LINKING RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES

Peter Walker

1 INTRODUCTION

This article provides a perspective on the issue of linking relief and development from the point of view of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, an international organization that links and supports 162 autonomous national societies. In the past decade, the Federation has seen two major shifts in its work. First, and as illustrated in Table 1, it has become more and more tied into long term relief/rehabilitation assistance. The value of relief appeals has more than doubled since 1988, and in 1993 exceeded the value of development appeals by a ratio of nearly six to one. At the same time, the number of beneficiaries has multiplied several-fold and the number of Federation delegates overseas has increased sharply. The days of the quick-in, quick-out assistance programmes are over. The life of most assistance programmes can now be measured in years rather than months.

The second development is that, in the post-Cold War period, there has been a phenomenal rise in spending in Europe and the former Soviet Union. As Figure 1 shows, spending in Europe multiplied eight times (in current US dollars) between 1991 and 1993, while spending was constant or declined in every other region. In 1993, Europe accounted for 60 per cent of all spending, Africa (albeit before the Rwanda crisis) for only a quarter.

These figures need careful interpretation. If we are honest in our appraisal of our work, we would admit that the vast majority of this money was spent on programmes which should really be termed rehabilitation, post-relief recovery or long-term welfare. Relief is really about providing very basic life-supporting needs. Sufficient food, water, shelter, medical care and protection from violence, to keep body and soul together. However, most of our assistance programmes go way beyond this, often providing long-term welfare support and assistance while strengthening local organizations.

Rehabilitation is also a major focus. In Federation parlance, this refers to the actions taken in the aftermath of a disaster, to enable basic services to resume functioning, to assist victims' self-help efforts to repair physical damage and community facilities, to revive economic activities and provide support for the psychological and social well being of the survivors. Whilst it initially focuses on enabling the affected population to resume more-or-less normal (pre-disaster) patterns of life, it should always strive to reduce vulnerability and create an improvement in living standards. This is an easy definition to put into a policy, but not so easy to put into action.

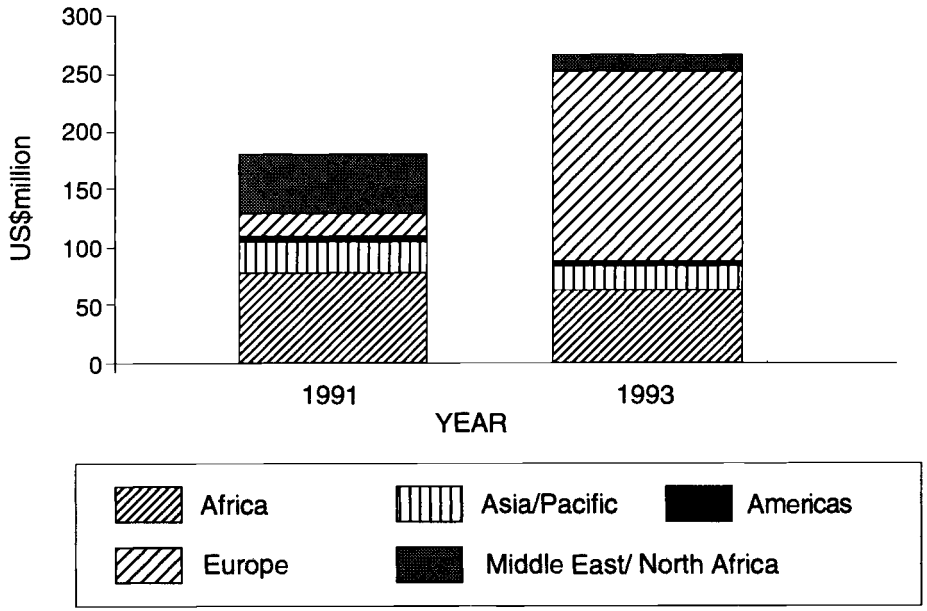
Nevertheless, the figures do reflect increased need. Families and communities are no longer able to

Table 1: International relief and development activities of the IFRCRCS, 1989-93

	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
Relief appeals (number)	51	39	44	45	54	31
Relief appeals value (US$m)	132	33	87	184	216	277
Development appeals value (US$m)	n/a	n/a	23	43	74	49
Delegates (number)	185	245	332	543	523	669
Target beneficiaries (millions)	n/a	2.6	5.2	5.7	19.4	15.2

Source: IFRCRCS

Figure 1: International relief spending by the IFRCRCS, 1991 and 1993 (US$m)



Source: IFRCRCS

recover speedily after a flood, or an earthquake hits. They remain in need of assistance for months or sometimes years after a disaster hits. And, increasingly, that assistance is not provided by the state or other local traditional support systems as it was in the past.

The growing needs of disaster victims are not balanced by an equal growth in the resources available to assist them, either at the national or the international level. The traditional welfare net provided by government is being eroded in almost all countries of the world. Whether we look at western Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa or Latin America, increasingly the burden for looking after the dispossessed and vulnerable people of our planet is being laid at the feet of the voluntary and private institutions and the UN. In taking on this load, we have a duty to lobby for national government and local institutions to reassert their central role in caring for the disaster victims of their countries, and to make it clear that we cannot double our caseload without an equivalent increase in the resources available to us. This growing gulf between the needs we are being asked to meet and the resources available to meet those needs is what we call the 'humanitarian gap'.

2 PROBLEMS OF MOVING FROM RELIEF TO DEVELOPMENT

In part, the Federation's structure helps it move more smoothly to rehabilitation. Our international assistance programmes work through National Societies. So, the programme for returnees in Mozambique, for instance, is a Mozambique Red Cross programme, assisted by the Federation. This focus on local action means that the Red Cross and Crescent usually has an involvement in a community before, during and after disaster, making the transition easier from intense relief efforts to less intense rehabilitation efforts.

There are still large problems, of course. Many societies which find themselves running long-term relief programmes find that their structures and way of thinking becomes skewed in favour of direct action and short-term planning. In relief programmes, time horizons for planning are typically in the order of months, yet plans for developing the National Society and implementing long-term

welfare and service programmes can take years. Where relief programmes dominate the work of a Society, they tend also to dominate its structure and planning, often pushing out other programming.

A more serious concern, though, is the inherently unsustainable nature of the way international relief is practised. Relief programmes, often costing tens of millions of dollars a year and importing much capital equipment, allow local organizations to pay salaries, build stores and offices, run training courses, all legitimate parts of the relief programme, but also part of strengthening local capacity. When the relief programme ends, so does the funding, and the local implementor is often left with a structure and overheads it cannot finance.

Serious personnel problems can be created by the fact that large numbers of people are taken on in relief programmes. When the National Society wishes to scale down, as it has in Somalia or Malawi for instance, dealing with disaffected ex-staff can become a major issue.

In many cases, we are having to face the above issues in a post-conflict environment, such as in areas of Somalia, or potentially in Bosnia, and are only now beginning to understand the complexity of the situation we are becoming involved in.

At a recent OECD hosted meeting, Dr. Mary Anderson made an excellent exposé of the problems inherent in post-conflict societies, illustrating it with a simple - but highly useful - typology of post-conflict problems which agencies may need to address:

To paraphrase her presentation: following war, there are four sets of needs, or hang-overs from the war, which have to be addressed.

2.1 The psychological aftermath

- In the post-war phase, emotions are high. There is a great deal at stake and all people have high expectations;

- Almost all people will either have been victims of violence and abuse, or perpetrators of it, or both. All people feel guilt, suspicion and hatred to some extent, and all have the habit of war-mindedness;

- The ending of war brings a period of euphoria, with people wishing to rebuild quickly and often to forget/cover-up the past;

- In wars people survive by learning to live minute by minute. Long-term planning, often even day-to-day planning is not part of the psychology of war survival. Yet rehabilitation requires just this sort of longer term planning.

2.2 The infrastructure aftermath

- Destruction of production infrastructure: water and power services, industrial plan, health and education buildings, homes;

- Destruction of connecting infrastructure: road and rail systems, post and telephone systems, footpaths and waterways, TV, Radio and newspaper services;

- Destruction of artefacts of continuity: historical and cultural monuments, places of worship, landmarks.

2.3 The labour-force aftermath

- The loss of old labour skills through migration and death;

- The acquisition of war-making skills;

- The removal of people from the place where they could practise their skills;

- Returning populations, often coming back with new skills and new attitudes.

2.4 The military aftermath

- Unemployed soldiers/militia. Problems of demobilization;

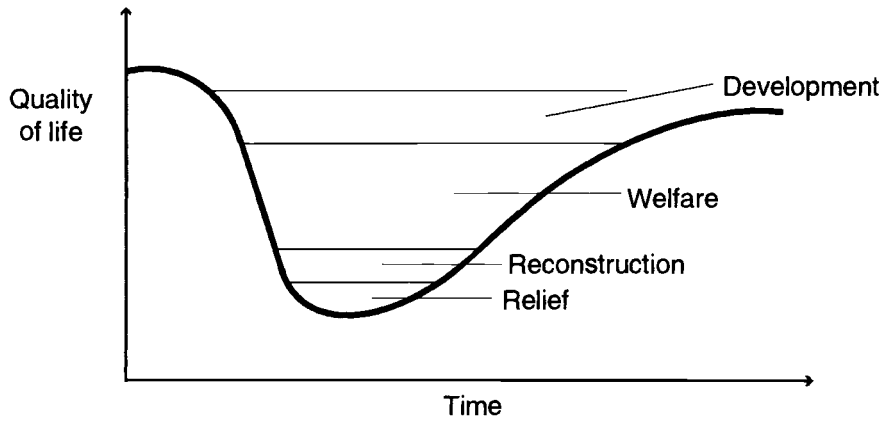
- A plethora of small arms within the community, freely available and in the hands of people used to using them;

- The danger of antipersonnel mines;

- The presence of, often external, peace-keeping forces.

For a society to recover from war, all of these factors need to be addressed. Not all of them need, or should be addressed by NGOs, but NGOs, particularly locally-based ones, have a critical role to play in lobbying government and international institutions to address the whole problem of post-war rehabilitation, not just the most visible symptoms.

Figure 2: Relief, rehabilitation and development



3 RETHINKING THE RELIEF-DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM

Many of the problems highlighted above have been exacerbated by thinking of relief-rehabilitation-development as a linear sequence of events, one finishing before the other ends. In reality, however, this is not the way it should work. Figure 2 illustrates a more useful way of thinking.

So, at the height of a crisis, there is simultaneously a need for relief to provide basic life-supporting needs, a need for reconstruction to help restore past structures, a need for welfare to tackle the heightened longer-term effects of vulnerability and, as always, a need for development to try and reduce future vulnerabilities. As a community pulls out of a crisis, the relief needs diminish, as do the reconstruction needs. In many instances, however, our experience is that welfare needs often carry on after a disaster, at a much higher level than before. Much of this increased load is accounted for by the long-term problems of refugees and internally displaced people who are almost always left in a heightened state of vulnerability after disaster. To illustrate, the Federation's projected spending for refugees who have fled Rwanda amounts to some $60 million for the second half of 1994.

4 COPING WITH THE FUTURE

Our vision for the future envisages two broad types of disaster scenarios. First, those smaller disasters and consequent relief operations in which there is a good chance of communities recovering quickly. To refer to figure two, after such disasters - smaller earthquakes, normal seasonal flooding - the curve representing the quality of life climbs back up to pre-disaster levels and it is possible quickly to phase out the relief work, reconstruction work and additional welfare work, leaving in place a local organization which can concentrate on its normal service delivery and community development work.

Second, and our fear is that this second scenario is likely to become the norm, international agencies will become increasingly locked into providing relief in disasters which involve the total breakdown of states, economies and norms of behaviour. Liberia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Rwanda are illustrative. In such situations there is very little prospect of a return to normality, let alone an improvement upon normality, for years to come. Agencies will increasingly find themselves providing long-term welfare support, doing the job which one might have expected a government to do in the past.

In this second scenario real rehabilitation becomes something of a pipe-dream and agencies are caught in the dilemma of running a holding operation whilst having little ability to address the root causes of the crisis.

If this is truly where the future lies, then we have some hard questions to answer: about how we fund such long-term programmes; whether NGOs and the

Red Cross/Crescent are the correct agencies in the first place to run such programmes and; whether, if we do so, we can do it in isolation from advocacy work aimed at addressing the root causes of crisis and the present distribution of responsibility and work within the international disaster response community.