some of these are legitimate. Government officials expressed concern that national staff in aid agencies might have some links to the LTTE and also that relief materials with a possible military “dual use” might fall into the hands of the rebels. When we suggested to one very senior military officer that food was relatively difficult to use directly for

47 Food Sector Coordination Meeting, 24 July 2007, p. 1.

48 WFP, “Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Project 10067.1,” n.p.

49 WFP, “Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Augmentation of Logistics Preparedness Capacity,” n.p.

50 WFP, “Hunger’s global hotspots,” 25 May 2007.

51 WFP, “Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, Sri Lanka 10756.0, 2008, Projects for Executive Board Approval, agenda item 8, 27-30 October,” p. 6.

52 Food Sector Coordination Meeting, 24 July 2007, p. 2.

military purposes, he replied, “Yes, food is not so much a “dual use” item, but the local staff worry was there — and there were detections, batteries in the panel of the truck, trucks hired by WFP.” He added:

All organisations had to depend on local staff. Some of the local staff employed by the majority of organisations were recommended by the LTTE. We had a problem identifying their neutrality. We don't know if they gave them [the LTTE] a percentage of their salaries or whatever. We have no way of monitoring anything happening on that side. We're finding stuff buried now all over the conflict zone... There's a worry on local staff, even with WFP.

Some of the aid workers we spoke with indicated that a portion of national staff in the north would indeed have had some links to the LTTE (and that some others would be connected to various paramilitary groups). One experienced aid worker, who was generally very critical of the Sri Lankan government, said, “Some 25 per cent of local staff probably have some sympathy or links to LTTE. We've had staff threatened by anonymous phone calls.” It is also fair to reiterate that while the military usefulness of relief goods is uncertain, the LTTE administration in the north was clearly strengthened by international assistance in many ways.

Under the PRRO, WFP food has been handed over to government authorities, with only a limited degree of monitoring allowed. One NGO worker who had earlier been working with NGOs in southern Africa was struck by the difference in Sri Lanka:

Here, WFP brings in food and hands over to the government. As the conflict has changed, the government's relationship with WFP has become more political. The government see the food as theirs, and being able to direct where the food goes. As NGOs, we have very little to do with WFP in Sri Lanka.

One WFP worker noted:

When we came to this country, back in 1968, it was a development problem. When we came in the Tsunami emergency [from December 2004], we were using the government as our partner only. In other countries, we have solidly relied on NGOs. [But here] convoys' food was handed over to the Additional Government Authority (AGA) who remained behind. We take food to the nearest government warehouse and they distribute and we come back later to monitor.

He saw a significant advantage in handing food over to the government, particularly in circumstances where relief agencies could easily be accused of aiding and abetting the rebels: “One time they complained that WFP bags were being used for LTTE bunkers, but we said ‘We gave them to you, what happened?’ They withdrew it [the allegation] straight away from the Ministry of Defence website!”

Relief and the Military Push from September 2008

Whilst the government's military push in the east of the country had been relatively slow, the push from the west was very rapid — particularly from September 2008. The Sri Lanka army's rapid military advance dramatically changed the humanitarian context in the country. One experienced aid worker commented, “Up to September 2008, the situation was more or less stable, but then there was a huge change — another country, another problem.” September 2008 saw the government telling humanitarian agencies that they should move out of the Vanni, noting that their security could no longer be guaranteed. Only ICRC and Caritas remained.⁵³

In this new context, some of the optimism that had been expressed about the virtues of

⁵³ IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, pp. 4-5.

working closely with the Sri Lankan government, already rather strained in view of the prolonged obstruction of relief supplies to the north, began to look increasingly unrealistic. One example of such optimism was a WFP PRRO Concept Paper for 2008, which noted:

The continued working through Government structures will require considerable effort and initiative to ensure appropriate standards of delivery but, if successful, will allow for better access and a greater, more integrated response capacity than working independently. Eventually maintaining this approach should also allow WFP to cease food distribution activities in Sri Lanka.⁵⁴

As of October 2009, such “cessation of food distribution activities” looks a long way off. The enforced evacuation of aid agencies in September 2008 was defended by the Sri Lankan government as necessary for the security of aid staff. But, as one Human Rights Watch report noted, aid agencies are accustomed to dealing with environments in which there are significant physical dangers and they need to be able to exercise their own professional judgment on operating in insecure areas.⁵⁵ There has been a great deal of discussion in the international community about the importance of “protection by presence” in the context of various crises around the world; but clearly this mechanism was not being taken very seriously in Sri Lanka: as soon as a military conflict threatened to escalate, the humanitarian presence was virtually removed. One experienced aid worker remembered:

There was a push on the east side of the country from March 2008. The idea was to close the LTTE in Mullativu. When the offensive came to Kilinochchi, so at that point the government

says we will have to use massive force. They came to us and said we can no longer provide security assistance, you need to go out. The LTTE tried to secure Kilinochchi, now it's completely destroyed... When the government entered, a lot of civilians were pushed by the LTTE to retreat. Surprising everybody was the speed [of the government advance].

He said humanitarians were regarded as “a nail on the foot of military plans to advance.” He suggested that the government’s plan had been to “push back the civilians,” adding, “But that conflicts with international laws on how to handle IDPs. Plus, shelling causes casualties to IDPs.” In this context, he emphasised, ejecting aid workers offered the advantage of ejecting potential witnesses.

Protests underlined the dangers that were seen to arise from the aid agencies’ evacuation. One aid worker remembered that at the time of the humanitarian withdrawal from Kilinochchi, “Local inhabitants were blocking the [compound] gates and saying you can’t leave, you’re leaving us so exposed.”⁵⁶ There was undoubtedly also pressure from the LTTE to remain. This was mentioned by another aid worker, who also stressed that government guarantees of security for those evacuating from Kilinochchi were meaningless in practice:

The LTTE organised demonstrations that wouldn’t let us leave. We were stuck. There were nine UN internationals and two from international NGOs and local staff, a terrible situation. It was obvious we had to leave. It was always about getting permission to leave from the LTTE. The solution came from thanking the LTTE for their coming solution, showing them to be in control, so it would have been difficult to stop us. We were 15-20 minutes delayed

54 WFP PRRO Concept Paper for 2008 .

55 Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, p. 3.

56 See also WFP, “Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Project 10067.1.”

when the LTTE were messing with us. Then there was a great air strike, three bombs on the road where we were supposed to be! So a guarantee here is not a guarantee. [The air strike here would have been from the government.]

Underpinning the crisis in the Vanni was not just the necessity of repeated displacement but also a huge disruption of production, notably agricultural production. The escalation of violence in the north hit food production hard: Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu have been important rice-producing areas and probably had no significant agricultural production in 2009, whilst the previous military push in the east had already damaged rice production there.

The Sri Lankan government claimed that in the absence of international agencies, it would provide for the people of the Vanni. However, the government has not been able to back up this claim by demonstrating the level of assistance given or the adequacy of distribution mechanisms.⁵⁷ With the withdrawal of humanitarians, diplomatic and aid agency energy was heavily invested in securing permissions for deliveries into the Vanni by convoy. The first relief convoy was in October 2008.

Beginning in October 2008, convoys went to three main places: Mullyavallai, Tharmapuram and Puthukkudiyiruppu (known as PTK). But after early December, they could not go to Mullyavallai and then they were cut off from Tharmapuram and the last convoy (which departed on January 16 2009) got stuck at PTK because of increased fighting.

A careful analysis of the adequacy of convoy relief deliveries from October to mid-December 2008 has been done by Human Rights Watch. It showed that actual deliveries were only 40 per cent of the minimum nutrition requirements of the displaced. It is worth quoting the analysis at some length:

Seven large UN food convoys were dispatched to the Vanni between October 2, 2008, and December 15, 2008, carrying a combined load of 4,120 metric tons of food (another food convoy is scheduled for December 18)... The UN World Food Program (WFP) and the government estimate that at least 750 metric tons per week are needed to meet the minimum nutritional requirement of the displaced population in the Vanni... Even the 750 metric tons is an underestimate, since the basic minimum WFP rations per person of 0.5 kilograms [cereals, pulses, oil, sugar] for 230,000 persons (the smallest credible estimate of the displaced population) would require a total of 805 metric tons per week, or 3,450 metric tons per month. Based on this formula, the IDP population of the Vanni would require a total of at least 10,250 metric tons of food for the three months between the withdrawal of the UN on September 16, 2008, and the time of the finalization of this report, December 15. However, the seven food convoys combined only delivered a total of 4,120 metric tons of food, a shortfall of 6,230 metric tons of food over the minimum nutrition requirements of the displaced (p. 27) population... As a result, a very large gap exists between the minimum daily requirements of the population and the food being brought into the Vanni. According to humanitarian officials, some of the camps they work in are already down to distributing just two meals per day, and one camp is reportedly surviving on just one meal a day." (pp. 27-28).⁵⁸

A 3 October 2008 WFP press release noted, "WFP plans to send a minimum of one aid

57 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 11.

58 Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December.

convoy per week.” But seven convoys between October 2 and December 15 represents rather less than a convoy a week. Even so, it was a major feat, given the obstacles involved. After the tenth convoy arrived in the Vanni (the first of 2009), WFP noted that it had now delivered 6,617 metric tons of food. In addition, WFP had procured 781 metric tons of rice from within the region for distribution to the IDPs.⁵⁹

In the reports of WFP and other UN agencies there was a great deal of focus on the displaced. Whilst there was sometimes an acknowledgement that other people in the north were very much in need of assistance, there was a tendency for the displaced to be equated with “those in need.” Particularly as the escalating war displaced more and more people, estimates for the displaced came to stand as a kind of proxy for the population in general. But all this carried the danger of underestimating the numbers in need of relief by omitting the non-displaced. Human Rights Watch noted in December 2008 that those who were not displaced and living in LTTE-controlled areas of the Vanni had “almost identical security concerns and humanitarian problems, so the total affected population — displaced and non-displaced — is well over 300,000, even by conservative estimates.”⁶⁰ A number of WFP food security

assessments had found that conflict had had a profound effect on host families and non-displaced households as well as IDPs.⁶¹ If we take a figure of 300,000 in need, then the quantity delivered between October 2 and December 15 2008 would represent only about 31 per cent of the amount required.

Human Rights Watch noted in February 2009, “Since September [2008], the WFP has delivered 8,300 metric tons of mixed food commodities to the area in 11 separate convoys. Since January 16 the WFP has been unable to deliver any food to the areas.”⁶²

There were some relief deliveries in addition to the main international convoys — notably a consignment from the Indian government and the government convoys carrying food-for-sale — but these will not have significantly plugged the gaps.⁶³

Shortfalls in essential provisions were even more serious when it came to non-food items and services. A senior aid worker said: “There was no shelter, and [there was] control of medicines that could go in — not making it comfortable for the IDPs.” Another aid worker who

59 WFP News Release, “First WFP food convoy of 2009 reaches the Vanni region,” 9 January 2009, Rome.

60 Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, p. 40. By “conservative estimates,” they meant the estimate of 230,000 displaced. Human Rights Watch noted, “There are an estimated 230,000 to 300,000 displaced persons currently trapped in the Vanni conflict zone, as well as a small number of Vanni residents who remain in their homes.” (Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, p. 25). While UNHCR put the number of displaced in the Vanni at 230,000 in November 2008, a UN interagency assessment mission of October 17-18 2008 put the number at 300,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, pp. 23-24). The figure of 230,000 was mentioned by the UN Office of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (“Press release: UN convoy delivers food to Vanni civilians,” 18 October 2008). WFP noted in October 2008 that the organisation “has dispatched a first convoy of food and other supplies for 200,000 displaced people in the LTTE-controlled area of Sri Lanka.” (WFP News Release, “First food aid convoy reaches thousands of displaced in northern Sri Lanka,” 3 October 2008, Rome).

61 An October 2008 WFP report observed, “WFP emergency food security assessments (EFSAs) in LTTE-controlled Vanni in October 2006, Jaffna in November 2006, Batticaloa in May 2007 and Trincomalee in July 2007 all indicate similar effects of conflict on IDPs, host families and non-displaced households...” (WFP, Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, Sri Lanka 10756.0, 2008, Projects for Executive Board Approval, agenda item 8, 27-30 October, p. 6). In a June 2007 report, WFP noted, “Besides the internally displaced persons (IDPs) are an increasing proportion of the general population across a number of areas in the North and East that are affected by the conflict” (WFP, 2007, “Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment,” based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June, p. 37).

62 Human Rights Watch, 2009, “War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni,” February.

63 Human Rights Watch noted, “The government is also sending in additional convoys of non-UN food through Government Agents, but the food on those convoys is destined partly to be sold at (28) the government-organised Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (MPSC) stores, and not for free distribution to displaced persons.” Many displaced people did not have the money to buy the food. The Indian government contributed 1,700 tons of humanitarian assistance (including food, clothing and hygiene items) in late November (distributed by ICRC) (Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, pp. 28-9).

travelled with many of the convoys said simply, "The government of Sri Lanka does not want anything to go in [to the Vanni] except food." Partly because of repeated displacements with in the north, shelter and water/sanitation were of particular importance. Human Rights Watch noted in December 2008:

It is in the non-food sectors that the impact of the ordered withdrawal has been felt most severely; it is these sectors that are not included in the permitted UN shipments into the Vanni and which are most impacted by the absence of qualified humanitarian personnel on the ground. The provision of basic assistance to IDPs in the Vanni is made more complicated by the fact that many families have had to move multiple times to escape approaching fighting. Each time, new shelters and sanitation facilities need to be constructed and new supply lines established.⁶⁴

One aid worker said the political importance of being seen to deliver food did not seem to extend to other supplies. "We could not take medicine on the convoys [from October 2008]. The government says, "We continue to provide food to the population." Starvation would be huge in the media, but blocking medicine is not so dramatic or visible."

The Sri Lankan government's ability to allow some relief deliveries but not others did not enhance the sense of unity among different aid agencies. One aid worker who travelled with some of the convoys said:

The great majority of non-food items were not allowed. There was a lot of negotiation to add other items and it was delaying departure and distribution. There were jealousies of WFP be-

ing in the frontline and other agencies not. The Humanitarian Coordinator was under pressure from other agencies that were not seen to be doing something for the people. If UNHCR wants to get shelter, it has to go and get permissions [from the government] separately, and UNICEF for water and sanitation and education materials. At times permission comes from Colombo and the commander here [in Vavuniya] says no.

With agencies vying for space on the convoys, the chances of collective pressure and advocacy seem to have been significantly reduced. One UN worker commented: "The government likes bilateral agreements, with UNICEF, UNHCR etc. Some agencies were not happy with WFP expansion from September 2008. They wanted their goods on it [the convoy operation] too. They bypassed some collective procedures." Another aid worker said:

With WatSan [water and sanitation], the amount going in for two years was negligible. What was going in was on the GA [Government Authority] convoys. There were more and more IDPs over time with the [military] push. We were never allowed to take water tanks and pipes in any significant quantities, and it was deliberate. They [the people in the north] were supposed to get sick. UNICEF never made a fuss, not publicly.

Significantly, the discrimination against non-food items was not new. Figures from OCHA-Kilinochchi for 2006 indicated that while 16 per cent of food projects in the Vanni were negatively affected by the conflict, fully 49 per cent of Water and Sanitation projects were affected, 51 per cent of health projects and 55 per cent of education projects.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December, p. 25.

⁶⁵ WFP, 2006, "Emergency Food Security Assessment, Vanni, Sri Lanka, October, p. 32.

Some of those interviewed recalled that the convoys that went into the Vanni from October 2008 were manipulated for military purposes. Part of this seems to have been an attempt to use relief to influence population movements *within* the Vanni. One aid worker commented angrily:

There was strong pressure. At a December 12 [2008] meeting, I said that [coming] convoy was screwed... When WFP was ordered to leave PTK [Puthukkudiyiruppu] and go to the no fire zone, it was supposed to draw people there. The convoy ended up in the no fire zone getting shelled to shit, and the strategy didn't work because the LTTE was putting their own people into the no fire zone.

In this connection, it is important to recall that the government was in any case trying to encourage population movements to the extreme north-east of the country. An aid worker with extensive experience of the north noted:

No army wants enemies behind their lines. People were pushed east to west. It was both the army and the LTTE, a combination of the army and LTTE not letting people go through their lines. If you get through the LTTE, then you have to go through the army. During convoy number 1, to Mullaitivu and PTK [Puthukkudiyiruppu], the second to third of October, I saw empty vehicles going east to west and full vehicles west to east, 24 hours a day.

One WFP situation analysis in September 2009 noted that civilians were likely to be prevented from moving from LTTE areas because, first, the LTTE wanted to keep control of this population and, second, "the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) wants no Tamil elements to move through the lines and have potential infiltrated elements in its back."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ WFP situation analysis, 22 September 2008.

Another problem was that the two warring parties were seeking to take advantage of the convoys as physical cover for military manoeuvres. An aid worker who travelled with several convoys recalled: "Going and coming, every convoy in no man's land suffered security incidents. We are not targeted by both parties, the problem is when someone wants to take advantage of the convoy, especially in no man's land." He recalled the final convoy:

The January 16 [2009] convoy, we left here around 10 am and reached about 60 kilometres from here. We were not allowed to use the A9 [main road], I think the military wanted to use it. They wanted us to use a dirt road. From Puliyankulam, we had to use a dirt road. At Ouddusuddan, the convoy branched into two, one to Mullyavallai and the other to PTK [Puthukkudiyiruppu] and then Tharmapuram, delivering food. We were trapped at PTK. There was fighting going on all around. The LTTE were firing over the warehouses and the military firing back to other warehouses. The government was arguing that they will lose military advantage if they have to make way for the convoy.

He explained the manipulation of the convoy in more detail:

The SLA [Sri Lankan army] wants to follow the convoy and use the convoy to hide behind, and if you are behind the convoy, the other side cannot fire. The government used convoys for physical cover to move and to find if an area is safe and, if so, they ask others to come and join. Before they change their forward position, they send others ahead.

A Human Rights Watch report cited one source who indicated that convoys had been delayed when the Sri Lankan army and LTTE

insisted on different routes, with both favouring routes that would allow them to advance their military positions.⁶⁷

Another aid worker who travelled with the January 16 convoy told us that both sides used it as cover: "They [the government army] did it to us, and the LTTE used the convoy to move around." It is clear that convoys travelled without effective guarantees for the safety of staff. This aid worker added: "For all of us on the convoys, the security was not enough. The guarantees were so low! The guarantees for the convoys couldn't be trusted. The last convoy [January 16 2009] was crazy, too much shelling, from land and sea." WFP's Asia Regional Director had stated in a 3 October 2008 press release: "WFP takes the safety and security of humanitarian aid workers very seriously. We will not tolerate threats to humanitarian workers nor disruptions to the critical dispatching of food for the people hit hardest by the continuing conflict in northern Sri Lanka." Whilst WFP undoubtedly had a concern for the safety of its workers, the strong diplomatic pressure for convoy delivery alongside relatively weak pressure on protection issues (including the use of military convoys as cover) was certainly endangering humanitarian workers.

Human Rights Watch's calculation that convoy deliveries (to December 15 2008) met 40 per cent of nutritional requirements was based on the assumption of an efficient distribution system with minimal waste or siphoning off of aid. This, as Human Rights Watch pointed out, was difficult to confirm or monitor without a humanitarian presence in the Vanni. It does appear that relief was subject to significant political manipulation once it arrived — not least by the LTTE. Some felt that a lack of adequate international supervision of distribution fed into diversion of relief from the intended benefici-

aries. Whilst a few international staff travelled with the convoys, monitoring was very limited. The aid worker who complained about lack of security guarantees added: "The time that staff were allowed to stay and interview people was very limited, one to two hours. NGO staff were not able to go." Those on the convoys acknowledged that some of the relief food ended up with the LTTE, saying this was inevitable. One international aid worker commented:

Expats were not there for the distribution of food September to December 2008. Feedback from colleagues says that on the list of beneficiaries given by the GA [Government Authority] sometimes the same name was there two times... Colleagues said there was not a real monitoring of the distribution and some IDPs didn't receive food they were entitled to. It was remote control with problems. Some part of the food was taken by the LTTE. In the last few weeks, I heard the LTTE take first what they want, the rest is distributed to the population... Before, it was more siphoning off some of what people got. I'm not saying it's better to stop. People need the food.

It was difficult to get a clear picture of how extensive such distribution problems were. Certainly, some senior staff at WFP did not see them as significant. One senior UN official commented:

Donors were resisting sending in food without international supervision. WFP sided with the government. WFP believed that food should go in. The government was saying it wouldn't allow international staff to be in the conflict area. The loss of international supervision was not a drawback at all. Rapid monitoring confirmed several times that people received food and received their fair share.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2009, "War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni," February. pp. 24-5. Human Rights Watch cites one source saying the Sri Lankan army (SLA) had used the convoy on December 29 to advance its position and that "long lines of SLA troops were walking alongside the convoy" (p. 25).

Manipulation of humanitarian operations by the government included a manipulation of the information flows associated with such operations. If the most obvious element of this was the government's instruction in September 2008 that humanitarian agencies should leave the Vanni, government opposition to international aid monitors can also be seen as an attempt to control flows of information. Significantly, those international aid workers who did travel with the convoy had only a very limited time to talk with people before the aid workers had to return. When road convoys were no longer possible, the emphasis in relief operations shifted to transporting food by sea, specifically from Trincomalee to Mullaitivu district, with WFP food being transported on ICRC-chartered ships. Again, the shift may have been related to the government's aversion to witnesses. As one UN worker put it:

We were no longer able to go to Kilinochchi, so we opened a corridor to Oudusuddan. The convoy went only to PTK [Puthukkudiyiruppu]. From the end of January 2009, it was no longer possible... When the military were pushing the LTTE to coastal areas, there were no more WFP convoys... They allowed vessels by sea. The government doesn't want people to see the devastation of the land.

Civilians were now being squeezed into a shrinking conflict zone in the area north of Puthukkudiyiruppu in Mullaitivu district.⁶⁸ Conditions were dangerous and squalid. ICRC was taking out some of the sick and wounded, and bringing in food.⁶⁹

Small shipments of relief to Mullaitivu district started on 17 February.⁷⁰ WFP's aim,

expressed on February 27 2009, was to deliver up to 300 metric tons of food commodities per week by boat.⁷¹ But in the period before 7 March 2009, 160 metric tons of (mixed) food had arrived by sea there. On 7 March, WFP announced that an additional shipment of 500 metric tons had arrived in Mullaitivu. By 2 April, 1,189 metric tons had arrived, and on 2 April WFP dispatched another 1,030 metric tons.⁷² At end-April 2009, one UN worker said:

It's been very difficult to get food into the Vanni, no food since 6 April [2009]. There are serious problems. The government sends in just enough. Just when accusations of trying to starve people come out, they send in some food. It was very inadequate in February.

Relief and the Politics of Numbers

Decisions on how much relief to allocate — and retrospective assessments on its adequacy — depend heavily on assessments of the numbers in need. Yet numbers trapped in Mullaitivu were very much a matter of dispute.

In early April, ICRC estimated the number of IDPs trapped in a thin strip of land in Mullaitivu district at 150,000.⁷³ On April 7, the UN Secretary General's representative on internally displaced persons Walter Kaelin spoke over "over 100,000" trapped in this strip of land.⁷⁴ Just a day later, UN humanitarian relief coordinator John Holmes estimated the numbers trapped at 150-190,000.⁷⁵ On 20 April, an International Crisis Group report noted that "as many as 150,000 or more civilians" were in Mullaitivu district, adding that "UN satellite image-

71 WFP News Release, "Sea route opened for WFP relief food deliveries to Sri Lanka," 27 February 2009.

72 WFP News Release, "WFP Dispatches another 1000 tons of food to the Vanni," Rome, 2 April 2009.

73 USAID, "Sri Lanka — Complex Emergency, Fact sheet 4, fiscal year 2009," citing figures for 1 April.

74 Text at "UN expert on IDPs tells LTTE to free all civilians," 8 April 2009, News Line, President's Office, Sri Lanka (http://www.priu.gov.lk/news_update/Current_Affairs/ca200904/20090408un_expert_on_idp_tells_ltte_free_civilians.htm).

75 See, for example, John Holmes, "Let them decide," 8 April 2009.

68 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 3.

69 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 5.

70 WFP, Internal situation report, March 27 2009, p. 1.

ry as of 23 March 2009 shows more than 30,000 tents in the area: estimates of the number of men, women and children at risk vary depending on assumptions about the average numbers in each tent.”⁷⁶

WFP put the numbers rather lower. A 27 March WFP internal situation report noted, “The government estimates that there are about 70,000 IDPs remaining in the Vanni. Other sources claim the number to be over 100,000.”⁷⁷ When the dispatch of 1,030 metric tons of food for Mullaitivu was announced by WFP on April 2 2009, it was noted that “The WFP food sent to the area will be sufficient to feed approximately 100,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) for a period of 20 days.”⁷⁸ Strictly, the press release was not claiming that there were only 100,000 IDPs in the Vanni/Mullaitivu, and the assumption may have been that not every IDP in the Vanni needed a full ration. But the figure may still have contributed to the impression of a smaller number than the actual number. This impression was not fully corrected by the use in other reports of the phrase “more than 100,000” (as in a March 27 WFP internal situation report, which noted, “More than 100,000 IDPs are still trapped in Vanni “safe zone” and require humanitarian assistance.”⁷⁹

Earlier, WFP was giving credence to much higher figures. In a 2007 Food Security Assessment, one table notes: Population estimate (2006) Jaffna 1,513,196, Kilinochchi 157,946, Mannar 460,918, Mullaitivu 793,063, Vavuniya 412,784, Trincomalee 807,024. Table 10, p. 51.⁸⁰

The total here for the Vanni (i.e. excluding Jaffna and Trincomalee) is 1,824,711. This may well be an overestimate and not all of these people will have been caught up in the mass movement to the coastal strip at Mullaitivu, but the difference with later figures is still striking. It is very rare to find any substantial or even brief explanation of how population estimates have been arrived at, and in these circumstances such substantial falls in numbers may pass almost without comment or explanation.

The figure of 100,000 trapped in Mullaitivu district has been mentioned. An October 2007 WFP report mentioned “400,000 conflict-affected beneficiaries,” and the figure it was planned to help was 500,000.⁸¹ Insofar as UN agencies were dealing in such rounded-up figures, confidence in the numbers used must be limited.

If we turn now to government estimates of the IDPs in the Vanni (more and more concentrated in Mullaitivu district as the war progressed), there were many different estimates.⁸² USAID quotes a Sri Lankan government estimate of 50-60,000 people trapped in Mullaitivu.⁸³ A senior civilian official in Vavuniya put the number significantly higher, telling us towards the end of April that “160-170,000 may be there in the Vanni.” One fairly senior official told us around 80,000 people had arrived in Vavuniya in the last few days, with roughly 50,000 people still present in the Vanni. Even within the military, different officials came up with different estimates. A more senior military official commented, “We originally said 60-120,000 in the

76 ICG, 2009, “Crisis in Sri Lanka,” April 20. An ICG report of 9 March, “Conflict Risk Alert: Sri Lanka,” noted, “Independent estimates from sources on the ground and satellite imagery suggest at least 150,000 people are trapped by the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military....” OCHA reported that, as of 8 April, more than 7,500 patients and relatives were evacuated from Mullaitivu district by boat.

77 WFP, Internal situation report, March 27 2009, p. 2.

78 WFP News Release, “WFP Dispatches another 1000 tons of food to the Vanni,” Rome, 2 April 2009.

79 WFP, Internal situation report, March 27 2009, p. 1.

80 WFP, 2007, Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment, based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June, p. 51. The report also gives a high figure for numbers in need: “... 900,000

need support with livelihood protection as their coping strategies are depleting in Kilinochchi, Mannar, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Trincomalee.” (WFP, 2007, Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment, based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June, p. 50).

81 WFP, “Budget Increases to Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations — Sri Lanka 10067.1,” Projects for Executive Board Approval, Agenda item 9, Executive Board, Second Regular Session, Rome, 22-26 October 2007, p. 5.

82 Reported in November, cited in Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, p. 24.

83 USAID, “Sri Lanka — Complex Emergency, Fact sheet 4, fiscal year 2009,” 10 April 2009.

no fire zone. Maybe 105,000 are here already. There are only 10-15,000 left there [in the Vanni].” The International Displacement Monitoring Centre cites a government estimate of only 1,000 people in the Vanni in April.⁸⁴

Much higher numbers came from local government officials in the north. In December 2008, a Human Rights Watch report noted that the Government Agents for Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi were estimating a total of 348,102 displaced in their regions.⁸⁵ But in Colombo government officials told us they were very sceptical about local government officers’ numbers. An official with the Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development (MNBEID) said: “We heard figures up to 500,000. We agree 110,000, the number of people in the uncleared areas. A lot of names were repeated — that inflated the numbers... Government agents exaggerate the numbers.” The issue of “double-counting” those displaced more than once was also raised by Human Rights Watch.⁸⁶ Some aid workers were also sceptical about the figures, saying that the LTTE was able to exert pressure that inflated them.

Inadequate Relief in Mullaitivu

Given the widely varying estimates of population, the adequacy of food deliveries can only be conditionally calculated. The last international relief food to arrive in the Vanni by land came on January 16 convoy. If we allow for a week at the end of January, a total of 66 days elapsed between the last road relief and the beginning of April. Yet if we take the figure of 100,000, the 1,189 metric tons of food that arrived by the beginning of April would have been enough to feed this population for only 24 days. If we take the ICRC/ICG figure of 150,000, this

amount would have fed the population for only 16 days. If we take the Government Agents’ figure of 348,102, then this quantity of food would have fed the population for only about 7 days.

The March 7 2009 Situation Report of Mullaitivu District Additional Government Agent (AGA) K. Parthipan gives a very detailed account of quantities of relief received and quantities needed:

Almost the entire people from all AGA Divisions of the District are displaced. The IDPs of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi and parts of Vavuniya, Mannar and Jaffna Districts are now staying in Mullaitivu District... The population of Mullaitivu District at present is about 81,000 families, consisting of about 330,000 persons... The required food items for the issue of Dry Ration under WFP have not been transported to the district. Only a few MT of food items were brought by ships and were issued to the IDPs. There is a severe shortage for food in the area. People are unable to purchase the food in the market. Prices of the food items have increased and vegetables and fruits are not available at all in the area.⁸⁷

This figure is rather close to the Government Agents’ figure of 348,102 (cited above). The AGAs’s Situation Report gave a monthly food requirement for February of 4,950 metric tons (mixed foods), noting that only 110 metric tons had actually arrived in February. Since the food was so scarce, it was distributed to about 30,000 people, while the great majority did not get any relief food.⁸⁸

Since the Sri Lankan government played a considerable part in pushing people into this strip of land, it might reasonably have anticipated that substantial deliveries by sea would

84 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 4.

85 Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December, p. 23.

86 Human Rights Watch, 2008, “Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka’s Vanni Region,” December.

87 Situation Report of Mullaitivu District by Addl. Govt. Agent, Mr K. Parthipan, 7 March 2009.

88 Situation Report of Mullaitivu District by Addl. Govt. Agent, Mr K. Parthipan, 7 March 2009.

be necessary. It seems quite possible that the grave and predictable shortfalls in February and March served a military function in encouraging civilians to break free from the LTTE and come to government-held areas, notably Vavuniya, where IDPs were safer with better access to relief.

Of course, the significant degree of LTTE control in the north complicated the difficulty of getting accurate figures. Even so, it is difficult to believe that in a small country with a sophisticated administration and a significant government presence in the north, there could be so much doubt about the numbers in the Vanni. What seems to have happened is that different elements within the government made widely varying estimates, influenced by a range of political factors. In general, minimising the numbers may have served a function in minimising the implied need for relief as well as in minimising the implied casualties. Certainly, population estimates coming from the military were particularly low. Certainly, the government's low population figures for the Vanni were seen by several aid workers as encouraging or legitimising low food deliveries or as a kind of morale-booster for the military push against the LTTE rebels. One aid worker commented:

An example of data that was useful — OCHA implemented it with full WFP cooperation — was detailing the amount that went to the Vanni. We could say only a small amount went to it and could do advocacy. But it depends on the population. Then the government says it's only 70,000 odd. It was partly to show the food was adequate and partly to show there were not many Tamils and they were not a force to be reckoned with. The GAs in Mullativu and Kilinochchi had 350-370,000 figures. But Colombo was saying they're compromised by the LTTE. There are incentives to ask for more. Plus, they were totally compromised.

Another aid worker suggested, "Maybe the 70,000 number was to make assistance inadequate."

Crisis in Vavuniya

While the migration to Vavuniya was certainly rapid and dramatic, the question of *why* people had moved there was relatively neglected. The Sri Lankan government's official explanation was that these people had fled to safety after being held captive by the LTTE rebels. That flight from the Tigers was indeed an important part of the story, and the most rapid influxes into Vavuniya coincided with government successes in breaking through the LTTE ranks and releasing some of the civilians that the rebels had been, in effect, holding captive.

Several caveats are worth stressing, however. First, while the desire to escape the LTTE was strong, it was also hard to separate this from the vulnerability to government attacks which proximity to the Tigers involved.

Second, there was significant migration into Vavuniya at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009 — that is, before the "rescue operation" in Mullativu.⁸⁹

Third, those we interviewed suggested a number of other factors influencing the large-scale movement of civilians towards Vavuniya. One major factor in the movement to Vavuniya from November 2008 to April 2009 was prolonged government shelling and aerial bombing of areas within the Vanni, particularly from August 2008. In addition to constituting a direct security threat, these military actions also destroyed much of the infrastructure needed for continued existence within the area. Aid workers reported in April 2009 that wounds for those in Vavuniya hospital were mostly shrapnel and gunshot wounds. Until roughly the second week of April, most of the wounds were from shrapnel

89 A WFP report noted at end-March, "Since late January, nearly 52,000 IDPs have crossed over to government controlled areas and are accommodated in IDP centres/welfare villages: Vavuniya (44,823), Jaffna (4,861), Mannar (856), Trincomalee (464) and Pulumudai hospital (957)" (WFP, Internal situation report, March 27 2009, p. 1).

(the result of shelling operations), and after this more and more were bullet wounds. One aid worker in Vavuniya said "Casualties were mainly by the SLA (Sri Lankan army). The government says there's shelling by the LTTE, but that's not happening. The LTTE is shooting at people, and there's [LTTE] suicide bombers to scare them." A UN worker commented: "Civilians have been deliberately shelled. Probably the figures are pretty high, maybe the same figure killed as Srebrenica... Part of the strategy is to shell civilians to move them around. I guess 10,000 lives lost and thousands maimed." In an open letter to the IMF on May 13 2009, Human Rights Watch noted, "According to the United Nations, as of late April more than 6,500 civilians have been killed and more than 13,000 wounded in the conflict area since January 2009. Given the intense fighting over the past two weeks, those numbers will have increased significantly."⁹⁰

A second factor encouraging movement to Vavuniya was the restriction of supplies (including food supplies) moving into the Vanni over a significant period. One NGO worker made an explicit connection between the drying up of food supplies and the migration: "From October 2008, the convoys were very good, and NGOs tried to bring in food through the GA convoys. But then permission to go by road was not there. People started to come to Vavuniya."

Another aid worker commented: "The condition of IDPs is increasingly worse and worse the more they stay in the no fire zone. 80 per cent of medical problems are surgical cases. Malnutrition is becoming more and more of a problem."

We have seen that even the convoys had met only around 40 per cent — at best — of the displaced peoples' nutritional needs, while relief transported by ship met only a fraction of the needs in February and March 2009.

A UN worker stressed that the government's emphasis on escaping the Tigers had to be put into a broader context: "They [the IDPs]

want to get away from the LTTE and the conflict zone. But they would rather go to their homes. There's mine clearance [needed], basic services are none, a lack of basic security. So it's not realistic to ask for them to stay in the Vanni right now." One representative of a major donor said:

In Vavuniya, the people say they are leaving because of, one, shelling, and, two, hunger. It's the same thing on medicines — the government has a longstanding policy of not allowing antibiotics, ostensibly because they wouldn't want it to fall into LTTE hands and treat their war-wounded, and the same with anaesthetics.

A local aid worker gave a similar analysis: "Why did they not send food to the Vanni if it's a humanitarian war? People are not willing to come here [to Vavuniya], but continuous shelling, heavy damage and no food or medicine make the people come out."

A third factor encouraging the movement to Vavuniya was the government policy of bus-sing people from the Mullaitivu area, first to Omanthei and then further south to Vavuniya. It is not at all clear that the displaced had the option of *not* catching the buses. One aid worker, a veteran of many emergencies, said "The people want to get away from the LTTE, but then they have to go with the army. The military put people on buses, but it's not voluntary, not at all." One senior government administrator hinted at this problem by noting, "People are coming [to Vavuniya], I don't know if wilfully, transporting by buses."

A fourth factor encouraging mass movement to Vavuniya has been information control. In particular, there is reason to believe that people were not told the whole story about the camps in Vavuniya — notably the lack of freedom of movement for those inside. One aid worker in Vavuniya, for example, stressed that the displaced were shocked by what they found in Vavuniya, especially the internment: "'If we'd known what was coming, we'd never have come.' You hear that all the time."

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch Letter to IMF Executive Directors on Sri Lanka's IMF Loan Request, 13 May 2009.

Significantly, some IDPs do appear to have anticipated the reception they would get — and this seems to have been one factor helping to reinforce LTTE “control” over civilians. Whilst acknowledging that LTTE intimidation was the main reason for civilians not fleeing the Mullaitivu area, a February 2009 Human Rights Watch report noted that many civilians were reluctant to flee because of fears of their life and safety in the hands of government forces; as one relief worker commented:

If people knew that there was ICRC or other international agency waiting for them on the other side, thousands, virtually all of them, would have run for safety, even if it meant breaking through LTTE cordons. But risking your life to end up in government detention — not many are willing to do this.⁹¹

In Vavuniya district, the displaced were confined in camps behind barbed wire and unable to move to friends or relatives or to pursue any economic strategies beyond the camps. In effect, the displaced have in effect been interned in camps in Vavuniya. One senior aid worker commented: “There is little freedom of movement; all the camps are barbed wire... Families get separated at screening centres and it’s very difficult to get families together again.” Another aid worker commented: “Firewood will run out. When people are desperate, the army surrounds them and allows them to go out into the bush around here.” Military officials have claimed that the barbed wire is there to protect those in the camp from the LTTE.⁹² One aid worker mentioned this interpretation but stressed that the location of concertina wire on the *inside* of the fence indicates it is there to keep people *in*. A fourth aid worker commented: “Ninety per cent have family they could go

to — if not in Vavuniya, then elsewhere.” The military in Vavuniya told us that freedom of movement would come in gradually.

Self-help was being actively discouraged. As one aid worker noted:

You have masons, bakers, competent people. But the Sri Lankan government will not allow any agencies to employ people from the camps. They say they’re sending them to technical school to teach them a trade, but many already have a trade. If they want bread, give them an oven to make it or bricks to make an oven!... They don’t let you work with IDPs, forming committees, like for food distribution. They won’t allow it.

There was a major sense of crisis as unexpectedly large numbers of internally displaced people flooded into the town. An IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre) report noted that, “Over 150,000 IDPs had managed to flee the Vanni between November 2008 and April 2009. They were being housed in camps and sites in the government-controlled districts of Vavuniya, Mannar, Trincomalee and Jaffna.”⁹³ By April, the influx into Vavuniya was extremely rapid. People were crammed into small areas with inadequate or non-existent toilet facilities and a lack of clean water. The hospital was severely overcrowded. One aid worker observed: “The hospital is choked with people with missing limbs. It has 2,000 people and is designed for 450 patients.” Another aid worker noted:

People are being discharged from Vavuniya hospital who shouldn’t be, and they’re being discharged into camps... C-sections [cesarian sections] are normal in this country, but women are being discharged after three days — there’s so much risk of infection... There’s no list of patients. People just

91 Human Rights Watch, 2009, “War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni,” February, p. 28.

92 Human Rights Watch, 2009, “War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni,” February, p. 32.

93 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009.

disappear from the hospital and you don't know who's gone.

Looking back on the mass influx into Vavuniya, a local NGO worker noted in September 2009:

We could have been better prepared to face the emergency. WFP, the government, the NGO community — getting ready as a coordinated effort was neglected. WFP staff were preoccupied with supplying food to the no fire zone. The government figure [for those who would come out] was very low, maybe 100,000, and then there were 290,000!

Aid workers stressed there was a desire to keep the displaced away from the rest of the population. When we asked a senior civilian official about the lack of freedom of movement, there was an evident concern to protect the resident population of Vavuniya: “There are 200,000 civilians in Vavuniya already. There is not any industrial activity. The IDPs can't do cultivation — they don't have land.”

Whilst Vavuniya has been severely overcrowded, establishing a “spill-over area” has been fraught with difficulties. One NGO worker observed, “... the [current] idea of getting more IDPs into Mannar, one minute it's on, one minute off. It seems the Minister of Defence wants everyone in Vavuniya.”

Closely related to the policy of internment is the weakness of screening processes. This is a particular worry in view of the history of government-related disappearances of those suspected or accused of links to the LTTE.⁹⁴ Such screening as has occurred seems to have been pretty superficial.⁹⁵ One NGO worker noted:

There isn't a thorough screening process. If there was a thoughtful and clear procedure, for example in Omanthai, then we'd be in a much better position to negotiate for freedom of movement — not necessarily full resettlement but for example day passes and some ability to leave the camps. So long as that screening is not done properly, they can say they need restrictions on the camps. Being able to achieve anything in these circumstances is very difficult.

Along similar lines, a UN worker noted in April:

The screening process doesn't exist in any sense that it has an end-point... You need to check, but show us that system! People are sitting under surveillance for a year. If there was screening, one single person could say I am a combatant or not. That hasn't happened. It justifies detaining 200,000 people⁹⁶ on the grounds that they are a security threat. We bought the line that they would show us that [screening] system.

One representative of a major donor suggested, “They haven't screened these people very well. They probably take metal objects off them. There are probably a lot of ex-combatants in these camps. So it really is an internment situation.” A UN worker suggested starkly, “The government think the entire population is pro-revolution.”

Aid workers said screening began with a basic body search, then some basic screening in Vallipuram, then on to Kilinochchi and Omanthai for more basic screening. An official at the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services acknowledged: “Screening is not a very thorough process because of such large numbers,” whilst a senior civil official in Vavuniya noted that in practice there was not much screening.

94 Gareth Evans, “Falling Down on the Job,” Foreign Policy (ForeignPolicy.com, 1 May 2009, on www.crisisgroup.org). On these disappearances, see for example International Crisis Group, 2009, “Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province,” 16 April.

95 NRC Sri Lanka, April 2009, in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 6.

96 Subsequently, the number rose significantly.

The rapidity of the influx and the inadequacy of preparations gave the impression that this was a sudden and unexpected population movement. However, the influx had actually been part of government planning. As one Human Rights Watch report noted in December 2008:

In September 2008, the Sri Lankan authorities informed the UN and humanitarian organizations that they were in the process of drawing up contingency plans to keep up to 200,000 displaced people from the Vanni in new camps in Vavuniya district, in case a mass outflux from the Vanni materialised.⁹⁷

This announcement left aid agencies in a dilemma, and the government was presumably aware that it would. If they prepared for a major influx, they might be said to be encouraging and facilitating the depopulation of the north. This was particularly problematic as the Sri Lankan government had not answered questions on whether those who were displaced to Vavuniya would enjoy freedom of movement.⁹⁸ One NGO worker, speaking in April 2009, emphasised the practical problems created by international agencies' reluctance to prepare for an influx: "We said we had principles in relation to the camps, not preparing the land and we won't build before the IDPs are here. We were strict, and now have more problems." There was also a significant problem with the government not allocating land to receive people. One UN worker commented:

It's a protection emergency. They have interned the entire civilian population that's come out of the Vanni, saying there are security reasons for not hav-

ing freedom of movement. Security is such a big factor. They wouldn't allocate land to us. We are finding ourselves in a situation as though it came out of nowhere.

Adding to the difficulties of providing assistance, it appears, was a reluctance to accept NGO help and a claim by the government that it could cope on its own. An IDMC report noted, "In Vavuniya, the government initially insisted that it would take primary responsibility for the IDPs and that there was no need for NGOs to become involved."⁹⁹

Contributing to the lack of preparation was a severe underestimation of the numbers in the Vanni by powerful elements of the government. One very senior aid worker commented, "The government believed its own propaganda on numbers — the 70,000. It fell in with the military figures." The UN worker complaining about lack of land allocation added:

Since September last year [that is, September 2008], agencies were told they need to leave the Vanni. The government said we will bring everyone to Vavuniya and it was saying there are only 70,000 there [in the Vanni]. They said the UN was exaggerating [the numbers] and that LTTE is always exaggerating to get more resources. Since then [September 2008], we are starting to prepare. We try to discourage displacement so as not to create a city so people will come, but we at least try to get land, clear the land. We've been saying this since September. The consequences now are no draining, no toilets, last night it rained [in Vavuniya], no road, the ground is not level. The first people were coming in November 2008. It's not like there hasn't been warning.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December, p. 17.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December, p. 17.

⁹⁹ IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 11.

One aid worker in Vavuniya, who had given considerable attention to the numbers issue, commented:

CIMIC [Sri Lanka's Civil Military Cooperation unit] said there were 432,000 citizens in the Vanni. This was in October-November 2008. There were some losses of life. Perhaps 370,000 were left in the Vanni late November, 365,000 with those who went to Jaffna. The army agreed — 400,000 was written on the whiteboard [that is, the military whiteboard] in November 2008, I saw it. Now the army has been saying a maximum of 70,000. There's been no census in the Vanni since 1983. Some of our esteemed colleagues took the 70,000 figure too much, didn't question it. It's a big reason why preparation is so bad now.

The figure of 365,000 is not so far from the abovementioned of total of 348,102 given by the Government Agents of Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi districts.

Particularly with the focus of the war shifting towards the coast of Mullaitivu district, there was an opportunity to increase road deliveries. But this was neglected. One aid worker said in April 2009, "The government has not allowed food to go to Kilinochchi," adding that the food was in stock and could be moved there. At a major aid coordination meeting in Vavuniya on April 22 2009, the lack of food in Omanthai was raised as a major problem. The government was handling feeding there. One aid worker with good knowledge of the situation in Omanthai commented: "The food and water situation is uncertain. It looks like people didn't eat in Val-lipuram. People are starving in Omanthai, no water, food, exhaustion. 2-3 people died."

Security obstacles should not have been prohibitive, this aid worker emphasised: "Just after the no fire zone, there's a risk of suicide attacks but it's OK beyond that. We should be present to give water and food." One senior

UN worker commented that there was no good reason that WFP could not be in Kilinochchi and Omanthai, pointing out that the road was being used for civilians coming out of the area.

A national aid worker commented: "They're sending 15-20 buses a day. People don't have food, water facilities, elderly and injured people. 300 buses are at Omanthai. The situation is much worse there than here." A senior aid worker noted that 21 elderly people had died in Omanthai the previous day, apparently from exhaustion. Problems were compounded when buses were returned from Vavuniya to Omanthai. As one aid worker noted: "They put them in buses in Omanthai. Some 20,000 are in Omanthai now. A lot came to transit centres in buses and didn't find any space, so they had to go back to Omanthai." In an article for the respected Sri Lankan think-tank, the Centre for Policy Alternatives,¹⁰⁰ Sanjana Hattotuwa noted: "A court order issued April [that] I got via email from the Vavuniya District Magistrate Court flagged up 30 cases in IDP camps where senior citizens had passed away due to the starvation and malnutrition and without any special care."¹⁰⁰

Distribution systems were also a problem. One aid worker commented on Omanthai in particular: "There is no distribution system. The stronger ones get food, there is a fight and the weaker ones cannot." Even in Vavuniya, the feeding arrangements were seen as damaging for a number of vulnerable groups. One UN worker noted:

Given mass internment, people's ability to supplement is very restricted, except if they bribe soldiers, who are not too much on the make [that is, not much inclined to take bribes]. There are 150,000 you need to fully support. WFP is providing a basic food basket, but the food may be culturally inappropriate, a lack of variety, or not tasty. The government has always had a policy of

¹⁰⁰ Sanjana Hattotuwa, 2009, "Cartography of shame," Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo, 17 May.

giving cooked meals. This emergency has been going three months and they are still doing communal cooking. It doesn't allow decisions on who eats first in a family. It's very clear that the most vulnerable are finding it difficult to access food in the camps. A woman with a 20-day-old baby — if I have no family members, it's necessary to go and wait in line and scuffle and try to get my food, so I'll miss meals regularly. There are no separate lines or cooking areas for the most vulnerable. The government has reliable registration data. They have data on women with small children etc., but they don't share with WFP or UNHCR. Cooperation with the government is very poor... Pregnant women are also vulnerable, and the elderly. They don't have the stamina, with months of not having access to food in the Vanni, they are very weak, dehydrated. There are recorded instances of preventable deaths.¹⁰¹

Commenting on the problems in Vavuniya arising from the low population estimate of 70,000, one aid worker commented, "They can always blame it on us — there's nothing in writing." In general, government officials tended to play down problems in the north and among those entering Vavuniya, whether this was protection problems, malnutrition or disease.¹⁰²

The Question of Speedy Population Return

Given that the displaced population is basically being interned in Vavuniya, the need to

facilitate a quick and safe return from Vavuniya to areas further north becomes all the more urgent.

Civil and military officials stressed that the Sri Lankan government sees this task as urgent but that the government faces severe constraints, notably in de-mining. One senior civilian official stressed that work to allow people to return had already begun: "We have started reconstruction of the A9 [road], hospitals, buildings, schools and other administrative blocks," adding, "The problem of demining, the army will do it very quickly." Although the official line is that the LTTE was being comprehensively routed in the north-east, there seems to be an awareness that pockets of LTTE resistance will remain. This may be another reason to discourage resettlement. One NGO worker commented, "The government stress the need for de-mining and that there might be clusters of LTTE and they need to be cleared out."

When we asked when it would be possible for people to return, answers were generally vague. For example, a senior military officer said, "That's a very difficult question to answer. De-mining is necessary." Others reiterated the view that the population would be returned to the north as soon as possible and that exploded mines were a major obstacle. One official at the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services told us: "People were all under the control of the LTTE, 100,000 people. As soon as possible, they will be resettled. The area is heavily mined. De-mining has to be done. The process has already started in Mannar and at the end of the month it should be done there." In fact, experience in Mannar has not been particularly encouraging. One aid worker whose organisation was working in Mannar said: "In Mannar it took ages for organisations to do de-mining, partly because of army authorisations... It took six months for these people to go back." Some people are still in camps there, moreover. One man who had been working in Mannar observed, "People have been more than one year in camps in Mannar, and movement is re-

¹⁰¹ One local NGO worker said the quality of the dahl provided was very low and that it would have been more culturally appropriate to provide unpolished brown rice than white rice.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch noted: "... the humanitarian plight of the Vanni displaced population has greatly concerned neighbouring India, with a large Tamil population in Tamil Nadu state; lowering the figures of affected persons may be an attempt to limit Indian pressure." (Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December, p. 24)

stricted.” Another aid worker gave more details on the restrictions in Mannar: “If one member of a family is going, you had to leave the rest of the family members in the camps. It’s affected access to schools, even university and hospitals, for a single person.” He added that restrictions had loosened to the point where leaving one member of a family behind was sometimes acceptable, but said this was still a major problem for anyone without family present. Another aid worker added, “They have no-one to serve as “collateral.”¹⁰³

One representative of a major donor was also sceptical about the government’s resettlement plans:

In Sri Lanka, we’ve seen some IDPs in camps for many years. There’s currently a caseload under SO1 of 433,000 people. Many IDPs are in camps for a year or more, so they’re not meeting the US government definition of an emergency. Many can’t go home because of the government and when that’s the case, it’s not incumbent on the international community to feed them. It’s up to the government... The UN ought to be working with the government for a realistic resettlement strategy. In February 2009, the government said 80 per cent would go home by end-2009. It’s clear now that that’s not going to happen. Now is the time the government can and should develop a returns strategy and WFP ought to be part of that.

An aid worker based in Trincomalee commented: “Two years from now when it’s not on the front page, resettlement is going to be a

big problem.” Along similar lines, a UN worker noted: “There’s current coverage, yes, but how long will it last? People in camps will be forgotten — just like at Puttalam where there have been camps for 15 years.” In fact, there are over 60,000 IDPs living in more than 140 camps in Puttalam and these camps have existed since 1990.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, in Jaffna, many IDPs have been unable to return home after their land was declared to fall within government-designated High Security Zones.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, resettlement from the Eastern Province has been far-going (and indeed there were pressures to return).¹⁰⁶

The priority given by the government to establishing of relief villages made many aid workers sceptical about the urgency with which resettlement was being contemplated. As one NGO worker put it: “Everyone has been under huge pressure to contribute to the construction of these villages... The idea of relief villages is that people are to be housed for 2-3 years and we’re saying focus on three months and monitor it and see what we learn from it.” Another aid worker noted, “The international community is sticking to a three month timeline, and maybe another three months. The government’s initial plan was for 1-3 year model villages. Manik Farm was going to be the model.” While more temporary shelter was in practice also set up, a senior civilian official told us that three villages on the Manik Farm model

103 A Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) report noted, “Two camps at Kalimodai and Sirikundel in Mannar have been in existence since March 2008, and house approximately 900 IDPs, only a small fraction of whom have been allowed to leave permanently. To leave, they have to obtain a pass for a specific purpose from the army and have a family member act as guarantor.” (CPA, “A profile of human rights and humanitarian issues in the Vanni and Vavuniya,” March 2009, 40, cited IDMC [International Displacement Monitoring Centre], “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 6).

104 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 9. The displaced in Puttalam have been receiving rations from WFP and the government. There has been some local integration; but the government resists this, saying the displaced will one day return to their homes (p. 9).

105 IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 1.

106 IDMC commented, “In the Eastern Province, where there had been massive displacement in 2006 and 2007, almost all the IDPs had returned to their areas of origin, with exceptions including those whose land had been designated as a High Security Zone by the government.” (IDMC [International Displacement Monitoring Centre], “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 1).

were indeed being planned.¹⁰⁷ A January 2009 document from the Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services makes the government's intentions pretty plain: "Since the incoming IDPs [in Vavuniya] would be large in numbers and expected to stay relatively longer period (2-3 years), welfare villages will be established with semi permanent structures which include shelters and other facilities..."¹⁰⁸ The facilities planned included temples, churches and libraries — no doubt useful, but not the kind of thing one would associate with a short-term stay.

Several aid workers voiced a suspicion that some kind of permanent or semi-permanent demographic change might be intended, and both political and economic reasons were put forward for such a process. One local NGO worker, who echoed others' emphasis on the lack of resettlement from camps in Mannar, pointed to a number of reasons for government actors to oppose resettlement to the north:

The government is planning to keep the people in the area for more than three years. The reasons? First, you can destroy the financial capacity of the Tamils. Second. If they have no purchasing power, they have to get out and lose our education and lose strong children and have malnourished children. Our total generation will be spoiled, and you can treat these guys as slaves. Third, the opportunity to bring all the wealth from the Vanni, timber, coconuts, we can abandon our area... The sea is our big resource, pearl in the Mussali area. In future, they can do resettlement for Sinhalese families. In Mannar most of

the area was cleared [that is, of LTTE] in 2006, but they still did not do any resettlement [of the displaced] in almost two years. You can easily do mine clearance. Do they need two years to do the mine clearing?

An international aid worker also emphasised that economic value of the Vanni might impede resettlement. He noted, "The north is the breadbasket of the country. It was producing 60 per cent of the rice."¹⁰⁹

A senior UN worker said: "Some IDP centres are semi-permanent. Some suspect the government is trying to go for demographic change." An NGO worker said, "Eventually, repopulation [of the Vanni] might be three to five years. There might be some ethnic re-composition." He believed that the government's strategy was to keep the guerrillas separate from the Tamil population and to exercise close control over the latter: "The view is, keep the fish away from the water, they'll fade away." Another aid worker said the burying of PVC pipes at "semi-permanent settlements" suggested they were actually intended as permanent. He added, "The long-term aim is to break them [the Tamil population] psychologically. Manik Farm has tin roofs — they're sweathouses,¹¹⁰ plus the lack of freedom of movement."

Significantly, the poor protection environment was damaging the funding of humanitarian operations. A senior UN worker noted that donor government scepticism on protection issues and resettlement was inhibiting their funding of aid operations: "Humanitarian agencies, others haven't got too much. You're talking about 5-20 per cent funding. WFP is close to 59-60 per cent funding." When I asked why the figures were so low for most agencies, he replied:

107 See also Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, 2009, "Urgent Relief Programme for the People of Vanni," January.

108 Ministry of Resettlement and Disaster Relief Services, 2009, "Urgent Relief Programme for the People of Vanni," January.

109 On the importance of the north as the "rice basket" of Sri Lanka, see WFP, 2006, "Emergency Food Security Assessment, Vanni, Sri Lanka, October, p. 9; and WFP, Internal situation report, March 27 2009, p. 1.

110 See also Sanjana Hattotuwa, "Cartography of shame," 17 May 2009, Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo.

Donors have no faith in the handling of IDPs and protection issues are not being addressed. Donors want settlements to be temporary and a roadmap to the IDPs' return. The government has no roadmap. Defence people say it will take longer than other representatives, different stories.

In September 2009, a local NGO worker stressed the urgency of dealing with congestion in the camps, emphasising that creating new smaller camps was not the answer whilst a strong advocacy campaign from the UN system was essential:

260,000 are being kept in camps. It's internment and not acceptable. The screening process is unending... It's very difficult to predict what numbers will be in camps by the end of the year. The government is not willing to share any schedule. The monsoon rains are fast approaching and we fear that we will not be able to prevent an impending disaster...¹¹¹ Relieving the congestion in the camps is still not happening on a large scale. Even those who are taken out are still kept in temporary camps in their districts rather than being released to their relations or friends, as claimed by the government. We are asked to feed these people in these new camps and we do not have resources and we also face an ethical dilemma.

Another local aid worker, speaking in September 2009, said: "The UN says it's providing shelter for 120,000 people, but 260,000 are occupying those shelters, so people are living in overcrowded tents. Women are mingling with a lot of strangers and people they don't know. It's very, very unhealthy to say the least."

¹¹¹ The possibility of major disease outbreaks was stressed by other local NGO workers. One said in September 2009, "We are facing the monsoon. When the rain comes, the water systems will all get clogged. The water purification system can't handle it."

Advocacy And Humanitarian Priorities

We did encounter some praise for UN advocacy efforts. Most strikingly, one NGO worker commented, "To be honest, the UN did well in terms of advocacy — answering to the needs, and in parallel, advocacy."

Levels of advocacy and interest were seen as having increased significantly with the crisis in the "no fire zone" in the first five months of 2009 and the mass influx into Vavuniya. As one UN worker observed, "It's not just statements between the agencies here. You get something from the Secretary General, something from the High Commission for Human Rights, a lot of high-level interest recently." The UN Secretary General's special representative on Internally Displaced Persons Walter Kaelin called for freedom of movement for the IDPs. UN Under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs Sir John Holmes, who visited in February and April 2009, repeatedly called for a temporary ceasefire and for improved humanitarian access and he called on the LTTE and the government to avoid use of heavy weapons. There were also visits from the UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon, who criticised the government's use of heavy weaponry, in civilian areas and from the Secretary-General's chef de cabinet Vijay Nambiar.

Some states including France, the US and Britain increased their pressure on Sri Lanka as the crisis in Mullaitivu worsened in April 2009. But in New York the issue remained relegated to informal statements and unofficial meetings taking place not in the Security Council chamber but in the basement of the UN building. Important states opposing engagement by the Security Council have included China, Russia, Libya, Vietnam and Japan.¹¹²

Despite some recognition of increased interest, most of those we interviewed were very critical of the advocacy effort over a prolonged period.

¹¹² Gareth Evans, "Falling Down on the Job," Foreign Policy (ForeignPolicy.com, 1 May 2009, on www.crisisgroup.org).

Weighing Advocacy and Delivery: The Wrong Balance?

In many crises around the world, aid workers have seen themselves as making difficult, if not impossible, decisions between prioritising the delivery of services, on the one hand, and speaking up about abuses and protection issues, on the other. In academia, Hugo Slim has expressed this dilemma very eloquently, and has suggested that there is often a strong case for prioritising the provision of an immediate and knowable benefit (delivering services) over the hope of a longer-term and essentially unknowable benefit (through advocacy).¹¹³ In Sri Lanka (as in other countries undergoing conflict-related disasters), getting the balance right has been difficult.

We heard some aid workers express the fear that their ability to deliver relief would be impeded by advocacy, particularly if this took the form of public criticism. But before concluding that advocacy can reasonably be sacrificed to delivery, three important points are worth stressing. First, it is noteworthy that several of those interviewed in Sri Lanka felt that a prioritisation of delivery over advocacy had ultimately had very adverse affects for the protection of target populations, and had actually done little to enhance staff security or even the ability to deliver relief goods and services. In fact, the amount of “humanitarian space” in which aid agencies could operate was perceived as having shrunk alongside a series of concessions to the Sri Lankan government. Second, in practice decision-making has not been simply a question of weighing delivery against advocacy. Many other considerations have come into play, including geopolitical concerns and organisational or bureaucratic interests. These considerations underline the possibility that the balance between advocacy and delivery may not have been optimal from the point of view of the target population. A third consideration is

the signal that may be sent internationally when humanitarian principles are compromised in the pursuit of access adjust structure of this section.

We have noted the perceived shrinkage of “humanitarian space.” Some concessions were not immediately damaging to target populations but may nevertheless have been significant in allowing the government to send a signal of its power, whilst also sending a signal to the government that it could go even further. One such may have been allowing government soldiers to search UN vehicles, notably at Medavachchiya, just south of Vavuniya.

More fundamentally, the international community’s willingness to support a peaceful solution to Sri Lanka’s long-running civil war was repeatedly called into question. This is complicated and cannot be examined in any detail here. One critic of international approaches to peacemaking in Sri Lanka has observed:

In June 2003 donors pledged US \$4.5 billion in reconstruction aid for the “entire” country, but only the (unspecified) amount destined for the war-shattered northeast was made conditional on “progress” in the peace process. Outside these pledges, bilateral and multilateral aid to the state continued... By not recognising that rising violence was a cycle of retaliation between army-backed paramilitaries and the LTTE, international actors denounced the latter’s intransigence and saw the state as tolerant and applied sanctions and incentives accordingly. Indeed, LTTE protests that violence was sustained by ongoing state support for paramilitaries in contravention of the CFA [Ceasefire Agreement] were not taken seriously by the international community until late 2006, long after the shadow war had become open (if undeclared) war.¹¹⁴

113 Hugo Slim, 1997, “Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War,” *Disasters*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 244-257.

114 Suthakaran Nadarajah, “Prejudice, asymmetry and insecurity,” *Conciliation Resources*, London, p. 1-2 (<http://www.c-r.org/our-work/accord/incentives/asymmetry.php>).

One local UN worker recalled:

There were lots of conditions for agencies to work after the east was liberated. That's when the state saw how far it could push. NGOs were told they have to do provision of services and not human rights work... If one agency refuses to engage, another will go in. That's a problem.

A UN worker with prolonged experience of the country said the Sri Lankan government had been emboldened by international quietude over the ejection of the ceasefire monitoring mission in January 2008:

We should have had a bigger protest when the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission was asked to leave [in January 2008]. They were monitoring the ceasefire. Nobody did anything, and after a while I think the Sri Lanka government got very bold because nobody was standing up to them.

This theme of emboldening the government was to be echoed by many of those we spoke with. Certainly, the government felt bold enough to eject humanitarian agencies from the north in September 2008 (with the exception of ICRC and CARITAS). Further, some aid workers saw the international community's near-silence at this expulsion as giving a "green light" to the escalation of war. Asked if there were protests from influential international governments at the expulsion, one experienced UN worker said:

No, they [the government] have the support of the Americans, the Pakistanis and the Indians for their strategy. The Americans wanted to avoid civilian casualties — they pushed to allow the humanitarian corridors to go in, but only to the extent that it did not conflict with war objectives.

One NGO worker who had recently arrived in the country recalled the evacuation:

I was surprised and shocked it was so easy. It took only a few days. Local staff started working for the GA [Government Authority] as volunteers and then civil servants. I don't understand why it was so easy to tell everyone to leave. Some expats were really upset at headquarters in Colombo, saying they should have reacted in a stronger way.

The NGO worker added that given the fighting, it would have been very dangerous to stay, pointing out that clearly identifiable hospitals had been attacked. However, the feeling that more could have been done to protest the expulsions was widespread. Another aid worker who had been working in Kilinochchi said, "In August and September 2008, bombs were dropped from planes right next door to our office. We were really angry. The statements coming out of Colombo were completely unhelpful, including OCHA/Colombo."

The evacuation of aid agencies in September 2008 was compensated, to a limited extent, by the creation of a series of road convoys for relief, but we have seen that these did not meet the full extent of humanitarian need, even in late 2008. After 16 January 2009, the convoys were no longer possible because of the escalating war.

One UN aid worker, whilst very mindful of the dangers for aid agency operations of speaking out too publicly or boldly, said:

There's a different level of negotiation that actually becomes begging. There's a need for stronger advocacy at all levels. We say, "No, we cannot be searched." You protest, then you accept. You are a Catholic and a Protestant at the same time! First the vehicles, then the staff, then the "big guns" [visiting dignitaries].

One UN aid worker said, "The bullying that has gone on here has been absolutely incredible. We have compromised. Historians

and academics will work out whether it was correct." A third UN worker said:

There are very few opportunities to look back and say "We confronted, and it didn't work." We're told we have no leverage. I don't know if that's true. It gets taken from us, and we accept. It's different from saying, "We tried other strategies and they failed." Overwhelmingly, we decided at all costs to stay engaged. It hasn't worked. It hasn't helped us to protect IDPs and it hasn't helped us to get influence.

The argument that speaking out could improve the protection environment was supported with an example from the east. One UN worker recalled:

I was working in the east. There were forced returns of refugees from Batticaloa to Trincomalee.¹¹⁵ UNHCR was releasing protection information in a very controlled way, in bed with the government. People were getting beaten onto buses, separated. Information did get out there, for example via OCHA, forcing UNHCR to come out with a strong statement. From then on, the way returns happened was so much better, though there were still abuses.

When the relief convoys from October 2008 were used as cover for government (and LTTE) military operations, this seems to have drawn little or no protest. It appears that silence on this issue was seen as the price to pay for getting relief delivered. When I asked an aid worker who had travelled with several convoys whether there had been any protests from the UN at convoys being used for military cover, he

said, "There was no protest from WFP because they know the LTTE is also using the convoys." A second aid worker who also had experience on the convoys said getting permission for the convoys was actually dependent on the government being able to use them militarily: "The government cannot give a green light if they cannot ensure that they will also take advantage." Objections to the convoys from both sides reportedly helped to create a context in which military manipulation by both sides was tacitly accepted.

When it came to assistance in Vavuniya, significant concessions on principle were made. One such was the decision to work at the government relief village of Manik Farm. One aid worker said of the Sri Lankan government: "They are clever, it's working. What we refused three months ago, we're now accepting. Manik Farm, with a plan to detain for 3-5 years, we refused, but now we're working there."

Interviewees said the boldness of the government extended to ejecting individual aid workers without giving reasons and to attempts to abolish the "cluster system" (a system under which different agencies take the lead on particular activities in accordance with their expertise). One aid worker in Vavuniya complained:

They [the government] tried to abolish the cluster system. They basically decide what to do, and nobody stands up to them. They play the PNG [persona non grata] game. Two CARE people were just PNG'd, one had been in the country for four years. They had a lot of institutional memory. They [the government] gave no reason.

Collective concessions on important humanitarian principles may send a signal, both locally and internationally, that emboldens abusive actors to step up their manipulation of aid. The same may apply to a parallel manipulation of truth. In Sri Lanka, several aid workers expressed strongly the view that this process

115 An Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) report ("Sri Lanka Fact Sheet — Batticaloa District," 22 March 2007) noted: "Despite Government assurances that all return movements will be voluntary, interagency monitoring reports indicate that heavy pressure has been applied on IDPs, including local authority statements that assistance will be stopped if they stay in Batticaloa."

was taking place in the country. One diplomat stressed the importance to the government of controlling information flows:

There are certain parameters — the idea that you must not give in to international pressure to stop the war, which partly has happened before. In the 1990s, there were so many human rights violations in the counterinsurgency that it limited the state's ability to crush the insurgency. A paradigm shift now, so you use propaganda and state resources to get support for the war. You have an organisation that can hold onto the objective of finishing the business. The army is not going to rebel — the President's brother is in charge.

We may note here that it is not necessarily the absence of human rights violations that may “create space” for eradicating the LTTE but the absence — or near absence — of information on these violations.

Commenting on the Sri Lankan government's success in lobbying for the rejection of a critical resolution at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and for the adoption of a complimentary resolution on 27 May 2009, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, Dr Dayan Jayatilleka, observed:

The attempt to hold a special session of the HRC [UN Human Rights Council] was on for four weeks. Those driving the move wanted to hold it when the war was on, and they pushed for it to be held on May 14th. They wanted to put the international brakes on our final offensive. In short they wanted to save the Tigers. We thwarted that exercise and bought the time and space for our armed forces to finish the job.¹¹⁶

116 Dayan Jayatilleka, “Stand up for others, they stand up for you,” interview in Waani Operation, June 3 2009 [wanniooperation.com].

Where untruths are not challenged, there is always the possibility of buying into them or of encouraging others to buy into them. One aid worker mentioned a range of issues where he felt untruths needed to be challenged:

When the BP-100 was locked up [the vehicle transporting these high-energy biscuits was detained at Medovach-chiya], the government accused UNICEF of feeding the Tigers to make “Supertigers.” Is this not something to stand up and refute?¹¹⁷ I feel like it's got progressively worse to the point where [Defence Minister] Gotabaya Rajapakse can say ridiculous things like not one person has been killed in our “humanitarian operation.” We've made them believe there is total impunity. They've started to believe their own figures. We've been saying it's not 70,000 [the total number of people in the Vanni]... They are in trouble. The situation is going to get so bad.

Meanwhile, there was considerable intimidation of journalists, and reports on the war were consistently pro-government. Constraints on journalism certainly inhibited national and international understanding of the unfolding humanitarian disaster in the north.¹¹⁸

Some NGO workers complained that they had had to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government that prevented them from speaking publicly even on the adequacy of relief services that were being provided.

Aid agencies' reluctance to speak publicly on sensitive issues has even extended to with-

117 A statement from the UN Office of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator noted, “The United Nations deplores that such life saving items, destined for severely malnourished children, were diverted from their intended purpose” (UN Office of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, “UN Sri Lanka Statement,” 10 March 2009, Colombo.)

118 On these, see for example International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Sri Lanka, 2008, “Media under fire: Press freedom lockout in Sri Lanka,” December (http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_sri_Lanka.pdf).

holding the results of nutritional surveys. (Naturally, these surveys represent a basic foundation for assessing the severity of humanitarian emergencies and for matching assistance to needs.) Levels of malnutrition among the IDPs in Vavuniya do seem to have been significant. One survey of six camps in early March by Dr Renuka Jayatissa of Sri Lanka's Medical Research Institute found that more than 25 per cent of children under five were suffering either severe or moderate wasting.¹¹⁹ According to one report, "Malnutrition among children below the age of five in Mullaitivu district has reached 25 per cent, the highest in the island. The results are believed to be indicative of malnutrition among children still strapped in the war zone."¹²⁰ Towards the end of April 2009, one senior UN aid worker said:

The government is not very cooperative on getting an objective baseline. UNICEF did a nutritional assessment more than a month ago, and when I ask I am told "We're still finalising and talking with the government." We could say we will not provide food unless we can provide nutritional data with results that can be public. They don't want to release nutritional data because they don't want to be accused of having starved people inside the Vanni.

Another UN aid worker said: "There are high level of malnutrition, 25 per cent among IDPs in Vavuniya. The government won't release it [the recent UNICEF survey]. It will be used internally by UNICEF for their budget." In September 2009, One local NGO worker commented, "It's difficult to get a current assessment [of the nutritional situation]. We are working with the health ministry. We helped collect nutritional data and

sent it to the Ministry of Health, and now they are not willing to share the results with us."

Also criticised by aid workers in the field were the relatively weak protests — at least in public — at the civilian casualties resulting from government shelling and aerial bombardment during the intensified military push from September 2008. There were some protests from various officials (as noted above), but many felt they were too little and too late. The lack of protest at child deaths resulting from these raids was contrasted by some aid workers with what they saw as a much greater degree of public protest of child recruitment (by the LTTE). One UN worker observed:

There are probably more than 1,000 children killed in the war since January 2009. We don't hear that. The UN spoke on underage recruitment, which was not verified, but not on child deaths. It compromised our neutrality a great deal... It was not helpful to have the UN back away from casualty figures, 4,500. If the UN speaks out on this, it is only going to be embarrassed by the scale of the error in the other direction in a year's time. It became embarrassing for ICRC to come out and speak about casualties because no-one else would, so the UN said a bit more... Our ability to verify that [child recruitment] was much less than our ability to verify child deaths. The UN had names, addresses and everything... It was dragged into making statements on child deaths.¹²¹

Over-optimism in relation to government intentions has been a prominent feature of UN statements in many crises around the world,¹²²

119 Renuka Jayatissa, 2009, Rapid Assessment of Nutritional Status Among Displaced Population in Vavuniya, Medical Research Institute, Colombo.

120 AFP, "Quarter of displaced Sri Lankan children malnourished," 11 April 2009, in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 10.

121 Statements on child deaths during the final stages of the war and on conditions in the government-run camps seem to have contributed to the expulsion of UNICEF's James Elder by the Sri Lankan government in September 2009 (Randeep Ramesh, "Sri Lanka expels UN official who criticised camps," Guardian, 6 September 2009).

122 David Keen, 2008, Complex Emergencies, Cambridge: Polity.

and this sometimes extended to the “safe zone” in Mullaitivu district, Sri Lanka. The war in the former Yugoslavia, of course, suggests every reason to be sceptical about the safety of zones that are declared to be “safe.” In the case of Sri Lanka, the concept of the “safe zone” was often used rather uncritically by aid agencies — and without inverted commas.¹²³ The UN Office of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator observed on 16 February 2009: “While the designation of the new safe zone has provided some respite for the tens of thousands of civilians trapped for weeks by heavy fighting which has killed and injured many people, reports from yesterday indicate that there was some fighting inside the zone.”¹²⁴ But if there was fighting inside the zone, it is difficult to see how it was providing “respite.”

Human Rights Watch reported in February 2009, “Many of the civilian deaths reported in past month have occurred in an areas that the Sri Lankan government has declared to be a ‘safe zone.’”¹²⁵ The International Crisis Group reported on 9 March 2009 that “government forces were shelling civilian areas, including in the no-fire zone which it had unilaterally declared, without any significant pause... While they [an estimated 150,000 IDPs] are mostly in or near the government-declared “no fire zone” along the coast, the government itself has shelled that zone daily.”¹²⁶ USAID noted, “Satellite imagery taken during the month of March indicated extensive shelling occurring in and around the no-fire zone.”¹²⁷

123 For example, a WFP press release noted on 27 February 2009: “... most displaced persons are now concentrated in a new safe zone along the eastern coastline of Mullaitivu district (WFP News Release, “Sea route opened for WFP relief food deliveries to Sri Lanka,” 27 February 2009).

124 UN Office of the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator, Sri Lanka, “UN Sri Lanka statement,” 19 February 2009.

125 Human Rights Watch, 2009, “War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni,” February, p. 13.

126 ICG, “Conflict Risk Alert: Sri Lanka,” 9 March 2009.

127 USAID, “Complex Emergency Fact Sheet no. 4,” 10 April 2009, in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, p. 5.

By mid-March, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was saying that a range of credible sources indicated more than 2,800 civilians had been killed since 20 January,¹²⁸ and by April this figure had risen to 6,432.¹²⁹ The ICG’s Gareth Evans noted on 1 May 2009:

Despite the government’s April 2 announcement that the military had been ordered to cease using air attacks, artillery, and other heavy weapons against remaining LTTE-held areas, such attacks have carried on with increasing intensity...the government has defaulted on its promises and paid mere lip service to calls for restraint, all the while pursuing its military onslaught.¹³⁰

It is important to remember the context in which the Sri Lankan government was trying (successfully) to prevent condemnation of government actions in both the UN Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council.

If the “safe zone” was not safe, another difficulty with the concept of a safe zone — and a further reason not to adopt the term uncritically — is that the concept may be used to indicate or imply that civilians outside this zone have no right to safety. A Ministry of Defence statement of 2 February 2009 is revealing here:

While the Security Forces accept all responsibility to ensure the safety and protection of civilians in the Safety Zones, they are unable to give such an assurance to those who remain outside these zones. Therefore, the government, with full responsibility-

128 OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN), 13 March 2009, cited in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, pp. 5-6.

129 AP, “UN says nearly 6,500 civilians killed in Sri Lanka,” 24 April 2009, cited in IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), “Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis,” 1 May 2009, pp. 5-6.

130 Gareth Evans, “Falling Down on the Job,” Foreign Policy (ForeignPolicy.com, 1 May 2009, on www.crisisgroup.org).

ity, urges all civilians to come to the Safety Zones; and also states that as civilians who do not heed this call will be among LTTE cadres, the Security Forces will not be able to accept responsibility for their safety.¹³¹

Some aid workers perceived a high degree of indifference to civilian welfare on the part of the government. One UN worker suggested: "In Kilinochchi, the government was not caring about civilians or even humanitarian workers. Twice our office was bombed because LTTE offices were nearby. If they kill 100 civilians for one LTTE, they will say it's a success."

Many saw advocacy as too cautious. Another UN worker commented:

A figure of 2,500 civilian deaths in the no fire zone — we got Tamil press figures checked against health workers' figures. But the humanitarian coordinator, under pressure, said he can't verify the figures. It's probably over 4,000 already a few months back. But a statement about child recruitment came from UNICEF and it makes the government happy.

Advocacy and "Counter-Advocacy"

Caution on publicising casualty figures seems to have reflected, in part, the government's determination to challenge any uncomfortable data. As one UN worker noted:

Opportunities for leverage are very small. Data is seen as key, but you can always turn it round and question the sources. Sometimes data can backfire, as when a WFP guy said the situation was worse than Somalia.¹³² If you expose the casualty figures, it can raise

the alarm but it can also backfire, unless you can back it up 100 per cent of the way. There's a process of counter-claim and counter-counterclaim and then people get bored of it — and that's part of the strategy.

In general, aid agencies — whether in the UN system or NGOs — appeared very much on the defensive in a context where any action could easily be turned against them, notably in a media subject to extreme government control. On several occasions, humanitarian organisations have been depicted by the Sri Lankan government and in the Sri Lankan media as undermining the fight against terrorism by lending support to a negotiated settlement or, in the case of several aid agencies, as lending direct material support to the rebel LTTE.

Some of the more chaotic elements in the aid agencies' response to the Tsunami seem to have contributed to the deep suspicion of NGOs.¹³³ Certainly, there was a sense of wanting to avoid accusations of working against the government. One NGO worker commented:

At the national level, we are working with IASC [Inter-Agency Standing Committee], now the humanitarian team, Vanni group, CHA [Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies]. We coordinate with each other. It's become very hard. We had what was called "the coffee club." The reason it was called that was to demonstrate informality of NGOs working in the north. After the Tsunami, it was whittled away but then became quite important again. It makes its way to the media, seen as elitist, a "crème de la crème" international NGOs group scheming against the government.

In a context where many international agencies have been wary of being seen to sup-

131 Human Rights Watch, 2009, "War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni," February.

132 It appears that a WFP representative in the north said on BBC Sinhala news service that the situation was as bad as Somalia; WFP later issued an apology.

133 On the Tsunami response, see in particular Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2006, "Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami."

port a long-term resettlement scheme, some officials were able to make accusations of providing inadequate assistance or preferring tents to more solid structures. As one UN worker noted: “The government says Manik Farm, this is what we’re providing. What are you providing? It’s so easy to turn it on its head.”

NGOs have been publicly taken to task, and major donors have not been spared harsh criticisms from government officials. UNICEF was accused of supplying high-energy biscuits to LTTE terrorists. OCHA came under some strong pressure from the government, in line with patterns elsewhere (including Darfur). One senior aid official noted:

The government has really taken on the NGOs, castigating them. It’s front-page news if any aid agency vehicle is found to be used by the LTTE, or equipment donated. NGOs have been browbeaten and scared and some were asked to leave. But the government is also quite ruthless with donors — the German ambassador, the Norwegian ambassador, the [Sri Lankan] Foreign Ministry has done dressing down sessions.

One diplomat recalled:

An underlying theme is the feeling that international NGOs in the north and east have been tools of the LTTE. The LTTE decided who could work where and there were LTTE people inside the NGOs, and this is partly correct because the international NGOs needed some kind of understanding with the LTTE. The government frightens, singles out organisations and individuals — for example, UNICEF, Norway, the US — depending on the issue. It’s craftily and skilfully done and they avoid collective efforts on various issues. Another technique is to start with very extreme demands and shake up what’s possible. The proposed MoU [Memorandum of Understanding]

agreement, for example, you shift your perception of what is possible. If you get a compromise, it can still be quite harsh and obstructive.

Some defended a more cautious approach, but at the same time still stressed the government’s extreme sensitivity to criticism. For example, a senior NGO worker said:

UNHCR has quite a lot of influence, from experience in the east. Negotiations here can’t be done on the basis of demands. It was something UNHCR learned in the east, making demands for IDPs in the east and the government just shoots it down. These lessons are embodied in the aide memoire and guidance notes for the north. The government has genuine concerns around security... It’s about picking your battles. The government is incredibly sensitive about being criticised and losing face. Any criticism and the government just turns it round and blames someone else... One helpful thing is the UNHCR scorecard, part of an ongoing evaluation. What’s good is it’s saying to government, “These are what we have achieved and this is the gap that still remains.” With protection, the space for negotiation is a lot slimmer. The most success in terms of negotiation is less formal and public. Anything that’s thrown out publicly, the government will react in a certain way. The JVP, JHU, NFF [National Freedom Front], the nationalist groups, can criticise the government. The government had to rely on their support to win the last election... The government doesn’t like it when, in their words, we go running to our ambassadors and chase up on issues... It’s about being sparing with your political capital, for example if the ambassador is running to the government every time there’s a problem, it becomes ineffective.

A strong impulse to defend national sovereignty (and in particular the influence of vociferous Sinhalese nationalist parties) was seen as creating particular difficulties when exerting international pressure. As one diplomat put it: "Normal restrictions on abuse include when officials like to have friends abroad, visas to North America and Europe. But here it's the reverse. The more you bash the international community, the more votes you get." Whilst most interviewees stressed the government's sensitivity, many felt there was still significant leverage. For example, one academic stressed to me the value placed by many politicians in Sri Lanka on having access to educational and health services in Europe.

The NGO worker who stressed the importance of "picking your battles" also emphasised the importance of not disrupting the efforts of local NGOs:

There are tensions between international and national NGOs. There are some very well established entities in this country. Some local NGOs have very good connections to top leaders and in international organisations we tend to go like a bull in a china shop — and when national agencies are trying to negotiate, it becomes difficult for them when the internationals rush in.

Advocacy and Interests/Incentives

If prioritising delivery over advocacy was often seen as contributing to the shrinkage of humanitarian space, we need also to consider the possibility that this priority was shaped not just by a concern to deliver humanitarian aid but by various kinds of self-interest. At the individual level, these include concern for personal safety and for one's career. There are important organisational interests. These appears to have had some influence in de-prioritising protection in many crises around the world (as have geopolitical concerns, considered below); Sri Lanka is not an exception.

Fear is a major reason for silence on key issues. One UN worker put these fears very bluntly: "Anyone who speaks up gets a bullet in the head. Aid workers here, there are 49 dead and two more unaccounted for. Sri Lanka is the most dangerous place in the world for aid workers." An International Displacement Monitoring Centre report noted that "At least 63 national staff [of humanitarian agencies] are believed to have been killed between 2006 and 2008, while other forms of violence have included staff abductions."¹³⁴ To the extent that keeping quiet is linked to concern for safety, it underlines the need for the international community to push hard on the investigation of violence and threats against aid workers. The use of paramilitaries makes this harder but does not take away from the urgency of tracing responsibility.

Part of the climate of intimidation in Sri Lanka has been a fear of being expelled from the country as a *persona non grata*. Such expulsions can inhibit the capacity of aid agencies and may make life more difficult for aid staff left behind. One senior UN worker said, "PNG makes it harder for the agency as a whole." Thus, avoiding such an expulsion can be defended on the grounds of prioritising delivery. However, some interviewees also suggested that aid staff were worried about their individual careers, and that a record of being PNG'd might in practice hold them back. One UN worker said, "Fear of PNG should not be driving our response," adding that the UN should be making clear that being PNG'd in Sri Lanka (or similar contexts) would not adversely affect one's career. An affinity for Sri Lanka as a place to live was seen as another factor that had sometimes kept advocacy within certain bounds. One diplomat remarked: "International NGO staff have kids at schools, and they like this country. They get money from Western donors and the government knows they can push people because they like to stay

¹³⁴ IDMC (International Displacement Monitoring Centre), "Sri Lanka: Civilians displaced by conflict facing severe humanitarian crisis," 1 May 2009, p. 11.

here.” In September 2009, the Sri Lankan government expelled James Elder, head of communications for UNICEF in the country after he expressed concerns for Tamils in the government-run camps. Elder had earlier spoken of the “unimaginable hell” suffered by children in the last stages of the war.¹³⁵

Organisational incentives are important too. For aid agencies, there may also be significant financial advantages in being seen to be present in a prominent emergency — perhaps particularly in the context of what one aid worker referred to wryly as the current “shortage” of international humanitarian crises. Aid agencies may argue that they need to raise funding if they are to be in a position to do any good; while this argument clearly contains a degree of truth, it also runs the risk of inviting the pursuit of access at any cost.

The way that fear and more mundane motivations could feed into advocacy failures was summed up by one national aid worker:

In many places [within Sri Lanka], the international community fails to raise their voices. One reason is working permits will be cancelled or they will be named a “white tiger” [that is, a white supporter of the LTTE rebels]. Plus, everyone is hunting for bread [money].

In line with some longstanding criticisms of humanitarian aid,¹³⁶ some saw the incentives within aid organisations as geared primarily to-

wards tangible and measurable outputs rather than co-ordination or protection, which are more difficult to measure and usually more politically sensitive. For example, one UN worker noted:

The incentive is to keep your head down, do your job, put your tents up, deliver your food. Output-based indicators can be a problem here, and all the reporting lines are upwards. There are very few incentives to do the coordinating meetings. It becomes an “add on” — a bit like training.

Some felt that this applied strongly to WFP. One senior WFP staff member said, “There’s a huge problem with our financing practices. We’re funded through a percentage of the tonnage we deliver. You keep the sub-office open through a certain amount of tonnage — whether it’s purchased internationally, locally, or comes in kind.”

Advocacy and the Geopolitical Context

As for the geopolitical context, a UN worker said of the military campaign from 2006, “There’s never been a serious international opposition to the war.” One UN aid suggested:

The only leverage is much higher up. I don’t think we’ve been clever in negotiating... I don’t think anyone thinks Sri Lanka is important. You just have to compare injuries and deaths to Gaza. It’s been a forgotten catastrophe, partly because of the restrictions on journalism. But if it was seen as important, the journalists would have been pressing to come and have access.

A local NGO worker commented in September 2009:

We do not know what the WFP/UN policy is on these new camps... In terms of advocacy, I think the UN as a whole should take a tougher stand at Headquarters level and continue to express its displeasure over the continued detention of IDPs... This can’t go on — it’s against international law and

135 Randeep Ramesh, “Sri Lanka expels UN official who criticised camps,” *Guardian*, September 6 2009.

136 Randolph Kent and Ken Wilson have both stressed how a concern with organisational health and growth can create a bias towards measurable and visible solutions to measurable and visible problems, including a bias towards shifting physical commodities to people once they have become thin in environments that can be easily monitored and publicised. See, for example, Randolph Kent, 1987, *Anatomy of Disaster Relief: The International Network in Action*. London: Pinter Publishers; Ken Wilson, 1992. “A State of the Art Review of Research on Internally Displaced, Refugees and Returnees from and in Mozambique.” Stockholm: Swedish International Development Authority; David Keen and Ken Wilson, 1994, “Engaging with violence,” in Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi (eds.) *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, London: Zed Books and Save the Children, UK.

everything else. On your own, individual agencies can't do much advocacy. The government is very strong and popular and controls the media... The sad reality is that larger geo-political realities (China, India, Pakistan, Iran) give the government of Sri Lanka unprecedented freedom to act with impunity and disregard international humanitarian law.

A Local UN worker commented:

There is value in using the human rights framework, including the Supreme Court. UN agencies and the humanitarian community need a common position. There's been no common position on when emergency funding should end or whether to support the centres housing ex-combatants... The problem is not having a coherent stand on an issue and not coordinating with the UN stance as a whole. If the state knows it can play one agency off against another, what's the leverage?... Within agencies, I don't think there is a push for a common stand."

Somewhat similarly, a local NGO worker said:

The UN Resident Representative wasn't able to get a common position on Manic Farm from a human rights framework. There has to be a lead from the UN Resident Representative and his team, supported by New York and Geneva... There've been a lot of missions — John Holmes, Walter Kaelin, but have they really made a difference?... Many do not realise that by funding internment camps, you are violating national laws."

It was stressed to us that the UN Country Team brought several protection concerns to the notice of the government both in writing and orally — and at times through the media. But many also felt these efforts were weak. The international geopolitical context is important in shaping what actions a Country Team can and

cannot take, and here circumstances were particularly unhelpful.

When Sri Lanka has not been forgotten, it has often been seen as pursuing a useful "war on terror." Particularly important in setting the context for repeated concessions to the Sri Lankan government has been the government's success in positioning the war against the LTTE within a more general framework of a global "war on terror." Both the US and the European Commission have declared the LTTE a terrorist group. As one aid worker put it, "All the western countries have said the LTTE is a terrorist group, so you can't back up and say it's not really a terrorist group." An NGO worker commented: "The government has played as much as it can on the global war on terror, but also at the same time they use the defence that this is a purely national problem, not an issue that has international implications."

It is notable that while the "war on terror" framework plays well with many Western governments, at the same time the Sri Lankan government has explicitly aligned itself with the Non-Aligned Movement (and Russia and China) and has portrayed itself as standing up for national sovereignty and standing up to the West and the declining colonial countries of Europe. Nor has acceptance of the West's "war on terror" been unconditional. Asked about media allegations of abuses in the camps, Sri Lanka's Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva Dr Daya Jayatilleka replied:

... anyone who has read Noam Chomsky on Kosovo will know the pernicious role played by sections of the western media in artificially creating the impression of a humanitarian crisis which provided the smokescreen for intervention. These media you speak of are the very same that tried to convince the world that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction!¹³⁷

137 Dayan Jayatilleka, "Stand up for others, they stand up for you," interview in Waani Operation, 3 June 2009 [wannioperation.com].

Whilst the strengths and weaknesses of diplomatic initiatives have not been a primary focus of this report, some of those consulted were close to discussions in New York, and they suggested that most powerful governments wanted to get the conflict over as quickly as possible. This seems to have set the context for statements and silences from UN officials. Also influential, it appears, were the prospect of co-operating with the government on reconstruction and the desire to avoid being ejected from Sri Lanka.

When it came to the leverage of WFP in particular, some stressed that the major protection responsibilities traditionally lie with UNHCR and ICRC. However, one major donor representative commented:

It's mainstream to say humanitarian actors have no leverage. I disagree. They are implementing operations and have advocacy tools and mandates. WFP is not known for its large advocacy approach. But it's part of the UN family. We see WFP not as a technical implementer of food on behalf of the government, which is taking credit for it and winning elections, but the PRRO [Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation], which is currently running for two years, is a non-adequate instrument to deal with the current humanitarian crisis. We've told WFP this since October 2007. You have a mandate, you're part of a family. You cannot reduce yourself to logistics! We understand the humanitarian imperative of bringing in the food now overrules. But from the beginning, there were problems of access and insufficient attempts to monitor and control distribution because the government said "We'll take care of it."... The system did not work before the influx [the mass influx into Vavuniya]. The system was not functioning before... The government continues to use the argument, "It's under the PRRO

and we distribute." They've used this politically to say, "We did the distribution."... We need to keep emergency at three months. WFP is raising money for 20 months for the emergency under the PRRO, saying it ensures the pipeline. But this is too long.

He said EMOP would be a more appropriate vehicle for WFP assistance than the PRRO. One experienced UN worker disagreed with this:

If we had an EMOP [Emergency Operations Programme], you would still have to work with the government. A PRRO allows you multi-year flexibility. You're not confined to 12 months. If conflict re-escalates, you can switch to relief mode, you don't have to go back for an EMOP.

The donor representative who stressed that WFP was "part of a family" went on to suggest that advocacy had been inadequate over a prolonged period:

There is New York. There are other levels [of the UN]. We have reacted a bit late. In late 2008, the government didn't want assistance in the Vanni. They saw it as interfering with the war operation. The humanitarian community was ordered out of Vanni. WFP was allowed, not others... Then we asked, "Would you consider international monitors." The first reaction was "no," and then "yes." Just before he left [that is before leaving his post as WFP country director], [Mohamed] Saleheen felt bold to push hard [in relation to the convoys].

A perceived lack of openness about the inadequate quantities of food reaching the north was seen as a significant problem. One UN aid worker said:

The MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] with the government left

WFP in a difficult situation. WFP was not making a fuss about the fact that the food going into the Vanni was not sufficient. From February 2008 was probably the last time a full ration went in for the IDPs. It was probably around 50 per cent after that. It was kept a secret. It was felt that a better fuss might jeopardise the food that was going in.

Some reports did note security obstacles to relief but the way this was expressed was usually fairly general. Thus, a June 2007 WFP report noted, "Security concerns, logistical constraints and lack of access have restricted food assistance by more than 50 percent over the last nine months."¹³⁸ Not uncommon was the attempt to preserve an image of governmental good intentions even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Thus one 2007 WFP report noted:

*Although the government is trying to maintain a normal level of health services in the conflict affected areas in the North and East, this can not be achieved due to the destruction of health facilities in a number of areas and the lack of qualified medical personnel. Virtually everyone in the Vanni area suffers from inadequate medical and educational services due to the conflict-imposed embargo.*¹³⁹

According to Human Rights Watch:

At a December 10, 2008, Inter-Agencies Standing Committee (IASC) meeting, WFP officials estimated that the food deliveries into the Vanni since the September 2008 withdrawal had been 38 percent below the minimum nutri-

*tional requirements, but this estimate was based on an estimate of 200,000 IDPs, which is lower than the 230,000 number used by other UN agencies, and also uses the date of the first convoy, October 2, as the starting date for its needs assessment, ignoring the fact that no food deliveries were made in September. Because of this, the WFP figures underestimate the actual food shortcomings in the Vanni.*¹⁴⁰

An October 2008 WFP report noted that, "WFP's assessments...indicate that current WFP activities have largely achieved the goals of maintaining good nutritional intake and preventing malnutrition rates among beneficiaries."¹⁴¹ However, this statement sits oddly with a statement on page 5 of the same report: "Malnutrition levels among children under 5 are high, especially in the main conflict areas of the north and east, where 40 percent of children are underweight, 31 percent are stunted and 28 percent suffer from wasting." What reconciles the two statements is the reference in the more optimistic statement to malnutrition rates "among beneficiaries" (that is, among those who have received food). On page 9, this is explained further: "... malnutrition rates among beneficiary populations have remained stable, while they increased in unassisted conflict-affected households."

The humanitarian arms of major donor bilateral organisations and governments frequently compete with other arms of government, which may put commercial or geopolitical aims ahead of humanitarian goals. In these circumstances, a greater degree of openness within the UN system offers the prospect of strengthening the arguments and the persua-

138 WFP, 2007, Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment, based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June, p. 38.

139 WFP, 2007, Sri Lanka Food Security Assessment, based on the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Approach, final report, June, p. 37.

140 Human Rights Watch, 2008, "Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region," December, p. 28. Human Rights Watch (p. 27) acknowledges some food stocks in the Vanni at the time the government ordered the humanitarian withdrawal.

141 WFP, Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, Sri Lanka 10756.0, 2008, Projects for Executive Board Approval, agenda item 8, 27-30 October, p. 3.

siveness of those with more humanitarian mandates and agendas. In line with other emphases on a lack of openness in the UN system, one representative of a major donor commented:

We need from our UN partners transparency, admitting there are obstacles and problems. The system as presented on paper is not the reality. It's not helpful if these elements remain hidden — the protection environment, problems of distribution.

We need to consider the possibility that in the absence of a political will to counteract the “end-game” against the LTTE, emphasising the provision of humanitarian aid rather than the provision of protection served as a convenient way of demonstrating (not least to Western constituencies) that “something was being done.” Certainly, there are precedents for this, the most notorious example being international inaction over the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the subsequent high-profile humanitarian assistance for Rwandans in Zaire/DRC and Tanzania. In his book on war in the former Yugoslavia (with the ironic title of *Love Thy Neighbour*), Peter Maass expressed a common sense of betrayal arising from the neglect of fundamental security issues:

What, [the Bosnians] asked, was the point in feeding us but not protecting us? So we can die on a full stomach? There was much truth to this: the main humanitarian problem in Sarajevo was not a lack of decent food but a surplus of incoming shells.¹⁴²

Another relevant case is Sudan — over a long period. As early as the 1980s, protection issues were consistently neglected in favour of a focus on humanitarian relief;¹⁴³ in 2004

the International Crisis Group noted, “The U.S. is still fixated on getting humanitarian workers into Darfur, a worthy but insufficient objective.”¹⁴⁴ In the case of Sierra Leone, the international community largely turned a “blind-eye” to abuses by Sierra Leonean government forces in the early- to mid-1990s when the emphasis, once again, was on intervening through “humanitarian aid”; this form of intervention seems to have served as a substitute for vigorous diplomatic intervention. More generally, Mark Duffield has observed that with the end of the Cold War there was a drop in diplomatic interest in many parts of the world and humanitarian agencies were encouraged to step into the vacuum left by this diplomatic withdrawal. Some aid workers, for example in Afghanistan, saw themselves as legitimising this withdrawal.¹⁴⁵

Whilst most of those interviewed in Sri Lanka viewed humanitarian aid as a sincere attempt to help (rather than a cynical attempt to show that “something was being done”), many nevertheless adhered to the view that, for complex and sometimes self-interested reasons, an excessive proportion of the international community’s time and energy was put into delivery compared to protection.

There is little doubt that the relief convoys from October 2008 were a major priority within the UN system and among the diplomatic community. One aid worker with experience on the relief convoys remembered, “All the convoys were very important. There was political pressure from the [UN] Secretary General.” One UN worker in Colombo said: “There was a big diplomatic push on the convoy, a huge energy investment.” I suggested that this was not a bad thing in itself, but perhaps there was only so much energy to go round? He replied, “Yes, and competency too.”

142 Maass, Peter, 1996, *Love Thy Neighbor: A Story of War*, London and Basingstoke: Papermac, p. 30.

143 See, for example, David Keen, 2008, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983-89*, Oxford: James Currey (first published, 1994, Princeton University Press).

144 ICG, 2004, “Sudan: Now or Never in Darfur,” p. 13.

145 Mark Duffield, 2001, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*, London: Zed Books. Michael Ignatieff noted this perception in Afghanistan in his 1998 book *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York: Henry Holt.

Obstructions to aid delivery and abuses against aid staff may also serve a function in absorbing time and energy that might otherwise be devoted to advocacy and protection more generally. The WFP country representative in Sri Lanka was having to put a good deal of energy into pushing for the relaxation of security measures for UN staff at checkpoints as well as for the early release of UN staff and dependents from IDP centres.¹⁴⁶ A similar process of absorbing valuable energies has been notable elsewhere, for example in Sudan.¹⁴⁷

Advocacy may also have been impeded by “pipeline” issues. A WFP report on relief in 2008 noted, “... the pipeline faced critical shortfalls in early 2008 due to high food prices.”¹⁴⁸ When WFP did not have enough food available for relief, this complicated the attribution of responsibility for lack of distributions, providing something of an “alibi” for government-led obstruction. Insofar as WFP’s own supply problems were contributing to low distributions, it was also clearly harder for WFP to point the finger at the government. Insofar as supply shortages encourage more “targeting” to the neediest areas, WFP becomes more vulnerable to government accusations of “bias,” for example in favour of the north.

Advocacy and Leverage

When it came to advocacy and pushing for improvements in protection, one source of leverage was seen to lie precisely in the government’s extreme sensitivity to critical or inconvenient information. As one UN worker noted: “The state is concerned about its international reputation. Otherwise, you don’t control information and journalists to the extent that they do.”

The government seems to have had a sensitivity to any accusation of creating hunger, and certainly in neighbouring India any suggestion

of a “famine” is considered a major political threat to incumbent politicians.¹⁴⁹ One UN aid worker noted: “From A to Z, the government controls all the logistics of WFP. The government is a bit afraid of humanitarian groups jumping on them and saying ‘You’re making hunger.’” One senior UN worker suggested: “The government realised early on that they didn’t want an outright food-based humanitarian situation. The government was keen food goes into Kilinochchi and Mullativu.” The fact that the government organised some convoys of its own also suggests a degree of desire to get relief through. Food on government convoys was sold in the market at low prices. An aid worker who travelled with some of the convoys said: “The LTTE wanted convoys because it wanted food for people — and the government doesn’t want to be the villain.”¹⁵⁰

Several interviewees stressed that WFP’s resources were valuable to the Sri Lankan government, and that this implied some significant degree of leverage (including on protection issues). One UN worker commented:

From a protection perspective, WFP needs to be fully in the protection dialogue in Colombo. They do come to meetings, but we need more action on food from a rights perspective... Food, it’s been pushed very hard, with hours of negotiating, including senior diplomats in Colombo. So it’s isolated from other humanitarian issues, and from protection issues in particular. There is scope to use the issue of food more in terms of pressuring the government. The government is entirely reliant on a

146 WFP, Internal situation report, 27 March 2009, p. 1.

147 Aid workers in Darfur have stressed how bureaucratic obstructions took time and attention from a range of other issues, notably protection issues.

148 WFP, “Standard Project Report 2008, Sri Lanka, Project 10067.1.”

149 See, for example, Alex de Waal, 1997, *Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey.

150 While there does seem to have been a desire on the government’s part to use food to influence population movements, one senior UN worker felt there was an awareness that food was not the only factor here: “Yes, the military probably would say ‘Separate the civilians and use food aid’, and they put a lot of obstacles in our way. But there was also some recognition that civilian movements were also being shaped by the LTTE, so it was not all about food.”

*daily basis on the international food...
They've needed WFP since day one.*

Adopting a similar emphasis on the importance of WFP adopting a clear protection role, an NGO worker suggested: "WFP can play a key role in freedom of movement. It can do more than NGOs, maybe going for timelines — for example, in relation to screening." A local NGO worker said, "WFP could lobby for more freedom of movement if it's done in a sensitive way." Another local NGO worker cautioned:

Protection is a very sensitive thing. It should be taken over by UNHCR, that's their mandate. WFP is a service organisation. They shouldn't take protection as a main them, but as a cross-cutting issue. If WFP takes that as one theme, the government will listen and talk. If they [WFP] emphasise protection too much, the government can react.

In line with the view that the government needed WFP, one experienced UN worker observed, "Economically, the government wasn't fit to respond to the emergency needs." When I suggested that the Sri Lankan government was neither particularly poor nor particularly desperate for international assistance, one UN worker replied: "In a way, they are desperate. They can't feed them [the IDPs], they can't house them." Another UN worker echoed this analysis: "Government money is running out. They are not paying salaries in certain ministries. It's given us more bargaining power in relation to the government. They can't afford to look after the IDPs." Another UN worker, a Sri Lankan national, said: "I don't think the government would say go away completely, because they can't feed hundreds of thousands of people. WFP gives 70 per cent plus of the food. If that's not leverage, then what is?" One senior UN worker said:

The food's value to the government is substantial. It saves a lot of money for them... The economy has rapidly de-

teriorated over the last six months — a costly war and the international financial crisis and loss of tourism, and demand for textiles and rubber is down, remittances are down (including Tamil). The government has decided to go to the IMF having shut off the IMF a few years ago. A 1.9 billion dollar bail-out package is wanted.

In mid-May 2009 US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton suggested it was an inappropriate time for the loan; but talks between the IMF and the Sri Lankan government progressed in any case.¹⁵¹

If WFP was seen as having at least some leverage, so too was the international community more generally. One national aid worker commented:

I'm still having doubt why the international community cannot make pressure, like economic barriers [sanctions] for Sudan. We are not challenging the government calling it a "humanitarian war." It's actually not. Yesterday around 400-500 people died in the no fire zone... They shoot and shell with multi-barrage. Every day they killed at least 200 people.

One UN worker observed:

It's easy to place the argument at the end of the spectrum, saying "Is it about walking away?"... IDPs are still in camps, two high security camps in Mannar are around a year old. We failed them... Nothings changed. It's just more people... When we had space to negotiate, we weren't doing it. There were small numbers coming into Vavuniya last year [2008], November, December and January 2009. The

151 See, for example, transcript of a press briefing by Caroline Atkinson, Director, External Relations, International Monetary Fund, 21 May 2009 (<http://www.imf.org/external/np/tr/2009/tr052109.htm>).

government could have met needs at that time if we'd withdrawn. Now they couldn't afford to. It's been played really nicely... We have to fill gaps at 100,000 and didn't have to at 20,000. It's not a poor country.

Another aid worker echoed this analysis:

Pressure should have started much earlier, at the time when we had to leave the Vanni. Pressure from the UN was not enough. Now if you say we stop the food today, it's very hard to pressure. With this amount of people, it's too late. In September 2008 or in February this year, more should have been done.

One UN worker asked:

Have there ever been consequences for the state in terms of how it behaved? They started to shell hospitals and health care locations, each shifting to makeshift facilities. Nothing in the vicinity was retuning fire. Plus, limiting medical aid that did go in [to the Vanni]. It was fundamentally eroding the ability to meet health needs.

Another senior UN worker said simply: "Nobody backed words with a threat." A diplomat noted:

As long as the Security Council doesn't see a threat to international security, as long as there's no willingness to impose sanctions, nothing will change... Short of serious sanctions, there's nothing we can do. The EU is playing with GSP plus [an updated Generalised System of Preferences] trade concessions. But it has had no effect, in my view. The state says it's willing to take the loss. The IMF loan is coming up. There's a possibility of restrictions. It's to be decided 10 May. There's no sign of the state getting more accommodative, though there may be some con-

cessions in the two days before 10 May. If the EU or US want, they can block it.

In other contexts, including Guatemala, loans from IFIs have helped to undermine the efficacy of pressure on human rights exerted by a range of donors.¹⁵²

One UN aid worker suggested: "Unless the government faces high criticism from major donors, India, the US, the Japanese, economic donors, the donors won't realise international influence." Other analysts have pointed to a marked lack of coherence or unity among donors as something that helped to undermine the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement.¹⁵³ As things stand, the government seems to have been able to play actual and potential donors against each other. An April 2009 report in the Economist noted that Pakistan had become Sri Lanka's main arms supplier, with Iran providing 70 per cent of Sri Lanka's oil supply on credit and Libya poised to make a soft loan of 500 million US dollars.¹⁵⁴ A senior UN worker commented:

If you don't get assistance from the US, Iran can come in and offer an oil deal. If not the UK, then China is happy to provide. Japan is ever ready to help the country economically. Arab countries are ready to come in. India does scare Sri Lanka, but they have a strategy for India.

China's role was seen as important. As one UN worker suggested, "China is vetoing an alternative path. They have their separatist movement in Tibet, and are supporting the government [in Sri Lanka] with weapons." The Sri Lankan government has cultivated Arab states through its position on Palestine. According to the "Wanni Operation" website (waaniperation.

152 David Keen, 2008, Complex Emergencies, Cambridge: Polity.

153 Georg Frerks and Bart Klem, 2006, Conditioning Peace among Protagonists: A Study into the use of Peace Conditionalities in the Sri Lankan Peace Process. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations.

154 "Dark Victory," Economist, 23 April 2009 (economist.com).

com) (subtitle: "Strengthening the hands of brave soldiers"):

... President Mahinda's support for Palestine (He's President of Palestine Association if Sri Lanka) has won the hearts of Arab Leaders (at the cost of Israel), resulting in all Arab Countries such as Bahrain, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia voting for Sri Lanka at UNHRC.

The website notes that in addition to cultivating these countries and China, Russia, Pakistan and India, the President has also made friends with President Gaddafi in Libya and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran.

In many ways, the Sri Lankan government has had a good development record, and the current regime emphasises successful development initiatives as part of its legitimacy. Thus, President Mahinda Rajapakse stated in April 2009:

The government has launched a massive development drive while prosecuting a war against the most ruthless and powerful terrorist outfit in the world. The government has not reduced welfare programmes or subsidies. This is the only government that has launched five port development projects, four power generation projects, reconstruction and rehabilitation of thousands of kilometres of rural and urban roads, four express ways and hundreds of other development projects simultaneously while in a war against terrorism.¹⁵⁵

Mindful of certain developmental successes, a WFP Concept Paper for 2008 noted that "... Sri Lanka is on course to reach most of its Millennium Development Goal targets, though the national development figures hide the striking regional inequalities."¹⁵⁶ The Economist

155 Sandun Jayasekera, "President offers to rehabilitate Prabha," Daily Mirror, 21 April 2009.

156 WFP PRRO Concept Paper for 2008.

noted in April 2009, "Coinciding with a period of high economic growth outside the war-zone, in the west and south, the conflict has come to seem an increasingly anachronistic blot on a hopeful country... Mr Rajapaksa has almost erased this stain."¹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that other states — including Uganda and Rwanda — have been able to harness a relatively good developmental record in securing "space" for abuses against internal and external enemies (and not least for military interventions in the DRC).

The Future:

It seems quite possible that controlling access may be maintained as a "card" to deter moves towards some kind of war crimes tribunal. Scepticism on the possibility of a quick return of displaced people to the Vanni has been noted above. It does appear that the government does not want these people further south, so this may feed into some kind of return, particularly if international objections to internment are strongly and continuously expressed.

Whether the war is now over is an interesting question. Military victory has been declared (and there may be significant electoral advantages in being seen to win a comprehensive and decisive military victory). However, there seems to be a degree of awareness in official circles that the war may mutate rather than end. One government minister offered the view that the security problem will be similar to that faced by the UK or the US, and will consist of terrorism. Several of those interviewed expressed the view that some kind of guerrilla action was likely to continue. It was felt that many LTTE soldiers and sympathisers will have sought to avoid almost certain death or capture within the narrow, so-called "no fire zone" on the north-east coast, and would likely have slipped away southwards. One diplomat noted:

The LTTE has lost a conventional war and probably will never come back and

157 "Dark Victory," Economist, 23 April 2009 (economist.com).

have territorial control. But that does not mean they are out of the equation, for example as an exile movement with the diaspora controlling, and the ability to exercise terrorist attacks is unknown.

Several aid workers and some government officials mentioned that the way displaced people are treated will affect the likelihood of their supporting some kind of violence in the future. Internment may give huge numbers the impression that they are being treated as terrorists.¹⁵⁸ It is worth noting in this connection that in early 2002, WFP reported, "The residents of the [government] welfare centers, who were displaced by fighting in the north and east of the island nation, have been deprived of the food rations they normally get from WFP because donor support has fallen off sharply."¹⁵⁹ Residents had received very little food, if any, for the previous three months, WFP's then Country Director noted. I have not seen any analysis of what contribution, if any, this shortcoming made to the resurgence of violence in Sri Lanka.

Beyond the immediate question of the displaced, the manner in which governance issues are addressed will be particularly important. One NGO worker observed:

The LTTE is resurgent in Batticaloa and Ampara, different cells hiding and coming up. It's far, far from over. In the east they can use Karuna... Now people feel less secure than when the LTTE was there. There are lots of abductions, extortions, white vans — people feel very, very insecure in the east. We need pressure from the international community — what sort of governance is going to be put in place?

Many were pessimistic here. A local aid worker observed:

The war won't be over. If they give a political solution, it can be. But they didn't give before. Do you think they will give it now? The [Tamil] bargaining position is zero. Another group will come and the LTTE will also be strong. The way the government is treating the Tamils will make another liberation movement.

Another local aid worker commented voiced his scepticism at the idea of a "military solution":

We have not solved the problem. We have militarily defeated the armed group. But all the factors that led to this conflict are still there... Even the opportunities for reconciliation, the government is not using them. We are heading for a big disaster, not rebellion soon because the Tamils will be very passive and Tamil politicians will be compliant. But the government is still not sending any message to the Tamil community that they are equal citizens, especially confining them in camps. There has not been a significant move on the hearts and minds.

Progress on some kind of autonomy in the east was also seen as important. As one senior aid official put it: "The government will have to deliver, on services and some general autonomy, to the east, or Kurana etc will take some action." The east remains prone to violence and the provincial government chief minister Sivane-sathurai Chandrakanthan has minimal power.¹⁶⁰ A recent ICG report on the east noted:

Violence, political instability and the government's reluctance to devolve power or resources to the fledgling provincial council are undermining ambitious plans for developing Sri Lanka's Eastern Province... Despite the pres-

158 "Dark Victory," Economist, 23 April 2009 (economist.com).

159 WFP Press Release, "WFP urges aid for forgotten victims of strife in Sri Lanka," 28 February 2002.

160 "Dark Victory," Economist, 23 April 2009 (economist.com).

ence of tens of thousands of soldiers and police in the east, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have proven able to launch attacks on government forces and on their rivals in the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Puligal (TMVP). There have also been violent conflicts between different factions of the pro-government TMVP, and impunity for killings and disappearances, many of them apparently committed by government security forces and/or their allies in the TMVP. Extortion and criminality linked to the TMVP also remain problems.¹⁶¹

There may be considerable reluctance to hold an election in northern province unless an anti-LTTE victory can be assured.¹⁶² When I raised the question of the Tamils' weak bargaining position with one diplomat, he replied:

Yes, there won't be big concessions... The Tamil civilian population, in the first year you will have people back on their feet and back to their original place, with rehabilitation and gradual development of some kind of Tamil polity, trying to implement the thirteenth amendment [governing the powers of provincial councils]. If there's a minimal interpretation of this, it's almost useless... The pessimistic scenario is the government will do as they have done in the east, put in leaders and ministers with almost no support from the Tamils, and disappearances, killings of those who raise their voices... The population is so fed up with war, no willingness to take up arms, so you don't have to do much to avoid big problems in the next 5-10 years. Plus, the northern Tamils detest the LTTE. Colombo Tamils might be more positive, and have only

the experience of suffering at the hands of the government, while the northern Tamils have suffered from the LTTE.

On the other hand, it was felt that a period of reconstruction might offer a better chance for outsiders to pressure for political reform. As this diplomat put it:

The biggest lever we will have is to help Sri Lanka with reconstruction and we must demand a legitimate political process in the north and a restoration of democracy and a state where minorities have a rightful place. It's appropriate to say, "Show us what you're planning to do. If we do not like it, we cannot fund it." The problem now is we are confronted with a humanitarian imperative, and the government is so fixed on winning the war that they don't have resources for saving lives. There will be a better opportunity to exercise influence later on.

That opportunity might even be increased if the "victory" in the war with the LTTE weakened the influence of parties espousing Sinhalese nationalism. The diplomat suggested, "Who is President depends on the parliament, to give minorities substantial concessions, then he has to have a new mandate from the people with less presence of JVP and JHU. That's the optimistic scenario."

Perhaps the grounds for pessimism remain more persuasive. We have noted that some kind of anti-government violence remains likely, and there would seem to be elements on the government "side" that have an interest in some kind of continued conflict. Suppression of freedom of speech has flourished under what some local analysts (CPA) have presented as "A State of Permanent Crisis" (the title of one of their publications),¹⁶³ a situation where "both conflict as well as the assumption of extraordinary pow-

161 ICG, 2009, Development Assistance and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Lessons from the Eastern Province, 16 April, Executive Summary, p. 1.

162 "Dark Victory," Economist, 23 April 2009 (economist.com).

163 Asanga Welikala, 2008, "A State of Permanent Crisis: Constitutional Government, Fundamental Rights and States of Emergency in Sri Lanka," Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo.

ers and measures by the State have become normalised as a part of everyday life.”¹⁶⁴ I suggested to several military officials that the end of the war would soon give them the opportunity to demobilise many of their soldiers, they replied without hesitation that this would not be possible or necessary given the continuing importance of “prevention” and “anti-terrorism.” Several other interviewees stressed that this is a highly militarised society and economy and many people, particularly in poor rural areas, have come to depend on income from the military (including the home guards). Development of the north is likely to be highly militarised and with “High Security Zones” a prominent feature, one local UN worker stressed. Certainly, there has been a huge increase in military spending in recent years. The government’s military expenditure rose from 562 million in 2003 to 856 million in 2008.¹⁶⁵ The possibility of a highly militarised peace was raised, and one aid worker commented: “The military are going to war. They have lost a lot of men. They will want their share, their fiefdoms afterwards.”

Conclusion: Key Points

Number 1: Credit for Delivering Food in Extremely Difficult Circumstances

Those we interviewed tended to give WFP a great deal of credit for getting large quantities of food to the Vanni in extremely difficult circumstances, particularly when the war intensified from September 2008. WFP was seen as having reacted flexibly and with ingenuity in its logistical operations, including on the establishment of logistics hubs, the use of local purchase, the practice of sealing trucks, and the use of ships as an alternative to trucks. In many

ways, this represents a significant practical contribution in a context where many agencies were left as virtual bystanders.

Number 2: Government Manipulation of Aid

Relief operations have been largely subordinated to the government’s military and political agendas. Many of the mechanisms involved are quite familiar from past emergencies.

A key technique has been using relief to weaken populations linked to rebel groups and ultimately to promote the depopulation — for an unknown period — of areas of rebel strength. Many aid workers pointed to a set of policies and practices on the part of government actors that have had the predictable effect of debilitating, displacing and ultimately interning a very substantial portion of the Tamil population. In practice, the Sri Lankan government has used the broad rubric of “security issues” to impose very far-reaching restrictions on the medical supplies, water and sanitation and food that have been directed at the Vanni region.

A second technique has been using relief as cover for military manoeuvres, notably when it came to the aid convoys from October 2008.

A third mechanism has been to use visas, travel permits, compulsory evacuations, written agreements, and various kinds of intimidation to ensure that damaging information does not leak out via the activities of aid agencies.

A fourth mechanism in Sri Lanka (clearly in some kind of tension with the previous three) has been to use the existence of humanitarian operations in order to demonstrate the government’s good intentions and “humanitarian credentials.” This has provided important legitimacy for the government even as it has contributed to humanitarian crisis in important ways.

A fifth mechanism is using the existence of relief operations as a kind of “leverage” over the international community — notably to encourage quietude over protection issues.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Asanga Welikala, 2008, “A State of Permanent Crisis: Constitutional Government, Fundamental Rights and States of Emergency in Sri Lanka,” Centre for Policy Alternatives, Colombo, p. 237. Mark Duffield drawn attention to the paradoxical existence of “permanent emergencies.”

¹⁶⁵ The Sipri Military Expenditure Database, 2009, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (<http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>). These figures are adjusted to keep the value of the dollar constant, based on 2005 values.

¹⁶⁶ This might also extend to leverage over the question of “war crimes,” which has recently come to prominence.

Number 3: Too Close for Comfort?

Whilst assisting food deliveries in certain respects, WFP's rather close relationship with the Sri Lankan government has carried important risks. Many of those interviewed expressed a concern that WFP, whilst in effect assisting the government's war/relief strategy, did not do enough to raise the alarm on protection issues — or even on shortcomings in delivery. WFP was felt to have significant leverage in relation to the Sri Lankan government, though this also had its limits (particularly given the geopolitical context of a "green light" for the government's "military solution"). Several interviewees stressed that WFP's resources were extremely valuable to the Sri Lankan government (particularly in the context of economic crisis and the mass influx into Vavuniya), and that this implied some significant degree of leverage (including on protection issues). Another source of leverage (for the international community in general) was seen to lie precisely in the government's extreme sensitivity to critical or inconvenient information.

Number 4: Emboldening the Government

When it came to advocacy, exerting early pressure *at an early stage* was seen to be important, and one example was the need to pressure for IDPs' rights at the point when the scale of IDP movements was relatively small. When there is a mass influx, governments may be unable to provide full assistance and the perception of "humanitarian imperative" may make advocacy and pressure on protection issues more difficult. Many interviewees stressed that making concessions to the government on various humanitarian principles had had the effect of emboldening the government in its relationship with the humanitarian community, and one source said the humanitarian community had been reduced to begging rather than negotiating. Official untruths need to be challenged at an early stage — or the international community risks "buying into them." Aid agencies' reluc-

tance to speak publicly on sensitive issues has even extended to withholding the results of nutritional surveys. Also criticised by aid workers in the field were the relatively weak protests — at least in public — at the ejection of aid agencies from the Vanni in September 2008 and at the civilian casualties resulting from government shelling and aerial bombardment during the intensified military push from around that time. Any protests were seen as too little and too late. The lack of protest at child deaths resulting from these military actions was contrasted by some aid workers with what they saw as a much greater degree of public protest of child recruitment (by the LTTE). In general, aid agencies — whether in the UN system or NGOs — appear to have been very much on the defensive in a context where any action could easily be turned against them, notably in a media subject to extreme government control. Interviewees questioned whether the Sri Lankan government had ever been subject to any significant consequences for its various attempts to restrict humanitarian space. The government's abundant options for international support were felt to have been significant here.

Number 5: Openness on Shortcomings in Protection and Assistance

It is important for WFP and other agencies to be as frank as possible about shortcomings in protection and assistance. This can strengthen the hand of those within powerful international governments who may have very significant leverage that can influence the Sri Lankan government in particular. The humanitarian arms of major donor bilateral organisations and governments frequently compete with other arms of government, which may put commercial or geopolitical aims ahead of humanitarian goals. In these circumstances, a greater degree of openness within the UN system offers the prospect of strengthening the arguments and the persuasiveness of those with more humanitarian mandates and agendas. Key protection failures in Sri Lanka include: civilian casualties

resulting from the war; the internment of hundreds of thousands of displaced people; and the lack of clear timelines for screening or resettlement. In terms of assistance, a perceived lack of openness about the inadequate quantities of food reaching the north was seen as a significant problem. Where there is a strong desire to show that relief has met the humanitarian needs, there may be a dangerous tendency to minimise the numbers in need; this in turn can weaken advocacy and protection efforts. In general, WFP and other UN agencies need to be mindful of the dangers in giving the impression that key protection and relief gaps are being met when in reality they remain extremely grave. There is also a danger that the UN in general serves a function for powerful international governments in giving this impression.

Number 6: Advocacy as a Way to Enhance “Humanitarian Space”—and the Question of Incentives

Whilst some aid workers expressed the fear that their ability to deliver relief would be impeded by advocacy, two important counterarguments emerged powerfully from the research.

First, several of those interviewed in Sri Lanka felt strongly that a prioritisation of delivery over advocacy had ultimately had very adverse affects for the protection of target populations, and had actually done little to enhance staff security or even the ability to deliver relief goods and services. In fact, the amount of “humanitarian space” in which aid agencies could operate was perceived as having shrunk alongside a series of concessions to the Sri Lankan government. Even the delivery of food relief often fell very short of the level of need.

Second, in practice decision-making has not been *simply* a question of weighing delivery against advocacy. Many other considerations have come into play, including geopolitical concerns and organisational or bureaucratic interests. These considerations underline the possibility that the balance between advocacy

and delivery may not have been optimal from the point of view of the target population. Particularly important in setting the context for repeated concessions to the Sri Lankan government has been the government’s success in positioning the war against the LTTE within a more general framework of, first, an purely internal struggle where sovereignty is under threat, and, second, a global “war on terror.”

To some extent, food aid has been used — by the Sri Lankan government and by international governments — to show that “something is being done” while an international “green light” has been given to the government’s pursuit of military victory. Other kinds of self-interest inhibiting protection have included; the fear for personal safety (which is distinct from a concern with delivery and implies a need for strong international and national action to improve such safety); concern for individual careers (which has been a disincentive to risking ejection); concern for organisational health and growth (with incentives often centring on delivering measurable outputs rather than enhancing protection). Each of these appears to have had some influence in de-prioritising protection in many crises around the world, and Sri Lanka is not an exception.

The research suggests that today’s trade-off, even when it appears to be a sensible one, may create a worse situation (and a smaller humanitarian space) tomorrow — because of the signals sent. Speaking out is not simply something to be balanced against delivery (or abandoned in favour of delivery); it is also a question of meeting agencies’ protection mandates. Insofar as aid agencies are actively assisting in a government plan of interning large elements of the northern population, speaking out becomes a clear responsibility. As one UN worker put it, “It’s our money that allows them to support this plan.”

The interviews left me with a strange impression: it was generally *someone else* that had the leverage. It seemed, moreover, that those who did have some ability to pressure the government were most often leaving this task

to those who either did not have the leverage or who were unwilling to use it because of a perceived humanitarian imperative.

One UN worker said simply: “We are not without power, we are without a will to use it.” While individual agencies may have significant leverage, the best opportunities to pressure for improved protection clearly lie with coordinated action, notably through the country office and with full support from New York. Yet pressures on these lines seem to have been sporadic at best, and came mostly from April 2009 when the Sri Lankan crisis became a major international media story. Again, the weak international response to government ejection of aid agencies from the north in September 2008 was a key moment.

Number 7: Who Learns the Lessons?

We found a significant concern that collective concessions on important humanitarian may send a signal internationally (as well as locally), that emboldens abusive actors elsewhere

to step up their manipulation of aid (and a parallel manipulation of truth). Whilst the international community often talks about “lessons learned” from various humanitarian crises, there is a need to be sensitive to the lessons that governments and other key actors within particular crisis-affected areas may be learning from crises elsewhere (and indeed from the crisis in Sri Lanka). This underlines the importance of defending humanitarian principles. It would seem that local actors may be learning lessons faster than the humanitarian community.

Number 8: Advocacy and the Pipeline

Advocacy may also have been impeded by “pipeline” issues. When WFP did not have enough food available for relief, this complicated the attribution of responsibility for lack of distributions, providing something of an “alibi” for government-led obstruction. Insofar as WFP’s own supply problems were contributing to low distributions, it was also clearly harder for WFP to point the finger at the government.

The Limits of Humanitarian Action: WFP, Food Assistance and International Aid in DR Congo

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Preface

This case study is based on a visit to DRC undertaken by the authors from 7th–16th May 2009. For reasons of time and security, the visit was confined to Kinshasa and to Goma town in the East of the country. The report is based on a combination of interviews, review of documentation and some limited programme site visits, followed by discussion and reflection.¹⁶⁷

The limitations of such a review will be apparent. It is not an evaluation of performance (of WFP or anyone else), nor do we attempt to make detailed recommendations specific to DRC, since we are not in a position to do

so. Rather, the idea was to consider the challenges to providing food and other forms of humanitarian assistance in DRC, the way those challenges were understood by humanitarian actors, what approaches had been tried to overcome them, and what broader lessons might be learned from this for working in conflict situations. We have at times expressed our views robustly with the aim of provoking discussion, and we hope this will be taken in the positive spirit intended.^{168, 169}

¹⁶⁷ The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

¹⁶⁸ The ToR for the case study are included in an Appendix.

¹⁶⁹ The authors would like to thank all those who gave their time to contribute to the study. In particular they would like to thank the staff of WFP in Rome, Kinshasa and Goma for organising and hosting the visit during such a busy period. We hope the result will be found useful and worthwhile.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a population of around 60 million unevenly distributed over 2.4 million square kilometres (roughly the size of Western Europe) and bordering 9 other countries. It ranks 177th of 179 countries UNDP Human Development Index. Decades of misrule and lack of investment, exacerbated by conflicts, have destroyed the government's capacity to administer at all levels. The entire territory of the DRC, including the conflict zones, is affected by the dilapidated state of the infrastructure, the lack of roads and other travel links, and the weakness of basic state services.

Although the west of the country remains in a state of relative peace, the populations are victims of acute malnutrition, epidemics, violence and serious violations of human rights. The dilapidation of road, river, lake and rail infrastructures and the lack of capacity of the government make access to affected populations difficult and costly. It is estimated that only 20% of the country can be accessed by road. Less than 2% of roads are paved.

A needs assessment process for the 2009 Humanitarian Action Plan was conducted in August and September 2008. At that time, 1,350,000 persons remained displaced in South Kivu, North Kivu and in the north of Province Orientale; 193 out of 515 health zones did not have the necessary capacities to respond to health crises; and some 1,700,000 children were estimated to be suffering from acute malnutrition, of which almost 1,000,000 were severe cases. Overall, a third of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition (stunting), and 13% suffer acute malnutrition (WFP/FAO 2006).

Levels of school enrolment fell from 92 percent in 1971–1992 to 64 percent in 2001–2002 (PRSP).

Background and Context

The history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) has been one of violence, conflict and chronic under-development stretching back to the colonial period.¹⁷⁰ More recently, it has been the setting for what has been called the worst emergency to unfold in Africa in recent decades, measured both in terms of human suffering and regional insecurity. Between 1998 and 2006 alone, an estimated three to four million “excess” deaths are estimated to have occurred, most through indirect effects of conflict: disease and malnutrition.¹⁷¹ Despite its relative wealth in terms of natural resources, the sheer scale of the country and the struggle to control its territory and resources (minerals, diamonds, timber) have led to a state that is fragmented, anarchic, weakly governed, highly unstable in parts and with some of the worst human development indicators in the world.¹⁷²

In 1997 when neighbouring Rwanda invaded the country to flush out extremist Hutu militias (the ringleaders of the Rwandan genocide of 1994), it gave a boost to the anti-Mobutu rebels. These quickly captured the capital, Kinshasa, installed Laurent Kabila as president and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo. A rift between Kabila and his former allies sparked a new rebellion, backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Other states (Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe) took Kabila’s side, turning the country — especially the eastern provinces of Kivu — into a vast battleground. The fight for control of the country’s enormous mineral wealth and large scale human rights abuses characterised the conflicts. Following

the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999, a UN peacekeeping mission was deployed (MO-NUC — see below). But this second Congo war lasted from 1998 through to 2003, with devastating human consequences.

After continued violence following the formation of the Transitional Government in 2003, presidential and national elections — the first in 45 years — were held in the second half of 2006. Political progress and improved security in some areas allowed internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees to return home, especially in Province-Orientale (except Ituri), Équateur, Katanga, Maniema and some parts of Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu. Some eastern regions including Ituri, Katanga, the Kivus and Maniema nonetheless remained seriously insecure: there were clashes between the *Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo* (DRC armed forces) (FARDC) and troops loyal to the dissident Laurent Nkunda (Tutsi) in Nord-Kivu. These tensions affected the presidential elections in August 2006.

The behaviour of some units of the army and of militias such as the *Front démocratique pour la libération du Rwanda* (FDLR; Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda — a “Hutu power” militia) contributed to continued insecurity and human right abuses. Coup attempts and sporadic violence heralded renewed fighting in the eastern part of the country in 2008.

In an attempt to bring the situation under control, the government in January 2009 invited in troops from Rwanda to help mount a joint operation against the Rwandan rebel Hutu militias active in eastern DR Congo. Rwanda also moved to arrest the Hutu militias’ main rival, General Nkunda, a Congolese Tutsi hitherto seen as its main ally in the area.

Beyond the Kivus, a further crisis has arisen because of the activities of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) from Uganda. The LRA is active in the North of Province Orientale (Haut Uélé) using the area as the safe haven and perpetrating atrocities against local civilian population.

170 The country was known as “Belgian Congo” prior to independence in 1960

171 These figures and the basis on which they were derived are much debated. The primary source is the surveys conducted on behalf of IRC between [...], Roberts, L. et al]). For a recent review of the debate between the relevant experts, see the recent HNTS peer review paper which casts some doubt on the high mortality estimates from the IRC surveys.

172 Ranked 177 out of 179 in the HDI

The UN peacekeeping mission in DRC (MONUC)¹⁷³ is an important actor on the ground. MONUC was established by United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1279 (1999) and 1291 (2000) to monitor the peace process of the “Second Congo War,” though in fact it has been actively engaged with the conflicts in Ituri and the Kivus.

In May 2007, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted an ambitious new mandate for MONUC under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorising the use of force to tackle the threats to peace and security posed by the armed groups in Eastern Congo, and specifically to protect civilian population. In addition, it was tasked with shoring up the democratic institutions in the country and promoting human rights. As of March 2009, MONUC remains under strength — and according to many, under-equipped and inadequately deployed — with numbers standing at 18,430 uniformed personnel and 3,700 civilian staff.

MONUC and the Congolese Army are jointly planning operations in South Kivu to eliminate the FDLR (operation “Kimia 2”). At the time this case study was being undertaken, over the weekend of 9-10 May 2009, FDLR rebels were blamed for attacks on the villages of Ekingi and Busurungi in South Kivu province. More than 90 people were killed at Ekingi, including 60 civilians and 30 government troops, and “dozens more” were said to be killed at Busurungi. The FDLR had attacked several other villages in the preceding weeks and clashes occurred between FDLR forces and the Congolese Army. The most recent attacks have forced a significant number of people from their homes.

This “peace enforcement” collaboration by MONUC with the FARDC — in effect, a joint counter-insurgency campaign — is the subject of considerable controversy. Many of the atrocities being perpetrated in the east of the country are attributed to government troops of the FARDC. Moreover, in the eyes of some, the qua-

si-belligerent status of the UN forces — symbolised for example by the use of UN-badged attack helicopters against rebel forces — compromises the neutral and independent status of the UN humanitarian and development agencies, potentially jeopardising their safe access to affected communities. MONUC is blamed by many Congolese in the East for failing to protect the civilian population, and this unpopularity appears to colour opinion of UN agencies as well (since most do not distinguish the agencies from MONUC). Both have been the subject of angry demonstrations by local populations.

WFP started to operate in DRC in 1973 and most of the current humanitarian actors have been active in the country since the mid-1990s with the eruption of the conflicts. Until 2006, their actions were limited to the conflict zones in the east of the country. Since then, the humanitarian community has gradually started enlarging its area of operation, having noted alarming indicators elsewhere the country.

Funding for humanitarian programmes in DRC has risen dramatically from \$150 million in 2002 to \$650 in 2008. Levels of development assistance have fluctuated over the same period, but have consistently been 5-10 times greater than humanitarian assistance.¹⁷⁴

Defining Vulnerability and Aid Priorities in DRC

Defining Vulnerability and Setting Response Priorities

It is important in a context like DRC to distinguish *acute* and *chronic* vulnerability, and the risk factors that underlie each. Acute vulnerability, or exposure to short-term hazard, tends to be linked in DRC to localized violence, mass displacement, natural hazards and epidemics. This form of vulnerability fluctuates over time and between different areas and populations, though people in the East have been repeatedly exposed in this way. Chronic vulnerability,

173 A French acronym for Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo

174 Source: OECD DAC

or exposure to persistent hazard, relates to multiple interacting factors, including generalised insecurity, poor health and nutrition, fragile livelihoods and long-term displacement. These are factors that, rather than representing a critical deviation from the norm, have *become* the prevailing norm for many.

Both kinds of vulnerability are in large part a function of structural factors: weak or abusive governance, corruption, impunity and the failure of basic state functions (including security and rule of law), combined with the common features of under-development and poverty: gross disparities in wealth distribution, weak infrastructure, lack of access to services, and so on. There is a strong social dimension to both kinds of vulnerability — particularly relating to gender, age and ethnicity — though the lack of disaggregated data makes it hard to draw many firm conclusions in this regard.

One of the features that make it difficult to design appropriate humanitarian and development responses in DRC is the complex overlaying of acute and chronic vulnerability. The use of the term “crisis” to describe the situation in the whole of DRC, or even the situation in the eastern provinces, is in many ways misleading. It implies a constant state of acute vulnerability. But what characterises DRC is the extraordinary extent of *chronic* vulnerability, evidenced in chronically high levels of mortality, morbidity and acute malnutrition. This coupled with (for many) constant exposure to violent insecurity results in a situation where *crisis* — in the sense of a dangerous deviation from the norm — is no longer an adequate term. Pockets of crisis (or “emergencies”) can be identified within the prevailing norm. In many ways, neither humanitarian nor development approaches as normally understood are well adapted to this kind of context. This point is explored further below.

Five cross-cutting strategic objectives are identified in the common Humanitarian Action Plan for DRC:

(i) Protect & assist IDPs, returned/relocated/repatriated families & host communities

(ii) Strengthen the protection of civilian populations

(iii) Reduce mortality and morbidity

(iv) Restore livelihoods

(v) Promote near-term community recovery.

The choice of these categories reflects judgements about prevailing vulnerabilities and threats. It also recognises the (limited) role that humanitarian action can play in the reduction of chronic vulnerability and the promotion of resilience. In the related Needs Analysis Framework, five “action thresholds” have been identified in order to guide responses. These are based on:

- Mortality and morbidity
- Acute malnutrition
- Incidence of violence
- Population displacements
- Population returns

In each case, a threshold for action is specified (e.g. U5MR >2/10,000/day). These thresholds correspond to the identified major causes of high mortality in the country, and have thus been agreed as triggers for humanitarian response anywhere in the country. Resulting from this analysis, the “humanitarian maps” presented in the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) in 2008 differed from those of previous years. Rather than concentrating on the zones of active conflict in the eastern provinces, the humanitarian community in the DRC was asked to respond to the various emergency pockets identified through the action threshold, wherever these needs may be present.

To some extent, this “threshold” approach avoids the problem associated with distinguishing acute and chronic vulnerability. In focusing on symptoms and outcomes, it points to interventions that tackle the proximate rather than structural causes of vulnerability. Given the scale of the development needs and the necessary limits of humanitarian action, this may be inevitable. But it also serves to highlight the immense (and largely unaddressed) challenge of tackling structural causes.

Perhaps the most important feature of the HAP is that, rather than taking the individual

sectors/clusters as the basis of analysis and planning (as in most CAPs), it focuses on cross-cutting outcomes of concern (the strategic objectives). The approach of each of the sectors/clusters is then considered according to its relevance to the outcome/objective. While not presenting a fully worked out analytical framework for achieving this, it nevertheless represents a considerable advance on sector-based approaches. Given the very limited extent of impact assessment in DRC, it remains to be demonstrated that this leads in practice to more complementary programming and more effective multi-sectoral interventions; but anecdotal evidence, at least, suggests that it leads to significantly more effective practice than previously.

The effects of violence and political instability remain the single biggest variable factor affecting both the general population and those planning aid or investment programmes. The uncertainty this creates affects the ability to plan at every level, and is itself a form of vulnerability and insecurity. When every venture (including aid) is potentially high risk, the business of intervention becomes one of weighing the risk of action against the consequences of inaction. It follows that joint risk analysis is an essential component of joint planning.

Approaches to Food Security in DRC

DRC faces problems with all three dimensions of food security: availability, access and utilisation.¹⁷⁵ The country used to be food self-sufficient, but it last exported food in the 1960s. Some areas remain productive, but on current trends it will take until 2060 to get back to the level of the 1960s. A high proportion of people (exact figures are not available) produce their own food; but there is generally little incentive to produce surplus given lack of access to markets. Purchasing power has

fallen dramatically over the past 18 months with the rise in food prices; particularly since labourers are paid in francs but traders deal in dollars. The Congolese franc is reported to have lost some 40% of its value against the dollar.

The 2007 WFP Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, drawing on the Poverty Reduction Strategy for DRC, put the percentage of food insecure people in the country at 70 percent of the population. The same source identifies a 30–40 % decrease in food crop production (it does not say over what period); a fall in food consumption, which is now put at 1,650 kcal per person per day compared with a requirement of 2,300 kcal/person/day; and increased malnutrition levels among both children and adults.

The 2007 PRRO document states that “in the absence of any recent exhaustive survey, the current nutritional situation cannot be accurately assessed” though it identifies the nutritional situation as being particularly serious in the conflict zones: Ituri, Nord-Kivu and Sud-Kivu, Maniema and north and central Katanga, where “fighting continues to cause massive population movements affecting household food security.” Since the PRRO was launched, numerous surveys indicate levels of malnutrition in other (non-conflict) areas in the centre of country as equally serious. The 2009 HAP records that:

*In the course of the 59 nutritional studies undertaken in the DRC between January and August [2008], **28 nutritional emergencies were identified** (acute malnutrition rate above 5%), **including a majority in the western provinces**. This distribution shows that while acute malnutrition in the conflict zones must be closely monitored, it is also important to take into account the zones affected by chronic food insecurity in the western provinces. **The results ... [indicate] a similar level of vulnerability to acute [nutrition] crises in all parts of the country, including the capital.** [emphasis added]*

¹⁷⁵ For a full “baseline” analysis of food security in DRC, see the WFP Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) report of July 2008.

This finding is perhaps unsurprising given the level of resources committed to food assistance in the eastern provinces. To accept this as the explanation as to why the non-conflict areas appear to suffer levels of acute food insecurity comparable to or worse than those in conflict areas is to assume that food assistance (predominantly food aid) has made a significant impact on acute malnutrition levels in the East. This may be so, though the relative lack of credible impact analysis makes it difficult to establish. What is clear is that the available capacity to respond to (or prevent/mitigate) nutritional crises in the East is far greater than in other areas, given the level of resources, number of agencies, etc. It also seems clear that, though the triggers of nutritional crises may be rather different in conflict and non-conflict areas, the same underlying factors behind food insecurity (poverty, isolation, etc.) affect all areas.

WFP PRRO (10608.0): Targeted Food Aid for Victims of Armed Conflict and Other Vulnerable Groups

Number of beneficiaries

1st year: 1,120,690

2nd year: 2,159,950

3rd year: 1,765,980

Total number of beneficiaries (30 months)

3,367,770 (66 percent women)

Duration of project 30 months

(1 July – 31 December 2009)

WFP food tonnage 210,084 mt

Cost (United States dollars)

WFP food cost 71,830,601

Total cost to WFP 230,874,212

The goal of PRRO 10608.0 is to help to reduce hunger and poverty in a conflict and post-conflict context by providing food aid for 3.4 million people from July 2007 to December 2009.

As appears from the figures in the PRRO description above, the cost of food aid delivery in DRC is very high.¹⁷⁶ As the PRRO puts it *“WFP’s logistics in DRC are complex and costly because of the size of the country, the poor state of roads, air, river and rail communications, the numerous supply corridors and the distances between them and the shortage of reliable transporters. WFP’s intervention areas are generally remote; the limited capacity of the commercial transport sector is likely to result in high costs.* Much of the cost relates to overland trucking of food originating in neighbouring countries, and it is notable that there is a negligible amount of in-country purchase. WFP’s new role as head of the logistics cluster and lead supplier of logistics services presumably allows some economies of scale, and it has recently introduced an air transport service for aid personnel.

The PRRO document records the main conclusions from a 2006 process of joint evaluation of food security and nutrition, subsequent discussion and field verification visits. Four major themes were highlighted:

i) **The impact of mass displacement on food security:** *“Looting and chronic insecurity have caused major population movements and prevented those who stayed behind from producing food. An optimistic scenario assumes that populations will return, but the situation is still precarious in the Ituri, Katanga and Maniema triangle. The ratio of displaced people to returnees will depend on the level of security that the new authorities can guarantee.”* In the event, new displacements in 2008/9 have seen overall estimated numbers of displaced people rise from 1.1 to 1.35 million, despite a significant level of return of those previously displaced. The “optimistic scenario” in the PRRO — on the basis of which it was in fact planned — was overtaken by events.

ii) **Food availability and access.** Despite DRC’s “enormous agricultural potential,” crop

¹⁷⁶ Average internal transport, storage and handling (ITSH) costs for the project are given as US\$353.49/mt in the PRRO.

production is estimated to have fallen 30–40 percent. This is attributed in the PRRO to a variety of factors:

- Continuous population movements
- Reduction of cultivated areas because of insecurity
- Degradation of infrastructures leading to limited access to markets
- Lack of technical assistance for farmers
- Limited access to farm tools and inputs
- Low crop yields and the spread of cassava mosaic disease.
- Looting of tools and food stocks.

It is apparent that only a few of these factors are amenable to aid solutions. Most lie beyond the capacity of aid agencies to influence, at least in the short term; and the prevalence of insecurity and looting render any food production inputs potentially futile, at least in the East. In other words, even the more immediate causes of low food production in DRC (and certainly the structural causes) are currently difficult or impossible to tackle through aid interventions.

iii) **Household access to food, lifestyles and survival strategies.** The PRRO describes coping strategies as tending to be “highly improvised,” particularly by IDPs and refugees with limited means of subsistence compared with host populations. “In most cases they lack access to land and subsist by selling labour or gathering wild foods. Displaced groups live in camps or host families and are entirely dependent on them.”

With a shift towards support for host families since 2007, this may no longer be true. But as in most such contexts, the extent and nature of the burden on host families remains little understood and hard to assess. Levels of dependence on aid among camp populations is variable, but the fact that many displaced families are only partly reliant on aid is evidenced by widespread (though unquantified) sale of food rations and the apparently non-critical effect of WFP reducing rations from 100% to 50% for those who have been in Mugunga camp more than 3 months.

iv) **Nutrition, food and health.** The 2006 joint mission found that “at the national level, global acute malnutrition is 13 percent; stunting is 38 percent, but there are major differences between regions. The joint mission noted that extreme poverty restricts households’ access to food and is a major cause of the high rate of malnutrition. Access to food is limited in terms of quantity and quality: 30 percent of the population eat one meal a day or less; 60 percent eat no more than two meals a day. Meals are generally the same and consist of cassava or corn.”

On the health situation, the report notes that “The rate of maternal mortality is among the highest in the world — 1,000 deaths per 100,000 live births. The main causes of morbidity and mortality are malaria, acute respiratory infections, tuberculosis (TB), diarrhoea and malnutrition.”

In addition to poor general public health, the report notes that “women and children are regularly exposed to sexual abuse by soldiers. This contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS, prevalence of which reaches 4.5 percent — 20 percent among women subjected to sexual abuse; 400,000 people affected by HIV/AIDS need medical care and nutritional support. DRC currently has 3 million orphans and abandoned children, including 1 million AIDS orphans.”

The 2007 PRRO has undergone two subsequent revisions in the light of changing circumstances. It is a very ambitious programme on any analysis — some of those interviewed judged it overly ambitious. It is beyond the scope of this report to comment further, except to note that a programme of this size and complexity places great strains on the available capacity and it is very hard to gauge its continued effectiveness and appropriateness in the light of shifting vulnerabilities.

The International Humanitarian Response in DRC

“There are few places on earth where the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources is as large — or as lethal — as in Congo” (Jan Egeland, former UN ERC).

Although levels of humanitarian funding to DRC have increased dramatically over the past 5 years, most of those interviewed considered that the amounts involved remained grossly inadequate to cover the needs — though many construed need in this context as extending beyond the “humanitarian” in a restrictive sense.¹⁷⁷

As the Executive Summary to the 2009 HAP makes clear, the humanitarians are also concerned about the question of “sustainability” of aid. After a review of interventions since 2006, it was concluded that:

Humanitarian action is effective when it responds to basic needs at the outset of a crisis. However, it is not very appropriate during the prolongation of the crisis, particularly if the beneficiaries are displaced people living within a host community or in isolated sites. The humanitarian actors have noted an increasing need to:

- a. Strengthen the traditional coping mechanisms of the Congolese populations, particularly for host communities in charge of displaced people;*
- b. Limit the dependency on humanitarian aid and favour durable solutions by providing beneficiaries with the means to progressively take charge of themselves.*

This analysis is fleshed out in the main text, which identifies the problem of continued vulnerability to “new crises” as a result of the failure to address root causes. “To confront this situation, and eventually reduce humanitarian aid in the DRC, the actors hope:

- a. To strengthen the capacities of the affected communities to confront new crises through actions beyond emergency aid;*
- b. To establish, in collaboration with the development actors, an early warning mechanism facilitating the identification of communities likely to be affected by*

humanitarian crises, and humanitarian or development aid to prevent them;

- c. Advocate with the Congolese government and the development actors in favour of reorienting the microeconomic development programmes towards the crisis zones, which hamper sustainable development.”*

The HAP therefore includes two new strategies for 2009. “The first is the restoration of livelihoods of the populations and communities in crisis situations, essentially through activities linked to food security, which allow the victims to take charge of themselves. The second is short term community recovery, including a multi sector strategy of post or pre crisis actions, complementing the microeconomic development programmes. Without results with regard to these objectives, the humanitarian actors will have to remain indefinitely in the DRC.”

There are a number of propositions here that are open to challenge. This line of thinking reflects the dominant paradigm of “linking relief and development” and the more recent formulation of “early recovery.” The sentiments expressed rest on highly doubtful propositions both about dependency and about the capacity of people to “take charge of themselves” (a strangely patronising phrase — who is “in charge” of them now?). The reason people in DRC do not recover is not because they have become dependent on humanitarian assistance and need to be weaned off it. The language suggests that aid is a kind of drug, peddled by humanitarians, to which the recipients have become addicted and which renders them helpless. This line of thought may satisfy a self-critical impulse on the part of aid workers but it does not reflect reality, and it misrepresents the part that aid plays in people’s lives.¹⁷⁸ Here as in most contexts, aid is one of a variety of means by which people (even those in camps) meet their basic requirements.

¹⁷⁷ See for example “*Sur quelle base? Document de réflexion, Oxfam RDC*” 2009 which critiques current approaches as being based on criteria other than need, resulting in distortions and a failure to address urgent needs in areas other than those affected by conflict.

¹⁷⁸ See Harvey and Lind, 2006 — ODI

The phrase *take charge of themselves* presumably refers to economic self-sufficiency, but it implies an upward trajectory in people's fortunes (once they "come off" aid) that is not indicated by the current economic and political trends in the country. Indeed many of the assumptions that underlie the "early recovery" paradigm appear to be challenged in the DRC context. There is no inexorable path from relief through recovery to development. The expectation that people will *recover* once a greater degree of "normality" is restored depends on that normality being one in which safety and a viable livelihood are achievable. For many people, in many parts of the country, that does not appear to be the case; indeed, many people are increasingly impoverished and insecure.

It is doubtful whether "coping mechanisms" is the appropriate term here. But preventing existing survival strategies — including asset sale and debt — from becoming unduly detrimental to the medium and longer-term welfare of the households concerned is clearly a priority. At the most extreme end, many "survival strategies" in DRC look like an accommodation to forms of abuse (sexual violence, looting) perpetrated on those who have run out of safe options. Such practices clearly fall in the category of things from which people need protection. That protection may consist partly of providing safer alternatives, including safe flight options where necessary; and it lies largely in the realm of law enforcement and effective area protection by government forces and MONUC. Tackling the source of the threat (e.g. by feeding the predatory army or paying their overdue salaries) may be an unpalatable and insufficient but necessary step.

Underlying the sentiments in the HAP is a stated concern with "sustainability," and an apparent conviction that humanitarian assistance is itself inherently "unsustainable." It is not clear why. It has been sustained (more or less) for the past 15 years in the East, and

indeed has increased significantly in the past 5 years. Over that time, for all its inadequacies, it has probably saved many lives, kept many in reasonable health and prevented livelihoods from complete collapse. In many ways it performs (however imperfectly) the role of a welfare safety net, in the absence of any such provision by the government. While no-one would argue with the desire (expressed in the same text) to *eventually reduce humanitarian aid in the DRC*, this must surely be premised on the *need* for such assistance itself reducing. It is very hard to defend the proposition that humanitarian aid is "not very appropriate during the prolongation of the crisis" in the absence of an effective alternative. If what is meant is that it does not get at "root causes," few would disagree; but that does make it inappropriate or unsustainable. On the contrary, for many it has proved an essential lifeline.

Nevertheless, the failure to evolve and adapt humanitarian approaches over time is open to criticism. It was pointed out by some of those interviewed that agencies have a "vested interest" in continuing their programmes, perhaps exhibiting a form of dependence of their own. At any rate, in DRC and other contexts (including Darfur in Sudan) where humanitarian assistance is provided over long periods, there appears to be a tendency to replicate approaches year on year without taking due account of changes in the environment and the potential for alternative (preferable) approaches. It was not possible in this case study to assess the extent of this tendency, but it was acknowledged by many of the agency staff interviewed. Part of the problem is the limited extent to which staff are encouraged and authorised to be responsive to change in the environment — and to recognise where assistance of a particular kind may be becoming a problem rather than a solution. The aid recipients themselves may also be resistant to change, which complicates the issue. Aid in these contexts becomes part of the environment in which people make decisions.

Where the potential exists to assist people in re-building effective livelihoods and attaining self-sufficiency, most of those interviewed agreed that it would be irresponsible not to attempt to do so, and this was an appropriate goal for at least part of the “expanded” humanitarian agenda. This should not entail simply cutting back aid entitlements, although it may be appropriate to change the aid package in conjunction with other measures to boost self-sufficiency. The question of who provides aid, and the role and responsibility of the government in that regard, was felt by some to be a significant issue. There was some concern that the continued expectation that the international system would deliver basic services would undermine attempts to establish the role of the government as service provider — and in a wider sense, therefore, undermine the fragile social contract. There were dangers, in other words, in filling the vacuum of state provision. The brief visit on which this study is based was enough to show how far removed the current situation is from one in which the state is established the main service provider. There seems to be no prospect of this changing in the short term or even the medium term.

All of those interviewed for this study were asked the counterfactual question: what would happen if you (and other aid agencies) were not here? The majority, at least on the food security side, felt that the result would not be catastrophic. People would find other ways of meeting their needs, though it would have an impact on overall poverty levels. This perspective on food security was influenced by the relative natural abundance of most of the areas concerned. Only in the health sector did all those interviewed feel that the impact of withdrawing international services would be catastrophic, particularly in relation to the loss of vaccination coverage. Some felt that the lack on international agency presence would render people even more vulnerable to violence and coercion (though that opinion did not always extend to the presence of MONUC). All agreed that there

would in any case be a major downturn in the local economy and in levels of employment: the aid machine is good for business.

Strategic and Operational Challenges of Operating in DRC

Multiple Agendas and the Search for Strategic Coherence

In common with other “fragile” states, international aid policy in DRC has to be understood as part of a wider spectrum of policy concerns that, in the case of DRC, include regional security as a core component. The potentially destabilising effect of a politically volatile DRC has been demonstrated repeatedly in the period since the mid-1990s. The fact that DRC’s neighbours have sometimes exacerbated that instability and chosen to exploit the resulting chaos for their own purposes does not negate this. But it points to a key factor in the country’s stability — namely, the support of neighbouring states, notably Rwanda and Uganda, for the mainstream political “project” of the Kinshasa authorities, and in particular for the counter-insurgency programme designed to eliminate the violent opposition (or opportunism) of rebel militia, some of whom operate across international borders.

A central aspect of the current “stabilisation” agenda (to use the current international jargon, now also adopted by the DRC government) involves MONUC as a direct ally in the government’s counter-insurgency campaign in the East. Some of the issues associated with this relating to perceptions of neutrality were mentioned above. A further dimension relates to the rationale for aid programming. It is clear from interviews conducted with donor representatives, MONUC and agency staff that concern with winning “hearts and minds” represents a significant driver for international donors and government alike. While it was not possible to judge the extent to which this had in practice “skewed” the delivery of assistance (contrary to the principle of impartiality), it highlights the challenges of trying to pursue multiple agendas

governed by potentially contradictory principles. Anecdotal evidence ranged from WFP "being told by MONUC where to distribute food"¹⁷⁹ to agency staff being de-prioritised for available places on transport in favour of military personnel. While the humanitarian agencies are working to the HAP priorities, MONUC is working to other (stabilisation) priorities.

Arguably, the heavy weighting of assistance towards the Eastern (conflict-affected) provinces represents a distortion when judged against observed needs in the rest of the country.¹⁸⁰ But this is in part at least a function of the humanitarian judgement that conflict-affected and displaced populations face more acute risks. It also reflects the mandates of the agencies involved, many of which are based around response to conflict and displacement. The immediate causes of food insecurity and other threats to well-being are easier to identify and respond to in the East. For all the insecurity, it is also a relatively easier place to operate in logistical terms than some other areas.

The stabilisation agenda itself has to be set in the wider context of **peace-building** and the consolidation of the process that brought about a new administration in 2006. This is largely beyond the scope of the current paper, but thinking about peace sets the context for much thinking about aid. In a recent paper,¹⁸¹ the Crisis Group identify five priorities for a peace-building strategy for the eastern Congo:

- 1) A credible and comprehensive disarmament strategy for dealing with Rwandan Hutu rebels in both North and South Kivu;
- 2) Resuming security system reform with a new focus on building capacity and accountability in the Kivus as well as Orientale province;
- 3) A specific plan for fostering reconciliation and human security that concentrates on

judicial accountability and the requirements of refugee and IDP return and re-integration;

- 4) Political engagement dedicated to improving governance through increased economic transparency, equitable taxation, decentralisation and local elections; and
- 5) Continuing efforts to sustain stable regional relations.

The Crisis Group does not see any immediate lessening of the requirement for international engagement. On the contrary, *"International engagement and support for peace-building in the Congo at least through the 2011 elections needs to be maintained... with a view to implementing a roadmap that defines precisely the role and responsibility of each partner and the benchmarks to be met so that the process becomes irreversible. Only then should the UN Mission in the Congo (MONUC) begin its drawdown."* What seems clear is that this transition will depend in part on the government demonstrating an ability to assume effective responsibility for the provision of security and the delivery of basic services.

The 2009 HAP does a good job of bringing greater coherence to the humanitarian agenda and (to a limited extent) of defining the interface between this and the development agenda. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it has much less to say about the interfaces with stabilisation, peace-building and related policy agendas. It does not purport to be an overarching policy framework for international intervention, and indeed it is unlikely that consensus could be found for such a framework. The result is that the overall strategy of the various international actors has to be gleaned from a variety of sources (including Security Council resolutions) while the job of working out the practical implications of these multiple strategies and related plans falls largely to the actors on the ground. This is most obviously apparent within MONUC, where multiple agendas (civil and military) are combined in ways which, according to those interviewed, it struggles to make sense of internally.

179 Subsequent enquiries indicate that this is not general practice, and is not a policy endorsed by either MONUC or WFP. The comment cited should be read in this context.

180 See Oxfam paper *"Sur quelle base?"* cited above

181 May 2009, Crisis Group

Beyond the security, humanitarian and development agendas, much of what actually shapes the environment in DRC are the competing commercial and property interests and the struggle for control of land. In DRC more than perhaps any other country, the nature of the conflict has been determined by the desire to control natural resources. This overlies the competition over land rights amongst indigenous groups, whose disputes have been exploited in the war to control resources.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this topic further, the role of China as a major new investor and speculator in DRC should be mentioned. This may bring much needed investment, but some have invoked the spectre of imperial land-grabs in the “Scramble for Africa.”

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) noted in 2002 that the Congo basin was subject to deforestation caused by uncontrolled timber logging and increasing demand for fuel-wood. This lack of regulation has major implications for DRC’s future development prospects, and some immediate implications for what constitutes responsible programming. WFP, for example, has a programme supporting reforestation and the construction of improved stoves in all primary schools benefiting from its school feeding programmes. *“In collaboration with the Government and implementing partners, and principally under the food security cluster, WFP will develop strategies to preserve forest cover while increasing production and managing soils and water sustainably.”* (2007 PRRO)

Security, Protection and Rights

As the strategic priorities in the HAP make clear, the protection of the civilian population from violence and coercion sits at the top of the humanitarian agenda. This concern is not confined to the East, though here at its most extreme, in the form of killings, sexual violence, forced displacement and looting. Much of the requirement for relief assistance is an indirect result of the violence perpetrated on the popu-

lation by the various armed factions, including the government’s own troops.¹⁸² The patterns of violence dictate to a significant degree the aid priorities, though they also dictate the extent to which areas are deemed safe to access for aid workers who are themselves vulnerable to attack. This leads to a familiar paradox: that those who may most require assistance may be the least able to access it. The question of access is considered further below.

While this paper is not concerned primarily with protection, it is central to the humanitarian agenda and (as noted above) there are important links with relief assistance. What constitutes effective protection strategy in such contexts is largely beyond our scope. The Crisis Group paper cited above makes the point that political action as much as (or more than) armed force is essential to an effective international strategy of engagement for protection. *“During the October-November 2008 crisis in North Kivu, when a humanitarian catastrophe threatened in and around Goma, robust political engagement with national and regional actors did more than troops on the ground to protect civilians.”* [op cit].

Protection of civilians occupies an ambiguous space in the humanitarian agenda. On the one hand it is agreed to be a central concern; on the other, there is considerable doubt as to the proper response by humanitarian agencies. There are strictly limited means by which such agencies can provide protection in any direct sense. The way in which assistance is provided can certainly affect people’s security, but to a large extent security lies in the hands of others. This question of who can protect and who is responsible is a difficult one. The Protection Cluster in DRC, for example, lobbies MONUC to protect civilians in camps. But the local authorities and the FARDC have formal responsibility for security in camps — and they are not part of the Protection Cluster. More importantly, they

¹⁸² Although the figures for excess mortality given by the IRC surveys (cited above) are disputed, most agree that large numbers of people have died as an indirect consequence of the war, principally through disease and malnutrition.

are themselves largely held responsible for the very insecurity from which people need protection, and impunity for abuse is rife.

It is clear that in the attempt to protect themselves, people are forced to adopt strategies that are harmful and dangerous. They reach an accommodation with a given armed faction — e.g. by allowing them to exact payments in kind, loot fields, etc. — reaching a kind of equilibrium that involves abuse but at a level that is containable. Shifts in the balance of power and control of territory disturb that equilibrium and create periods of heightened danger, until a new equilibrium is established with a new faction. The same is true of businesses, which regularly pay protection money to the factions. The result is a situation of perpetual fear and uncertainty. Many displacements are reported to arise on the back of rumours rather than actual attacks; but the threats from “exactions” and physical attacks are certainly real.

One of the issues contributing to insecurity is conflict over land rights. Land issues are reported by WFP and others to be “constantly raised” by beneficiaries. Returnees face uncertainty about being able to return to their land, particularly since they often lack title deeds or formal tenancies. Formal and customary land rights may conflict here, and many fear eviction by landlords or those with mineral extraction rights. Social factors are also at play here. Women are unable to inherit land, and what land is available to families gets split into ever smaller parcels as sons inherit their fathers’ land.

Planning and Needs Analysis

WFP’s 2007 PRRO plan is explicitly premised on a set of predicted **scenarios**, expressed as follows:

The international community expects that the situation will gradually stabilize and that returning populations will need assistance to resettle. The Government will have to enhance all available mechanisms to consolidate the peace and promote sound governance and sustainable

development. It will need to embark on reconstruction programmes to enable people to access social services such as health, education and transport and to resume their normal activities.

In the worst-case scenario, conflict would continue in the east, with the risk of entire regions being involved. Volcanic eruptions, drought and floods are also a source of concern ...

The current PRRO is based on an optimistic scenario involving progressive improvement in institutional capacities. The worst-case scenario will be considered in re-examining the planning of emergency operations (EMOPs).

On this basis, WFP sees its basic role as being to *respond to emergencies and organize recovery activities, giving priority support to internally displaced people and returnees...* The operation will focus on areas at risk of serious food insecurity, particularly in the east and Kattanga. WFP has closed several of its sub-offices in the areas less affected by food insecurity and foresees a reduction in the level of aid in 2009.

This raises some interesting questions about what constitutes a realistic and responsible basis for projecting future needs and designing appropriate strategies in such volatile contexts. The 2007 PRRO clearly reflects the dominant political mood at the time. The optimism that informs it proved to be somewhat misplaced, given the subsequent outbreaks of major insecurity in the Kivus and in Haut Uélé (an EMOP was launched in response to the latter situation). But crucially, it also assumes things about capacities and the pace of government-led reform that now (and perhaps at the time) look highly over-optimistic. Perhaps this is what WFP thought its donors wanted to hear, but it raises serious questions about the kind of consensus that allows such propositions to become the basis for planning.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Afghanistan is another notable example of this tendency towards unrealistic scenario planning.

The risk assessment for the PRRO acknowledges the potential for things not to go according to plan. The operation *“will be implemented after the new institutions arising out of the 2006 elections are established. Any political blockage would undermine national unity and lead to a resurgence of hostilities. Fresh population movements would take place and access to target populations would be reduced. Benefits stemming from WFP interventions would be jeopardized, especially the return and resettlement of IDPs and refugees.”* Fresh population movements did indeed occur, but the failure of state institutions to develop cannot be attributed to political blockages or the continuing conflict.

Allowing for the unexpected, the PRRO makes provision for **contingency planning** and situational monitoring, including sentinel sites established with FAO, staff training in emergency preparedness, provision for a contingency plan to be updated regularly, and strategic food stocks set up in Kampala, Goma, Lubumbashi and Kinshasa. When necessary, priorities would be reassessed: *In the event of large-scale resumption of hostilities and consequent limitation of humanitarian work, WFP will refocus its assistance on populations directly affected by the situation; vulnerable groups and malnourished people will be treated in nutritional centres...In addition to life-saving interventions, the other components — FFW, emergency school feeding etc. — will be reviewed in the light of the situation.*

The overall process of needs analysis in DRC is based on a common needs assessment framework (NAF). Needs assessment in a context like this poses some obvious challenges, particularly for survey-based assessments. Population figures (including numbers of IDPs) are much debated, providing an uncertain denominator for calculation of aid requirements. That said, while there are major reported gaps in the available data, more is now being invested in this “diagnostic” aspect of the international programme, including the estab-

lishment of sentinel sites¹⁸⁴ and epidemiological surveillance by WHO. Together with agreed action “thresholds,” these are beginning to provide a fuller picture of needs across the country.

Capacities and resources to tackle these needs remain inadequate, though the Pooled Fund has allowed the HC (who oversees allocation) to take action to deal with some of the most obvious anomalies between areas. Reporting against the Pooled Fund allocations now includes a breakdown of performance against target (numbers of beneficiaries reached), providing a potential basis for **impact assessment** which at the moment is largely absent. The challenge of reporting against *outputs* is already considerable¹⁸⁵; the challenge of reporting against *outcomes* is of a different order again. Determining impact involves establishing correlations and causal relationships between programme interventions and observed outcomes. An important mid-way step is identifying correlations between outcome indicators and risk factors, which can then be addressed through programme interventions known to be effective against those factors. The capacity to do this in DRC is still rudimentary.

Ultimately, for both needs and impact assessment, a combination of (reliable) quantitative and qualitative data is required, including feedback from aid recipients and service users; and a means of gathering such data on a rolling basis. But data alone is not useful: it has to be processed in such a way as to lead to actionable conclusions. The explanatory models for shifting forms of chronic vulnerability are felt by many to be weak or absent. As one interviewee said “we are getting better at measuring, but not at analysing.”

A striking feature of the DRC context is the extent to which the major donors engage direct-

184 Serious concerns were raised in interviews about the quality of the data (about malnutrition, market prices, etc) being generated from these sites. One respondent described it as “very low quality data, very unreliable.”

185 One respondent said, “We are not honest enough about what we actually deliver.”

ly in the planning and priority-setting process, as well as in oversight of programme implementation. The consensus represented by the HAP could arguably not have been reached without this. The Government of DRC is part of this consensus, though many of those interviewed reported difficulties and frustrations in working with government departments and officials. The donor influence (particularly that of the EU, UK and US) is widely perceived as positive, though perhaps some of those interviewed were being diplomatic in their responses. Certainly it has influenced the extent of coordination among UN agencies and NGOs, which is greater than in most comparable contexts. As one major donor representative put it, this is “multilateralism with edge” — a critically engaged but essentially collaborative mode of operating. Judging by the (high) level to which appeals are currently funded, this level of engagement has evidently brought with it increased levels of donor confidence in the whole process.

There is perhaps a danger of “group think” here. The smaller donors were felt by one interviewee to be “scared of going against the consensus view.” Whatever the merits of coordinated strategy, it is clearly essential that the analysis on which it is based remains open to challenge in the face of contradictory evidence.

Related to the point above is the question of the relative independence of humanitarian NGOs in DRC. Some of those interviewed felt that funding through the cluster system had led to a loss of flexibility and independence of thought and action on the part of the NGOs. They had become “implementing partners,” focused on delivery but not necessarily doing their own thinking and analysis. It was also pointed out by some that NGOs tended to have a “survival” mentality, needing to justify and sustain their own continued presence — and therefore perhaps being unwilling to think too critically about the role they were actually playing and the added value of their programmes. The same is probably also true of UN agencies. The authors noted a degree of tiredness and

resignation in the attitude of some of those interviewed. This is not unusual in programmes that have continued for a long time, but it tends to lead to a lack of fresh thinking and perhaps also some carelessness about quality. However, it is not possible to generalise about this and it is noted here as an impression only. It is an impression shared by some of those interviewed for this study.

The Challenge of Coordination

The **integrated mission** structure of MONUC allows for a UN Humanitarian Coordinator who is also Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG). He oversees the design and implementation of the humanitarian strategy embodied in the HAP while working with his colleagues on the overall UN strategic priorities for DRC. Whether such a role is inherently compromised as between political and humanitarian goals has been much debated, and depends on one’s view as to the relationship between political and humanitarian agendas. It does at least ensure a greater degree of programme coherence than might otherwise be the case, and few would question the present HC’s humanitarian credentials or his commitment to the humanitarian cause. If the position is compromised it is perhaps most obviously in the requirement noted above to work to scenarios and priorities that are politically acceptable both to the DRC government and to international donors. The HC position is hardly unique in this respect within the UN system.

The presence of an integrated mission has implications for WFP and for other humanitarian organisations. One OCHA representative said in relation to MONUC “we co-exist with them rather than coordinate,” and stressed the need to keep at arms length where MONUC was “fighting a war.” As the joint operation of the FARDC and MONUC against FDLR in the East gathers pace, it is likely that “humanitarian space” and access would decrease. The NGOs were concerned not to be seen as the aid wing of MONUC (let alone the FARDC).

Even amongst the UN agencies, engagement with the blue helmets of MONUC was guarded. OCHA, UNICEF and WFP do not take part in the “joint protection teams.” UNHCR do, but they make their own protection assessment. And while the UN agencies were reliant on MONUC for armed escort to insecure areas, NGOs tended to make their own arrangements.

This distance between MONUC and the aid agencies was also perceived as one of differing understanding about priorities. As one aid agency respondent said “MONUC see aid as a means to an end. They don’t “get” humanitarianism. They think we and they have the same goals.” MONUC personnel, for their part, were reported to be sceptical about the added value of the humanitarian agencies.

DRC has acted as a test-bed for many of the **humanitarian reform** processes of the past few years — the CERF, the enhanced role of the HC, the use of pooled funding mechanisms and the coordination of sector-specific work through Clusters. While this study is not concerned with the reform processes *per se*, most of those interviewed felt that the reforms, taken as a whole, had had a beneficial effect on the effectiveness with which the international community engaged in the country. The HAP is itself a product of a better coordinated approach. In the sphere of food security, WFP and FAO had combined to form a food “cluster” and this was reported to be working well. Some pre-existing mechanisms, notably the Rapid Response Mechanism led by UNICEF (with IRC and Solidarité as implementing partners) had yet to be properly reconciled with the cluster approach, but continued to play a vital role.

There is a highly structured set of arrangements in DRC to bring the various humanitarian actors together at national, provincial and local level. At national level there is a Humanitarian Advocacy Group chaired by the HC that brings agencies and donors together. At the provincial level is the CPIA that brings the IASC agencies together (UN, Red Cross, NGOs). Then there is the Inter-Cluster mechanism which brings

the heads of the various clusters together, and below that the Clusters themselves. The workings and effectiveness of these mechanisms is beyond the scope of this paper. What is striking is that they add up to a system for sharing information and discussing response priorities between different levels, bottom up and top down. Although there are problems at each level (“we sometimes have to prod the clusters to draw conclusions rather than just present data”), it nevertheless represents a considerable advance on previous practice. The fact that all work to a common humanitarian action plan gives meaning to a process that might otherwise be simply bureaucratic.

Programme Approaches

“Pure” humanitarian response represents a minority of the work undertaken in DRC, confined largely to emergent nutritional and health crises or sudden displacements. As one interviewee put it “most humanitarian programming in DRC is humanitarian *plus*”; that is, it goes beyond a concern with life-saving and acute vulnerability, aiming to ensure people’s access (at least in the short term) to basic subsistence and the conditions for good health. It is here that the disjuncture between humanitarian and developmental approaches is most obvious, the latter tending to involve forms of engagement for which the conditions (at both macro- and micro-levels) appear not yet to exist in many parts of DRC. The interface between humanitarian and development approaches remains unclear, but current approaches assume a transitional phase from one to the other.

The concept of “early recovery” is used to describe this transition, but there is considerable uncertainty surrounding the meaning of the term. Some appear to use it interchangeably with “stabilisation,” pointing to some conceptual confusion with both terms. For OCHA, it represents a demarcation point at which the humanitarian role ceases. In the words of an OCHA official in Goma: “For us it’s our exit strategy. Where the indicators fall below the

defined thresholds and stay there, that's a recovery situation." The Humanitarian Coordinator Ross Mountain uses the phrase "slip-back insurance" to describe the rationale of early recovery; in other words, it aims to ensure that people do not fall back into conditions of complete destitution. In that sense it implies a building of resilience to shocks. Given the significance of the early recovery paradigm in both agency and donor policy, both the theory and practice of early recovery efforts deserve closer attention. The main question seems to be whether such efforts are premised on valid assumptions about the prevailing conditions, and whether these are such as to allow "recovery" in the sense implied.

In this context, it is important to consider the preventive agenda and risk reduction. This forms part of the rationale for early recovery, but deserves consideration in its own right. One OCHA staff member gave the example of cholera epidemics. "Every year there is a cholera outbreak in Maniema. To be responsible humanitarians, we have to work to prevent this, to work "upstream" of the potential crisis." Few would disagree with this in a context of repeated exposure to acute vulnerability. But in addition to emergency response preparedness, it implies a willingness to take action to before a crisis actually materialises and therefore to tackle the key risk factors involved. This is an agenda that falls somewhere between the humanitarian and developmental agendas as normally understood. It does not "fit" neatly, but it surely deserves to be given priority. The question then arises: how far should this same logic be applied to other kinds of threat? It is not clear where the boundaries lie.

Of all the many programme approach issues, one that repeatedly came up in interviews was the question of whether it was better to give in-kind assistance (particularly food) or cash/vouchers to beneficiaries. One WFP manager said "If I was given a free hand, I'd do much more cash and vouchers," but said he was constrained by mandate and available resources.

This was the view of all those who expressed an opinion on the subject. There does appear to be considerable scope to explore alternative food assistance interventions. Given the cost and difficulty of delivering food in DRC, this surely deserves priority attention.

Access and Operational Security

People's access to relief assistance in Eastern DRC has been consistently hampered by insecurity since the "official" end of hostilities in 2003. Agencies' ability to access affected populations has fluctuated over that period and continues to do so. All provinces are currently between security phases 2-4 on the UN five point scale, with the Kivus (beyond Goma and Bukavu towns) on level 4. That said, the overall impression gained was that security was a significant but not currently a dominating factor in operations, with conditions improving somewhat since early 2009 and most areas reasonably accessible.

Since 2006, UNDSS and MONUC have run integrated security arrangement. It appears that the UN and NGOs apply rather different standards with regard to security. One interviewee said that "at least 3 main routes in Kivu that NGOs have considered safe for months are still off limits for UN." However, areas that were previously deemed "out of bounds" by DSS have now opened, though travel in the more insecure areas is restricted to transport with a MONUC escort. NGOs tend to rely on their own judgment about security. As one commented: "We know who to speak to in the Province. Once a particular group establishes control over an area, security calms down and we can negotiate directly. We employ our own security officers."

There is no doubt, however, that DRC remains a highly insecure place to operate, particularly in the East. WFP's operations have been hampered by this and the level of insecurity has also added considerably to the cost of operating. The most extreme case of this is the Emergency Operation (EMOP) in Haut Uélé in Orientale province, where WFP has been forced to mount an airlift of food.

Conclusions and implications for WFP

The scale and nature of needs in DRC pose one of the greatest challenges that WFP and other agencies face anywhere in the world. The human indicators in both conflict and non-conflict areas are extremely serious, there is a country-wide nutritional and health crisis, and around 1.3 million people remain displaced by violent insecurity. The hoped for “peace dividend” following elections in 2006 has not materialised, and international efforts are aimed in large part at consolidating the peace and preventing a slide back into generalised conflict. To this end, the UN through MONUC has sided with the Government in its attempts to bring stability to the East. But the institutions of government, including the army in particular, are weak and crippled by corruption. This provides a highly uncertain platform for cooperation both on security and development.

The particular programmatic challenge facing WFP is to respond appropriately to *both* acute *and* chronic forms of food insecurity. As with other forms of vulnerability, these are combined in complex ways. While most of the means available to WFP — in particular food aid — are best adapted to tackling the symptoms rather than the causes of food insecurity, the aims set for the PRRO demand that it also tackles at least proximate causes and attempts to help people (re-)establish resilient livelihoods. There is little doubt that it is chronic vulnerability that poses the greater challenge — a function not only of conflict but of desperate poverty following years of under-development, isolation and misrule. Here, WFP’s partnership with FAO is potentially crucial. But the prevailing conditions in the country, as well as the challenge of scale and resources, set the limit on what is possible. Approaches like Purchase for Progress can help, though it is striking how little of the food WFP distributes is sourced locally. But unless major development funding is directed at creating the conditions where farmers can profitably bring their produce to market,

efforts to build resilient livelihoods will always be hampered.

Given the scale and severity of the problems, WFP’s programmes represent a vital safety net for vulnerable groups in DRC, whether through its school feeding programmes or through its targeted assistance to displaced and host communities. That said, it is not clear exactly what role that assistance plays in people’s lives. It was apparent, for example, that a considerable proportion of food aid is sold in local markets. Given the huge cost of delivering that food, it is essential to understand the scale of this and the reasons for it, and to explore options (such as cash or vouchers) that might represent both a more cost effective way of transferring value and giving people more choice. While the implementation of the WFP programme in the face of massive challenges is impressive and commendable, the rationale for the programme sometimes appeared to be *assumed* rather than tested in practice. A more general critique of humanitarian practice in DRC could be made on these lines, with programme approaches seemingly not always adapted to take account of evolving vulnerabilities and opportunities. Some programmes seem rather to be self-justifying and self-perpetuating.

Some of the assumptions on which current approaches are based seem hard to justify. Asked the counterfactual question *What would happen if you (and other aid agencies) were not here?*, the majority of those interviewed — at least on the food security side — felt that the result would *not* be catastrophic. People would find other ways of meeting their needs, though it would have an impact on overall poverty levels. Only in the health sector did all those interviewed feel that the impact of withdrawing international services would be catastrophic, particularly in relation to the loss of vaccination coverage. Others felt that the loss of international presence would render people considerably more vulnerable to abuse. Already they were forced to reach a dangerous accommodation to the demands of the military factions, though ex-

actions and otherwise. This would only increase without international presence.

General assumptions about “sustainability” and “dependence” often seem misplaced, based on ideology rather than evidence. Perhaps most significantly, the dominant paradigm of *early recovery* deserves much more careful attention. The crucial question seems to be whether efforts aimed at supporting “early recovery” are based on valid assumptions about the prevailing conditions, and whether these are such as to allow “recovery” in the sense implied. There is good reason to think that in many cases they are not. More generally, the relationship between humanitarian and development approaches is unclear. While the humanitarian agenda as defined in the 2009 Humanitarian Action Plan has a strong degree of coherence, it leaves open the question of how chronic vulnerability is to be addressed — and how the (necessarily limited) humanitarian efforts to increase resilience relate to a wider developmental agenda.

There are many constraints to effective humanitarian programming in DRC, not least the sheer scale of needs and the remoteness and scattered nature of many of the communities who need assistance. Security is a continuing constraint in the East, though this fluctuates over time. The patterns of violence dictate both aid priorities and the extent to which areas are deemed safe to access for aid workers, leading to a familiar paradox: that those who may most require assistance may be the least able to access it. There are other limits set by the availability of resources, though the scale of humanitarian funding has increased dramatically in the past 5 years and there is arguably scope for working in more cost-effective ways. Implementing capacity is certainly a constraint, one that was repeatedly expressed by those interviewed for this study. Skilled and experienced staff (national and international) appear to be hard to find, and the agency coverage on the ground essentially sets the scope of what is currently achievable. OCHA’s field presence

is limited, and it is unclear how well standby arrangements with UNDP are working.

The presence of an integrated UN Mission (MONUC) has significant implications for the delivery of aid, positive and negative. On the one hand, without military escort, many areas would remain inaccessible in the conflict zones. On the other hand, MONUC’s unpopularity (it is perceived by local populations, particularly in the East, as having failed to protect them) colours opinion of the UN in general, and perhaps of other agencies as well. With the stepping up of joint counter-insurgency operations with the Government forces, it is feared that a UN-badged force openly waging war on insurgents will further undermine efforts to establish the UN as a neutral and impartial actor. The policy of aid agencies appears to be to maintain an arms-length relationship with MONUC, but the distinction is hard to maintain for the UN agencies in particular.

Winning “hearts and minds” represents a significant driver for international donors and government alike under the stabilisation agenda. While it is not clear to what extent this has in practice “skewed” the delivery of assistance (contrary to the principle of impartiality), it highlights the challenges of trying to pursue multiple agendas governed by potentially contradictory principles. The prioritising of assistance to the Eastern (conflict-affected) areas of the country when comparable levels of need exist elsewhere reflects both humanitarian and political judgments about the significance of the conflict areas. At the more operational level, priorities sometimes clash: while the humanitarian agencies are working to the HAP priorities, MONUC is working to other (stabilisation) priorities.

On the question of planning assumptions and needs analysis, it seems that some of the scenarios on which forward plans are based are considerably over-optimistic. This probably reflects the question of what is a politically acceptable narrative, but it leads to some false assumptions and unrealistic expectations of what is possible. The 2007 PRRO is an example of this, though adaptation and contingency plans made

response to the subsequent more acute needs possible. Again, this reflects WFP's relatively greater competence in responding to acute vulnerability than to chronic vulnerability.

Needs assessment in DRC has been strengthened considerably across the board in the past 2 year, and this is reflected in the 2009 HAP as well as in the way that Pooled Fund monies are allocated. The discovery that acute malnutrition levels were as high in parts

of Central and Western DRC as in the East led to some re-assessment of priorities. But despite investment in sentinel sites and other monitoring mechanisms, there remains a huge "diagnostic" challenge in DRC, and a need to better correlate outcome indicators with risk factors to inform interventions. Crucially, the crisis *prevention* agenda lies uncomfortably between development and humanitarian actors, and this ambiguity needs to be resolved.

Case Study: Haiti *(Field visit, June 2009)*

Review of WFP's Responses to Operational and Programming Challenges in Conflicts and Complex Emergencies: A Case Study of Haiti

Thomas Gurtner, Consultant

Executive Summary

Of Haiti's 9 million people 60 percent reside in towns, of whom half live in slums; 55 percent live below the poverty line of US\$1 per day. A severely degraded environment, frequent hurricanes, decades of poor governance, poor market infrastructure, small and fragmented landholdings and lack of health and agriculture extension services are all factors that exacerbate poverty and vulnerability. Food security, health and nutrition are extremely precarious in many areas, and critical in some places.¹⁸⁶

Haiti lies in the path of tropical storms and hurricanes; its topography combines steep deforested hills and flood-prone areas: it is hence extremely vulnerable to climatic shocks. Severe degradation of the landscape and natural resources, especially forest cover, is a major factor in vulnerability to disasters and long-term food insecurity.

The current political situation is volatile, with triggers for renewed social unrest. In the opinion of many, this justifies the continued peace-keeping operation led by the United Nations. The coming year is expected to be politically delicate because presidential elections will be held in 2011.

The United Nations integrated mission is dominated by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which disposes of a security force of 9,000 and is also in charge of government capacity-development projects. There are tensions between the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and the United Nations country team that stem from the absence of a comprehensive framework to regulate the roles and responsibilities of United Nations bodies under the "One UN" concept.

Haiti is a fragile state with very limited national capacities. Five previous United Nations missions have failed to make a difference; the current mission shows little sign of sustainable success. There is an urgent need for the international community to develop new joint working methods with a view to pooling humanitarian and development resources in a more unified and comprehensive approach that will respond with urgency and in a focused manner to the critical problems in Haiti.

WFP is known as a credible and reliable partner. Its role appears to be recognized by beneficiaries, who distinguish between it and other United Nations entities. WFP's role as lead agency of the logistics cluster is particularly noteworthy.

WFP is in the process of reviewing its overall approaches. It is willing to invest in innovation and is developing programmatic approaches that are humanitarian and developmental in nature. Critical factors in WFP's success will be its capacity to engage with civil society and to develop a more flexible approach in which outputs can be rapidly adapted on the basis of sound understanding of the evolving socio-economic, climatic and political environment of Haiti.

¹⁸⁶ The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of WFP.

Introduction

Over the past decade, unprecedented security risks, unforeseen outcomes of the “war on terror” and converging military, diplomatic and development agendas have strained the inventiveness and capacity of WFP in complex emergencies. At the same time, new thinking on power dynamics, livelihoods in conflict, fragile state economies and state building are shaping the humanitarian agenda.

Haiti is not at war, but most other considerations apply and WFP’s humanitarian and development interventions continue to grow; they are in the process of shifting in response to the realities on the ground.

This case study examines the challenges faced by WFP, its responses and its practices — good and bad — in delivering assistance.

Objectives and Methods

Objectives

This study aims to identify the challenges and dilemmas faced by WFP, its operating partners and the humanitarian community in delivering assistance in a fragile state such as Haiti. The country is experiencing a protracted crisis characterized by urban violence, natural disasters, extreme levels of poverty and massive exposure to the global economic downturn, which is forcing many more Haitians to join the 4.4 million people already living on less than US\$1 per day.

It will consider the One UN concept, which is dominated by the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and a large military stabilization force; MINUSTAH also has a mandate to reform the police and the judiciary. The study will also assess WFP’s capacity to be a neutral and impartial humanitarian actor in the United Nations integrated mission and to be perceived and accepted as such.

Methods

The case study builds on:

- a desk review of internal and external reports and publications on Haiti;

- a country visit to allow face-to-face interviews and focus-group discussions with WFP staff, partners, other United Nations agencies, government agencies, military and police forces, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and beneficiaries; and
- additional telephone interviews with experts and personnel formerly working in Haiti.

The Country and Context

Historical Background

Following the fall of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1987, a new constitution was ratified that is still in place today. In December 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a charismatic Roman Catholic priest, won 67 percent of the vote in elections that international observers deemed largely free and fair. President Aristide’s radical populist policies alarmed many of the country’s elite, and in September 1991 he was overthrown in a military coup. There was violent resistance to the coup, in which hundreds were killed, and Aristide was forced into exile; there was also a major exodus of refugees.

In July 1994, as repression mounted in Haiti, the United Nations authorized its Member States to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure of the military leadership and to restore Haiti’s constitutionally elected government to power. With United States troops heading for Haiti, the then leaders agreed to step down and President Aristide was able to return in October.

The initial force of 21,000 was transformed into a United Nations peacekeeping force of 6,000 troops in 1995; it was scaled back progressively over the next four years as a series of United Nations technical missions succeeded it. In January 2000, the last United States troops departed.

In February 1996 René Préval, a prominent Aristide ally, was elected President with 88 percent of the vote. But in late 1996, Aristide broke

with Préval and formed a new political party. He and his party won elections in April 1997, but were never accepted by the then government.

In May 2000 elections for the Chamber of Deputies and two-thirds of the Senate finally took place. Voter turnout was 60 percent, and Aristide's party won a landslide victory. But the elections were flawed by irregularities and fraud: as a result, the November 2000 elections were boycotted by the opposition. This political deadlock between Aristide and the opposition continued with increasing tension until a rebellion in 2004 brought Goïnaives and Cap-Haïtien under rebel control.

The Political and Security Situation

On 29 February 2004, with rebels marching towards Port-au-Prince, Aristide was forced to depart from Haiti and an interim government petitioned the United Nations Security Council for an international peacekeeping force. This was immediately granted, and a military force led initially by the United States arrived in Haiti the same day.

In spite of the controversy and violence, however, the interim government planned legislative and executive elections, which were finally held in February 2006. The elections were won by René Préval, who is still President.

In April 2008, "food riots" broke out; some main roads were blocked and the airport at Port-au-Prince was closed. As a result the country was without a government for five months. The tense and fragile situation was exacerbated as Haiti was hit by the worst storms in two decades in August and September of that year: 65 percent of agricultural production was lost and a further 1 million Haitians saw their already fragile livelihoods swept away by the floods.

The country is worse off today than it was before the food riots; six successive United Nations missions to Haiti have not managed to create a sustainable state. The élite, mainly represented in the Senate and Parliament, remains reluctant to support the Government, which still

predominantly represents the interests of the poor, in its efforts to reform. Elections that were deemed crucial were held in April, but the turnout was below 10 percent and many voters were "encouraged" to stay at home.

The Socio-Economic Context

Haiti has a population of 9 million, with another 1 million living abroad; 60 percent of the resident population are concentrated in towns, of whom half live in slums. More than half of the population live below the poverty line: 76 percent live on less than US\$2 per day and 56 percent live on less than US\$1 per day. About 1 million Haitians are totally dependent on remittances from abroad; another 2–3 million are partially dependent. Remittances in 2006 accounted for 20 percent of the gross national product of US\$1.65 billion.

Haiti normally produces 50 percent of its food requirements, but the floods in 2008 reduced this capacity as 60 percent of arable land was temporarily lost. Half the population has no access to potable water; 72 percent have no access to any form of healthcare. Only 40 percent of children are vaccinated; one in four appears to be chronically malnourished and stunted. HIV prevalence is the highest in the Caribbean, estimated at 2.2 percent among people aged 15 to 49. This amounts to 120,000 people living with HIV, of whom 58,000 are women and 6,800 are children. It is estimated that fewer than half of those who need anti-retroviral therapy receive treatment. Haiti's literacy rate is 53 percent; fewer than 20 percent of school-age children have access to public schools.

Tropical storms and hurricanes appear to be increasing in frequency and intensity. Haiti's forest cover has almost entirely disappeared, but firewood and charcoal continue to be used for cooking in most households.

The global economic downturn has reduced the flow of remittances by 30 percent. The political stalemate and the resulting slowness of government reforms are further undermining the strained coping mechanisms of

millions of Haitians. It is not surprising that the Millennium Development Goals are far from being reached; progress on some has actually reversed, particular with regard to mother-and-child mortality, eradication of extreme poverty and environmental sustainability.

Future Prospects

The Government, supported by MINUSTAH, is embarking on various reforms to re-build an effective police force and judicial system. The United Nations country team (UNCT) is working under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)¹⁸⁷ to develop a coordinated approach to enhance government capacities in the areas defined in the 2007 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The Government remains extremely weak, and its credibility and legitimacy in Haiti are currently less than they were before the food riots of April 2008.

The current political situation is volatile. Concerns are expressed by MINUSTAH, the UNCT and the international community that social-unrest could flare up at any time. The coming year is expected to be politically delicate, with presidential elections scheduled for 2011.

There is consensus among the UNCT and NGOs that humanitarian and development agendas must work hand-in-hand. But coordination among stakeholder groups remains extremely weak.

The Humanitarian and Development Environment

The Government of Haiti

The Government's primary challenge is to keep Haiti on the path to social and economic stability and improved security despite increasing poverty. The Government faces a daunting task: it has few capable officers and delivers almost no services such as health, nutrition and education. Public administration, where it exists, is carried out by NGOs, private entre-

preneurs or church associations. The legitimacy of the Government is further weakened by opposition from different and often influential segments of Haitian society: this is exemplified by the low voter turnout — estimated by independent observers at less than 5 percent — during the elections in April 2009.

The PRSP approved by the Government at the end of 2007 requires US\$3.8 billion over three years. It serves as a roadmap for improving social services, expanding infrastructure and cultivating growth and development areas. Its three pillars are:

- enhance human development by improving basic services;
- promote growth with a focus on agriculture, tourism, infrastructure and labour-intensive construction; and
- promote democratic governance, focusing on improved justice and public security.

The PRSP is sometimes perceived as insufficiently focused, but it nevertheless identifies critical areas where the Government needs to scale up its capacities to deliver services to its population.

The second government document driving its agenda is the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report (PDNA), which was prepared after the catastrophic floods in August 2008 with support from the World Bank, the UNCT, the European Union, IFRC and other stakeholders. It highlights the need for urgent action to develop an adequate disaster risk management plan for Haiti, for which a crucial prerequisite is creation of the capacity to engage in reducing risks and to move the development and poverty-reduction agenda forward. The three pillars of the PDNA action plan — food security, social protection and watershed protection — require urgent intervention and should ideally lead to adjustments in the sector action plans in the PRSP.

Although progress is extremely slow, there are signs that the international community is willing to continue to support the Government. The donor conference that launched the PRSP in April 2009 also allocated an additional

¹⁸⁷ See Annex 4

US\$320 million in funding, though this amount was well below the US\$3 billion requested.

The Government is willing to move forward, but in view of its lack of capacity much will depend on the speed and effectiveness with which donors, MINUSTAH and the UNCT can develop a joint framework for capacity-development. It is revealing in this context that during a briefing with the Deputy Director of the Civil Protection Agency of Haiti and his coordinator for prevention and mitigation measures, the discussion was mainly led by representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Government representatives interviewed in Port-au-Prince and Gonaïves were generally satisfied with WFP's response to last year's flooding, though they mentioned that assistance had been slow to arrive. They applauded WFP's willingness to engage with them. But government and NGO representatives and donors appeared to be concerned by what they described as *le travail cloisonné des agences* — the agencies' compartmentalized way of working: it transpired that the representatives were frustrated by what they saw as lack of coordination among United Nations agencies, particularly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and WFP, and sometimes UNDP. All three are essential in providing concerted support, particularly in response to the planned PDNA initiatives.

Haitian Civil Society

The background of past slavery and current poverty, manipulation of the poorest by elite interest groups, lack of a middle class and domination of the slums by gangs have reduced solidarity mechanisms to a bare minimum, often the immediate family. The increase in evangelical churches has reduced the proportion of Catholics from the 80 percent of 20 years ago. NGOs associated with Christian groups are usually approached to partner international as-

sistance agencies; they are the main partners of WFP in Haiti, particularly Caritas.

It has to be understood that virtually all Haitians remain faithful to the other official national religion — Voodoo. This does not receive enough consideration: few members of the international aid community engage with this movement beyond superficial networking with some of its more prominent leaders. Following the disaster in Gonaïves, various Voodoo organizations that had previously competed against each other rallied together to find ways to help: it was striking to meet young Haitians in Gonaïves who were lobbying agencies for support for their youth-mobilization campaigns to address the urgent need for reforestation in the region.

Voodoo may not be well organized, but can be seen as a dynamic grassroots movement pressing for change. This aspect of Haitian society unfortunately remains "below the radar" of mainstream agencies. It is definitely worth engaging more with Haitian society: there may be a hidden potential here that could contribute to improving the lives of Haitians over time.

The United Nations System and Integrated Mission

The Peace-Keeping and State-Building Mission of MINUSTAH

After the overthrow of President Aristide, violence in Haiti continued despite the presence of peacekeepers. Clashes between police and Aristide supporters who were demanding for his return were common; several of the protests resulted in violence and deaths. Criminality in the townships was at its peak.

On 1 June 2004, the peacekeeping mission was passed to MINUSTAH. It comprised a 7,000-strong military force led by Brazil, complemented by a United Nations police contingent of 2,000; it was supported by Latin American countries, particularly Argentina and Chile. It received a strong Chapter VII mandate to ensure security and stability, support the political process and monitor the human rights situation. On 15 October 2005, Brazil called for more

troops to deal with the deteriorating situation: they intervened in several townships, which led to a major disarmament operation, the arrest of hundreds of gang leaders and general containment of the violence.¹⁸⁸

The Haitian National Police (HNP) is currently being re-formed with support from MINUSTAH; the riots in April 2008 showed that HNP was unable to maintain order or ensure stability. HNP will have a force of 9,500 by mid-2009, on its way to a target of 14,000 by 2011. But with only US\$150 million allocated to HNP annually, there are serious doubts as to whether they will be able to address the violence and crime in Haiti.

Although the country is currently calmer, the continued presence of troops and United Nations police seems justified as the United Nations works to rebuild HNP. Many observers, however, question the large military deployments because the violence of the last 25 years has largely been a matter of the mobilization of poverty-stricken crowds for political interests.

The United Nations integrated mission is led by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) from the Department of Peace Keeping Operations who is closely associated with MINUSTAH. The SRSG is assisted by a force commander and two deputy SRSGs, one of whom is from UNDP and acts as the United Nations Resident Coordinator.

Humanitarian agencies are wary of the role of the military, even though the troops gave valuable assistance in providing relief for flood-affected populations and the WFP country team stressed the positive cooperation with the military during the initial emergency in August and September 2008. MINUSTAH's statement of its intention to take over the coordination of humanitarian responses during the next crisis was received with some alarm, but it is hoped that with more proactive involvement of NGOs

in the management of the clusters, particularly logistics, problems can be averted.

MINUSTAH has large military and police assets, and its direct programmatic engagement with the Government in matters of policing, justice reform and electoral support causes it to be perceived as wanting to control the United Nations agenda rather than work harmoniously in an agreed framework of responsibilities.

There are, therefore, tensions between MINUSTAH and the UNCT and there appears to be only limited mutual understanding of roles in helping Haiti to become a more viable state. Dialogue between UNCT and the SRSG also remained difficult and resulted in tensions between the two entities: some UNCT members felt sidelined in the process of reconstructing state institutions, but appeared worried that MINUSTAH was taking on tasks in sectors where they lacked experience and that could have been carried out better under the leadership of the specialized agencies.

There is further unease with regard to the maintenance of the strict security measures for United Nations agencies, which according to most observers are out of proportion to the current level of security threats. The IFRC and NGOs have largely relaxed their security rules and can move freely in the most poverty-stricken areas, whereas UNCT movements are constrained and it has to rely on a strict notification procedure or on military escorts when entering these areas. This does little to enhance its acceptance by local people who are unimpressed by the presence of foreign troops and who have seen little progress, even though the current United Nations mission to Haiti is the sixth.

The United Nations Country Team and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework

The UNCT involves the following organizations:

- FAO;
- the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD);

¹⁸⁸ According to *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF), gunshot casualties referred to their hospital in Port-au-Prince fell from 20–30 per night to 30 per month after the MINUSTAH clean-up operation.

- the International Organization for Migration (IOM);
- the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA);
- the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS);
- UNDP;
- the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);
- the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF);
- the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM);
- the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA);
- the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS);
- WFP; and
- the World Health Organization (WHO).

A new UNDAF for 2009–2011 has now been released. It embodies a peace consolidation and a short-term transitional stabilization strategy to be implemented before the 2010 presidential elections combined with longer-term recovery and development. The three priority areas are: i) democratic governance; ii) sustainable human development; and iii) environmental and disaster management. The UNDAF also indicates the level of funding necessary to ensure proper programme implementation. But in an environment such as Haiti, where donor coordination is sub-optimal,¹⁸⁹ it remains to be seen whether the UNDAF will contribute to improved coordination among the partners.

¹⁸⁹ It has taken UNDP several years to produce a comprehensive framework that engages donors in a coordinated strategic approach. The Government's leadership weakness and bilateral donor agendas have made this approach difficult. Today the ten top donors — the EU, the World Bank, the Inter-American Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, CIDA, USAID, Spanish Development Cooperation, French Development Cooperation and the ABC group — sit on a joint steering committee chaired by the Resident Coordinator; technical work is carried out through sector and sub-sector groups with a view to harmonizing donor strategies and adhering to the code of good donorship.

OCHA, which has faced many difficulties in recent years, has been struggling for improved coordination and information-sharing among United Nations and other partners. It has been considerably under-funded and only now, after lessons learned from the last hurricane season, is there a willingness in the UNCT to accept a larger OCHA role.

UNCT member agencies appear to prefer to engage bilaterally with ministries and services of direct interest to them; this tendency is compounded by the lack of leadership in government and the nature of the relationships in the United Nations integrated mission. UNCT efforts appeared to be based on a theoretical concept in that no evidence of joint planning and implementation was visible. Stated commitment to full coordination and consultation was rarely followed up with joint action. WFP was involved in the UNDAF exercise, but seemed more comfortable maintaining its relationship with UNCT partners at a bilateral level.

WFP, however, was willing to invest resources for coordination in areas for which it was accountable such as re-activating and upgrading the logistics cluster in preparation for the hurricane season, engaging proactively with all stakeholders and inviting NGOs to join in the management of this inter-agency service. This approach was applauded by the international community in general.

Important relationships exist with UNICEF in the nutrition and cluster sectors and with UNDP, FAO and ILO in relation to early-recovery projects. WFP has sometimes been frustrated by the slowness of partners' responses; some staff feel that it cannot always rely on its United Nations partners, who regularly face capacity or cash-flow problems and are not necessarily comfortable with the sense of urgency prevalent in an organization that is more humanitarian than developmental in orientation.

International NGOs and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have good working rela-

tionships; IFRC confirms that it has been profiting considerably from the services provided through the logistics cluster.

Interlocutors from the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), *Action contre la faim* (ACF) and *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF) emphasized that there was little sharing of information or coordination between the United Nations and NGOs, though OCHA had tried to facilitate such approaches. NGOs also felt that although last year's clusters had helped to improve coordination, the United Nations organizations focused on sectors and so ran the risk of not covering critical assistance gaps or duplicating efforts. NGOs were proposing to improve inter-cluster coordination to ensure that cross-sectoral concerns such as security were addressed more fully. They welcomed the Resident Coordinator's invitation to engage more actively and assume joint leadership of selected clusters in partnership with United Nations agencies.

CARE in particular highlighted its concerns about long-term food aid approaches. Like other donors such as European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), it felt that mechanisms to respond to longer-term needs were inadequate. CARE had reviewed its own strategy, and would make the provision of food a means of last resort. But this did not prevent it from maintaining a dialogue with WFP, which they saw as the only United Nations agency capable of engaging in sustained dialogue outside its immediate domain of intervention. In general, NGOs felt that most United Nations agencies in Haiti were weak, a judgement based on the perceived limited capacity of UNICEF and IOM to manage their clusters in 2008.

Most NGOs felt that WFP had been too slow to review and adapt its approaches: many felt that better engagement with communities and a more differentiated approach to large-scale food distributions were required. WFP has recently started to address these concerns. But on one point there was unanimous agreement: WFP is the only United Nations Agency that is

actually seen working on the ground and recognized as such by the people of Haiti; by and large it is a trusted and reliable partner with a good track record, willing to engage with external stake-holders and capable of adapting to a changing environment.

WFP and Interactions with Partners

WFP continues to deploy its entire set of tools to respond to the needs of vulnerable and disaster-affected populations in Haiti. Following the April 2008 riots caused by high food prices, WFP scaled up its operations to reach an additional 1.5 million people; this was complemented by an emergency operation to assist up to 800,000 people for six months in response to the three hurricanes and the tropical storm that struck Haiti in rapid succession in August and September 2008.

These shocks weakened an already vulnerable population. Logistics capacity was massively increased: in two special operations WFP reached communities that had been cut off from food supplies because roads had become impassable; 700 mt of high-energy biscuits and nutritious foods were transported by air and children, malnourished mothers and injured people were evacuated to health centres. WFP was also the first to arrive in Gonaives with first aid supplies after the tropical had killed 125 people and covered the town with 2 million m³ of mud. In recent months, WFP has shifted its operations towards early recovery and rehabilitation interventions.

During the 2008 shocks, many schools were damaged and others were used as shelters. This delayed the start of the 2008–2009 school year by a month in many areas. In response, WFP expanded school feeding to the areas worst affected, reaching 480,000 children. During the 2008 school holidays, the food needs of 200,000 schoolchildren and out-of-school children were met in summer camps organized by WFP. This initiative was recognized by all stakeholders as an innovation; it was much appreciated by poor parents.

The country office is planning to hold workshops in the four WFP sub-offices that will focus on: i) improving capacity for seasonal analysis and targeting by enhancing understanding of livelihood mechanisms; ii) fostering a culture of information-sharing among stakeholders; and iii) discussing partnerships and ways to improve their performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The new country team is reviewing its approaches and addressing challenges related to deteriorating coping mechanisms among the poorest and the increasing risk of natural disasters.

WFP sometimes feels isolated and frustrated by limitations imposed on its operational capacity by the constraints inherent in a United Nations integrated mission. These include tight security guidelines — which are not followed by non-United Nations entities — that prevent it from moving freely, and reliance on UNCT partners who may be reluctant to engage or who face problems in meeting commitments when working with WFP in joint programmes.

As in many other places, however, WFP shows considerable capacity for adaptation: learning from the lessons of the flood response barely a year ago, for example, it has championed re-activation of the logistics cluster in a timely and effective manner and is encouraging NGOs to become co-conveners. By sub-contracting its vehicle fleet to a specialized transport NGO, WFP has accelerated deliveries of goods for the humanitarian community without the restriction of United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) requirements.

Most partners consulted emphasized that of all the United Nations agencies WFP was the most responsive and that it was seen to be active and operational. Haitians differentiate between WFP and other United Nations entities, in particular MINUSTAH, because it is present in the field and seen to be supporting communities and bring assistance when needed.

Haitians may be somewhat disenchanted by the performance of the United Nations, but WFP stands out as capable of responding to humanitarian needs rapidly and impartially.

The Way Forward

A case study such as this aims to promote discussion of the optimum approaches to co-ordinate support for Haiti with a view to lifting it out of its desperate situation. Observations on the issues of fragile states, protracted crises and the United Nations integrated mission concept will feed directly into a conference to be convened by the Institute for the Study of the Americas.

Haiti is not a country in conflict, nor is it experiencing a complex emergency. It is an extremely poor country with one of the highest corruption indices in the world and wide social disparity; it has a democratically elected government that faces huge legitimacy problems and lack of capacity and that is increasingly exposed to humanitarian disasters linked to 200 years of environmental degradation. Haiti is regularly supported by the international community, led by the United States and Canada. Five previous high-profile United Nations missions have failed to bring change for the better: how will this one succeed?

The international response relies principally on a disproportionate investment in a military stabilization force that has also been mandated to address government capacity deficits in judicial reform, security and the constitutional and political processes, and to foster principles of democratic governance and institutional development.

It can be argued that the daunting tasks to be addressed through the PSRP and PDNA require donors and the United Nations to adopt a focused, balanced and comprehensive strategy to address the underlying causes of Haiti's fragility. MINUSTAH spends US\$500 million per year, mainly on peace-keeping and the maintenance of 9,000 security personnel, but the development agencies receive far less financial

support. If the size of Haiti and the issues at stake are compared with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it must be asked whether the presence of such a large peace-keeping force can be justified. The resources currently spent on troop maintenance in Haiti might better be used for direct investment in recovery, reconstruction and capacity-development in education, health, agriculture and environmental rehabilitation.

Should the United Nations take a more principled stance in advocating for a different strategy? This may be an argument to be developed further. The recent humanitarian disaster in Haiti triggered the release of additional humanitarian funds and created a window of opportunity to ensure that urgent needs were addressed comprehensively and sustainably. Failure to invest in subsequent major recovery will result in a high probability that natural hazards such as the ones witnessed in 2009 will shift another 1 million or more Haitians from living in poverty on less than US\$2 per day into abject destitution.

In such an environment, where the post-crisis response is also a pre-crisis preparedness phase, the traditional separation of humanitarian and development agendas into two distinct approaches cannot be maintained. Humanitarian

and development agendas need to become far more inter-linked; the humanitarian and aid communities need to develop working modalities that are interchangeable and complementary to make progress in addressing Haiti's diverse ills in a sustainable way.

The optimum way forward can therefore only be developed through reflection on the best ways to harmonize humanitarian and development practices in a new modular approach to address complex crises in a fragile state such as Haiti.

WFP's interventions to protect vulnerable and food-insecure populations while supporting long-term government work in disaster preparedness, risk reduction and the rebuilding of economic and social infrastructures show that it is already embracing a comprehensive relief/development approach as part of its response to the chronic crisis in Haiti.

Because it is recognized by most stakeholders as a reliable and effective humanitarian player, WFP could take on a broader role and engage more fully with civil society, using its position to mobilize other agencies to engage in a process that will ensure a more focused, complementary and comprehensive inter-agency approach to tackling the structural and humanitarian issues in Haiti.

Annex 1. Partial List of Interlocutors

WFP Port-au-Prince

Myrta Kaulard	Country director
Benoit Thiry	Deputy country director
Etienne Labande	Head of programme, a.i.
Montserrat Barroso	School feeding programme
Michel Fontaine	Head of logistics
Edmondo Perrone	Head of logistics cluster
Baskarane, Deiva	Field security officer

WFP Gonaives

Jean-Pierre Mambounou	Head of sub-office
Zacharie Bagula	Logistics officer
Jerume Dieujuste	Senior programme assistant

United Nations system

Eric Muillefarine	Strategic planning adviser, Office of the RC
Philippe Gauthier	OCHA, head of office in Port-au-Prince
Judy Dacruz	Head of programme, IOM, Port-au-Prince
UNICEF staff	Nutrition/education clusters
Jean-Marc Cordaro	UNDP, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery

MINUSTAH

G�rard Le Chevalier	Director, Political Affairs and Planning Division
Heiner Rosendahl	Acting head, civil affairs
Guido Galli	Senior political affairs officer

IFRC

Valentina Bernasconi	Acting head, ICRC Haiti
Brigitte Gaillis	Head of operations (flood recovery), IFRC

NGOs and civil society

Sophie Perez	Director, CARE Haiti
Massimiliano Cosci	Head of mission, MSF Belgium
Olivier Leguillox	Head of mission, ACF Haiti
Caroline Broudic	Food security coordinator, ACF, Haiti
Cl�ment Jude Charles	CARITAS coordinator, Haiti
Max G. Beauvoir	<i>Grand Ma�tre, Le Peristyle de Mariani</i>

Government services

Pierre-Louis Pinchinat	<i>Directeur adjoint, Minist�re de l'Int�rieur et des Collectivit�s Territoriales, direction de la protection civile</i>
Roosevelt Confr�re	<i>Coordinateur prevention aux d�sastres, direction de la protection civile</i>
Marjorie Charles	National expert in disaster management (UNDP)
Alex Ceus	<i>Coordinateur de la rehabilitation de l'environnement, Minist�re de la Planification, Les Gonaives</i>

Annex 1. Partial List of Interlocutors – *continued*

Donors

Martin Weiersmüller	<i>Coordonateur, direction du développement et de la coopération, Confédération Suisse</i>
Dennis B. McCarthy	Office chief, Food Security and Humanitarian Assistance Office, USAID, Haiti
Marie Flore Cadet	Deputy office chief, Food Security and Humanitarian Assistance Office, USAID, Haiti
Damien Berrendorf	Head of Mission, ECHO, Haiti
Jan Jakobiec	<i>Deuxième secrétaire, Coopération Canadienne (CIDA)</i>
Ambassador	Brazil
Rose-Luce Cadot-Prevot	Disaster Risk Management Specialist, USAID

Annex 2. Literature Consulted

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Acronyms used in the document

MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
NGO	non-governmental organization
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNCT	United Nations country team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
PDNA	Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Report
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
HNP	Haitian National Police
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
SRSR	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
WHO	World Health Organization
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
ACF	Action contre la faim
MSF	Médecins sans frontières
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
CFSVA	comprehensive food security and vulnerability assessment
CNSA	Coordination nationale de la sécurité alimentaire
PNSAN	Plan national de sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle; National Food and Nutrition Security Plan
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security

Conference Agenda

23Rd June Arrival Of Participants (All Day)

Welcome drinks and snacks available at the Gazebo from 16:00 to 19:00

24Th June Day 1

08:30 – 09:00 Registration and Welcome Coffee

Venue: San Francesco Room & San Bernardo Room

09:00 – 09:15 Opening Address

Venue: San Francesco Room

Ramiro Lopes Da Silva (Conference Chair)

WFP Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Director of Emergencies

09:15 – 09:30 Introduction of the Conference Objectives and Programme

Venue: San Francesco Room

Nicholas Crawford and Thomas Gurtner

Overall Conference Facilitators

Part I: Overview on Theory and Trends

09:30 – 10:30 Conflict, Complex Emergencies and Humanitarian Assistance: Theory and Trends

Venue: San Francesco Room

Session Chair: **Mark Duffield** (University of Bristol)

Panelists: **James Darcy** (ODI), **David Keen** (LSE),
Fabrice Weissman (MSF)

10:30 – 11:15 Open Floor Discussion

11:15 – 11:30 Coffee Break

Venue: San Bernardo Room

11:30 – 12:15 From Theory to Practice: Findings from the Field

Venue: San Francesco Room

Session Chair: **Lauren Landis** (WFP)

Panelists: **Thomas Gurtner** – Findings from WFP studies
Abbas Gullet (KRCS) – National humanitarian organisations in conflict
Dominik Stillhart (ICRC) – Principled humanitarian action
Peter Goossens (WFP) – Complex emergencies/protracted crisis perspective

12:15 – 13:00 Open Floor Discussion

13:00 – 14:15 Lunch at the Gazebo

Part II: Critical Areas of Engagement and Operational Effectiveness

- 14:15 – 14:30 **Introduction to the Plenary on Critical Areas of Engagement**
Venue: *San Francesco Room*
Plenary Chair: **Ramiro Lopes Da Silva**
- 14:30 – 16:00 **Critical Areas of Engagement – Simultaneous Fora for Debate**
Forum 1 – States, UN/Integrated Missions and Impact on Humanitarian Space
Venue: *Beata Gabriella Room (Convent Side)*
Facilitator: **Jean-Luc Siblot (UNDOCO)**
Presenters: **David Harland (UNDPKO)**
Antonio Donini (Tufts University)
Rapporteur: **Mohammed Haider Reza (UNMAC-Afghanistan)**
Forum 2 – Non-State Actors, Security and Impact on Humanitarian Space
Venue: *Bottegai Room (Convent Side)*
Facilitator: **Mustafa Darboe (WFP)**
Presenters: **Hussein Halane (SCF), Khaled Mansour (UN)**
Rapporteur: **Corinne Fleischer (WFP)**
Forum 3 – Protection, the Rights Agenda, Principled Humanitarian Action, and Advocacy
Venue: *Capella Room (Convent Side)*
Facilitator: **Gemmo Lodesani (WFP)**
Presenters: **Liam Mahony (Fieldview Solutions)**
Christine Knudsen (UNICEF)
Rapporteur: **Bruno Lemarquis (UNDP)**
- 16:00 – 16:30 **Tea Break**
Venue: *San Bernardo Room*
- 16:30 – 17:45 **Feedback to Plenary by Rapporteurs and Open Floor Discussion**
Venue: *San Francesco Room*
- 18:00 – 19:00 **Welcome Reception at the Gardens and the Gazebo**

25th June Day 2

- 09:00 – 09:05 **Introduction to Day 2 Programme**
Venue: *San Francesco Room*
Overall Facilitators: **Nicholas Crawford/Thomas Gurtner**
- 09:05 – 09:15 **Introduction on the Plenary of Operational Effectiveness**
Venue: *San Francesco Room*
Plenary Chair: **Ramiro Lopes da Silva**
- 09:15 – 10:30 **Simultaneous Fora for Debate on Operational Effectiveness**
Forum 1 – Understanding and Reaching Out Effectively to Local Communities
Venue: *Beata Gabriella Room (Convent Side)*
Facilitator: **Zlatan Milisic (WFP)**
Presenters: **Jemilah Mahmood (Mercy Malaysia)**
Margaret Vogt (UNDPA)
Rapporteur: **Claude Jibidar (WFP)**

Forum 2 – Challenges to Effective Programming (1): Planning, preparedness and rapid response

Venue: *Bottegale Room*

Facilitator: **Myrta Kaulard (WFP)**

Presenters: **Rashid Khalikov (OCHA), Carlos Veloso (WFP)**

Rapporteur: **Giancarlo Cirri (WFP)**

Forum 3 – Challenges to Effective Programming (2): Protracted Crisis, Sustainability and Exit

Venue: *Capella Room (Convent Side)*

Facilitator: **Mohammed Diab (WFP)**

Presenters: **Luca Alinovi (FAO), Barbara Boyle-Saidi (ICRC)**

Rapporteur: **Al Kehler (WFP)**

10:30 – 10:45 Coffee Break

Venue: *San Bernardo Room*

10:45 – 11:30 Feedback to Plenary by Rapporteurs and Open Floor Discussion

Venue: *San Francesco Room*

11:30 – 12:15 Plenary Presentation: Drivers of Conflict and Future Challenges to Humanitarian Assistance

Venue: *San Francesco Room*

Session Chair: **Laurent Thomas (FAO)**

Panelists: **Elisabeth Rasmusson (NRC)**
Adil Najam (Boston University)
Alexander Downes (Duke University)

12:15 – 13:15 Open Floor Discussion

13:15 – 14:45 Lunchtime Dialogue with WFP Executive Director Ms Josette Sheeran At the Gazebo

Part III: Summary, Next Steps and Closing

14:45 – 16:00 Highlights of Findings: Brief thematic presentations drawn from the conference

Venue: *San Francesco Room*

Plenary Chair: **Ramiro Lopes da Silva**

16:00 – 16:15 Tea Break

Venue: *San Bernardo Room*

16:15 – 17:15 Consolidation and Presentation of Key Recommendations for Moving Forward

Venue: *San Francesco Room*

Plenary Chair: **Ramiro Lopes da Silva**

17:15 – 17:30 Closing Remarks by the Conference Chair

Venue: *San Francesco Room*

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