Humanitarian Coordination

Lessons Learned

Report of a Review Seminar
Stockholm, April 3-4 1998

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***This report is dedicated to the memory of* Pierce Gerety**

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I. Introduction

The international Seminar on Lessons Learned on Humanitarian Coordination was jointly organised by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. It was made possible through a generous contribution of the Government of Sweden and was held in Stockholm on Friday 3 and Saturday 4 April 1998. The seminar brought together some 40 experienced humanitarian practitioners and policy makers from the donor, United Nations and NGO communities, and from regional institutions and governments in affected countries.

The UN human rights, political/peacekeeping and development perspectives were also represented in order to encourage cross-fertilization among the different 'cultures' and actors involved in crisis countries.

In mid-1997, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) commissioned an independent study to identify lessons relating to the strategic coordination of humanitarian activities in the Great Lakes region of Africa in 1996-1997. The report, which was issued in March 1998[i], was made available to seminar participants and provided an opportunity for discussion and debate on a number of wider questions relating to the functions, nature and direction of the humanitarian endeavour in the post Cold War world. In addition, two papers, on critiques of humanitarian action and on 'learning to learn', were specifically commissioned for the seminar. They are annexed to this report.

Participants were invited in their personal capacity: they were asked to focus on:

- key issues raised in the Great Lakes report, as well as in other recent evaluation or 'lessons learned' studies, and on factors that impede and/or impact upon the fulfilment of humanitarian responsibilities;
- policy and operational implications for future international humanitarian response;
- how to increase the capacity of the international humanitarian community to adjust to lessons learned in crisis settings;
- further actions to be undertaken in order to address the issues examined.

The seminar provided an opportunity for a timely, stimulating and informal discussion. While there was a convergence of views in many areas, particularly on the analysis of the challenges faced by international and national actors in countries in crisis, the purpose was not to reach unanimous conclusions. Areas where there was a general consensus and some emerging suggestions or recommendations are identified in the paragraphs below. There were, of course, areas where a diversity of points of view were expressed, particularly on how humanitarian principles could be reconciled with politics and on the shape and direction of the humanitarian enterprise. Issues were debated in an open-minded and constructive manner. The organizers are confident that the seminar will have allowed all participants, from their own particular perspective, to chart the 'road ahead' and to refine their understanding of the challenges and constraints of operating in the ever more volatile and dangerous contexts of crises which generate massive humanitarian needs.

II. Summary of Discussions

1. Principles and Principled Engagement

Law, Principles or Pragmatism? The issue of principles, and the extent to which humanitarian agencies can maintain a principled stance in contemporary conflicts provoked a spirited discussion. Presentations on the experience gained in Afghanistan and in the Great Lakes Region served as a background. Participants debated whether the same principles applied to all actors in a conflict situation and reviewed ways in which respect for humanitarian norms could be secured particularly in situations where warfare was designed to harm civilians. There was no disagreement on the importance of principles but there were different perceptions as to *which* principles should apply in conflict settings and *how.* Several participants called for reference to international law rather than to humanitarian principles as principles were viewed as 'too soft', imprecise, and harder to implement. The Geneva Conventions, in particular, should not be abandoned, replaced or forgotten; along with human rights and refugee law, they should form the basis of action in conflict settings.

Many participants pointed to the difficulty of getting all actors in the international community to

adhere to a principled approach. It was noted, for example, that international humanitarian law provides a "framework for the conduct of war", while the UN Charter and UN agency mandates had proactive objectives aimed at peace, protection of refugees, and development.

The linkages between politics - the art of the possible - and principles were seen as problematic. Most participants agreed, however, that the same humanitarian principles applied to all actors irrespective of their mandate or objective. It was noted that the Security Council often referred to humanitarian principles and supported the need for humanitarian action. Principles and politics should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Many argued that 'principled pragmatism' was both possible and desirable in conflict settings.

It was noted that international laws were often not clear enough and did not provide enough guidance. Participants stressed the need for a clear and practical set of values and normative standards that would inform decision-making when choices were ethically difficult. The recently completed Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was cited as an excellent example of grounding humanitarian principles and action in international law.

There was much discussion on the fact that different agencies operating in the same context and under the same principles could, in good faith, apply them in very different ways. In the former Yugoslavia, for example, the ICRC and UNHCR were seen to have applied the same principles quite differently. Recent experience confirmed the need for a more 'strategic' response based on clearly defined principles and objectives. Reference was made in this context to the Strategic Framework approach being tested in Afghanistan and to efforts aimed at the development of 'Principles and Ground Rules for UN action in countries in crisis'. The purpose of both initiatives was to promote a more coherent and predictable UN approach in countries in crisis and to reduce dissonance between mandates and procedures of different components of the United Nations. The work presently underway through the Sphere Project (Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards), concerned with identifying the minimal technical standards in substantive areas through reference to international law and principles, as well as the ICRC Code of Conduct[ii] were cited as other useful initiatives aimed at clarifying and crystallizing 'principles'.

A number of participants suggested that the best and only realistic manner to secure commitment by all the relevant actors to a principled engagement was to negotiate and obtain consent for a principled response from the very beginning of a crisis. In the Great Lakes region, both international law and humanitarian principles had been compromised from the very beginning and this undermined the ability of all to be effective. Once conflict had broken out it was often too late to advocate for laws and principles. It was also noted that international agencies tended to react to, rather than engage in dialogue with national authorities and other relevant parties. International actors should develop agreements based on principles, setting out the duties and responsibilities of assistance agencies and relevant national and local authorities.

Principles: local ownership. Many participants stressed the importance of local ownership, including governments, NGOs and affected communities, of principles which enshrine respect for civilians. It was noted that regional actors, after the genocide in Rwanda, had concluded that they should no longer wait for action by the international community or the Security Council. This showed that the absence of support by the international community for basic principles was likely to lead to unilateral action by affected countries in the future. The UN was encouraged to engage proactively with regional actors such as IGAD or ECOWAS on the issue of mutual respect for universal principles in crisis situations.

On the issue of non-state actors and rebel movements, it was important for the UN and the

international community to engage with these entities and promote respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. There may be sensitivity to engaging with such actors because of fear of providing legitimacy. However, neglecting them from the very beginning could make it difficult to engage in a principled fashion later. Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), with its negotiated Ground Rules, was cited as a good example of how to interact with non-state actors.

Principles: Non-Compliance and Disengagement. The discussion on how to address the problem of disrespect of fundamental tenets of international humanitarian law gave rise to a number of observations and recommendations. It was noted that, in general, little concrete action was taken in face of violations and that this acceptance of impunity must change. There was agreement on the importance of holding accountable all actors who ignored or violated humanitarian law. Unfortunately, however, suspension and disengagement were often the first actions considered and a number of participants expressed concern about further jeopardizing civilians in need of humanitarian assistance. The imposition of sanctions also raised difficult questions. Sanctions could work against the humanitarian imperative and there was often public pressure on agencies to act in a certain fashion. Participants agreed that feasible, practical, and credible options were needed so that the international community 'could draw the line' in a clear and principled fashion. It was suggested that when the humanitarian community was faced with egregious violations, alternatives to sanctions should be considered. For example, the humanitarian community should consider working through influential actors, such as the media, Member States and regional entities which have the capacity to exert pressures on parties who otherwise would not respond to appeals to support the welfare of the civilian population.

Some participants queried whether the 'drawing the line' approach was enough given the complexity of contemporary crises. What was critically needed was a change in behaviour and attitude towards civilians in conflict settings. This viewpoint warned against the danger of accommodating violence and stressed the importance of negotiated cease-fires and other measures which would ensure the protection of humanitarian space.

Concern was also expressed that support was often elusive for a unified stand within the international community for difficult measures, including disengagement, when the humanitarian community decided that this was the only option. In addition to different perspectives within the humanitarian community, donors sometimes exerted extraordinary pressure on UN agencies and NGOs to continue operations or to withdraw. Unity of action both at the country and international levels, was thus an essential element for an effective and principled approach in countries in crisis.

Suggestions to Enhance Respect for Principles:

- Humanitarian agencies should invest more time and resources in training of staff including Senior Management;
- Training in humanitarian law, human rights and other relevant law must be a priority for all personnel involved in countries in crisis:
- Support for training should be reflected in the donor community's allocation of funds.
- Human rights and humanitarian principles should as far as possible be mainstreamed into strategic planning and programming:
- The humanitarian community should continue efforts to operationalize international humanitarian laws and principles, e.g. through country-specific ground rules or agreements with local authorities and other relevant parties;
- Humanitarian/Resident Coordinators, or as the case may be, lead agencies, should be provided with adequate resources, both financial and human, in order to ensure the mainstreaming of

human rights and humanitarian principles; this should be reflected in their terms of reference.

More effective ways of dealing with breaches of humanitarian principles should be identified:

- Humanitarian agencies should develop advocacy strategies to encourage enforcement and responsibility for the legal obligations of the international community;
- Civil society organizations should be mobilized in stigmatizing violations of humanitarian and human rights law. (e.g. through NGOs as in the International Campaign to Ban Landmines);
- Donors should make funding to organisations and programmes contingent on their respect for principles and on the adoption of principle-based and coordinated approaches within the larger assistance community.

Dissemination and advocacy for humanitarian law and principles is of utmost importance:

- Agencies should ensure that practical examples of principled approaches are widely disseminated, e.g. examples of Ground Rules and Protocols reached between UN, NGOs, rebels and/or Governments;
- The UN should engage in discussions with regional organizations on how to promote principles and their application in crisis countries.

2. Partnership, Ownership and Coherence

The second day of the seminar commenced with a moment of silence in memory of the Rwandan Genocide and of the 50th Anniversary of the Genocide Convention. It was followed by a debate on how partnership, ownership and coherence could be improved within the existing international system. Participants were asked to focus on ways in which local ownership of humanitarian activities could be enhanced, on measures to ensure donor support for coherent humanitarian strategies, and on how to reduce the disconnects between political, peace-making/building and assistance strategies in particular crisis situations.

There was strong support for the proposition that unless all concerned actors, including the Security Council, operated in accordance with the same principles it would be difficult to develop any kind of genuine partnership or coherence. In this connection it was also noted that pervasive misconceptions about human rights, and of the role of the UN and its partners in promoting respect for human rights had undermined attempts to achieve coherence and a common approach in countries in crisis.

There was strong support for the suggestion that the UN should provide moral authority and leadership. Some participants rejected the blurring of distinctions between the UN as an organization where Member States made decisions and the UN staff who implemented these. It was noted that 'the UN' should not be accused of lacking backbone when it was the responsibility of Member States to act decisively and to provide for a coherent and sustained response. However, others noted that the different parts of the UN system had the ability to obstruct coordination. The UN as an implementation mechanism had a tendency to blame Member States when "80% of the problem was internal incompetence" and the unwillingness of different entities to act as one organization.

Strong reference was made to the need to re-legitimize humanitarian action in the wake of genocide in Rwanda so that a different type of relationship could be built with affected countries. It was noted that since the international community, including the Security Council, was no better equipped today than in 1994 to deal with genocide and conflict, unilateral initiatives would probably flourish and there would be less room for broad-based coherent responses.

On the question of accountability, it was stressed that recipient Governments and beneficiaries had

responsibilities and an obligation to provide a "framework of consent". They too must be held accountable as international treaties and international law created *legal obligations*. Humanitarian law applied not only to belligerent parties but also to the actions of relief agencies. The usefulness of monitoring mechanisms for both belligerents and agencies was noted. Some participants advocated fact-finding enquiries after the event. In this connection, the OAU Panel of Eminent Persons to investigate the causes of the genocide in Rwanda was presented as a possible model. It was welcomed as a timely undertaking by African nations to increase accountability and to address the issue of responsibility in an objective fashion.

Obstacles to Coordination. A number of obstacles and problems were identified as impeding coordination within the humanitarian community. It was noted that the proliferation of humanitarian actors could seriously affect coordination including the application of principles. A strong national government could control the number of humanitarian organizations and thus theoretically, facilitate coordination. It might also intentionally obstruct coordination.

Some participants argued that there were confusion, overlaps and gaps between UN mandates leading to competition and a failure to work together. This argument was rejected by others for two reasons. First, the Governing boards of agencies obviously did not intend for the mandates to be used as excuses for the agencies not to cooperate -- blaming the Executive Boards was an alibi. Second, mandate overlap was inevitable and appropriate: if mandates were too tightly defined there would almost certainly be gaps. It was noted that coordination by consensus appeared to be the most that the international community was willing to support: discussing new structures was a waste of energy. While there was still room for improvement, many participants felt that there was real progress. Agencies now strongly welcomed OCHA taking leadership decisions; donors supported OCHA and wanted it to succeed. As related by one participant, recent events in Afghanistan showed that a principled UN position vis-à-vis the Taliban and effective coordination under OCHA's leadership were possible.

Field Coordination. Different suggestions for improving coordination and coherence in the field were discussed including what some perceived as an increasing disconnect between Headquarters and the field. The Afghanistan example showed the importance of strong leadership by the UN Coordinator and the country team combined with high-level backing from Headquarters and throughout the system. The Dayton agreement provided for a much stronger framework but it had a large amount of muscle behind it. Was this an argument for one 'head person' to manage and direct all UN political and assistance activities? Or should the UN invest the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator with more authority but limited to assistance activities? A more radical approach was also suggested: in civil war situations one integrated UN Office should be made responsible for all assistance and protection activities. Other Agencies' expertise would be incorporated into the UN Office. When the conflict ends all the agencies could return with their flags and profile. This would require a new and much stronger commitment to a unitary approach. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines was also mentioned as a possible alternative model -- an example of coordinating action around a very specific objective without creating a permanent structure for coordination.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee had enormous potential for coordination. Here too renewed commitment and minimal reform rather than radical change should be tried. The IASC's broad membership including NGOs should be able to enhance coordination and promote shared strategic visions beyond simply the United Nations. Some areas which needed to be addressed included: an ineffective division of labour between the IASC and ECHA; lack of an IASC mechanism at the field level; the distance of donors from the IASC; and the weakness of representation and coordination within the various NGO consortia.

Wider coherence in response to crisis. While the importance of partnership, coherence and ownership was not questioned, the definition of these terms seemed problematic. For some participants, these terms implied a shared vision and understanding of the crisis itself rather than shared objectives and a shared programme. It was unlikely, perhaps undesirable, for all parties - the humanitarian, the diplomat, the national authority - to share the same objectives. The need was for an alignment of interests rather than a consensus on narrow objectives. For others the focus was on the importance of partnership between different institutional cultures, identifying common principles, and reading from the same music. Coherence required **collective reflection** in the field but there was rarely time or incentives to engage in analytical work. Opinions differed on whether the Strategic Framework was the right tool for promoting this coherence amongst the many different UN actors and components in a crisis situations.

More dialogue was needed, many argued, between the humanitarian community and the Security Council and donors, between human rights and development actors, and between regional, national, local and non-state actors as well. Member states, especially Security Council members and donors needed to be strategic partners along with UN agencies and NGOs and governments. Commitments from governments and regional organizations to promoting and participating in partnership must be secured. National actors sometimes thought that a fragmented UN was to their advantage. Hence the importance of speaking with 'one voice'. The UN must also dialogue with non-state actors. One participant noted that there may not always be 'partnership' with a local authority but there will always be 'engagement' on such issues as access to and protection of civilians.

It was suggested that **partnerships between regional organizations and the UN** should be strengthened. DPKO was presently preparing guidelines for co-deployment with regional groups. OCHA was setting up a small office in Addis Ababa, jointly with the UN Department for Political Affairs, in order to increase coordination between the humanitarian community and the OAU as well as with other subregional organizations.

Despite much discussion on the relationship between **relief and development**, increased coherence between programming and resource mobilization mechanisms, particularly those of the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), Round Table, and Consultative Group, was still needed. Similarly, more dialogue and communication between the UN and the Bretton Woods Institutions was called for. For its part, the humanitarian community simply must understand the economic dynamics of crisis situations and in particular the role, usually relatively minor, of humanitarian assistance.

Numerous participants restated that humanitarian action could not act as a substitute for "political will" to address the root causes of conflict. Improved dialogue between the humanitarian community and the Security Council would help this body's decision-making process but many felt that a more proactive role was unrealistic. The 'Somalia syndrome' meant that most western militaries, did not want to get involved. Given this reality, some participants believed that full coordination was a lost cause. Others however demanded that the UN should continue its efforts towards a principled and coherent response.

Suggestions to Enhance Coherence in Countries in Crisis**:**

- More dialogue between the Security Council and humanitarian agencies;
- Increased partnership between the UN and regional organizations, including on humanitarian and human rights issues;
- The IASC should resolve its ineffective division of labour with ECHA;
- An IASC mechanism at the field level should be developed;

- Better IASC-donor interaction was required, partially within the ECOSOC humanitarian segment;
- Positive incentives for coordination should be introduced, e.g. Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators should be evaluated for their successful contribution to in-country coherence and coordination;
- The potential of the Strategic Framework, as a tool for enhanced coherence in countries in crisis, should be further explored;
- UN assistance agencies should work more closely and at an earlier stage with the Bretton Woods Institutions in order to address relief-development linkages.

3. Learning

Not surprisingly, given its focus, the Seminar witnessed repeated discussion of how, when, why, and who should learn. A presentation on 'learning to learn' highlighted three hindrances to learning within the humanitarian community:

- a failure to be open-minded i.e. UN people/agencies come with fixed perceptions;
- a poor ability or attitude towards hearing criticisms that come from the local actors; and
- an inadequate involvement of local actors in the conceptualization and creation of solutions.

These findings were seconded by some of the participants, one noting that the Study on Strategic Humanitarian Coordination in the Great Lakes was the first time he had ever witnessed the UN being criticised in an internal study. Another noted that the IASC's initial response to the study was dismissive and questioned whether Agencies would follow-up on its recommendations. Others stated that the UN was quite ready to examine itself and learn from past experience; indeed the IASC had officially welcomed the study. It would certainly assist in increasing consciousness of the issues examined.

Participants were asked to focus on *learning* as a means to inform policy and improve performance, and in that context to consider the following three questions:

- How to better use existing knowledge (e.g. reports, persons and institutional experience)
- What joint-learning initiatives are desirable?
- Should there be more 'independent studies'?

Understanding the context. The critical need to understand the context of a crisis was underlined by many speakers: the need to understand the political, military, economic, and cultural dynamics of a crisis as well as, for instance, the inadvertant negative impacts of humanitarian assistance or its implications for military strategy. Complex situations could not be reduced to simple answers in order to respond to symptoms at the expense of root causes. Yet the quality of political-economic analysis was often poor so it was not surprising that it was very hard for an expatriate to understand 'what was going on'. For instance, local coping mechanisms usually existed but the time pressures experienced by relief workers meant that they were rarely able to identify and capitalize on them. Part of the learning agenda should be to develop more holistic approaches to crisis response e.g. ensuring that planning for transition, and relief-development linkages corresponded more accurately to the reality on the ground. More attention should be given to identifying opportunities for peace and promoting effective solutions.

International organizations should search for local organizations and experts to better understand the dynamics of the society in crisis otherwise there was a danger that humanitarian action unwittingly could prolong war, undermine local capacities, etc. Unfortunately, there was sometimes reluctance of

expatriate staff to accept local opinions cultures and solutions.

Use of existing knowledge. There was a great reservoir of experience and knowledge in the UN and the humanitarian community. These resources should be put into training and dissemination. On the use of studies and reports, it was felt that the process of dialogue in coming up with a final report was more important than the actual dissemination of the report itself. In fact dissemination was overrated as many UN and Agency people staff did not have time to read. Reports sent to Governments rarely went to the appropriate person. In one person's experience, reports marked 'confidential' were often the most widely read reports and the most rapidly implemented! Another participant wondered whether political officers actually took seriously the reports in which there were calls for changes in the political action of Member States.

Studies and training. Despite the comments above, many of the participants stressed the importance of studies. Topics suggested included: comprehensive studies on crises to establish causes and possible solutions, and studies on longer term issues such as globalization and its impact on vulnerability, root causes and the politics of rights in the global context. It was suggested that studies should focus less on the implementation of humanitarian assistance and more on the responsibility of states, looking particularly at respect for international humanitarian law. Both external and independent as well as internal evaluations were considered necessary.

Training was seen as very important for humanitarian and other international staff as well as for partners and actors with whom the humanitarian community must engage. Without ongoing training, professionalism was threatened. For instance, there was much discussion of human rights mainstreaming. But human rights was a specialized field that one does not instinctively know or understand. Furthermore human rights issues could be very sensitive with respect to local cultures, if they were not professionally managed. Along the same lines, relief workers were expected to become development experts and then democracy activists. These areas were not interchangeable. Training was essential in all these areas. Training should not be seen as an end in itself, but must be accompanied by system-wide commitment. Such a commitment required, for instance, providing the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator with authority and respect and demanding accountability from the country team.

Several suggestions were made:

- UNDP and OCHA should work together to tap their collective experiences.
- Field staff should be provided with documents and examples of best practices in other contexts.
- UN should undertake training at the system-wide level to anticipate contingencies, e.g. run exercises to prepare for what would happen if, for instance, genocide or similar mass atrocities were to happen again.
- Hold a conference to construct an agenda for a more full participation of civil society in peace-building initiatives.

Finally, most participants reconfirmed the utility and importance of independent studies by OCHA and UN agencies but also by regional organizations such as the OAU and others. Adequate resources were essential both for the studies themselves and for follow-up action.

Critiques of Humanitarianism and Humanitarian Action

Discussion Paper Prepared for OCHA by Cindy Collins

Humanitarianism has come under fire due to the failures and unintended consequences of humanitarian action. The media delivers images of these failures to the global public, particularly from the Great Lakes region. And the public has responded by diminishing its financial and political support to "do something" when new images of tragedy are aired. Nick Stockton of Oxfam refers to this response as a decline in the "constituency of compassion" and considers it the most important crisis confronting the international humanitarian system. Two other crises compete for primacy on reform agendas. How do we overcome the difficulties in obtaining and sustaining consent to access vulnerable groups, and how do we prevent the use of relief inputs for war aims? Old humanitarian principles and practices are being taken advantage of and are confounded by relatively new phenomena: the blatant violations of international humanitarian law, the direct targeting of noncombatants and relief personnel, and the incorporation of humanitarian resources into war economies and strategies.

The solution to these crises seems obvious to some. If we improve how humanitarian action is conducted -- that is, make the existing system more efficient and effective -- then the system will regain the trust of donors and recipients, and international indifference will be overruled by universal compassion and operational excellence. Others argue, however, that solutions also require the conceptual stretching of what is deemed to be humanitarian. It is implied that certain activities are more humanitarian in the long-term and should not be undermined by the provision of immediate relief. Some argue, for example, that it is more humanitarian to link the provision of food relief to development-related projects or to condition the provision of humanitarian aid on belligerents' adherence to political agreements. In this sense, humanitarianism becomes a concept inside of and subservient to development and political agendas. It becomes a tool for achieving a variety of objectives beyond the immediate relief of human suffering.

Many current debates are rooted in these disagreements concerning the short- versus longer-term objectives and the range of activities to be included in a "humanitarian" agenda. On the one hand are the Classical Humanitarians, who argue that the provision of emergency relief and protection, performed in a politically neutral and impartial manner, is a valid endeavour in its own right. On the other hand are those who support what is labelled here as the Relief-to-Development-and-Democracy Approach ("RDD Approach"). The RDD Approach is comprised of multiple objectives, including but not limited to relief, development, rehabilitation, democratic processes and "civil society" building. Whereas the work of Classical Humanitarianism is deemed complete once immediate human vulnerability has diminished, the RDD Approach requires the strengthening of economic, social and political systems for mission satisfaction. In its harshest tone, the RDD Approach suggests that Classical Humanitarianism is debilitating in that its singular attention to sustaining lives, rather than livelihoods, creates a protracted dependency on external- rather than self-help. It should be noted that this latter charge is deemed unsupportable by Classical Humanitarians. Given the small amount of relief provided, especially when Consolidated Appeals are not met and the duration of relief assistance is so tentative, no rational human being depends upon emergency aid to the abandonment of other "natural" coping strategies.

Those who support Classical Humanitarianism and those who champion the RDD Approach are involved in critical appraisal of the other while simultaneously acknowledging their own contribution to past humanitarian failures. Conferences abound in which these two schools of humanitarian agendas meet separately and jointly to identify lessons from the past and correct strategic and operational problems. In addition to the critiques that flow from within and between these two dominant humanitarian agendas are the critiques coming from outside the existing humanitarian system. These outside voices can be classified broadly as "Ownership Agendas" and "Aggressive Solidarity."

Ownership Agendas demand that states be made responsible for providing protection and sustenance to their own populations. These agendas argue that the strategies and physical presence of the international humanitarian community interfere with sovereign rights and responsibilities. Although Classical Humanitarianism and the RDD Approach agree that ultimate responsibility for providing relief and protection resides with the host government, those who support Ownership Agendas refuse to compromise on this point when it moves from theory to practice.

The primary position of Aggressive Solidarity is identification with and a commitment to a perceived aggrieved party in a conflict. The protection of human rights and the push for fair political representation are two common bases of solidarity. The solution to the crisis, therefore, demands that all third-party humanitarian actors speak with one voice and behave according to one strategic plan or vision. In the case of solidarity based on human rights, for example, all acts of third-party intervenors would be conditioned upon belligerents' adherence to human rights principles and practices.

Criticisms toward the existing humanitarian system, from those working within the system to reform it, and those criticizing and challenging the system from the outside, are outlined below.

Classical Humanitarianism

Classical Humanitarians are painfully aware of how susceptible humanitarian assistance is to incorporation into the war strategies of belligerents. Among the negative consequences of that incorporation is the contribution to, rather than amelioration of, suffering among non-combatants, as well as the prolongation or "fuelling" of war through the diversion of relief inputs. Moreover, in their efforts to gain access to vulnerable populations, Classical Humanitarians may have ignored human rights violations towards, perhaps, the most vulnerable.

The solutions being suggested to counter these problems include the strengthening and enhancement, of the principles of neutrality, impartiality and consent of the parties. From the Classical Humanitarian perspective, if all third-party actors in the field abided by the ICRC Code of Conduct, then there would be fewer incidences of harm to relief personnel and less swapping of access to vulnerable groups in exchange for relief inputs.

Outside criticism toward Classical Humanitarianism begins with this solution. Certain signatories to the ICRC Code of Conduct confess that they agree to the principles in theory, but they do not adhere to them in practice. Their agreement to sign the Code of Conduct is partly a public-relations ploy. Donors may be more willing to give funds to those who are signatories than to those who are not. Those who have worked in the field with signatories also note a dissonance between theory and practice and have commented on the Code's inability to monitor and enforce compliance by its signatories.

It is also argued that adherence to the Code will not increase consent to access. Various case studies have revealed that the ability to gain access to populations in need has most to do with the political/military/economic objectives of the authorities who control them, and secondarily to do with the personality and professional skills of the relief aid negotiator. Criticism is rampant regarding the failure of humanitarian agencies to hire and train appropriate individuals for sensitive positions. Instead, institutional politics, rather than professionalism, determines who will be the belligerent's interlocutor.

Without question, the strongest outside critique toward Classical Humanitarianism is its refusal to abandon its non-political "blinders." Whenever resources are applied to a resource-scarce environment, someone is being empowered and the dynamics of war are being altered. Critics who

hold this position include those who support an Ownership Agenda and those who are in favour of Aggressive Solidarity.

Within the broad label of Ownership Agendas is a subset of distinct positions. They include Justifiable Isolationism, African Solutions for African Problems, and the Revolutionary Political Contract. Justifiable Isolationism desires to contain the conflict from spreading and to have the warring parties "burn themselves out" without having to involve itself directly. Isolationism criticizes Classical Humanitarianism for fuelling war by allowing relief inputs to be diverted, by protecting militia inside relief camps, and by assisting noncombatants in leaving a conflict environment as refugees (that is, not force the parties to deal with the vulnerability of noncombatants themselves).

African Solutions for African Problems argue that the non-political position of Classical Humanitarianism ignores the impact of aid on state and regional politics. The provision of relief aid by Classical Humanitarianism also interferes with the formation of African social and political contracts, particularly over issues of state responsibility and accountability toward civil society. And although Classical Humanitarianism professes to be the guardian of international humanitarian law, it uses such law to protect the rights and privileges of the humanitarian agencies themselves at the expense of the rights of non-combatants.

The Revolutionary Political Contract is slightly different from African Solutions. Both agree that any external involvement, however well-intentioned, almost inevitably damages the search for local solutions. But whereas African Solutions chides Classical Humanitarianism for not giving humanitarian funds directly to African governments to control relief operations, the Revolutionary recommends that funds also be directed toward local *progressive* organizations with *progressive* social agendas, and which would engage with government in a form of popular struggle toward a political contract. For African Solutions, the transfer of funds and humanitarian functions from third-party Classical Humanitarians to African governments is a far cleaner and quicker transfer of power and authority than that suggested by the Revolutionary.

Aggressive Solidarity is perhaps the most severe critic of the professed "non-political" nature of Classical Humanitarianism. Solidarity argues that the actions of Classical Humanitarianism are counterproductive in that they are temporarily life-sustaining, inadequate and can exacerbate the root causes of war by supporting indirectly human rights abuses and further political marginalization. It argues that in order to build local capacity for humanitarian action and human rights, third-party intervenors must challenge sovereignty claims; that is, they must be political in action and force governments and/or *de facto* authorities to be accountable. For example, some solidarity agendas suggest that donors and aid agencies form a united front in setting conditions by which all humanitarian assistance and aid be withdrawn should basic human rights violations continue or agreements to access populations be dishonoured.

How seriously should Classical Humanitarianism take these critiques of its continued "non-political" stance? Without exception, all alternative models of humanitarian agendas include a final qualifier of their critique: When there is no local political authority, no local political contract, and no political desire by a foreign power to intervene, the presence of Classical Humanitarians is critical for the survival of noncombatants. And although there have been clear failures in the implementation of humanitarian action according to principles of neutrality and impartiality, there are also advantages to the maintenance, if not further entrenchment, of these principles. Non-political NGOs use extensive communication channels and media partnerships to induce UN agencies and governments to provide assistance; they deter certain acts of violence by their presence and monitoring; they mobilize the international community to adopt and comply with international humanitarian law; and they can act as neutral intermediaries between warring parties.

Relief-to-Development-and-Democracy Approach

While the Relief-to-Development-and-Democracy Approach criticizes Classical Humanitarianism for favouring short-term solutions, Classical Humanitarianism and other agendas argue that modern humanitarianism has exceeded its limits and must become more modest in its ambitions and expectations. The humanitarian concept within Classical Humanitarianism is based on the will to provide for the well-being of others when circumstances render self-help difficult, if not impossible. Conceptual stretching of humanitarianism has led to the incorporation of all third-party activities into a grand agenda designed to bring a society back to equilibrium and prevent future conditions in which emergency relief must be applied. The concepts used most frequently in relation to the RDD Approach are "civil society" and "capacity-building." The RDD Approach seeks to strengthen civil society by capacity-building the social systems (kinship networks, hierarchy of elders, gender relations), economic systems (markets, insurance, credit, infrastructure), and political systems (local councils, traditional authority and decision-making, democracy, peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms). In the most severe situations, the RDD Approach goes so far as to recommend that the UN serve as a surrogate government in situations where there is no existing central authority.

The above activities, whether coordinated or independently strategized and implemented, are elements of the RDD Approach. UN agencies are representative of actors that have adopted this approach, which is loosely structured and resistant to a single over-arching authority. Multiple actors are involved in multiple objectives, such as relief, development, conflict resolution, democratic processes, market-oriented skills development, judiciary reform, and infrastructure rehabilitation. A "humanitarian" marketplace in which NGOs tend to adopt a functional specialty and then compete with other specialists for donor dollars now exists. Activities within this approach are donor-driven, rendering the Approach susceptible to gaps in certain relief functions while others are over-funded.

Relief is a small part of the RDD Approach and intentionally so. Emergency relief, it is argued, should not undermine other preventive, rehabilitative or development activities. Emergency operations receive too large a proportion of third-party resources, use fewer local institutions than other activities (that is, they do not "capacity build"), and create dependency cultures.

Criticisms against the RDD Approach are plentiful, beginning with its development component. As one author notes, the same aid workers and volunteers who once tried (and largely failed) to teach farmers to grow things are now fanning out and sowing the seeds of 'civil society' across the world. First, development efforts largely failed, in a wide swathe of the South, during the Cold War. In some countries, the evidence shows more of a development-to-relief continuum than vice versa. And as another author notes, development in some instances contributed to ethnic violence. The Rwandan genocide, for example, is summarized as an extreme outcome of the failure of a development model that was based on ethnic, regional and social exclusion. Second, the new development model focuses on the concept of civil society, but agencies that have adopted the RDD Approach design projects to strengthen "civil society" with little basic knowledge of the subject. Political scientists, after decades of attempts to identify the factors that comprise and strengthen civil society, as well as to understand the relationship of civil society to political authorities, have few answers themselves. Third, the term "civil society" implies that such a thing exists separate from the state and can be strengthened to counter poor and unaccountable political authority. Critics argue that in relatively permanent predatory environments, there is no distinction between state and civil society--all are politicized. And even if there was a distinction, how would humanitarian agencies know which groups within a territory represent a nascent and "good" civil society to capacity-build?

Each of the schools of humanitarian thought attack the RDD Approach from different angles. Classical Humanitarianism argues that those who adopt the RDD Approach state prematurely that an

emergency period has passed. Declaring an emergency over before its time is facilitated by measuring a state of emergency in terms of crude mortality rates rather than the traditional use of wasting and malnutrition statistics. Thus, changes in the primacy of certain emergency indicators rearranges the primacy of development, rehabilitation, and democracy-related components of the RDD Approach over continued relief activities. Abusive regimes have benefited from the sensitivity of the RDD Approach's desire to move quickly beyond an "emergency." In the case of Sudan, for example, the emergency was declared over, despite ongoing hostilities. And the Government of Sudan now permits international organizations to register only for rehabilitation and development activities even though there are vulnerable populations in great need of emergency relief.

Classical Humanitarianism also expresses great concern over the shift in focus from people to processes, particularly when the processes are without criteria for measuring their own success. For example, how long must third-party actors remain actively involved inside a territory before they feel comfortable that the democratic system they've helped to construct will "hold"? How will third-party actors involved in the development component measure their success if the economy they are attempting to assist has limited potential to compete in the global economy? As mentioned, a critique of Classical Humanitarianism is that it absorbs too many donor resources without contributing to the longer-term well-being of local institutions. Is this a fair critique given that there is no guarantee of the long-term sustainabilty of other components of the RDD Approach?

Those who favour Justifiable Isolationism are critical of the development component as well. The failure of the Development Decades should not be forgotten just because of more recent failures in humanitarian operations. Some who support the RDD Approach are operating from the assumption that there has been a "trade-off" between donors' provision of funding for emergency versus development projects. This assumes that once emergencies subside, donor dollars will return to development. One U.S. AID official remarked that such thinking is erroneous; the U.S., for one, is deeply committed to allowing the market (and IMF restructuring) to lead to development and has no intention of increasing development aid in the future. The drop in U.S. development funds to Africa (annually, from $1.3 billion in 1994 to $700 million today) will not be reversed.

African Solutions to African Problems argues that third-party actors are unprofessional, behave unethically, and are driven by donor agendas. And the imposition of an elite external service corps is in many cases deeply resented and often sabotaged in ways totally counterproductive both to hosts and to donors. Unless Africans are given the resources necessary to design and implement their own response to meet humanitarian needs, they must continue to accept and be humiliated by the agendas of their benefactors. As one author notes, for Africans to meet the conditions of foreign assistance, business investment, and be granted the resources to design and administer their own humanitarian operations, they must accept and work within "good governance" frameworks from five different perspectives: external governments, external enterprises, external cause groups, domestic elites, and ordinary people.

The Revolutionary Political Contract is also highly critical of the RDD Approach, which requires a marketplace of NGOs to implement the projects. Problems with NGOs are that anyone can create one, professional standards are unenforceable, and assessments of their performance are not made public. As for the UN, for those who espouse the Apolitical contract@ position, there is still an absence of accountability; there is little attention to waste and corruption within the UN system, which will continue to grow with the expansion of RDD components; there is no regulation of professional standards; disagreements within the system are left unresolved; and there are no enforcement measures attached to "lessons learned." Finally, the existing international humanitarian system remains unaccountable to its recipients for the negative consequences resulting from its presence.

There are no mechanisms in place for recipients to judge the behaviour of their "benefactors" without being punished by the withdrawal of all external assistance.

The Aggressive Solidarity approach mirrors the RDD Approach toward capacity-building, but is highly critical of its loose structure, which defies coordination and a commitment to a single over-arching objective such as protecting human rights. The state-centric nature of the UN system prevents it from boldly shaming abusive governments. The political and competitive nature of UN agencies prevents agency cooperation in developing and implementing a unified strategy. And the donor preferences and organizational survival of the UN and unregulated NGOs create incentives to continue to provide inputs regardless of belligerent behaviour and negative consequences to vulnerable populations. In sum, there are too many third-party actors in the field that are resistant to coordination and conditions placed upon their operations and funds.

An additional critique of the RDD Approach comes from those who offer an alternative understanding of conflict environments. The RDD Approach relies upon a clear dichotomy between war and peace--a dichotomy that may be delusional. The structure of the international political economy has changed. There is less optimism about the ability of certain regions of the world to develop and compete in the global market. These regions have thus developed economic systems built primarily upon parallel and grey markets; social welfare systems dependent on external third-parties; and systems of political power in which there are many sources of political authority, each with their own set of followers, and all competing in a predatory environment for power and resources. This conceptualization is of a relatively permanent conflict environment; there is no process that can be introduced by the RDD Approach that can possibly overcome the grand structural problems of the world system. In a sense, this scenario has been accepted by Justifiable Isolationism, in that some believe that there are certain regions that are a waste of donor resources. It is implicitly accepted by some who support African Solutions and who believe that they must get control of third-party resources before their political competitors steal them through relief diversion. It is also implicitly accepted by the advocates of the Revolutionary Political Contract, who believe that a long political struggle is the only way to overcome the absence of government accountability and populations' own lack of will to collectively organize against famine and repression. The presence of third-party humanitarians and the application of resources according to the agendas of those who live elsewhere only perpetuate human vulnerability to famine and personal harm.

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The greatest challenge to the existing international system appears to come from the proponents of Ownership Agendas, who deliver a message that both developed and developing countries want to hear. For the potential donor government, if the sole responsibility for providing humanitarian relief rests with the host government, then there is a clear sovereignty-based excuse for the donor to remain uninvolved politically, militarily, and now humanitarily. Donor governments' financial and technical support to African regional peacekeeping is one example of the growing popularity of Ownership Agendas. To Classical Humanitarianism, however, surrendering to Ownership Agendas is a surrender to international indifference. To those who support Aggressive Solidarity, it is a surrender to expanded human rights violations and the continued vulnerability of those who are politically marginalized. And to those who support the RDD Approach, the dominance of Ownership Agendas would represent a "disempowerment" of UN agencies and NGOs far beyond that which these institutions now fear from organized cooperation with each other.

It is imperative that there be a clear demonstration that the existing humanitarian system is becoming more operationally and financially efficient, and its personnel and agencies are becoming more accountable, professional, and cooperative. If the prevailing doubt remains that the existing system is

incapable of "learning lessons," then it is critical that all now begin contemplating and constructing additional mechanisms, grounded in international law, to ensure future international engagement in the lives of the world's vulnerable and to protect against the humanitarian and human rights violations perpetrated by governments and authorities against their people.

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Learning to Learn

Discussion Paper Prepared for OCHA by Larry Minear*

This paper examines the lessons-learning process among international humanitarian institutions in the post-Cold War period. It begins with a review of experience in the Great Lakes region (Section I), with particular attention to problems of coordination among humanitarian organizations and at the political interface. It then turns to experience in other major recent crises, which confirms the recurring difficulty of putting humanitarian principles into practice (Section II).

The paper assesses progress to date in making the necessary reforms in humanitarian policies and procedures (Section III), finding that while numerous changes have been introduced, the underlying problems identified remain largely unresolved. The paper links resistance to learning and institutional change with four characteristics of the culture of humanitarian organizations: their tendency to approach every crisis as unique, their action-oriented nature, their defensiveness to criticism, and their lack of accountability (Section IV). It concludes with a discussion of an agenda for future action (Section V).

The Great Lakes Experience

The experience in responding to the crisis in the Great Lakes region is a logical starting point for this review, both because the experience has proved so searing and because the associated lessons learning process has been unusually carefully tracked. Among the evaluations at hand are the 1996 five-volume multi-donor evaluation of the Rwanda response[1], a review of follow-up action taken after a year-plus[2], a 1997 IASC-commissioned Study[3], a 1998 Tripartite Study of Operational Coordination by UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP,[4] and separate reviews by the Departments of Humanitarian Affairs[5] and Peacekeeping Operations.[6]

Taken together, these studies identify coordination among humanitarian organizations and at the political interface as the two critical areas of weakness in the international response to the genocide in April 1994, the uprooting of Rwandans which followed, the festering problems that led to the creation of the DRC, and the continuing crisis of insecurity, human need, and human rights abuse throughout the region.

The IASC Study links the weakness of the UN's humanitarian response to the lack of clear and decisive authority to exercise coordination. "The simple reality is that within the diverse UN family, no element has adequate authority to command, coerce or compel any other element to do anything."[7] Describing the prevailing situation as "coordination light," it picks up on a recurrent theme of earlier studies on Rwanda and elsewhere: that a more assertive model of coordination is necessary for

activities to be effective.

The 1994 DHA study of Rwanda distinguishes among coordination by command, by consensus, and by default and concludes that humanitarian coordination in complex emergencies generally relies on coordination by consensus or default.[8] Advocating that "DHA must tighten its managerial and institutional grip on the coordination of complex emergencies," the study concludes that "the donors (and the general public) cannot forever claim that the UN is ineffective in coordinating emergencies while at the same time refusing to give it the means and the resources to do so."[9]

Weaknesses in the area of coordination in the Great Lakes have also played themselves out at the more operational level in the lack of a balanced deployment of resources and programs. The Multidonor Study contrasted the non-response to the genocide in April 1994 with the outpouring of assistance following the mass displacement later in the year. The existence of a continuing problem is confirmed by the IASC Study, which noted that the consolidated appeal process does not function as a instrument of UN system-wide strategic planning and observed that protection activities were underfunded while "hundreds of millions of dollars were relatively easily obtained for moving large volumes of relief supplies."[10] The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has confirmed that "mobilization of resources does not appear to have been a problem in the region -- the appropriate allocation however is a different issue."[11]

Once again, however, the failure to act upon lessons identified earlier has returned to haunt the system. The 1994 DHA study had noted that "DHA's credibility would be well served by a limited dose of coordination by command, both in terms of some un-earmarked funds, which could be obtained through CERF [the Central Emergency Revolving Fund] or another mechanism, and in terms of leadership and authority on the ground."[12] In early 1998, however, the system appears no closer to acting on that recommendation than when it was tabled.

The studies of the Great Lakes also identify recurring difficulties at the interface between humanitarian organizations and political actors, both international and local. The multidonor study, while citing numerous problems among humanitarian organizations, saves its most blistering critique against international political actors for acts of omission and commission. It was they who misread the signs of approaching genocide and reduced rather than strengthened UNAMIR ranks once the bloodshed had begun in earnest. It was they who responded to an underlying political crisis in exclusively humanitarian terms and sent mixed signals to political and military actors in the region.

Lack of political coherence is indeed a constraint on effective humanitarian action. This was underscored at a February 1998 Symposium on the Relationship between Humanitarian Action and Political Military Action, organized by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross. One of the Symposium's three working groups identified the absence of coherence among political institutions -- donor governments, UN member states, Security Council members, international and regional intergovernmental bodies, and the UN's political department -- as a more serious constraint on consistent and effective humanitarian action than problems among aid agencies themselves. In fact, the reality of coordination by default between and among political actors works against the creation of a policy framework within which humanitarian action in complex emergencies can succeed.

Problems of political coherence at the international level are compounded by local political actors. As the IASC Study notes, coordination "is a function of interaction between elements of the UN system and those political and military actors that are legally, morally and materially responsible for the welfare of affected populations, i.e., national governments, local governments, armies, and in some

instances, rebel authorities."[13] In the Great Lakes, such political-military actors represented a threat even to the most effectively coordinated humanitarian efforts. They were best dealt with when consistency existed at the international political level, enabling special representatives of the Secretary-General to negotiate access in selected settings. "Elsewhere, especially in Rwanda, where donor nations and the UN system's agenda often were not in harmony, envoys did little to create humanitarian space, or to pressure for consent to humanitarian action."[14]

By all accounts, the lessons of the Great Lakes are clear: coordination-light is inadequate to the formidable challenge of orchestrating effective humanitarian action in complex emergencies and the absence of political coherence has deprived aid agencies of the indispensable framework for humanitarian action. Various remedies have been suggested: for example, the consolidation of such aid activities into a single agency and the provision of more assertive and consistent political direction. Later sections of the paper suggest why these conclusions have not been acted upon.

Other Recent Experience

From the experience in other post-Cold War conflicts, confirming that of the Great Lakes, emerge several recurring problems that confront and frustrate humanitarian action. From Somalia to Chechnya, from Liberia to Karabakh, the United Nations has not found effective ways of dealing on humanitarian concerns with non-state actors -- and with state actors under duress from insurgents. UN humanitarian agencies, with governing bodies composed of sovereign states and themselves integral parts of a world organization made up of such states, have exhibited well-documented structural difficulties in discharging their mandates to carry out needs assessments, provide assistance and protection to civilians, and monitor their programs in government- and rebel-controlled areas alike.

Problems in the Sudan are illustrative.[15] In 1989, Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), breaking new ground, negotiated humanitarian access with the warring parties -- only to see such access eroded by the belligerents and by its own decision to shift OLS' administrative base from New York to Khartoum. A 1990 OLS case study noted the importance of "coordinating activities from a location removed from each party in a civil war."[16] Decisions about situating relief administration in places such as Monrovia, Luanda, and Zagreb have subsequently created similar problems in carrying out non-political functions on highly politicized terrain. The UN has been no more effective in needs assessment in Chechnya and Nagorno-Karabakh than in the run-up to OLS. As for on-the-ground presence, UN aid agencies have been excluded from those two settings altogether.

Despite its failure to address the generic problem of carrying out humanitarian functions in situations of contested sovereignty, the United Nations system continues to position itself as the focal point for coordination, a position accepted by donor governments and other member states. But there are, however, alternatives. James Ingram, a former executive director of WFP, has expressed his considered judgment that there is "no reason" why a coordinated international response to future complex emergencies "should be built around the United Nations" and a variety of reasons why it should not. He recommends the ICRC or a new organization situated outside the UN system.[17]

If the UN is indeed to remain at the center of the world's aid efforts in contested settings, steps could and should be taken to clarify that humanitarian action by UN organizations does not confer sovereignty upon those with whom access is negotiated. Such an understanding allowed UNICEF to take the lead in negotiating the terms of OLS with insurgents and the UN-recognized authorities alike. Why should such an understanding not be written into the mandates of other UN aid organizations (WFP's governing body has moved in that direction) or, alternatively, become the rationale for creating a new UN relief dedicated to complex emergency response?

Post-Cold War conflicts have raised serious questions not only about the nature of humanitarian principles but also about how these may best be preserved in practice. In fact, the post-Cold War period can be read as a time of testing established principles in the cauldron of internal armed conflicts. The experience in the former Yugoslavia highlights the extent to which, confronted with the same challenges of the denial of humanitarian access, the UN and the ICRC responded in different fashions. The ICRC took a principled stand, negotiating the access provided under international humanitarian law with the belligerents and being prepared to suspend operations if a party reneged on its obligations. The UN took a more pragmatic approach, ceding the belligerents greater authority over its activities and accepting greater political conditionality in the process.[18]

Which approach works better, in what circumstances, for what reasons, and for how long? The IASC Study makes the intriguing observation that strategic planning and coordination "worked best when grounded in specific tenets of international humanitarian law."[19] It is difficult to say whether this conclusion might be writ large over post-Cold War experience to date. However, it would be useful to explore whether there is a positive correlation between principled action and successful humanitarian action.

The UN system and its stakeholders have yet to address a related problem in the area of principle and practice, flagged in several earlier studies. At issue is the extent to which the effectiveness of humanitarian activities and the security of aid personnel may be jeopardized by association with other more political elements of the UN system. The IASC Study identifies difficulties created for aid actors by the political framework of international action within which they function. "[H]umanitarians in the UN system, and their NGO partners," it observes, "have borne the brunt of anti-UN, anti-humanitarian sentiments far beyond that for which they are responsible."[20]

Such difficulties are not unprecedented, although the extent to which the effectiveness, not to say the principles, of humanitarian action are compromised is often understated by political policy-makers, and even by officials at aid headquarters. In former Yugoslavia, for example, the association of UN aid officials with UN peacekeeping activities and with economic sanctions created a certain "schizophrenia" within the UN and complicated the performance of their humanitarian mission.[21] While such problems at the peacekeeping interface may have eased in recent years, the reason probably lies not in the improved management of the inherent tensions but rather in a reduction of the number of peacekeeping operations themselves.

The United Nations system has an uneven track record in identifying lessons such as these and, once identified, in instituting the changes deemed necessary. Among the useful steps taken to date have been an exercise by the IASC, begun in 1994 and completed in 1996, to examine tensions between humanitarian principles and other activities of the UN system.[22] OCHA's current review of the UN principles and rules of engagement in countries in crisis may provide a useful point of departure for a formulation of options in this area. As indicated in the discussion to follow, however, the structural nature of such problems has made them unusually difficult to resolve.

The learning curve

Scholarly analysis has yet to examine the dynamics of institutional change within humanitarian institutions. Numerous studies of corporate and public sector institutions remain largely without analog in the humanitarian sector. Yet aid agencies are subject to the same forces that are producing change elsewhere, however idiosyncratic the dynamic among humanitarian organizations may be. These forces include new technology, changing roles of governments and non-state actors, disparities between resources availability and demands, greater media scrutiny, a more informed public, growing

competition in the marketplace, and a newly global environment.[23]

Once again, the Great Lakes experience, better documented than most, is a logical starting point for examining the impact of the learning process, and evaluations of it, on institutional behavior. From the Great Lakes studies mentioned earlier, augmented by experience from other settings, emerge the main outlines of a laconic learning curve.

The multidonor study of Rwanda provides an instructive example of the importance of evaluation exercises -- but also of their limited ability, in and of themselves, to produce institutional change. The initiative was launched in November 1994 by a steering committee of some 37 institutions, governmental, intergovernmental, and NGO. The study enlisted 52 consultants who in March 1996 produced a 5-volume work. With direct costs alone of some $2 million, the evaluation reviewed issues related to aid programs that in the April--December 1994 period had cost $1.4 billion.

If the "mother of all evaluations" was unprecedented in scope and detail, so too was a follow-on initiative that urged and monitored implementation of its recommendations. The Joint Evaluation Follow-up Monitoring and Facilitation Network (JEFF) was formed in May 1996 by eleven individuals from the original study and funded by concerned donors. A preliminary JEFF report, released in February 1997, was followed by a final report in June 1997, after which the JEFF group disbanded.[24]

Of the 64 recommendations in the multidonor study, the JEFF study found that, based on submissions from 19 of the 37 members of the original evaluation's steering committee, about two thirds had received some positive action during the initial 15 months. Of course, some of the 64 were more important than others and, as it turned out, the more critical recommendations had received the least responsive treatment.

Ignored altogether were the most overarching, such as the recommendation to foster policy coherence in the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and UN Secretariat and the recommendation to encourage effective prevention and early suppression of genocide. *Reviewed but rebuffed* were recommendations to institute coordination-by-command arrangements in the aid sector and to set up an independent watchdog to keep international institutions' feet to the fire. *Acted upon to one degree or another* were recommendations that involved the least radical options on coordination and accountability, the commissioning of four additional studies, and -- most encouraging -- a number of measures to strengthen international human rights machinery. At several points, the JEFF survey found fuller implementation outside the UN system than within.

The impact of the multidonor study points to a larger conclusion, one corroborated by other evaluations and evaluators: that the role played by formal evaluations in institutional change is modest at best. Indeed, "evaluation x" rarely causes "change y," although a given study may contribute to subsequent reforms. While such a conclusion "may come as a disappointment to policy researchers and to foundation officers and others who underwrite their work, rarely does the impetus for change come only or even primarily from an assessment, whether by outsiders or insiders."[25] The JEFF review did find, however, that the multidonor study probably accelerated changes already under discussion, facilitating and supporting the process of lessons-learning and policy dialogue within and among institutions.[26]

That said, failure to implement some of the specific changes that had been recommended contributed to the recurrence of the identified problems in the ensuing years. The lack of attention to refugee camp security and the empowerment of the *genocidaires* led to the unraveling of the situation described in detail by the 1998 IASC Study. Festering discontent in 1996-97 confirmed the urgency of specific

recommendations to remove barriers to repatriation. There was an occasional encouraging note: for example, the JEFF study found that several "immediate and urgent" measures recommended for Burundi had indeed been put into place, recalling the progress acknowledged by the IASC Study in fashioning and implementing a common humanitarian policy.[27]

Nevertheless, the follow-up study to the multidonor initiative concluded on a bleak note: "the case of Burundi must lead us to conclude that, one year on, a great deal has **not** changed, despite all the debate and meetings described above."[28] In fact, reflecting the passage of time between February and June 1997, the final JEFF commentary expressed even more keen disappointment than had the preliminary review at the absence of action on many key fronts.

A 1996 study of the Rwanda crisis by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations makes for some interesting comparisons. In reviewing how the international response could have been improved, DPKO's terms of reference are far more circumscribed. "[I]t is important not to search for idealistic solutions," the study states, Abut rather to remain within the constraints of the reality of the United Nations system today."[29] Yet the 43 "lessons learned" are decidedly critical of the response mounted. Seven are related to coordination and exhibit little patience for coordination-light. Lesson 11, in fact, urges that "The United Nations overall presence in a country should reflect a unified, cohesive structure. The SRSG should be recognized institutionally as the head of the United Nations family in the mission area."

What of the broader lessons learning process beyond the Great Lakes? Unfortunately, no counterpart to the JEFF review exists surveying actions to implement recommendations in other evaluation studies or to address problems identified. Yet it is possible to retrace some illustrative steps taken, whether in response to evaluation studies or, more likely, to the cumulative pressure for change.

Foremost among macro-level changes was passage in late 1991 by the General Assembly of Resolution 46/182, opening additional humanitarian space in situations of contested sovereignty. "Humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country," the Resolution stated, "and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country."[30] The expanded space was staked out through a carefully negotiated text that spoke of "consent" rather than request, of "country" rather than government, "in principle" rather than in every particular instance, and based on a "appeal" rather than a formal application.

Passed in the wake of the first major post-Cold War humanitarian response and reflecting donor government concern about the disarray of the relief effort on behalf of the Kurds, the resolution also created the position of Emergency Relief Coordinator. In early 1992 the Secretary-General established the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. While the relaxation of sovereignty drew more immediate attention, the orchestration of humanitarian efforts would prove the more consuming challenge. As the situation has evolved, both the relaxation of sovereignty and the efforts of DHA to ensure greater coordination have proved by and large serious disappointments in their practical consequences for a more responsive and effective international humanitarian regime.

Other changes of major proportion and potential include the heightened involvement of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the humanitarian sphere. The decade has seen greater engagement by ECOSOC (and its sub-working groups), which has required of the IASC and its member agencies in-depth reviews of their capacities to respond to emergencies. Preparation of the requisite reports have provided a focus for IASC discussion on such issues as coordination and resource mobilization. Again, however, the results to date have disappointed. The ECOSOC review of humanitarian action scheduled for mid-1997, which was expected to bring a new rigor to the process, was upstaged by the UN reform discussions, then at a critical juncture.

Also of significance at the interagency level has been the establishment in 1997 by the Secretary-General of executive committees, designed to achieving greater policy coherence and interaction in the political, peacekeeping, humanitarian, human rights, and development dimensions of the UN system's response to crises. The inclusion of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) -- and, for that matter, now on the IASC as well -- reflects the implementation of lessons distilled from a variety of conflicts regarding the centrality of human rights issues and a departure from 46-182. An ECHA working group tasked with recommending steps for implementing the reform package made a number of useful suggestions. However, no significant expansion of coordination authority is in sight and confusion remains regarding the division of labor between ECHA and the IASC.

Reform has been achieved in the groundrules governing the withdrawal of UN staff in insecure situations. Responding to situations earlier in the decade when the withdrawal of UN staff from places such as Somalia left the system without essential information about the deteriorating plight of the civilian population, the UN Secretariat has drawn up and implemented new groundrules which allow essential humanitarian personnel to remain in place after less critical UN staff have been withdrawn. NGOs, too, have taken steps to inform their decisions and equip personnel on matters related to the security of staff and programs.[31] Progress has also been made in formulating groundrules for the use of military and civilian assets in responding to major humanitarian crises.

At the intergovernmental level outside the UN system, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee has devoted attention to the impact of conflict on development activities. A Task Force formed in 1995 has produced a set of guidelines on conflict, peace, and development cooperation which were embraced in a policy statement in May 1997 by development ministers and others. The statement pledges to "Work with colleagues within our governments to ensure that all our policies -- including in the areas of security, policy and economic relations, human rights, environment and development co-operation -- are coherent in fostering structural stability and the prevention of violent conflict." The statement raises the possibility of "an independent co-ordinating authority to monitor donors' adherence to agreed principles."[32] The DAC Expert Group on Evaluation is also involved in major efforts in the lessons-learning area.

Beyond interagency and intergovernmental arenas, there have been other changes of potentially major proportions in individual agencies and governments. In late 1996, the World Bank approved new policy on post-conflict reconstruction, followed by a decision to establish a new department to orchestrate expanded operational involvement. UNICEF has promoted successful adoption of a Convention on the Rights of the Child and backstopped a detailed study on the impact of armed conflict on children, which has subsequently been endorsed by the General Assembly and contributed to a more rights-based philosophy of programming[33].

A WHO process has reviewed its role in complex emergencies, noting structural and administrative inadequacies and recommending that the agency "should not normally take a direct role in service delivery or procurement and delivery of supplies."[34] The ICRC is about to implement recommendations flowing from its multi-year Avenir review. The Netherlands government has positioned its humanitarian assistance activities within its conflict resolution unit in an attempt to capitalize on the expected synergies. Such changes often reflect recommendations of individual lessons - learning studies, some of them confidential, others available to the public.

As the focus shifts to the more programmatic and procedural level, there is a proliferation of developments to report. One example is provided by the newly available Report of the Tripartite

Lessons Learned Study of the Great Lakes mentioned above. The report highlights what it considers "the importance of the achievements of the three agencies ... in developing the new formal and informal modalities of operational coordination and joint action." At the same time, it acknowledges that even such improvements "often could do little to harmonize agency operations" in the face of personality clashes, interagency competition, and other "natural" tendencies of the emergency system. The study's 28 recommendations offer an agenda for further progress.[35]

In view of the multiplicity of arenas, actions, and studies involved, it is difficult to establish with any precision the significance of the changes achieved to date, to say nothing of the extent to which they have resulted from lessons-learning processes. The evidence suggests, however, that the observations in the various Rwanda studies and their follow-up represent a microcosm of the larger picture of institutional change in the post-Cold War.

That is, while the mechanisms and mechanics of the humanitarian apparatus have been adjusted, the more systemic problems remain to be addressed. Reforms to date have been largely technical, procedural, logistical, and administrative in nature. These include memoranda clarifying relationships among humanitarian agencies of the UN system, guidelines for the utilization of military and civil defense assets, and rosters for personnel with particular expertise available for rapid deployment. In other words, the easiest changes have been made. Still to be addressed are the weak structures of humanitarian coordination and the knotty political and humanitarian tensions underlying the intergovernmental system itself.

Taking stock of the situation in 1995, one study concluded that "the United Nations has made surprisingly few fundamental changes of an institutional or a policy nature."[36] Three years later, a similar verdict would be equally justified, and more alarming.

Cultural impediments to learning

The fact that more significant changes have not been forthcoming, despite profound changes in the external environment, reflects a number of constraints in the institutional cultures of humanitarian organizations. Four are examined here.

The first is *the tendency to approach every crisis as unique*. Sooner or later in most discussions of humanitarian crises, someone observes that Zaire is not Cambodia, Somalia is not Bosnia, Sierra Leone is not El Salvador. The point, while not exactly profound, is legitimate. Complex emergencies being complex, a one-size-fits-all response is inappropriate. The idiosyncratic dynamics of individual conflicts need to be taken into account in charting effective international responses.

In a more fundamental sense, however, no crisis is unique. "[E]ach crisis pits the same institutions (the United Nations, governments, NGOs) against the same [interlocutors] (government and insurgent groups, civilian and military host officials) in a continuing effort to find solutions to recurring problems (the obstruction of humanitarian access, the manipulation of relief, inequitable economic relationships, the absence of viable and accountable local structures). As long as every crisis is perceived as wholly without precedent or parallel, there will be little scope for institutional learning."[37]

In fact, overemphasis on the idiosyncratic reinvents the wheel and leaves earlier lessons unlearned. The manipulation of belligerent and criminal elements of the refugee camps in eastern Zaire in 1994 was a rerun of problems unaddressed in Cambodian refugee camps along the Thai border years before. The rebuffs in Sierra Leone in 1997-98 were not the first time that humanitarian agencies had been barred from fulfilling their mandates in insurgent regions. Yet, as noted above, little has been

done to address the structural political constraints inhibiting the discharge of the UN's humanitarian responsibilities, whether in Khmer Rouge-held territory in Cambodia, SPLA-controlled southern Sudan, sovereignty-asserting Nagorno-Karabakh, or perilous Chechnya.

The second constraint to learning is *the action-oriented nature of the humanitarian ethos*. Much has been written about the hyperactive pace of the relief enterprise, borne of the need to respond to rapid-onset crises. In the heat of a crisis, humanitarian agencies and staff can hardly be expected to pause and reflect. The reality that "crisis x" is often followed by "crisis y" and "crisis z" -- if not accompanied by them -- may shift such reflection more permanently to the back burner. As a result, copies of the multidonor Rwanda study and others like it remain intact in their cellophane wrappers.

There is an underlying tension, if not contradiction, between the can-do spirit of concern for suffering humankind and the discriminating calculations needed for effective functioning in today's internal armed conflicts. Only in recent years have the agencies taken specific steps to facilitate reflection on their mandates, strategies, modus operandi, and results. In fact, after some progress in approaching humanitarian activities with greater deliberation, the pendulum may be swinging in the opposite direction. Some NGO practitioners are now concerned that overdue attention to the broader political, military, and social context in which humanitarian interventions are set is beginning serve as a rationalization for inaction rather than a prelude to more strategic intervention.

The third cultural deterrent to learning is a certain *defensiveness to criticism.* Dismissive treatment by the spokesperson of the Secretary-General of the multidonor study surely impeded serious review of that very detailed and thoughtful examination of the UN response to the Rwanda crisis. Her comment to the press at a time when the report was still embargoed -- "we will not continue to take such criticisms lying down" -- was interpreted by those preparing to launch the findings and recommendations as "an attempt to undermine the report and unbalance media coverage of the launch."[38] The implicit message to UN officials was that the changes proposed were unneeded and, in the view of senior management, did not deserve serious consideration.

While institutions dependent upon public support are understandably reluctant to wash their dirty linen in public or to see others hang out their laundry, there are various signs of the emergence of a more self-critical breed of humanitarianism. Agencies that only a decade or two ago rebuffed efforts to examine the implications of the prevailing East-West political framework for humanitarian action are now much more prepared to consider the political dimensions of their work. Assessments themselves have become a cottage industry, with think tanks, universities, research groups, and consultants cranking out more material than can be digested, much less acted upon. A recent compilation of peacekeeping studies published during the first seven years of the post-Cold War period tallied 2200 titles in English alone. That number doubtless dwarfs the recent upsurge in policy reviews of humanitarian activities, whose numbers, as suggested by the ALNAP inventory, are nonetheless numerous.[39]

The swing of the pendulum from a dearth of thoughtful material to an abundance of it is welcome and overdue. Yet the latter extreme may be as unhelpful to the process of learning and change as was the former. Even the proliferation of so-called lessons learned units is not in and of itself a sign of progress. Since serious learning requires institutional change, such units might better be called "lessons-learning" or "lessons identified" units and viewed as means to an end rather than ends in themselves.

In any event, both DHA/OCHA and DPKO now have such bodies. They review the same crises, although from different perspectives, with different methodologies, and without much consultation. Each has mounted half a dozen major studies in the past several years. DPKO's unit, which applies a

standard set of questions and an established and highly iterative process to each review, is well staffed and securely situated within its parent department. That arrangement has concomitant advantages such as access to information and engagement of professional colleagues, as well as disadvantages, including more circumscribed terms of reference and less independence. DPKO's studies appear not to have generated much of a constituency either in-house or beyond.

The DHA (now OCHA) unit is smaller and less adequately provided for within the regular budget of its parent office. Reaching beyond its own staff to engage outside researchers in its studies, its approach is generally less constrained by institutional politics and more wide-ranging and independent in nature. While individual UN agencies have their own internal lessons-learning processes, DHA reviews have sparked interest across the broader humanitarian community and attracted a wide following in academic and policy circles.

Certainly the spirit of the times requires asking tough questions and subjecting policies and programs to rigorous scrutiny. One thoughtful critic has recently observed that in recent years, the agenda may have shifted "from a debate regarding how to reform the humanitarian system, to the question of whether it is worthy of reform at all."[40] As long as reasonably satisfactory answers emerge, however, tough questions may be a vehicle for rekindling respect for the humanitarian impulse and principles. The court-martial of several Canadian peace keepers for mistreating Somali captives did not lead the Canadian public to demand, or the Ottawa authorities to initiate, reduced national involvement in international crises. Canada has indeed reaffirmed and continued its tradition of engagement. That said, many humanitarian institutions remain more wary of criticism than open to it.

The fourth constraint on lessons learning is *the prevailing lack of accountability*. The lessons-learning process is undercut by "the culture of impunity:" that is, the failure to hold actors responsible for their actions. As noted earlier, donor governments often send mixed signals to UN agencies and fail to demand appropriate accountability from their operational NGO partners. UN agencies point the finger at governments rather than taking responsibility for variables they themselves control. (Adapting the figure used in the IASC Great Lakes study, the UN, while neither king nor rook, it is nevertheless more than pawn.)

NGOs rationalize dubious levels of professionalism through appeals to their good intentions and voluntary ethos. Armchair generals criticize peacekeeping operations from desks in parliament without having slept in the UN barracks in Srebrenica or gone on patrol in Abkhazia. Conflict specialists pontificate about peace-building without having set foot on an ethnic fault line. Researchers do not take time to read what others write or assume responsibility for their own recommendations.

A recent study on improving the UN's management of economic sanctions, commissioned by the IASC utilizing independent researchers arranged by DHA and underwritten in part by the agencies -- provides both a fascinating insight into confused accountabilities and a good example of constructive post-Cold War change.[41] The study noted that humanitarian organizations are asked by governments to offset the "unintended consequences" of sanctions on vulnerable groups living under targeted regimes, consequences which in reality can be foreseen and are often indeed intended. Aid actors are then faulted for failing to relieve suffering, in part because of the unwieldy system by which governments simultaneously exempt and control humanitarian shipments. Governments themselves, monitoring humanitarian items closely as a threat to the integrity of sanctions, turn a blind eye to illicit imports. The Security Council's Sanctions Committees take decisions of major humanitarian import behind closed doors, well protected from public scrutiny.

For their part, UN aid organizations lack clear policy on how to function in countries under sanctions

yet are reluctant to seek clarification for fear that stakeholder governments will tie their hands further. Among and within NGOs, themselves lacking policy in this highly political area, there is a high degree of opinionation by individual staff, often reflecting the particular responsibilities of given staff in the organization, and their personal views. The blurring of who among those involved in sanctions is accountable to whom for what reflects the lack of coherence and transparency in the sanctions scene.

Sanctions illustrates two dimensions of the problem of accountability. The first is the lack of clear policy and lines of authority by which actions of individuals and institutions may be judged. Should a UN aid official be chastised for expressing critical views about the impacts of sanctions on vulnerable groups when his or her organization lacks clear policy about how it will function when sanctions have been imposed? Should an aid organization be faulted for not delivering relief supplies effectively? Is a diplomat who votes to impose sanctions responsible for the pain they cause civilians? More often than not, accountability is something expected of someone else. Everybody -- but also nobody -- is ultimately responsible in the shell game.

The second dimension concerns the multiple points of accountability. NGOs are responsible to their boards of directors and the constituents who elect them, to donor governments and/or multilateral organizations from whom they receive resources, to partner organizations in crisis countries with whom they collaborate, and to beneficiaries on whose behalf they mount programs. Indeed, aid organizations attach great importance to their obligations to beneficiaries, although the prevailing measurements of accountability are largely western in orientation and character and quantitative in nature.

But change is taking place. The sanctions study was the outcome of efforts within the interagency body and by individual agencies over a period of several years to address difficulties in Iraq, Haiti, Former Yugoslavia, Burundi, and Sierra Leone.[42] Following through on the study, which proposed a methodology and indicators for pre-assessing and monitoring sanctions impacts, the IASC formed an inter-agency technical group and also sent a first-ever communiqué to the Security Council articulating its concerns on the humanitarian impacts of economic sanctions.[43] During the years 1996-98, DHA/OCHA also carried out and/or coordinated sanctions missions to the Sudan, Burundi, and Sierra Leone. Such steps hold promise for addressing underlying as well as procedural problems experienced by the humanitarian community and for enhancing accountability.

Accountability is currently being enhanced in other ways as well. NGOs have taken steps to promote a voluntary code of conduct and to establish certain minimum essential thresholds in key programming sectors. The Sphere Project seeks to improve not only the quality of humanitarian response but also "the accountability of humanitarian agencies to beneficiaries, members and supporters." Some donor agencies are now making a given NGO's endorsement of the code a condition for receiving grants and contracts.

Yet since accountability also involves issues at the interface with political-military actors, it needs to be approached on various fronts in concert. There is little value in holding aid organizations accountable for problems encountered in reaching people inside Afghanistan, for example, when small-arms trade, acquiesced or engaged in by governments, is at the heart of the problem. Accountability is not just a one-way street.

An agenda for the future

The constraints to learning, however deeply rooted in the culture of humanitarian institutions, are not beyond remedy. Correcting the tendency to approach every crisis as unique will require development

of greater institutional memory and greater attention to comparative analysis of similarities as well as differences among major humanitarian crises. Institutional implications include providing greater support for in-house evaluation capacity and more consistent and creative use of the results of outside studies.

The action orientation of humanitarian institutions is not likely to change significantly. However, it can and should be balanced by a more reflective approach to the challenges confronted. The idea is not that the agencies should become, Hamlet-like, sicklied over with the pale hue of thought but rather that their activities should be impelled and informed by more savviness about political, military, and social realities on the ground.

Defensiveness to criticism will not metamorphose overnight into more openness to change. The constraints run far deeper than will be remedied by placing a "suggestion box" outside the chief executive's office. Yet ways may be found to institutionalize incentives for constructive criticism and promote an culture receptive to thoughtful critiques of current policy and suggestions of alternatives. The studies reviewed confirm an indispensable role for outside researcher in keeping the system honest, although the data reviewed suggest that evaluations, external and internal alike, have at best limited impact on institutional change.

The prevailing lack of accountability is perhaps the most difficult constraint to address, since it reflects confusion in the accepted approach of coordination-by-consensus. The shell game described earlier in which no single individuals or institutions are held accountable for international humanitarian interventions undermines effective action. Accountability requires clear lines of authority, which in turn means clear-cut delineation of responsibility, political no less than humanitarian.

The future agenda for learning to learn cannot be tackled in isolation from the issues of coordination and the lackluster learning curve. That is, learning the lessons of the early post-Cold War period and of future crises will require a more sober view of institutional resistance to change and a more strategic approach to creating and managing opportunities for reform. Such an approach might permeate the unglamorous day-to-day work of coordination with greater purpose and energy. It would inject greater rigor into interagency coordination efforts. Had it infused the IASC Working Group meeting in Geneva on March 12, for example, it might have produced different outcomes.

- Debate about the first OCHA-era report to ECOSOC would have had less difficulty generating a consensus in support of something other than a business-as-usual approach.
- Discussion of the strategic framework initiative in Afghanistan, itself a ground-breaking attempt at changing the way the UN functions in complex emergencies, would have been less threatened by the significant momentum being generated by the agencies in the field.
- Contingency plans for the worsening situation in the Sudan would have been challenged for not having given serious consideration to terminating or suspending OLS, its principles already badly tarnished, rather than to limping further into a darkening future.
- Discussion of the IASC Great Lakes Study would have spent less time on whether to distance the agencies and the IASC from the report and more time on how to review and address its criticisms.

It is clear that donors have an indispensable role to play in supporting the processes of lessons-learning and institutional change within the agencies. The impression currently abounds that many governments are not interested in serious reforms in aid policies and activities since these would require greater political coherence in their own relations with individual UN agencies and with the UN system as a whole. They are viewed, as is the 46/182 resolution, to be mandating greater

coordination while frustrating efforts to achieve it.

Yet government initiative is reflected in some of the creative initiatives in recent years such as the multidonor evaluation of Rwanda and follow-up JEFF initiative. While some governments have resisted the recommended humanitarian safeguards in economic sanctions, others have rallied behind them. Is it not high time for governments to put most of their funding into common funds for programs in a given country and, as some are already doing, fund only those agencies that subscribe to the NGO Code of Conduct?

The present moment is opportune for taking stock of the lessons already identified and for vetting a strategy for fundamental institutional change. A widespread sense of disillusion with the humanitarian enterprise prevails among insiders and outsiders alike. There is new leadership in the offices of the Secretary-General, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights and elsewhere. Various proposals are on the table, including the creation of an independent watchdog entity to promote greater accountability. The Stockholm Seminar is opportunely situated to develop consensus on a strategy for tackling these critical issues.

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Footnote

[i]Sue Lautze, Bruce Jones, Mark Duffield, *Strategic Coordination in the Great Lakes Region 1996-1997, An Independent Study for the Inter-Agency Standing Committee,* OCHA, United Nations, March 1998. The study is also available on the Internet at: Http:/www.reliefweb.int.

[ii] Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes.

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12. Donini and Niland, *op. cit.*, page 38.

13. Lautze et al., *op. cit*., para. 7.

15. *ibid*., para. 274.

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26. Weiss-Minear, *Dynamics, op.cit.*, p. 5.

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