



Maximilian Lakitsch, Svenja Wolter and John Pokoo (Eds.)

Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa and Beyond



AUSTRIAN STUDY CENTRE FOR PEACE
AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION – ASPR

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Editing and layout: Caitlin Ahern (caitlin.ahern@gmail.com); www.caitlin-ahern.com

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Preface

This special volume was created as part of a programme on peace and security in West Africa by the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR) at Schlaining Castle in cooperation with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping and Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Accra, Ghana. The programme was funded by the Austrian Development Cooperation and further supported by the Austrian Armed Forces and the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports.

The overall purpose of the endeavour is to foster peace and security in West Africa by supporting and implementing capacity-building measures for humanitarian assistance. At the heart of the project lie training courses on humanitarian assistance for civilians, military and police actors at one of the ECOWAS centres of excellence, the KAIPTC.

This edited volume shall further the programme's purpose of promoting peace and security in the ECOWAS region. While the impact of training courses is related to the number of its participants, an online publication like this makes the topics of the courses available to a large audience in West Africa, Austria and beyond. It seeks to provide insights about the multifaceted discourse on a variety of issues surrounding humanitarian crises and assistance.

We, the editors of the volume, wish to express our gratitude towards all coordinators, officers, researchers and directors, who are involved in the project, as well as the trainers and participants of the courses on humanitarian assistance in West Africa at KAIPTC. Not least, we wish to thank all the contributors to this volume; due to their input this publication has become a rich and varied compilation of insights from praxis and academia.

Maximilian Lakitsch, Svenja Wolter and John Pokoo
Stadtschlaining (Austria) and Accra (Ghana), December 2015

The State of Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa and Beyond – An Introduction

BY SVENJA WOLTER

We have the blessing of the wealth of our vast resources, the power of our talents and the potentialities of our people. Let us grasp now the opportunities before us and meet the challenge to our survival.

KWAME NKRUMAH,¹ ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 26 MARCH 1965

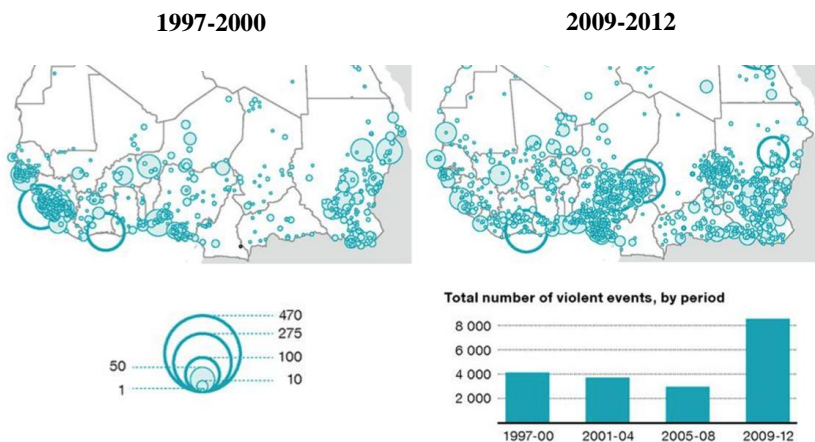
The spread of the Ebola virus in 2014 was unprecedented in its scope and magnitude in West Africa. While the pandemic raged predominantly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, it cost about 10,000 lives and infected roughly 25,000 people (Global Ebola Response 2015). Ebola was yet another reminder for West Africa of the menaces and challenges to its political stability, economic integration and development, and generally the (human) security of its population. Thus Nkrumah's call to face the challenges to survival still holds true in West Africa more than 50 years after Ghana's independence.

Not only pandemics, but especially the combination of the creeping and sudden effects of climate change as well as violent conflicts trigger and/or aggravate mass displacement, food insecurity, poverty and insecurity. Man-made and natural disasters have increased in frequency, scope and severity during the past few decades (World Disaster Report 2015). Figure 1 illustrates the occurrence of violent events between 1997 and 2000 and from 2009 to 2012, revealing that the total number of violent events, such as violence linked to regime

¹ Nkrumah was the first president of Ghana from 1960-1966.

changes or extremist groups, increased substantially in the past decade, especially around the four-border region of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Such violence is often directed against civilians and therefore triggers large population displacements and shortages of food and water, which quickly turn into humanitarian emergencies, for instance in refugee camps. The causes and effects of the humanitarian crises are inter-connected and transnational, such as those that led to and followed the surge of violence perpetrated by the Nigerian-originating extremist group Boko Haram. Since May 2013, as a result of the violent attacks against civilians, about 1.5 million persons have been displaced and roughly 90 per cent of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) live in harsh conditions with no or difficult access to healthcare, water and sanitation facilities. Additionally, food insecurity and malnutrition affects 4.6 million people in the conflict-affected areas. The violence and severity of their consequences is a problem of regional concern, as about 157,000 refugees and 53,000 returnees have swept into Cameroon, Chad and Niger, placing an additional burden on already vulnerable communities (OCHA Status Report 2015).

Figure 1: The occurrence of violent events in West Africa by location and period

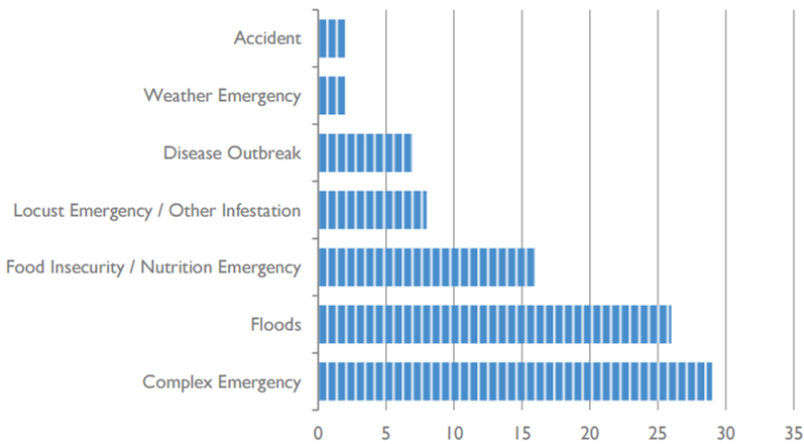


Source: ACLED data 1997-2011 and 2012

Statistics indicate an increasing complexity of humanitarian crises due to a rise in the number of conflicts in which natural and man-made disasters coincide (Figure 2). This inter-connectedness is apparent in the western Sahel region, which encompasses countries such as Niger and Mali. The Sahel is characterized by political and socio-economic insecurity in addition to harsh seasonal

weather conditions and changing climate. In 2012, for instance, a severe drought and the eruption of armed conflict in Mali met with creeping desertification, which exacerbated the chronic food insecurity, eroded resilience and significantly increased the numbers of IDPs and refugees in the region (UN Report on Sahel 2014). These so-called complex emergencies have occurred not only in the Sahel, but also in other regions of Africa and the world. Meeting those challenges in West Africa and beyond, a vast international system of humanitarian assistance has evolved. The following paragraphs outline the developments towards the current state of humanitarian action.

Figure 2: The occurrence of natural disasters in West Africa by type (FY 2004-2013)



Source: USAID West Africa Report 2003-2013

MITIGATING DISASTERS: PARADIGMS, ACTORS AND THE HUMANITARIAN AID INDUSTRY

The normative foundation of humanitarian action encompasses the principles of impartiality, humanity and neutrality. Those were formally institutionalized with the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the 19th century and were codified in the Geneva and Hague Conventions. The primary aim of humanitarian assistance is the mitigation of the consequences of armed conflict through the protection of peoples' lives and dignity (Nascimento 2015). Thereby aid is limited in its scope to short-sighted aims providing immediate relief through, for instance, the provision of food, shelter and medical sup-

plies. Originally the principles of humanitarian action only applied during war times; however, it is now a common position, laid out for instance in the Codes of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (IFRC 1994) and the Oslo Guidelines (2007),² that humanitarian aid must be provided to *all crisis-affected* people.

At the end of the 20th century, the increasing complexity of humanitarian crises provoked a paradigm shift in the discourse and practice of humanitarian assistance. The multiple and long-term consequences of violent conflicts, natural disasters and poverty-related issues such as malnutrition also demanded a change in focus and scope of humanitarian assistance: immediate relief for survival was no longer enough to alleviate current and future suffering, and strategies of donors and receiving countries required the inclusion of long-range disaster risk reduction and peacebuilding activities (Nascimento 2015). The IFRC for example stipulates in its 1994 revised Code of Conduct that emergency relief ‘shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities’ (para. 6) and ‘must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs’ (para. 8). Thus there have been an increasing number of links between humanitarian assistance and long-term development cooperation with the goal to decrease poverty and foster peace and security, by empowering local institutions through capacity development, fostering participation and promoting human rights. The merging of humanitarian, security and development principles and objectives gave rise to a new paradigm of humanitarian action and thereby further blurred the lines between humanitarian and development engagement (Nascimento 2015).

Related to this paradigm shift and overlap is also the growing number of actors engaged in humanitarian action, be it state-related, intergovernmental or non-governmental. In addition, the early 2000s saw an unprecedented increase in deployment of military forces for direct and indirect assistance (the distribution of goods and services and transporting relief goods) as well as infrastructure support (e.g. road repair and power generation) in humanitarian operations (Oslo Guidelines 2007).

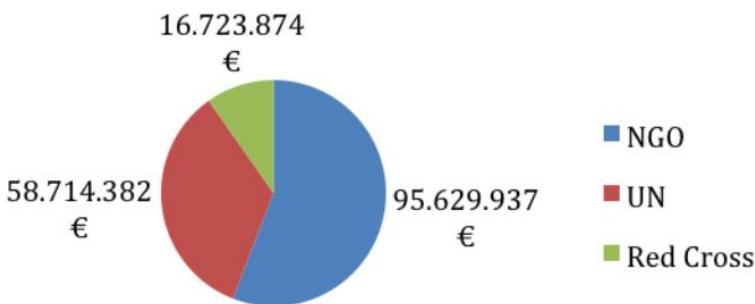
As (national) military forces are not impartial or neutral *per se*, their involvement in humanitarian assistance, especially in emergencies related to armed conflict, is often perceived controversially. Therefore a substantial body of rules and strategies for effective civilian-military cooperation and coordination has developed, such as the aforementioned Oslo Guidelines (2007), the

² Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (2007)

OCHA on Message: Civil-Military Coordination (2013), the UN/EU Civil-Military Coordination Handbook for Field Officers (2008) and the Civil-Military Coordination – Operational Guidance of the World Food Programme (2013).

This varied landscape of humanitarian actors, guidelines and tasks is also reflected in the immense (financial) size of the humanitarian aid apparatus. Local, regional and international actors mobilize vast human and financial resources to deliver humanitarian assistance to affected populations. The international humanitarian aid industry has grown to a financial capacity of approximately USD 20 billion. Above all, private foundations are gaining significant importance in this sector, recording annual budgets larger than those of individual countries – the income of international NGOs alone amounts to about half a billion dollars (World Disaster Report 2015). In coastal West Africa, in the period from 2008 to 2014, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) spent more than EUR 189 million (about USD 201 million), supporting 42 partner organizations, with UNICEF, the Red Cross family and various NGOs being among the organizations receiving the largest amount of funding (see Figure 3). Most funds – about EUR 66 million – flowed into the health sector (EU 2015).³ Additionally, following the food crisis in the Sahel, the European Commission allocated EUR 202 million (about USD 215 million) for humanitarian assistance in 2014 alone (ECHO Factsheet 2015).

Figure 3: ECHO funding in coastal West Africa per organization, 2008-2014



Source: EU 2015

³ Note that, bilaterally, many EU Member States, such as the UK, France and Sweden, additionally allocate millions of euros in humanitarian assistance.

In bilateral cooperation, the United States financially supported about 105 projects in the same period from 2008-2014 in West Africa⁴ (USAID 2015). Within 10 years (from 2004 to 2013) the U.S. has spent approximately USD 1.6 billion on humanitarian aid in the region, from which the largest share, USD 1.3 billion, went to emergency food assistance (USAID West Africa 2003-2013). Generally, money flows from international donors, mainly from Europe and North America, to international agencies that set the agenda of humanitarian relief programmes (World Disaster Report 2015). These donor-driven and donor-owned activities pose the danger of conflict of interests and priority setting between local and international actors. International actors often sideline local actors, still acting on the assumption that governments are unable or unwilling to provide for their population in need and that communities lack the capacities to respond appropriately to crises (ibid.).

In the following pages of this introduction, it will be shown that this tendency does not necessarily hold true for West Africa: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁵ is gaining more and more importance in promoting regional solutions to regional problems. It is apparent that affected countries and especially local communities know best the priorities and needs as well as the cultural context for effective disaster relief in their very own regions. Studies such as that of Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti (2013) identify that local actors, especially communities affected by disasters, are key to the success and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions. Therefore, systematic partnerships and coordination between international agencies and local actors should be the basis for humanitarian responses. The Western humanitarian aid industry should finally translate the existing principles of local ownership and a holistic understanding of local networks, values and culture into practice in order to finally enhance the effectiveness of the humanitarian endeavour (World Disaster Report 2015). Some of these issues are exemplified by the recent Ebola crisis.

⁴ The projects were located in Ghana, Mauritania, Chad, Senegal, Niger, Liberia, Mali and Nigeria (USAID 2015).

⁵ ECOWAS currently comprises 15 Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (ECOWAS 2015).

MITIGATING DISASTERS: THE EBOLA CRISIS AS AN EXAMPLE

In West Africa, the Ebola crisis in 2014 and its responses provide a good example of the shortcomings and challenges to the international and regional systems for humanitarian relief. Jacqueline Sultan (2015), Minister of Agriculture of Guinea, accurately sums up the situation, pointing out that ‘Ebola has made us aware of the weakness of our health system and our lack of readiness to respond. Beyond the shortcomings of our health services, we were also confronted with the lack of understanding in our entire population.’ One can detect two separate issues in Sultan’s statement: first the lack of preparedness of the national health system *prior* to Ebola and, second, the inadequacies of the *reactions* to the disease, due to the lack of consideration of the context in West Africa. Both conditions fuelled the rapid spread of the virus.

Preparedness

In 2012, ECOWAS adopted its Humanitarian Policy 2012-2017, providing the legal, political and institutional framework for cooperation on humanitarian challenges between Member States. Moreover, among other plans, the strategy stipulates capacity building of social actors at the local level and the strengthening of national state capacities to respond to crises. The Humanitarian Relief Fund and Response Mechanism were established to coordinate and fund these activities (ECOWAS Commission 2012). Although some structures were in place (such as the West African Health Organisation), the national capacities, in particular the health sector, were not adequately developed to cope with, let alone stop, the virus. Thus Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, where Ebola predominantly raged, were insufficiently prepared to deal with the disease and the high numbers of infected people.

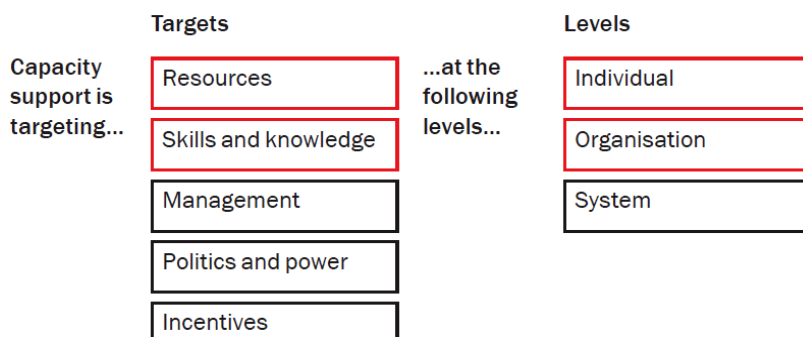
The national infrastructure of roads, information and health services as well as telecommunications was too underdeveloped to be used for an adequate and timely response to Ebola. Additionally, the three countries faced a severe shortage of health staff, as even before the outbreak the doctor-population ratio was about 2 doctors per 100,000 people. This state became further aggravated as nearly 700 medical personnel were infected, and by the end of 2014 nearly half of those had died (WHO 2015). Ambulance and burial teams were understaffed and faced challenges in reaching the sites in time. Especially in Sierra Leone, after years of armed conflict, the health system is still too damaged to function effectively, even in non-emergency times, despite the fact that USD 360 million

has been invested to improve the health sector since the war ended in 2002. International development aid organizations devoted their energy to capacity-building projects with an emphasis on the building of technical knowledge and skills of individuals and different organizations; thereby systemic problems, such as the connection between the plurality of units and actors within the health sector, were neglected (Denney/Mallett 2015).⁶

Figure 4 depicts the different dimensions of capacity building. The resources, skills and knowledge (marked in red) were the primary focus on the individual and organizational levels. The strategy management, power politics and incentives within the health sector were not targeted. Another flaw of this type of international development initiative is that its interventions are based on the assumption that there is a direct, causal change in behaviour as knowledge is transferred. Ebola has revealed the blind spots of those long-term efforts, especially in Sierra Leone. During the crisis, the adequate behavioural attitudes and safety proceedings, for instance on how to act when a family member develops symptoms of Ebola, were not followed. The desired behavioural change, resulting from capacity-building measures and promotion with local communities, failed to bring changes into practice, especially during the crisis situation (Denney/Mallett 2015). These issues that were revealed during the Ebola crisis all circle back to the point mentioned above: the insufficient linkage between long-term development cooperation and humanitarian action in times of emergency. The Ebola case exemplified that, in the area of emergency preparedness of the health sector, development cooperation overlaps with humanitarian assistance, as the strengthening of the local health system requires long-term investments and engagement with all relevant units and levels within the sector. In times of crisis, when Ebola struck, humanitarian actors stepped in. What these responses looked like and why they failed to stop the rapid transmission of the virus is explained in the following section.

⁶ In Sierra Leone, the health system is divided into formal, government health providers/facilities and a large informal sector of traditional healers, community health workers (employed by the government but unpaid) and drug peddlers (Denney/Mallett 2015).

Figure 4: Dominant approaches to capacity building often overlook other aspects



Source: Denney/Mallet 2015

Responses

One year after the peak of the Ebola emergency, it is clear that a major failing was the late reaction by the international community: although the virus had already broken out in December 2013, it was not until August 2014 that the World Health Organisation called an emergency meeting and sketched out an Ebola action plan (WHO 2014). One might argue that the first cases were not reported to the WHO and thus it is the authorities of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone that are to blame (WHO 2015). Nonetheless, the WHO was unable to cope with the disease's rapid geographical dispersion and failed to recognize its seriousness. ECOWAS, on the other hand, demonstrated leadership and political initiative in a timely manner. It was the first organization to respond, declaring the disease a threat to regional security in March 2014 and adopting an action plan in July/August 2014 (Habibu Yaya 2015). In an extraordinary summit, an action plan was elaborated and a political coordinator was appointed (CEDEAO 2014). Moreover, ECOWAS set up a solidarity fund of about USD 5 million (Habibu Yaya 2015), though very little compared to the sums international donors have released for Ebola relief: the World Bank, NGOs, the EU, several states as well as the African Development Bank and African Union have granted about USD 3.6 billion (Financial Tracking Service 2015).⁷

⁷ Of this amount, USD 597,186,585 is still outstanding. For a detailed list, see 'List of total funding and outstanding pledges' by the Financial Tracking Service (2015).

However, both the WHO and ECOWAS fell short of taking adequate measures to halt Ebola's quick geographical dispersion. They failed to recognize some particularities in West Africa: in the past, Ebola only raged in equatorial Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo or Central African Republic, where many health centres are actually prepared to treat patients and take the necessary quarantine measures. In West Africa, however, the pandemic struck in a 'new' context and an unprepared system, in which Ebola was unprecedented. The high population mobility across borders through well-developed transportation systems fuelled the spread of Ebola (WHO 2015). Likewise the transmission of the virus in densely populated urban areas was a crucial driving factor: previously the virus had predominantly raged in rural settings, where isolation and quarantine measures could be taken more easily. Now the major cities in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia were epicentres for its transmission (*ibid.*).

Furthermore, the international and regional actors underestimated and did not sufficiently (if at all) consider the cultural practices that influence the transmission of the disease. Especially in Sierra Leone, traditional healers and drug peddlers form a crucial part of the informal health sector and were completely bypassed in responses by international agencies to Ebola (Denney/Mallett 2015). Cooperation and information exchange between traditional health workers and international organizations as well as the inclusion of local NGOs and affected communities through partnerships in international responses might have helped to contain Ebola.

Moreover, according to the WHO (2015) an estimated 60 per cent of the new infections in Guinea and as many as 80 per cent in Sierra Leone were linked to local burial and funeral practices. At this point the military also took on responsibilities outside of its regular duties. Apart from assisting with logistics, military personnel efficiently and safely buried victims – though not necessarily in a dignified and culturally appropriate manner that would allow for ancestral mourning rites (WHO 2015). The United Kingdom, for example, deployed 1,500 military personnel for 14 months to Sierra Leone tasked with the construction of treatment centres and training of local and international health care staff (GOV.UK 2015). The U.S. sent about 3,000 military personnel to virus-affected areas. Despite initial reservations by aid agencies, it is apparent that the military quickly and efficiently assisted the aid relief processes (Dizard 2014).

In conclusion, there are many lessons to be learned from the Ebola crises for the international aid community as well as ECOWAS. Ebola revealed that the enormous financial resources that have been allocated to the development of

health sectors in West Africa did not sufficiently translate into effective capacities to cope with the virus. The additional millions that were mobilized during and in the aftermath of the crises could not alleviate the fact that the regional particularities of population mobility and cultural practices were not accounted for in region-wide response strategies. In the wake of Ebola, one may hope that the recommendations and lessons learned trigger a re-thinking of approaches to long-term development cooperation and humanitarian assistance during complex crises in West Africa. The international aid apparatus and regional governments may start by dealing with the immediate consequences of Ebola, such as the 30,000 Ebola orphans, the heightened malnutrition rates or the delayed return of 38,000 Ivorian refugees from Liberia.⁸ This is also the point at which humanitarian assistance abates and new development initiatives arise, e.g. for the health sector to step in, building national resilience and capacities to cope with future crises.

OVERVIEW OF THIS VOLUME - PERSPECTIVES ON PRESENT ISSUES AND FUTURE OUTLOOKS

The future of humanitarian assistance in West Africa and beyond depends in part on the extent to which international aid agencies as well as the regional player ECOWAS has put into action the lessons learnt from Ebola and other complex emergencies, such as the triple crises in the Sahel of 2012. Various reports and studies regarding humanitarian assistance (e.g. about food security, health, role of culture or local ownership) such as the World Disaster Report 2015, the UN Report on Sahel 2014, or the study of the health system in Sierra Leone by Denney and Mallett (2015) provide a vast pool of knowledge and suggestions for improvements.

This edited volume seeks to contribute to the multifaceted discourse around the theory and practice of humanitarian assistance in West Africa and beyond. The compilation brings together carefully selected insights, reflections and outlooks from practitioners and academics from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. The topics range from controversial issues such as civil-military relations to novel developments in technologies as well as advocacy approaches.

In the first article, **Afua Agyeiwaa Lamptey** and **Serwaa Allotey-Pappoe** give a comprehensive account of the developments toward the legal and political frameworks and practices of humanitarian assistance, with a particular focus

⁸ The refugees are not permitted to return due to the Ivorian government's fear of Ebola (Collins 2015).

on gender. The authors raise awareness of the opportunities, challenges and negligence of gender-sensitive approaches in humanitarian action. In the second essay, **Stefan Ziegler**, with a contribution from **Eva Birk**, presents a practice-oriented synopsis of the tool of humanitarian advocacy. Knowledge-sharing networks, so-called learning alliances, apply this evidence-based and research-centred approach in order to place crisis-affected people at the centre of humanitarian interventions. Thus networked learning and joint communications are vital tools for suitable and locally owned humanitarian action. **Laura Swift** and **Jessica Saulle** address the issue of sustainability and beneficiary-centred approaches from a different angle. Their chapter provides insights on food security in the Sahel, presenting one of the rare success stories. The Household Economy Approach (HEA) measures how people earn their livelihoods as well as consumption patterns; this offers a sound instrument for governments and aid organizations to conduct early warning analyses for food crises, while placing the local consumers and their possibilities of access to food at the centre of interventions. Another revolutionary approach to humanitarian action is presented by **Tobias Burgers**, who illustrates how new technologies can be used to facilitate disaster relief, such as the use of drones for aid delivery or the use of social media as information systems in crises. He calls for the embrace of the possibilities of the 21st century to provide effective relief for and thereby even empower beneficiaries. A regional perspective is given by **Christian C. M. Ichite** and **Monique Bowmanere**, who illustrate that the Boko Haram insurgency has become a critical threat-multiplier to the dream of regional integration of ECOWAS as well as its very existence. Moreover, other challenges, such as poverty and the imbalance between external interests and other alliances, further undermine the capacity of ECOWAS. In the last article, **Alois A. Hirschmugl** outlines the possibilities and obstacles for civil-military cooperation and coordination during humanitarian action. In particular, mechanisms for cooperation set forth by the UN, EU and NATO are presented in order to illustrate the complex – though well established and mainstreamed – cooperation and coordination tools for international organizations.

Overall, the range of topics presented in this volume highlight that the challenges and opportunities for the future of humanitarian assistance in West Africa and beyond are as diverse as they are numerous and provide feasible solutions to some of the pressing issues.

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Gender-Sensitive Assistance: Empowering Women in Humanitarian Crises in West Africa

BY AFUA AGYEIWAA LAMPTEY AND SERWAA ALLOTEY-PAPPOE

Over the past two decades, a number of West African countries have experienced natural and man-made disasters resulting in humanitarian crises in the sub-region. Consequently, many women and children have been displaced both domestically and abroad, and/or have lost their livelihoods. The negative effects of conflict and disasters disproportionately impact the lives of women and children due to several social, political and economic factors that produce unequal power relations often exacerbated in times of crisis. It is estimated that women and children accounted for about 75 per cent of refugees and internally displaced persons during the conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. In the past, humanitarian assistance gave insufficient attention to gender considerations, but the shift in policy direction in the 1990s internationally highlighted the importance of gender dynamics to a successful humanitarian intervention. This has resulted in the gradual incorporation of gender concerns into humanitarian thinking and practice. However, in some evaluations of humanitarian assistance programmes, gender blindness was identified as being the cause of the failure of humanitarian assistance. This article seeks to examine the gendered nature of humanitarian assistance in West Africa through qualitative analysis of existing literature. The article argues that while crisis situations increase women's vulnerabilities and exacerbate inequalities, these situations can also offer an avenue for challenging discriminatory gender norms and unequal power relations and provide opportunities for change.

The article is structured as follows: the first section provides an understanding of the concept and practice of humanitarian assistance, while the second examines the frameworks for humanitarian assistance. The third part analyses the gendered nature of humanitarian crises and the challenges of delivering gender-

sensitive assistance. The final section then discusses how to harness capabilities to improve women's coping strategies in humanitarian emergencies.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE – CONCEPT AND PRACTICE

The Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (2015) indicates that in 2014, USD 24.5 billion was received as global humanitarian aid, an increase of over 11 per cent from 2013. This huge jump (especially when compared to the 1970s figure of USD 1 billion (Cahill 2013)) indicates that complex emergencies are becoming more intractable and avenues for supporting disaster and conflict prevention must be increasingly sought. Though conflicts affect both men and women, in crisis situations there is a differential impact on both. For instance it is estimated that 80 per cent of internally displaced persons and refugees are women and children (McAskie 2000). Many women are forced to flee their homes while some end up being caught in the crisis and others in humanitarian camps. It is within these contexts that humanitarian aid is usually administered to those in need. The concept of humanitarian assistance is thus premised on the natural human tendency to respect a fellow human in a systemic fashion, especially in conflict situations (Grossreider 2013). In other words, it systematizes the organization and mobilization of various human and logistical resources to lend assistance to one or more specific population groups in emergency situations (Conoir 2002).

The concept of assisting people in need has existed from the beginning of mankind and can be found in many religious practices, as well as religious and military orders (Conoir 2002: 3-15); the modern concept of humanitarian assistance, however, is traced to the pioneering actions of Henry Dunant in the mid-1850s. Dunant inspired the principles that underpin the Red Cross today and fought for the establishment of a new idea: to impose on armed forces and the states they represented a neutral space of intervention that would enable the wounded to receive, with complete impartiality, the aid and medical care due them. These form the tenets of the Red Cross – impartiality, neutrality and independence (Grossreider 2013).

In Africa, humanitarian assistance can be traced to the activities of the European colonialists, especially France and Great Britain, which, in conquering and administering immense territories in Africa, opened new quasi-apostolic missions among the humanitarians of the day – namely, religious missionaries, colonial administrators and the medical and social services they created. Thus the humanitarian action of the colonial period was governed by a discourse emphasizing the 'civilizing mission' while masking the political and economic in-

terests of the colonial powers (Conoir 2002). During the Cold War era, the neutrality and impartiality of the International Red Cross (IRC) caused a revolt by a group of French doctors seconded to the Biafra War: they reformed under a new organization ‘Médecins sans Frontières’ (MSF), or ‘Doctors without Borders’ (Grossreider 2013).

The post-Cold War era in Africa was marked by a series of armed conflicts beginning in the 1990s in Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire and reaching to the current on-going crises in Congo, Sudan, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Central African Republic. Humanitarian assistance in these areas has occurred largely without attention to gender considerations; nonetheless during the Angolan crisis in the mid 1990s the data of displaced persons was disaggregated by gender and age, and the ensuing socio-demographic study alerted agencies to concentrations of vulnerable women and girls (UNICEF and Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2002). It also permitted more accurate targeting of initiatives to ensure the participation of women.

Humanitarian assistance today, as distinct from that of the 1950s, is conducted in extremely complex political, economic and social contexts, which sometimes decreases efficiency and effectiveness. Intractable conflicts in Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Libya, to name a few, have contributed to mass displacement of people. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) in its 2015 Global Overview Report estimated that at the end of 2014, 38 million people had been forced to flee their homes – an increase of 15 per cent from 2013. This included 11 million newly displaced people (*ibid.*). Further, 77 per cent of the world’s IDPs live in just 10 countries, with approximately 25 per cent located in sub-Saharan Africa. Of these, 52 per cent are women and girls (*ibid.*).

Nonetheless the assistance provided by humanitarian organizations including the UN-mandated organizations and NGOs in Africa has helped to save thousands of lives. While one shudders to think of what could be the norm in the absence of humanitarian aid, some analysts have argued that such assistance in fact exacerbates conflict.

The first such argument is that humanitarian assistance feeds the war effort when aid is inadvertently or indirectly distributed to combatants. This assertion is illustrated in the Rwanda refugee camps in Zaire (Lassiter 2007). Combatants may also steal food, medicine and equipment or lie just to get aid from humanitarian organizations. Aid thus provides sustenance to militants and sustains war economies (*ibid.*). In this sense the intended beneficiaries such as women and girls may not get access to the relief items or their rations may be cut drastically, thus further worsening their plight.

Secondly, other analysts contend that the resources transferred during humanitarian assistance may have direct negative impacts on the conflict. Mary Anderson, in her book *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace and War* (1999) sums it up succinctly: aid distorts war economies as civilians become increasingly dependent on aid agencies and warlords define their responsibilities and accountability only through military control. This then makes the post-conflict country increasingly dependent on aid with no will to take responsibility for itself. In West Africa, humanitarian assistance over the years in various natural and man-made emergencies lends credence to this assertion. Most governments are unable to protect the people caught in the wake of such emergencies, particularly women and girls. A typical case is the humanitarian crisis in Northern Nigeria, which has resulted in the displacement of one million people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2015) and further endangered women and girls.

Thirdly, humanitarian organizations can enhance and prolong conflict through their conduct in the field and the way aid is distributed (Lassiter 2007). By legitimising rebel groups and by their willingness to pay taxes or negotiate with rebel factions, humanitarian organizations solidify the reputation of rebel groups as powerful and legitimate (Lischer 2003).

Nonetheless, it is generally agreed that without aid, millions of people affected by humanitarian crises would be worse off, among them vulnerable groups like women and girls. In countries ravaged by conflict and/or natural disasters, aid is critical to maintain basic human dignity and survival. In situations in which the state or its political leaders hold military control and barter the lives of their citizens away under the cloak of sovereignty, the intervention of humanitarians is critical to prevent civilian death.

West Africa's experience with humanitarian assistance dates back to the days of the Biafra War in Nigeria, winding its way through several droughts in the Sahel, civil wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, to present-day emergencies in Nigeria's conflicted north. As of December 2014, there were about 1.5 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) across eight West African countries.¹ As intimated, the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group in Nigeria resulted in Nigeria having the largest number of IDPs, followed by Côte d'Ivoire and Mali (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2015). The surge in humanitarian crises can be traced to the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Libya, which indirectly led to the coup d'état in Mali and subsequent vulnerability

¹ These include Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo and Cameroon.

of the populations in the north of the country. The role of extremist violence should also not be forgotten: this is closely linked to political power struggles, disputes over natural resources and inter-communal conflicts linked to land tenure (*ibid.*). These conflicts also transcend borders with their accompanying threats to human security. Most governments in West Africa appear overwhelmed and unable to cope with these humanitarian crises. The next section looks at some legal frameworks and policies that guide the conduct of humanitarian assistance.

FRAMEWORKS FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Global frameworks

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and Human Rights Law (HRL) regulate the provision of humanitarian assistance. IHL applies in times of armed conflict and defines the rights of civilians affected by conflict as well as the obligations of parties to the conflict. HRL, on the other hand, applies in times of peace as well as in times of war. The four Geneva Conventions formulated in the 1950s form the core of IHL.² Also referred to as the laws of armed conflict, they cover the wounded and sick in the armed forces, the treatment of prisoners of war and the protection of civilians.³ These conventions have been supplemented by additional Protocols I and II of 1977 (AP I and AP II),⁴ which relate to the protection of victims of international and non-international armed conflict, respective-

² Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, 12 Aug 1949, 75 UNTS 31 (Geneva Convention I); Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea, 12 Aug 1949, 75 UNTS 85 (Geneva Convention II); Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 12 Aug 1949, 75 UNTS 135 (Geneva Convention III); Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 12 Aug 1949, 75 UNTS 287 (Geneva Convention IV).

³ See: Article 3, Geneva Conventions

⁴ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 Aug 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, 8 Jun 1977 (Protocol I); and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 Aug 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts, 8 Jun 1977 (Protocol II).

ly. IHL, however, has been critiqued by some feminist legal theorists, who argue that it is inherently discriminatory, as the legal regime prioritizes men and often either relegates women to the status of victims or accords them legitimacy only in their roles raising children (Gardam/Jarvis 2002). This is buttressed by the fact that of the 42 specific provisions relating to women within the Geneva Conventions and their 1977 additional protocols, almost half address women in their roles as expectant or nursing mothers (*ibid.*). The authors further contend that the crime of sexual violence and the historic lack of prosecution of rape as a war crime and the fact that it is not listed in the ‘grave breach’ of provisions of the Geneva Conventions all contribute to the low visibility given to women’s issues in IHL. To counter this position, Charlotte Lindsey (2005) of the ICRC, for example, while acknowledging the archaic language in the text of the IHL, argues that the Geneva Conventions must be read in the context of the 1940s and within a range of cultural constructs; moreover, some of the provisions such as sexual violence and rape as a war crime have been addressed in subsequent frameworks.

In responding to these concerns, the international community acknowledges the dangers of developing new and specific treaties as they could weaken the protections available. Thus ‘soft law’ options that increase the protection of women during times of armed conflict have been developed instead. These include standards, guidelines and resolutions from the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly such as resolutions 1888, 1889 and 1894 as well as 1325, which together seek to bolster the protection of women and children against sexual violations during armed conflict as well as to increase their role in post-conflict peacebuilding processes.⁵ It must be noted, however, that these ‘soft laws’ are not legally binding on states; as such it is difficult to elicit compliance.

The UN Charter in its preamble speaks to the fundamental human rights and the dignity and worth of the human person as well as the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small. Since the end of World War II several instruments on human rights have been drafted that straddle both peace- and war-time environments. The 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights em-

⁵ See: UN Doc. S/Res/1325 (2000) on Women and peace and security, UN Doc. S/Res/1612 (2005) on Children and armed conflict, UN Doc. S/Res/1674 (2006) on Protection of civilians in armed conflict, UN Doc. S/Res/1820 (2008) on Women and peace and security, UN Doc. S/Res/1882 (2009) on Children and armed conflict, UN Doc. S/Res/1888 (2009) on Women and peace and security, and UN Doc. S/Res/1894 on Protection of civilians in armed conflict.

phasizes the universality and indivisibility of human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979) also states that discrimination against women violates the principle of equal rights and respect for human dignity, and it is an obstacle to the participation of women on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries. It continues that such discrimination makes life more difficult and impedes the development of the potentials of women. Furthermore, there is now international consensus on the commitment to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. This is a recurrent challenge in emergency situations, and many women and girls remain exposed to conflict-related sexual violence, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. The latter has been especially reported in peacekeeping environments in West Africa, where some aid relief workers are reported to have exchanged food for sex (UN 2002).

It must be noted that there is no internationally accepted model for introducing gender policy into humanitarian assistance programmes; nonetheless, humanitarian organizations have formulated their own processes towards gender. In 1994, the Committee for Humanitarian Response developed a code of conduct for NGOs with recommendations for disaster-affected areas and inter-governmental organizations (Byrne/Baden 1995). Though gender is not explicitly mentioned in the code, it recognizes the critical role played by women in crisis situations and it emphasizes that need for women to be supported and not side-lined by aid programmes (*ibid.*). It is encouraging to observe again that various organizations have initiated gender policies for emergency operations. These include the UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, USAID, GIZ, CARE and Oxfam. These initiatives, some of which have resulted in gender policies guiding humanitarian assistance, seek to mainstream gender in their operations. The intent is to give women visibility, status and a chance to participate as well as access to other opportunities to enhance their livelihoods.

Sub-regional frameworks

In West Africa, the 1999 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security addressed the concept of humanitarian assistance under Chapter VIII. It stated that 'ECOWAS shall take active part in coordinating and conducting humanitarian assistance' (ECOWAS 1999: 18) and further mentioned that ECOWAS shall develop its own capacity to efficiently undertake humanitarian actions for the purposes of conflict pre-

vention and management, and in doing so shall recognize, encourage and support the role of women in its initiatives for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security.

The 2006 ECOWAS policy for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) also seeks as one of its 10 policy principles to ‘pay attention to the gender perspective and the cultural diversity of the sub-region’ (ECOWAS 2006: 11). However, an evaluation done in 2013 on mainstreaming DRR among ECOWAS Member States revealed that DRR activities had not been fully mainstreamed into the development plans and policies of most Member States, except of Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. Further, there was no mention of the gender perspective in the report, implying that gender issues in DRR are still given low implementation priority.

It is instructive to note that, the above notwithstanding, the ECOWAS Humanitarian Policy (ECOWAS 2012) and its corresponding Plan of Action⁶ were developed in 2012 with much more expansive and specific measurable guidelines on how humanitarian assistance should be coordinated and implemented. Premised on the ECOWAS Vision 2020, the policy seeks to safeguard and consolidate relations conducive to the maintenance of global peace, stability and security. It recognizes the non-attainability of these objectives without the atmosphere of sustainable peace and security.

The policy first of all argues for the adoption and implementation of a national policy and action plan on national disaster management, as well as a national agency for disaster management. It also encourages the integration of cross-cutting issues such as gender and SGBV issues into all humanitarian activities. Its Strategic Objective 5, which is further expanded in the Code of Conduct, emphasizes the promotion of special measures for the protection of vulnerable persons, especially women and children, during emergency situations. To this end it enjoins ECOWAS and its Member States to take the following measures (among others):

- Establish monitoring mechanisms to address child protection and gender issues in humanitarian situations
- Ensure speedy and effective registration and tracking of women and children affected by emergencies

⁶ For the Plan of Action for the ECOWAS Humanitarian Policy (2012-2017) see: <http://www.westafricagateway.org/node/2879>

- Provide support services in line with the needs of women and children in humanitarian situations
- Provide regular training addressing vulnerabilities, especially in gender and child protection, for all humanitarian response officials, taking into account the cross-border dimension
- Integrate gender analysis into emergency planning

The above policy is still in its early stage, and more time is needed to examine its effectiveness. It must be noted, however, that of the 15 states in ECOWAS only 3 – Ghana, Gambia and Nigeria – have national institutions for disaster management. The other countries have so-called protection centres, which are ad hoc and not well coordinated. Additionally, it is often not clear whether gender issues have been integrated in the existing structures. ECOWAS has also initiated a Code of Conduct on Humanitarian Assistance: this follows a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2010 between the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which seeks to promote the facilitation and regulation of relief operations and assistance within the context of disaster response (WACSI 2012). Nonetheless, the lack of a reference framework, laws or specific regulations in many West African countries has made effective coordination and response exceedingly difficult (*ibid.*). Even where these laws exist, experts observe that they are poorly implemented in facilitating and regulating international aid. This results in restrictions on tax and customs procedures, as well as poor coordination and control of assistance operations during crises and humanitarian emergencies (*ibid.*). In 2007, the IFRC adopted a new set of guidelines for national facilitation and regulation of international relief operations in the event of disaster and recovery assistance (*ibid.*). These are known as the IDRL Guidelines (International Disaster Response Laws), and ECOWAS Member States have been urged to use these guidelines to strengthen their national laws and promote and develop bilateral and regional agreements. International, regional and national frameworks mostly speak to the importance of gender considerations in humanitarian assistance. However, in practice it is often difficult to elicit compliance due to a number of political and socio-cultural factors. Nonetheless, as then-UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1999) rightly stated, states must do more to help their citizens in such emergencies; a preventive approach to nip the crisis in the bud that precipitates humanitarian assistance should be a priority.

GENDERED IMPACTS OF HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN WEST AFRICA: WHY WOMEN REMAIN VULNERABLE

Humanitarian crises, in whatever form they occur, have gendered impacts, meaning they affect men and women differently. This is because men and women have different needs and vulnerabilities as well as capabilities, which determine their levels of resilience in crisis situations. Several studies (e.g. Gasseer, et al. 2004; Neumayer/Plumper 2007) suggest that the negative consequences of conflicts, disasters and pandemics impact the lives of women and girls more due to a number of factors. These disparities occur as a result of gendered roles emanating from deeply rooted socio-cultural orientations that produce unequal power relations and are often exacerbated in times of crisis (van Dijkhorst/Vonhof 2005).

Violence is often directed at people based on their gender and also on the effects violence has on their gendered roles. Men and young boys may be targeted and killed in wars or recruited to fight, while women may be targeted for rape, sexual assault, abduction, forced marriages and slavery. This is as a result of the way the role of men and women are socially constructed and defined. The level of women's vulnerability during crises depends on a number of factors. Particularly in West Africa, women bear greater family and communal care responsibilities. In many instances, women may have the full responsibility of providing food, water and fuel for cooking for their households, which can put them at greater risk of abduction and sexual assault. In other emergency situations such as outbreak of diseases, the cultural practices and traditional roles of women in some communities such as caring for the sick and the injured or the preparatory rites for burial also expose women to greater risk of infection and death. For example, in some parts of Liberia, it is the role of elderly women to wash and prepare corpses for burial (Mulbah et al. 2015). Thus more women were exposed to the Ebola virus as a result of these traditional roles.

Secondly, the disparate social, political and economic differences between men and women create different levels of vulnerability. Generally, women have limited access to and control of capital and resources to offer them adequate economic protection in times of crisis, leaving them more vulnerable than men. In some instances in which women may have economic opportunities, the kinds of activities they engage in make them more vulnerable. In the case of the Ebola outbreak in the Manor River region, women were at a higher risk of exposure to the infection because more women engaged in cross-border trading activities, which was a key factor for the spread of the infection across the region. This reinforces the above point that women continue to remain vulnerable in humani-

tarian crisis, and a more nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of these interventions will help address their needs.

Low levels of education among women and girls also contribute to their vulnerability in crises. Tens of thousands of women across the region are excluded from economic and political opportunities due to their lack of education. The cycle of poverty grossly diminishes women's abilities to protect themselves and develop appropriate coping strategies during humanitarian emergencies. For example, systemic and structural inequalities reinforced by the lack of education have been identified as one of the factors for the indiscriminate use of women and girls in suicide bomb attacks in Northern Nigeria. Evidence suggests that some of the women and girls who have participated in the suicide bomb attacks were unknowingly lured into wearing explosive devices under the impression that they were recording devices that could pick up information from the security agencies (Allotey-Pappoe/Lampsey, unpublished). It is believed that if those women and girls had adequate education they would have been in better positions to understand the schemes of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Furthermore, humanitarian emergencies make women more vulnerable with regard to their reproductive roles and healthcare. Access to healthcare services and facilities in many West African countries is inadequate. Additionally, these services drastically decline during crises, due to insecurity resulting from conflict or disease outbreak. Health service workers may abandon their posts due either to insecurity during conflict or to the lack of supplies and equipment; in the case of disease outbreak, they may also succumb to disease, resulting in personnel shortages. In such periods women and girls are at higher risk of pregnancy-related complications and death. Others may also resort to alternative healthcare service providers who may not be certified or have adequate training and expertise.

In sum, women's vulnerabilities during humanitarian emergencies are not necessarily new issues, but rather a manifestation of pre-existing social, political and economic inequalities that only worsen during crisis periods.

CHALLENGES OF DELIVERING GENDER-SENSITIVE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The nature and manner in which humanitarian assistance is provided may sometimes allow gender considerations either to be ignored or to seem irrelevant. As previously stated, humanitarian assistance is designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters ('Defining humanitarian assistance'

2015). Humanitarian assistance is usually characterized by quick responses and short-term interventions. These underlying characteristics of humanitarian assistance form one of the major reasons for the absence of a gender perspective in humanitarian interventions. The pressure to respond immediately and save people from a crisis does not allow for careful analysis of the impact of the situation on women and men, or even allow for proper planning to avoid some of the negative effects of intervention.

Funding is particularly important to the kind of relief that can be planned and delivered in emergency situations. Humanitarian interventions are often restricted in terms of time and budget. When budgets for relief interventions are not designed to be gender sensitive, they fail to take into account the different needs of women and men and the gendered impacts of the relief or assistance itself. They may even risk reinforcing the factors that make women more vulnerable and undermine their coping strategies.

Furthermore, the degree of vulnerability and resilience of men and women in crisis situations is largely constructed by gender power relations. The gendered roles and responsibilities of men and women lead to unequal power relations and also affect women's abilities to respond to and cope with crises. This can further translate into unequal access to relief aid or create situations in which relief assistance does not reach those who actually need it. Although women are primary caregivers, the distribution of basic relief such as food is often placed under the control of community leaders or persons in decision-making positions in the communities, who are generally men (Benjamin 2013). The structures for relief distribution therefore create opportunities for exploitation. Women can either be cheated on their rations or be forced to exchange sex for relief items. This was the case in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where food and other basics were traded for sex in refugee and Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camps. Moreover, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) has also been committed by UN peacekeepers and humanitarian aid workers, who have offered affected women and young girls money, food or gifts in exchange for sex. A report released by Save the Children UK in 2002 gave detailed accounts of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Many of the victims were girls under the age of 18 who had been abused by peacekeepers, aid workers and community leaders (UNHCR 2002). It is important to note that the extent of vulnerability in these crises goes beyond gender to include age, class and social status, among other factors. Therefore young girls, single women and widows may experience greater degrees of discrimination and exploitation. This can be seen in Northern Nigeria, where women and girls remain vulnerable to both the security services

and the Boko Haram militants. Efforts by national and state governments to address their needs are inconsistent, and poor access to the northern regions also limits support from international agencies. Additionally, the terrorist group perpetrates sexual violence against the women and girls it abducts: this has led to forced displacement of many communities with scarce resources to meet their own needs.

Finally, in a bid to offer rapid response to victims of an emergency situation, humanitarian organizations may inadvertently reinforce certain gender stereotypes that consider women to be passive, helpless victims. Such categorizations further marginalize women and alienate them from decision-making processes rather than regarding them as people who have a voice and who can actively participate in processes to better their lives.

HARNESSING WOMEN'S CAPABILITIES IN HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN WEST AFRICA

If gender perspectives are integrated into the delivery of humanitarian assistance, they can provide an avenue to challenge discriminatory gender norms and unequal power relations and offer opportunities for positive social change.

For humanitarian assistance programmes to adequately respond to the needs of all persons and engineer positive social change, frameworks for humanitarian interventions must first of all be based on a gendered analysis of the causes and impacts of the crises (Green 2013), taking into account the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys in the design plan and implementation of programmes so as not to undermine cultural sensitivities or perpetuate existing gender biases. This implies that all actors engaged in humanitarian aid delivery, which include donors, humanitarian organizations, national governments and NGOs, must understand and adopt policies that promote women's rights and gender equality in their interventions. In this vein it is encouraging to note that Oxfam, in responding to the Ebola outbreak in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, took note of the gendered implications of the pandemic. Their briefing note in December 2014 reiterated the need for all implementing agencies to integrate gender dimensions to improve the Ebola response (Hillier 2014). They highlighted the participation of women throughout the outbreak and recovery process and encouraged the financial support of women's rights groups and their integration into the response structures (ibid.).

Secondly, capacity building at different levels – i.e. the international, national and local levels – will ensure gender-sensitive responses to crises. For instance, gender-sensitive training for relief and aid workers will improve the de-

livery of gender-sensitive relief programmes. In addition, strategic lobbying of national governments and adequate capacity building for national institutions will help strengthen national laws and improve gender-mainstreaming efforts. This will also offer greater protection against gender-based violence and improve women's participation and leadership. Similarly, specific empowerment programmes such as building the capacities of local organizations with expertise on gender (Green 2013) and networking with local women's organizations could contribute to ensuring a gender-based approach to the provision of emergency relief and aid. This is evidenced in the case of Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the delivery of humanitarian assistance from organizations such as the World Council of Churches and the International Red Cross Society enabled local women's organizations to mobilize and engage in the peace process. Such local capacities were harnessed to give voice to women and ensure their greater participation in decision-making processes.

In addition, specific empowerment programmes such as livelihood and income-generation support programmes as well as the provision of healthcare, education, shelter, water and sanitation should be designed to target the specific needs of women to help improve their coping strategies and survive with dignity in crisis situations. These measures not only enhance women's rights, but also deliver assistance that actually helps to eliminate structural factors that contribute to inequalities and increased vulnerability for women while helping to address some of the root causes of complex emergency crises.

There is also a need for ECOWAS Member States to implement the humanitarian policy with particular attention to gendered needs. This will provide the framework that will guide future initiatives and programmes. At the moment, the lack of a strategy guiding humanitarian assistance is inimical to the practice of the discipline.

CONCLUSION

The need to restore the dignity and worth of the human being is at the heart of humanitarian interventions and must continue to be upheld by all actors in the field. A reading of the history of humanitarian assistance reveals that women tend to be neglected in humanitarian relief, especially within the culture of most West African countries, where women's social status tends to be given low priority. The legal frameworks on humanitarian assistance do not always end up being implemented: in some cases they remain just politically binding and most countries prioritize neither them nor the needs of women. Further, where these policies have been adopted at the ECOWAS level, the experience on the ground

indicates patchy implementation frameworks. Though it is encouraging to note that some humanitarian organizations such as the UNHCR, WFP and Oxfam have gender policies that seek to guide humanitarian assistance and have trained staff on their use, there is still more work to be done for these theories to align with the practice on the ground. It is obvious, then, that conscious efforts must be made to analyse and take into account the different vulnerabilities of women and men in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Ignoring this fact may result in perpetuating gender inequalities. ECOWAS Member States must strengthen and train their humanitarian assistance institutions to first of all be the primary responders in any humanitarian crisis in their countries, and secondly to complement the role of other international actors offering aid. In this vein a landmark project, the West Africa Disaster Preparedness Initiative (WADPI),⁷ launched at the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in July 2015, seeks to strengthen regional coordination across ECOWAS Member States while utilizing lessons learned from the recent Ebola outbreak in the region to foster an all-hazards approach to disaster preparedness. Modules on gender and humanitarian assistance were developed and taught to the participants; such initiatives are important at both the regional and national levels in training the next generation of humanitarian workers to be gender sensitive in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

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⁷ WADPI is sponsored by the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) Post-Operation United Assistance (OUA) Transition Disaster Preparedness Project and hosted by ECOWAS, in collaboration with the Kofi Annan Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) and the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) of the Republic of Ghana.

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Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa and Beyond: Communicating the Community

Working Definitions of Humanitarian Advocacy & Learning Alliances

BY STEFAN ZIEGLER, WITH A CONTRIBUTION FROM EVA BIRK

This essay is a reflection on humanitarian advocacy and the use of knowledge-sharing networks in humanitarian contexts. The text is a synopsis of years of conflict-related experience derived from praxis. It also draws from training front-line practitioners deployed to conflict areas.

This article argues that, not only is advocacy inherent in all alleviation measures carried out by aid agencies, but also that to abstain from any sort of advocacy is counter to the humanitarian principle of *Humanity*, which is often summed up as a ‘do no harm’ approach. In this context, the essay explores how research-based analysis and resultant communications tools can ensure that humanitarian interventions actively help groups of beneficiaries meaningfully re-define their lives after the initial shock of a natural or conflict-related disaster.

Rather than a purely academic approach, this article is organised anthropologically: its methodology incorporates the personal into a wider appreciation of the world, here meaning the world of conflict and natural disaster, in which communities have typically experienced a shock to or a disruption of ‘normal’ life. Lessons learned are encouraged to be adapted in the West Africa context.

This article takes inspiration from a recent publication: ‘Knowledge-Making and its Politics in Conflict Regions’, by Dr. Christine Leuenberger from Cornell University (2015). In her essay, she chose to create a methodology of writing her personal experience as a researcher in order to make inferences on the universal. She calls her article ‘a personal journey’. Her style is fresh and vivid. She keeps a sense of scientific expression in dealing with delicate questions of

knowledge creation in conflict zones and reflecting on the role of the researcher in these contexts.

The many ways in which societies or communities cope with crisis is reflective of human resilience and creativity. This essay draws on the spirit of resilience rather than that of charity. It appeals to a self-inflicted sustainability chosen by its population, rather than an imposed one.

The conclusions presented in this text are drawn from over 15 years of field experience, predominantly in human-made disaster areas. They also echo countless hours of reflection in training and learning environments aimed at humanitarian practitioners. These conclusions are broad reaching, targeting the *beyond* as much as the West African context. The aim of this article is to strengthen advocacy outcomes and outputs of organizations and governmental agencies.

This article first teases out a working definition of humanitarian advocacy as it relates to the basic humanitarian principle of *Humanity*, including ‘do no harm’ and accountability. This is followed by a discussion of action research as one of the most direct and transformational research and learning methods available to establish strong, sustainable evidence-based advocacy initiatives.

Lastly, this article reflects on best practices for constructing formal stakeholder learning and advocacy networks on the ground by exploring a case study of one such learning alliance in the West Bank called the Academic Cooperation Palestine Project (ACPP). Over a short period of time, ACPP produced a number of advocacy tools to assist academic researchers, institutional actors and community groups struggling to collect and share humanitarian data within a conflict zone. Lessons learned from this project range from best-practice methods of gathering data to steps for creating a functioning learning alliance in order to communicate gathered evidence to local, national and even international power structures.

One point remains to be mentioned at the outset: although the wider humanitarian community has elaborated minimum standards for many of its life-saving endeavours (e.g. THE SPHERE Project, 2011), it has never expressed the urgency of making advocacy or communications on behalf of beneficiaries a core issue of concern. This article hopes to bring this issue to greater light within humanitarian practice.

HUMANITARIAN ADVOCACY

Even if not noted explicitly, advocacy is already a core instrument for many aid organizations. Practitioners, typically under order to push ‘local capacity-building’ agendas on behalf of beneficiaries and vulnerable populations, often fail to recognise that their actions are in fact ‘advocacy efforts’. Others shy away from the term because it can be seen as politically motivated. Many organizations explain their representations vis-à-vis interlocutors, who range from local policy-makers to global power brokers, as simply ‘communications efforts’ or communications ‘campaigns’. What all humanitarian practitioners have in common, however, is that they are charged with transmitting the voices of populations who do not have sufficient access to power to those who *do* hold formalized power (e.g. policy-makers), the goal being to eventually gain attention and alleviate circumstances related to a calamity.

Trying to define the term advocacy globally is nearly impossible, not only because it depends greatly on the context within which it is used, but also because it has no ready definition. This obviously does not help organizations and their staff to articulate the message of those whom they are mandated to support or assist. In fact, in some cases this reluctance to spell out the underlying reasons or interests for which a message is being related can hinder effective messaging and therefore be contrary to the cause.

Luckily, in English at least, the term advocacy can be commonly understood, especially in conjunction with humanitarian aid work. It gets harder when one tries to translate the idea into other languages. In French, *plaidoyer*, the literal translation of advocacy, does not pay sufficient tribute to the importance of the beneficiary. It rather connotes the word’s common usage in French legal language, meaning to make a plea in court. The same is true for other languages. In Russian it can even carry the opposite of its English meaning: propaganda (i.e. that which in all cases must be avoided). In the absence of a ready definition, one can come to understand advocacy by looking at and interpreting working definitions in specific contexts. It is through attempted definitions that a conceptual and contextual understanding of advocacy develops and becomes meaningful.

Advocacy is:

- Actively putting a problem on the political agenda
- Focusing on solutions
- Participating in a process rather than a single event
- Requiring patience, persistence, flexibility and iterative reflection

- Closing the gap between policy and action
- Negotiating change in the real world (as opposed to the theoretical world)

There is another way of thinking about advocacy that helps tease out the different ways this term appears in professional and non-professional practice. Instead of a one-term-fits-all approach, advocacy can be broken down into categories, each suggesting a different way of initiating change:

- Interest-group advocacy: using like-minded organizations to pursue a common goal, often through lobbying
- Social justice advocacy: inferring a more just and lasting social situation or outcome for a specific group
- Media advocacy: making use of the media in order to achieve one's advocacy objectives
- Bureaucratic advocacy: engaging primarily with professional 'experts' and specialists to persuade and bring about political change
- Legal advocacy: targeting lawmakers to change laws that are deemed unjust or in need of revision
- Political advocacy: exerting influence on political parties or in the political arena
- Environmental advocacy: defending the environment from negative human-induced impacts

Adding to this list we may now characterise humanitarian advocacy in terms of its own unique motivations:

- Humanitarian advocacy: representing vulnerable people or populations in contexts of war or natural disaster vis-à-vis an institutional authority or outside donor in order to effect change; humanitarian advocates assume that due to cases of extreme structural inequality, political corruption or life-threatening conflict, the voice of the population of concern is either unheard or under-represented

Despite the obstacle of finding a common expression in language, this article argues that no matter the organization (non-governmental or governmental), if one is trying to alleviate the suffering of constituents, one is engaging in advocacy in one way or another. This can be on a minor or major scale, depending on organizational size, structure and access to formal or informal power.

Many have termed advocacy as ‘mobilisation for change’ or ‘mobilisation for positive social change’. The introduction of the concept of change is interesting. It assumes that if people voice their discontent in sufficient numbers, societal awareness and discourse can trigger organizations or institutions to remedy structural inequalities. In a humanitarian environment this means that those who have lost the most, particularly their means of livelihood, might be supported by ‘conscientious advocates’ – a difficult and strange task indeed. It does need to be stressed, however, that doing advocacy on behalf of people carries not only responsibility to ‘do no harm’, but also a necessity to perform in the ‘best interest’ of the beneficiary. To advocate half-heartedly can be more detrimental than doing nothing at all.

There are two main ways of expressing advocacy: from the inside of a campaign or as an outsider. If you are part of the group you represent, to work from the inside (e.g. from a community-based organization) can be of great value to an effort since you have ample local knowledge and are authentic. This may, however, also be a drawback. As an insider you may be perceived as working within a set of narrow self-interests.

If you are advocating from the outside, you represent a group of people to whom you do not directly belong, but with whom you are affiliated. For example, you may be working for a large organization, foreign or national, which is mandated or invited by the government to aid people in distress. This has implications on the way you and your organization are perceived and portrayed. It is not always clear from where you get your mandate and how well you know your ‘clients’, i.e. those you seek to represent. It is up to you to clarify this position in order to be credible and accountable.

One element without which advocacy cannot exist is the message. If your organization cannot identify with the message or core interests of your beneficiaries (perhaps due to restrictive institutional mandates), you ought to be careful about purporting to ‘represent’ community needs. In this way messaging is most likely stronger if it comes from a network of actors. In some cases it may be necessary for your group to ally with another organization that is able to say what your organization cannot. Also, a message needs to be transported. A message without communications remains stalled – utterly insignificant. Whether participating in advocacy efforts as an insider or outsider, it is imperative that humanitarian practitioners be proficient at transmitting the beneficiaries’ message to those who can help change their situation for the better.

Communications and change

In humanitarian disasters, one can assume that the main role of communications is to transmit and amplify critical data about a problem, as well as demands for change. However, one has to remember that societies undergoing rapid transformation due to conflict or natural disaster are already experiencing swift and unforgiving societal change processes. Vulnerable populations especially may become estranged and fearful of any change at all.

To be aware of this sensitivity is to attempt to understand the plight of those whose very foundations have been uprooted and unsettled. To communicate messages in these contexts is a sensitive undertaking and requires attentive listening before making any decision about communications or advocacy strategies.

One way of ensuring that evidence-based messages are understood and used to their fullest advantage is to cooperate with local players or actors (both professional and non-professional) concerned with the same problem, and to commit to building knowledge together via co-research or knowledge exchange.

ACTION RESEARCH

This section provides a brief introduction to a specific co-research method: action research. Action research is an approach to social research that emphasizes participation and action by community members (Carr/Kemmis 1986: 162). Through its reliance on rigorous, iterative inquiry into shared problems, action research offers useful advice for how practitioners may undertake the hard work of linking the worlds of advocacy and research in a humanitarian context.

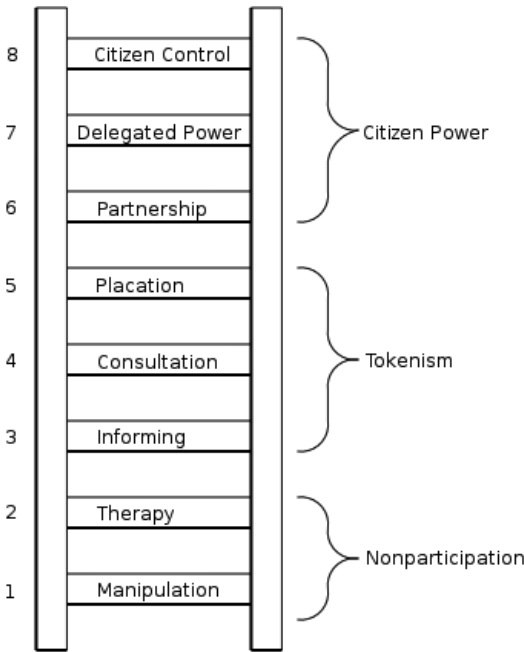
As mentioned above, humanitarian practitioners may be considered ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ in a community of concern. For our purposes, we are most interested in what tips action research can offer to humanitarian outsiders who, because of their professional obligation, are in effect in a state of limbo between competing obligations to ‘teach change’, ‘build capacity for change’ and ‘make change’. Action research is valuable in that it presents specific methods for engaging networks of interested actors to strengthen channels for knowledge sharing and knowledge building via an iterative process of action and reflection on action. Action research tools can help humanitarian practitioners better understand the root of the problem at hand. They can also provide space for transformational processes in which a group of individuals affected by conflict or disaster engage to advocate, learn and build knowledge on their own behalf.

Action research offers a variety of perspectives to describe what fruitful shared inquiry in a group setting looks like. The action research toolbox brings to the table the notion that collaborative inquiry or co-research into shared problems is the preferred way to intervene in complex, interrelated systems (Flood 2010: 270). In the non-profit arena action research practitioners such as David Brown and John Gaventa take this idea further, arguing that transnational and even ‘north-south’ action research networks encompassing groups with varying levels of resources, expertise and social backgrounds can build shared trust and values and improve institutional capacity (Brown/Gaventa 2010: 15) and (Brown/Tandon 2008: 231).

Action research in humanitarian and institutional settings

It is important to acknowledge how action research in humanitarian and institutional settings differs from traditional ideas of partnership for social change. The classic article ‘A Ladder of Citizen Participation’ (Arnstein 1969) outlines a range of ways in which community members may be engaged by outside parties for better or for worse, from damaging manipulation and delegated power to complete citizen control. Action research’s placement of traditional academic or ‘professional’ research on this ladder is quite low (see Figure 1), rejecting the notion that ‘neutral’ or purely professional researchers can empower communities by knowledge transfer alone.

Figure 1: The ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’



Source: Arnstein 1969

While a humanitarian researcher may be deeply committed to changing the daily reality of vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, he or she still has a mandate to ‘do no harm’, that is, not to put the population or community of concern further at risk. Since humanitarian practitioners have an immediate obligation to ensure survival before all else, they are in a sense immediately limited in how far up the ladder they can climb *with* a community. For example, a community may decide to increase risk-taking as a means to reach its goals, a decision a humanitarian practitioner simply cannot support.

Linking advocacy and research with ‘good’ data

Non-profits and aid agencies rely on the accuracy of analytical information to continue to make credible arguments for change. In strained conditions, access to ‘good’ data is habitually invaluable. Action research speaks to best practice in evidence-based advocacy, that is, research agendas for which the methods are strongly informed by their eventual use in an advocacy setting. Shared co-

research between a beneficiary and the research team, as well as encouraging professional researchers to share their methodologies and findings across institutions and borders, can increase not only the legitimacy but long-term sustainability of humanitarian advocacy efforts.

From the humanitarian practitioner's point of view, documenting the research process and particularly beneficiary-related events in the field can be as simple as recording voices or capturing events on the ground via photo or video while performing urgent crisis-based support. Alternatively, it can be as complex as asking entire communities to participate in co-defining research goals inside a long-term refugee camp. The capturing of case study material in particular can help the analysis of the research effort as well as exemplify needs on the ground to future donors or interested parties. This type of information is notoriously difficult and costly to collect at later stages. For example, taking photos or video footage of a community on first contact can add valuable data to a baseline. Being able to illustrate the situation in terms of lessons learned after the calamity, as well as in interviews with the representatives of the community, can help demonstrate immediate needs or progress over time, something donor agencies are always keen to see.

One cannot stress enough the intricate link between effective research and good data gleaned from the very onset of a project. Many projects start out as assistance projects – for instance food security – and later turn into livelihoods projects. These missions (starting as an emergency) will likely need some component of advocacy supported by communications tools in order to be sustainably handed over to local entities. It is therefore important to capture all key moments of a project in as complete and standardized a way as possible in order to have material to assist and effect change further down the road.

COMMUNICATING THE COMMUNITY – LEARNING ALLIANCES

A learning alliance (LA) is a term used to describe a diverse network of individuals or groups committed to improving knowledge on a specific research topic (Lundy 2004). Learning alliances consist of small networks of public, private and/or civil society groups seeking to further social or political change. They constitute a powerful tool to move collective knowledge of participants into informed and impactful action. LAs and their members commit to a process of knowledge production and knowledge translation that is iterative, collaborative and participatory (i.e. there is mutual learning between all parties).

Learning alliances often consist of a series of facilitated meetings or informal exchanges between stakeholders with a common advocacy interest. The purpose of these exchanges is to share knowledge and lessons learned, as well as to define best practices for research methodology (LearningAlliance.ch 2014).

An LA might take shape, for example, to advance applied research on gender-based violence in West Africa. In this example, local NGOs, victims' rights groups, researchers and governmental agencies might form an LA for the purpose of discussing new ways to catalogue and track cases of gender-based violence across institutions and physical geographies. Individual actors or groups in the LA would join, motivated by an interest to improve the validity, accuracy and dissemination of information (Lundy et al. 2006).

Benefits of a learning alliance

Learning alliances differ from traditional activist coalitions in that they place a higher importance on improving the capacity of disadvantaged social groups to solve problems on their own. In humanitarian research, the term learning alliance has been used by international aid groups to describe cross-boundary stakeholder networks with an emphasis on community participation, capacity building and the empowerment of disenfranchised social groups (LearningAlliance.ch 2014).

The learning alliance approach was first discussed in literature investigating what Michael Gibbons (1994) called 'mode two' knowledge production. This involves multidisciplinary teams that work together on specific problems in the real world. In contrast, 'mode one' knowledge production is motivated by empirical inquiry alone. In the context of international development work, Lundy (2004) defines the learning alliance as: 'a process undertaken jointly by research and development agencies through which research outputs are shared, adapted, used and innovated upon to strengthen or create outputs, generate and document development outcomes, and identify future research needs and potential areas of collaboration' (226).

By giving practitioners the opportunity to learn through formal communities of practice, learning alliances can develop cumulative and shared knowledge across geographical, social and organizational borders (Lundy et al. 2006). By doing so they can increase the visibility of disenfranchised groups.

LEARNING ALLIANCE CASE STUDY: THE ACADEMIC COOPERATION PALESTINE PROJECT

The case below illustrates how one group of actors used evidence-based advocacy to mobilize for change in a humanitarian context. As an actor in this LA, the author found that it successfully engaged communities whose lives had been disrupted and helped empower both professional academic researchers and community groups not only to create their own meaningful messages, but also to strengthen their resilience to future shocks and challenges.

The context of this project is similar to project conditions that might be encountered in West Africa, where advocates face multiple obstacles to getting even the most rudimentary research project off the ground. The following case study from the Middle East emphasises the wide applicability of the learning alliance approach.

In 2012, the United Nations Barrier Monitoring Unit (BMU) launched a learning alliance called the Academic Cooperation Palestine Project (ACPP) to enhance educational and technical capacity of local Palestinian researchers. Initially, the ACPP was focused on the need to enhance international research partnerships around sensitive issues related to Israel's Separation Wall, including land degradation, water rights and land title controls (UNRWA 2012). The ACPP was later transformed into the WALL Learning Alliance ('Wall Monitoring' 2015).

The ACPP grew organically out of a need to better capture the impacts of Israel's separation wall in the West Bank. An article appearing in the journal *Technologies for Sustainable Development* entitled 'Academic Cooperation to Foster Research and Advocacy Competencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (West Bank)' (Golay et al. 2014) describes the initiative as follows: 'ACPP serves as a platform to bring together academic partners from the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), West Bank (WB) and Switzerland, as well as Palestinian governmental, non-governmental and academic organisations'. Although the alliance had an academic base, it tapped into quasi-academic sources from within a broader spectrum of Palestinian society. Started in early 2011, it was 'designed as a large cooperation and networking platform involving researchers, students, public servants and experts from occupied Palestinian territory' (ibid.).

Golay et al. (2014) succinctly sum up major local research challenges the ACPP sought to surmount:

Palestinians living in the West Bank, a territory occupied by the State of Israel according to International Law, face deprived access to land and limited ability to move freely,

which pertains to the presence of Israeli settlements and other infrastructure (closures, restricted or forbidden roads, etc.). This confinement has significant impacts on their economic and social livelihoods, and it is even worsening with the on-going construction of a 709 km long Barrier [or Wall] which mainly runs inside the West Bank. With regard to this situation, there is a clear need to strengthen the capacity of civil society and its representatives to apply sound research processes as a basis for improved advocacy for Palestinian human rights.

Golay, a professor at the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL) in Switzerland, and his team of researchers, including myself, reference within this article ways in which partners in the alliance (from their varied vantage points) contributed to knowledge creation and sharing:

Reliable data had also to be collected, managed and above all, shared. These challenges have been addressed within the ACPP that bring together academic partners in the occupied Palestinian territory. [...] A large set of actions have already been developed during the first year of the project, including courses, training, and research efforts. [...] Taken as a whole, the project produces valuable results for all partners: useful advocacy material for the Palestinian partners, and a unique ‘real-scale laboratory’ where investigations are jointly conducted to develop novel confinement and change indicators. (ibid.)

Excerpts offered by another member of the learning alliance (here, a university) exemplify the validity of the work process and the learning alliance approach. Within his own personal analysis Golay raises another important issue; the ethics of conducting academic research on one side of the political or conflict divide. On this topic he argues, ‘Among scientists working with one or the other party in this conflict, we may be fully comfortable in fostering knowledge and competences of the Palestinian civil society as the unequal occupied party and as mandated by international law.’ Here he is referring to International Humanitarian Law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention on occupation. In short, in a situation in which a territory is being occupied by another state, the occupier is under the obligation to ensure civilian life is maintained ‘as normal’.

Within the ACPP learning alliance, the benefits of UN officials, local and international researchers, students and civil servants working alongside each other were myriad. First, we found that different organizations could specialize in different areas, mobilizing resources jointly and securing shared interest in the project beyond the UN’s limited project parameters. Second, establishing the learning alliance brought together unequally sized organizations with unique specialisations. Third, organizations with ‘fringe’ interests were still able to ac-

cess the main players in the learning alliance. We found that regular meetings resulted in fruitful troubleshooting and sharing of information and knowledge rather than vying for donor funding, a unique success in a conflict-ridden area where small, medium-sized and large NGOs often compete, rather than collaborate, for grant funding.

The ACP learning alliance was never meant to be an end in itself. In order for partners to receive formal funding, for example, a much more concrete format of partnership or framework agreement would have been necessary. In the case of learning alliances generally, the author found that a letter of intention often sufficed to publicly commit members to a shared research agenda. However, the moment financial resources came into play, stronger contractual agreements such as partnership agreements or framework agreements were necessary.

In this case partners best suited to working together eventually looked into forming a contractual partnership in order to gain access to both local and international donors. The signing of letters of intention helped cement cohesion between these potential (funding) partners. In later months, international donors viewed learning alliance membership prior to formal project partnership positively because it illustrated not only a higher level of institutional commitment, but also thoughtful work to assess and pursue shared priorities.

Lastly, although this LA is still in existence, learning alliances have the potential to be rather fragile platforms if, after a certain time, no organization makes any real financial or contractual commitment. Here alternative drivers must exist to keep all parties interested, engaged and ‘at the table’. Learning alliances depend on the will of individuals or groups and their availability to participate fully in an iterative process. In this particular case it was useful to use the *idea* of a learning alliance to jump-start a long-term formalized partnership. This lesson could be readily adapted by organizations in West Africa looking to kick off local, regional or even cross-boundary learning networks where no formal institutionalized research partnerships exist.

CONCLUSION

Humanitarian advocacy is a necessary tool for assisting those in need during or after crisis and conflict. The absence of a clear definition of humanitarian advocacy cannot be taken as an excuse simply to ‘dump’ assistance on vulnerable communities. Advocacy instead should be seen as a necessary tenant of humanitarian work. Tools like learning alliances are useful in that they provide a sustainable, network-based approach to helping communities realize healthier levels of subsistence. In addition these processes can be transformational in nature,

opening space for beneficiaries to create their own messages in their own voices.

As has been suggested throughout this article, West African practitioners could benefit vastly from employing advocacy approaches based on the learning alliance model to alleviate donor fatigue and emphasize the value of evidence-based research.

The ACP case, as well as others referenced here, demonstrates that advocacy based in research, networked learning and effective communication is the sole way forward. Resilient communities should have the opportunity to engage in advocacy initiatives for positive social change and livelihoods with dignity.

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Note: Please be aware that large amounts of information are taken from a 6-week e-learning course on social advocacy devised in conjunction with the NGO Management School, Geneva, in 2014. Copyright of all the material remains with Stefan Ziegler, except when sources have been referenced otherwise.

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Dealing with Food Crises in the Sahel

BY LAURA SWIFT AND JESSICA SAULLE

Desertification, food crises and malnutrition are commonly associated with the Sahel. Ironically, the parts of the Sahel that have been most affected by food crises and malnutrition, such as Southern Niger and Mali, are productive agriculture and livestock areas. Amartya Sen (1981), winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics, has provided an explanation to this paradox: his research in the early 1980s showed that famines occur ‘not from an absolute lack of food but from systematic inequalities that limit access to food for some people’.

Despite his findings, until 2010, the approach to famines in most countries in the Sahel focused mostly on declining food *availability* rather than on food *access*.¹ This clearly impacted the design of effective and appropriate humanitarian programming, including the targeting of households most in need of food assistance. Generally, low production areas were prioritized, regardless of whether or not they had the options of non-agriculture or livestock livelihoods that enabled them to purchase or otherwise access enough food during the production deficits (Gubbels 2011: 15-20). The terms of trade, or ‘barter price’, which are critical components of nomadic populations, were not understood, meaning that pastoralists (whether politically integrated or not) were left out of the relief efforts (ibid.). Moreover, the timing of the support that was provided was also an issue: relief was not provided early enough for populations to avoid food insecurity and malnutrition (Oxfam 2010).

During the past five years, the humanitarian community and national governments in the Sahel have increased efforts to institutionalize early warning systems and have recognized the need to understand livelihoods in order to have early, targeted and appropriate responses and longer-term investments in resili-

¹ i.e. ‘access’ to the appropriate resources to acquire food

ence and poverty reduction (ODI 2014).² While early action to respond to slow-onset food crises is not yet systematic, there has been an increased use of the Household Economy Approach (HEA), a framework originally developed by the international non-government organization (NGO) Save the Children (SC)³ in the 1990s, which permits a thorough understanding of how households access food and income throughout the year.⁴ This approach will be described in greater detail later on. In this article we postulate, on the basis of our own experience as practitioners as well as on the literature and available data, that the increase in the use of HEA is having a profound impact on the understanding of the community dynamics and coping mechanisms and therefore on the design and effectiveness of early interventions, leading to the prevention of catastrophic food insecurity and malnutrition levels. HEA allows humanitarian communities and government to better understand the context, conditions and perspectives of local people, thus better positioning them to provide appropriate and timely assistance (De Waal 1989).

THE CONTEXT IN THE SAHEL

Food security and nutrition in the Sahel is characterized by fragile livelihoods, low and deteriorating resources, and recurrent slow-onset shocks: food crises have occurred in 2005, 2008, 2010 and 2012. In addition to persistent poverty, levels of chronic food insecurity and malnutrition are high. Even during a good harvest year, malnutrition rates remain significant and many people struggle to survive (ECHO 2009).

Production levels are generally low. In a relatively good production year, only about half of the Sahel's population's food needs is produced locally, most of which is grown by the relatively wealthier households. As a result, the poorest households depend primarily on purchasing food to meet their food needs (FEG & SC 2014), making them extremely vulnerable to price fluctuations. During times of crisis they must resort to activities and strategies that are detrimental to their futures, such as selling assets (for example land, livestock and

² This can be seen in the Global Alliance for Resilience (AGIR) Sahel and West Africa Regional Roadmap http://www.oecd.org/swac/publications/AGIR%20roadmap_EN_FINAL.pdf.

³ SC is an international NGO that promotes children's rights, provides relief and helps support children in 120 countries.

⁴ For detailed information, refer to 'The Practitioners' Guide to the Household Economy Approach' by the Food Economy Group and Save the Children.

household items); removing children from school to avoid tuition fees; forcing children to work to earn extra income; and decreasing the quantity, quality and frequency of meals. Ultimately, households end up in a ‘poverty trap’ from which they can escape only with timely and appropriate humanitarian recovery support and long-term ‘resilience’ programmes.

Despite decades of investment in early warning and food security information systems in the Sahel, food and nutrition crises remain frequent, with information often inaccurate, incomplete or delayed – resulting in late and often inappropriate humanitarian responses by the international community, including donors, NGOs and UN agencies, as well as governments. A key component to tackling this situation is the strategic strengthening of early warning systems, combined with greater attention to early, targeted and appropriate responses and longer-term investments in resilience and poverty reduction.

A MORE NEEDS-BASED RESPONSE TO FOOD CRISIS: AN EXAMPLE FROM MALI

For decades, the international aid community has responded to food security crises generally with food aid, based on little or no response analysis (Maxwell et al. 2013). This aid has tended to arrive late, well into the lean season, after communities have already been suffering, often for months. Moreover, the response has tended to be timed according to the agrarian community hunger period, which in the Sahel falls months later than the pastoral hunger period. This late response therefore has particularly dire consequences for pastoralist households, which rely on livestock for their livelihoods and have few other options to earn an income. In the Sahel during a ‘normal’ year, when agriculture and livestock production levels are average and households can generally meet basic food needs, the rainy season begins in June and lasts until September. The timeliness of this season is critical for agriculture and pastoral households’ production in the region. When these rains have been poor, it is extremely difficult for livestock to access sufficient pasture and water during the hot and dry months from March to June.

This was the unfortunate case in Mali in 2009 and 2010. By August 2009 it was clear that rains throughout most of the country had been erratic and insufficient, which should have triggered responses by the humanitarian community. In September 2009 during visits with nomadic populations in the Circle of Bourem in the Gao Region, humanitarian staff from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) realized that these communities already knew that their survival would be challenging in the year ahead, especially from December onwards.

Although the NGOs alerted the government and donors of the critical situation, there was little reaction (Oxfam 2012). Before drafting a response and action plan the government and donors wanted to be certain of the severity of the situation and decided to wait to see the official harvest data, which would not be available until November 2009 (*ibid.*). However, once available the government's harvest data did not show extensive deficits, and thus limited humanitarian support was requested in comparison to the needs that were identified through the NGOs' assessments. Ultimately the national response plan, developed by the government and humanitarian actors including the UN's World Food Programme (WFP),⁵ was largely based on the food availability (harvest) data and unfortunately did not acknowledge certain critical pastoral food security aspects that were identified in the NGOs' assessments, such as water and pasture deficits, sharply decreasing livestock prices and the timing of the pastoral hunger period. While NGOs advocated for the inclusion of pastoralist households in the response plans, relief efforts came too late for pastoralists. Ultimately, the impact on pastoralist households' food and nutrition security was severe.

In addition to the untimely response, the type of aid provided was also inappropriate (Gubbels 2011). Despite the fact that pastoralist households purchase the majority of their food from local markets (or exchange an animal for food), the relief plan was largely based on food aid, which was purchased and shipped from abroad or from within the region.⁶ If distributed in an inappropriate context, food aid can severely hurt market actors by decreasing general demand, which shrinks their business and impacts their livelihoods. In addition, the type of food distributed is not always locally appropriate or desired, and logistically food aid is heavy. In this specific situation, in a region in which infrastructure is poor, delays in the provision of assistance occurred at the decision-making, procurement and delivery stages. WFP's plan was not ambitious enough and initially aimed to cover less than 30 per cent of the population in need (Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan Revision Niger 2010). It was only in mid-July 2010 (four months after the start of the pastoralist hunger gap) that WFP increased its caseload (WFP 2010).

⁵ The World Food Programme is the food assistance branch of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.

⁶ This is apparent from their Sahel Crisis website, which detailed their response plan: <http://www.wfp.org/crisis/sahel>.

In conclusion, it is apparent that most of the weaknesses that plagued the response plan could have been avoided. Their causes include a lack of understanding of population specificities (including their main sources of food and income, as well as seasonal patterns), a lack of accurate early warning information and the international aid community and local governments' general lack of preparedness and capacity to respond quickly. Unfortunately this was not a standalone case: other countries in the region, including Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso, also experienced delayed and inadequate responses despite the existence of what should have been obvious early triggers (ReliefWeb 2010).

LESSONS LEARNED

Based on Amartya Sen's research, in the 1990s the international NGO Save the Children (SC) developed a livelihoods-based framework called the Household Economy Approach (HEA), which provides a thorough understanding of household-level economy as well as a means to measure the purchasing power and the accessibility component of food security. It enables the identification of populations most at risk to different shocks and quantifies food and income sources throughout the year. This approach has been gradually introduced in the Sahel by SC, food security and nutrition-focused international NGOs including Oxfam⁷ and Action Contre la Faim (ACF),⁸ institutional donors ECHO⁹ and USAID,¹⁰ and governments' early warning systems. Given the example described above, since 2009 these actors have continuously advocated for increased use of HEA in the region and have successfully launched a mini revolution in the discourse of crises in the Sahel.

⁷ Oxfam is an international confederation working in approximately 94 countries worldwide to find solutions to poverty and what it considers injustice around the world.

⁸ ACF is a global humanitarian organization committed to ending world hunger. The organization helps malnourished children in about 50 countries.

⁹ The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) is the EU agency that aims to save and preserve life; it is supported by EU citizens and delivers relief through humanitarian aid and civil protection.

¹⁰ The United States Agency for International Development is the lead U.S. government agency that works to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potentials.

The Household Economy Approach

The HEA framework represents typical household economies in a defined reference year, quantifying their main food and income sources and expenditures against a standardised energy (kilocalorie) requirement. It is based on the production of a *baseline* description of household livelihoods by wealth group in a ‘normal year’ within a defined *livelihood zone*, rather than the administrative divisions used in traditional surveys. As part of the baseline process, in each livelihood zone a number of villages, camps (in a nomadic context) or neighbourhoods (in an urban context) are selected to be surveyed. In each unit, the HEA data collection team holds discussions with the community to gather historic and contextual information. Communities are separated into wealth groups and discussions with each group aim to identify *key parameters* that significantly affect household food and income sources (such as food prices, crop and animal production, agriculture labour wages, etc.); these key parameters differ from one livelihood zone to another. By understanding how different wealth groups cope with various shocks, specific vulnerabilities are also captured. An example can be seen in Niger, where the HEA baselines developed in nomadic livelihood zones showed that, whilst there are more wealth-generating opportunities in the pastoral zones than in the neighbouring agro-pastoral zone, pastoralists rely on increasingly drought-depleted livestock herds for their food and income. The HEA information therefore exposed the extreme vulnerabilities of pastoralist households, highlighting the links between the successive food crises and rapid impoverishment of the communities, which has been caused by decreases in herd sizes.

The disaggregation of the population into livelihood zones and wealth is critically important for understanding the specificities of the very poor. HEA has highlighted that, in general, these people rely significantly on market purchases for food and not on their own production. This is because of their limited productive assets as well as their lack of reliable income sources, as well as their detrimental coping strategies (such as reduced expenditure on essential goods and services and migration) (Hypher/Martlew/Saulle 2012). In general, HEA highlights that, even in rural and sometimes remote areas, the economy is largely cash-based, and basic essential commodities are usually available.

Once a baseline has been established, HEA’s Outcome Analysis (OA) can be used to model the effect of changes in the key parameters on total food access of different household types over the following season or year. Multiple scenarios can be developed and modelled. For example, the OA can model the impact that a drought could have on pastoral conditions, such as pasture and wa-

ter levels. This, in turn, enables an understanding of the drought's impact on livestock, milk production and price of animals, and ultimately on the ability of nomadic populations to access food such as meat and milk, non-food items and essential services such as health care and education. The HEA OA will also identify the most difficult time in the near future for different groups of the population in terms of access to food and income: for each scenario, the OA exercise will show the gap that the different wealth groups in each livelihood zone are likely to face in the event of a defined shock. This is a particularly valuable exercise in the Sahel, where climate change is resulting in variable rainfall.

Since HEA describes the risks and vulnerabilities faced by different categories of households under different scenarios, it can identify appropriate opportunities to increase poor households' incomes and consequently reduce poverty and improve resilience. Therefore it should be used by governments, donors, UN agencies and NGOs for a range of purposes, including early warning and the planning and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies, emergency response, early recovery and food security policy analysis. In the Sahel many stakeholders, including the governments of Niger and Burkina Faso as well as regional institutions, have already recognized how HEA can strengthen regional early warning and response systems and improve the design of both emergency response and development planning.

The Success of HEA in the Sahel

During the past two decades, HEA has been gradually introduced in the Sahel and has significantly impacted the discourse surrounding food security programming and policy. However, it was not until 2010 that a real shift in national debates and policies started and that the notion of food access began to be as important as the notion of food availability and production (Gubbels 2011). Since 2010 SC has been leading the regional, multi-agency HEA Sahel Project¹¹ with implementing partners Oxfam, ACF and WFP, originally funded by ECHO and co-funded by OFDA since 2013. Since 2010, the project has gradually and successfully introduced the HEA methodology into regional early warning systems and response plans. The project works closely with the Sahel's regional early warning systems, which are coordinated by CILSS (Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel).¹² CILSS specialist agencies relevant to food security and early warning are INSAH (the research and training

¹¹ Refer to <http://www.hea-sahel.org/> for further details.

¹² 'Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel'

coordination body) and AGRHYMET (the technical wing responsible for collecting and analysing information on food security and markets). The CILSS uses a modified Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) framework called the Cadre Harmonisé (CH) to combine data on different dimensions of food insecurity into a coherent overview for early warning of crises. The CILSS and its partners conduct regular analyses on the food security and nutrition situation in most countries in the Sahel and West Africa, and the HEA Sahel Project seeks to reinforce these analyses.

Largely due to efforts made within the HEA Sahel Project, HEA is increasingly used by humanitarian actors throughout the region – including donors, governments, NGOs and UN agencies – to inform emergency food security programming. In particular, HEA is being used to provide the poorest households and children with seasonal safety nets and livelihood support (ECHO 2014). The OA is also increasingly used to inform the timing of seasonal safety net projects, as well as transfer amounts. As part of an ECHO-funded food security and livelihoods alliance in Niger, Save the Children and its partner NGOs developed detailed HEA Targeting Guidelines to promote thorough, accurate, participative and harmonized targeting for seasonal safety net, livelihood and supplementary feeding activities. Moreover, in several countries in the region, including Mali, Chad and Niger, discussions are on-going between NGOs, the World Bank and governments to establish efficient targeting methodologies for longer-term social protection programming.¹³ The World Bank is increasingly open to adopting HEA criteria for targeting the poorest households, demonstrating the gradual institutionalization of HEA-based programming in the region.¹⁴

In addition to the use of HEA within humanitarian programming, the HEA Sahel Project has contributed to a certain degree of adoption or institutionalization of HEA within programming in the region. For example, many governments now regularly use HEA information to inform their resilience and development plans to ensure that the most vulnerable children and their families are targeted with appropriate response. This is evident in Burkina Faso's recent 'Resilience and Support to Vulnerable Populations Plan' as well as in Niger's

¹³ For example, the World Bank funded a comparative study in Niger in December 2014 to examine the differences between HEA and Proxy Means Testing for targeting the most vulnerable households.

¹⁴ This can be seen in Niger, where the World Bank and NGOs are in the process of collaboratively developing a tool to target the most vulnerable households for the government's Safety Net Project; this tool will combine targeting criteria used by the World Bank and the NGOs to include HEA indicators.

‘AGIR Resilience Priority Plan’,¹⁵ both of which base geographical and individual household targeting on HEA criteria. The government of Niger is also considering using HEA to inform its on-going Safety Net Project, which provides cash transfers to thousands of households. And in Burkina Faso, the government has shown commitment to HEA, allocating some of its budget and encouraging institutional donors to finance HEA activities (Delpero 2013). Institutional commitment to HEA is also increasingly evident with AGRHYMET’s re-ception of ECOAGRIS¹⁶ funding for HEA regional activities.

HEA is also contributing increasingly to policymakers’ understanding of communities’ use of non-traditional income generation sources, as well as the possible security threats that they may present. For example, in Mali, HEA baselines in northern pastoral areas Gao and Kidal revealed the links between decreasing animal livestock numbers and communities’ subsequent involvement in trafficking activities, as well as the formulation of their new allegiances to ideology groups. Similarly, in Niger, HEA baselines captured the migration patterns that different parts of the population undergo at different times of the year to look for income opportunities. While most agro-pastoralists from villages along the Niger River go to nearby cities, some choose to make the longer trip to Ghana, where opportunities are deemed to be greater. Whilst most migration is seasonal, HEA also reveals the motivations that drive households to consider migrating to further destinations, including other regions in the world. By understanding the root causes that led communities to adopt new income sources and ideologies, appropriate programmes and policies can be designed to address the issues that pose possible security threats.

The HEA Sahel Project has also successfully introduced the use of HEA into national and regional food security early warning systems. Since 2014, OA exercises have been conducted twice a year at the national level. The timing of the OA sessions ensures that the results are available to feed the regional, consolidated analyses that are conducted at strategic moments throughout the seasonal calendar (following the agriculture harvest and prior to the pastoral lean season). Because the OA defines and projects the critical moments at which different types of households will need assistance, it enables humanitarian action

¹⁵ AGIR, the Global Alliance for Resilience in the Sahel and West Africa, is a supranational framework aiming to improve coherence, synergy and effectiveness in support to resilience initiatives in 17 West African and Sahel countries.

¹⁶ ECOAGRIS is a project funded by the EU and implemented by regional institutions, with the goal to establish a dynamic tool for ECOWAS’ agricultural sector, to monitor agriculture in West Africa.

to be implemented prior to the impending shock, preventing the deterioration of livelihoods and the use of harmful coping strategies.

A key component to successfully increasing the sustainable use of HEA in the Sahel has been building local capacity to carry out the approach. Since the beginning of the Project, nearly 500 people from governments, regional institutions, relief and development agencies have been trained. The trainings have focused on key elements of the HEA framework, teaching trainees about the technical methodologies of baseline assessments and outcome analysis, as well as providing an opportunity to practice the skills they learned. Capacity of those trained remains variable, but it is clear that expertise in the region has increased substantially since 2010. The establishment of a critical mass of qualified and experienced HEA practitioners who are based in the region within governments and humanitarian agencies is an important element of achieving sustainable results.

In addition to the increased use of HEA to inform programming and early warning systems, because of its multiple uses and relative cost-efficiency, financial commitment to HEA is becoming more and more evident in the Sahel. For example, in Chad, largely because of the government's advocacy efforts, the national early warning structure has obtained funding from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)¹⁷ for HEA activities, and diverse actors, including NGOs, UN agencies FAO and WFP, and government bodies have recognized the usefulness of HEA in supporting the creation of more resilient livelihoods in the Sahel. Likewise, in Niger, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹⁸ has recently provided funding to the government's early warning system to conduct HEA activities.¹⁹ While these investments demonstrate a vested interest in institutionalizing HEA, it is important to recognize that the majority of funding remains short-term and insufficient to reach the widespread needs. As indicated by the funding of the HEA Sahel Project, institutional donors such as USAID and ECHO have recognized HEA's importance.

¹⁷ The FAO is an agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. It helps developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all.

¹⁸ The UNDP is an agency of the United Nations that advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. It provides expert advice, training and grant support to developing countries.

¹⁹ UNDP funded two HEA baselines in August and September 2015.

However, their funding is short-term and humanitarian-focused and therefore not substantive enough to sufficiently avert the deterioration of livelihoods.

A success story in Burkina Faso: an example of institutionalization

An example of the institutionalization of HEA can be seen in Burkina Faso. Following the food crises in 2008 and 2010 (related to food price increases and drought, respectively), the need to project and quantify the impact that future shocks could have on the population was high on the political agendas. At the beginning of 2010 the government adopted HEA into its early warning systems because of its multiple functions and low cost. As a result, between 2010 and 2011 six government experts were trained in the approach and two livelihood zones were covered by HEA baselines. While this was an initial success, the government quickly acknowledged that activities should be scaled up and agreed to contribute some of its budget, which was complemented with funds from WFP, to produce baselines in all nine livelihood zones in the country. The HEA national coverage was led by the government's early warning system and the results revealed that almost 3 million people (20 per cent of the national population) were likely to suffer from a lack of access to basic food in 2012. Based on the results, the government designed a comprehensive and detailed response plan valued at USD 196 million, which aimed to prevent the deterioration of food security, livelihoods and nutrition. The plan was implemented by the government with the contribution of humanitarian actors, including NGOs and UN agencies. Building on this experience, the government systematised key parameter data collection into national monitoring systems to ensure the completion of accurate scenario and outcome analyses, and developed a national crisis management mechanism. Since 2012, throughout the country 200 people from government institutions (including community and national levels), academic institutions and aid agencies have been trained on how to use HEA; prefectures identify villages that are most affected by shocks with the support of a dozen NGOs. A working group of relief actors coordinated by the UN uses the information collected by the prefectures and NGOs to develop relief plans and information to distribute to the donors and media. To this date, HEA not only enables the government to target the households most in need with appropriate assistance in a timely manner,²⁰ but because its methodology is participative, it

²⁰ This can be seen in the government's 2014 Resilience and Support Plan for Populations Vulnerable to Food and Nutrition Insecurity.

also allows the beneficiaries to understand and accept the response. Therefore, the government plans and actions become more accessible and transparent to communities.

Whilst HEA activities were scaled up rapidly in Burkina Faso, the maintenance of activities is not systematic due to financial constraints. Many of the country's baselines need to be updated, as per the standard 5- to 10-year validity period and, while the government has dedicated some funding, it does not have sufficient resources compared to what is required. Going forward, prioritization of HEA activities in government budgets, combined with investment from development donors, will be crucial for establishing sustainability of activities.

CONCLUSION

If no action is taken soon, the primary challenges that the Sahel faces – including climatic variability, erratic rainfall patterns and rapid population growth – will continue to aggravate poverty and impede the poorest families' access to food and income. Stakeholders in the region must therefore continue to improve their understanding of livelihoods, as well as the efficiency and accuracy of early warning and response systems. Regular monitoring and analysis of household situations will be a critical component of these early warning systems.

Because it provides accurate, detailed and quantified results, HEA should contribute to these improvements. Stakeholders from governments, donors, NGOs and UN agencies should work together to establish HEA baselines in all livelihood zones in the Sahel, which will facilitate programme design and accurate early warning projections. HEA indicators should be systematically monitored and entrenched within the regional early warning systems. To ensure sustainable quality, a permanent cadre of skilled HEA practitioners should be established at national and regional levels, with a focus on government officials.

While HEA can contribute to the identification of the most appropriate interventions, a certain level of commitment from donors and governments is critical to ensure the timely funding of required responses. Moreover, multi-year development funding will be crucial to establishing sustainability of HEA and the programmes that tackle the root causes in the Sahel. Understanding how to support livelihoods before their substantive depletion could prevent not only food crises and malnutrition, but also insecurity. Investment in HEA will enable an appropriate and sustainable diversification of livelihoods, which will ultimately reduce vulnerability and food crises (Seaman 2014). Donors and governments must recognize that taking a portion of the funds currently invested to fight terrorism in the Sahel and investing these in HEA-based programmes

would contribute to increased food security throughout the region and, therefore, stability.

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Robots to the Rescue?

How Digital and Robotic Technology Could Improve Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa and Beyond

BY TOBIAS BURGERS

The most fundamental element in providing humanitarian assistance is having knowledge of what exactly is occurring on the ground and how a possible humanitarian crisis is developing. At the heart of any such effort is the need to acquire relevant and correct information in a timely manner. However, in conflict regions and areas affected by natural disaster or paralysed by diseases, it is difficult for aid organizations, governments and international governmental organizations (IGOs) to acquire the necessary information in order to develop an appropriate aid response (Williamson 2009: 9). The Ebola outbreak exemplified this: when lacking the proper information and capabilities, aid organizations were often incapable of responding with the appropriate means and at the right time (Burato 2015: 83; Chan 2015: 2). However, recent aid efforts in Haiti and the Philippines, among others, have illustrated that new approaches to information management offer opportunities to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance (Chan 2015: 2). Much of this effort has centred around the increasing, and at times innovative, use of digital and robotic technology by aid actors (IFRC 2013: 9).¹ The use of digital and robotic technology, such as social

¹ The International Telecommunication Union defines the digital revolution thus: 'The rapid growth of Information and Communication Technologies and innovation in digital systems represent a revolution that has fundamentally changed the way people think, behave, communicate, work and earn their livelihood. This so-called digital revolution has forged new ways to create knowledge, educate people and disseminate information. It has restructured the way the world conducts economic and business

media, drones and satellite communication, has enabled aid organizations to gain a significantly better understanding of the situation on the ground during humanitarian crises, emergencies and natural disasters. In addition, these technologies have created novel approaches to delivering aid (Burato 2015: 83; Chandran/Thow 2012; IFCR 2013: 9, 10). Granted, digital and robotic technologies should not aim to replace existing frameworks in which humanitarian assistance is provided. As Letouzé (2012: 4) notes, it is important to recognize that big data (large amounts of data) and real-time analytics are no modern panacea for age-old development challenges; rather, they constitute a genuine opportunity to bring new tools to the long-existing fight against poverty, hunger and disease.

This article aims to contribute to this discourse and debate and will explore how (advanced) digital and robotic technologies could improve the efficacy of humanitarian assistance in the West African region. The article is structured into four sections. The first will address the value and importance of information in humanitarian assistance efforts in West Africa. The second part focuses on digital technology and will explore how such technology could enhance information collection and might provide new approaches to humanitarian assistance, as well as in which framework digital approaches should be pursued. The third section will do the same for the robotics revolution. The conclusion will briefly summarize the overall research outcome.

THE VALUE OF INFORMATION

Over the course of the last decade, the West African region has witnessed a multitude of humanitarian crises and disasters: the civil war in Sierra Leone, the political crises in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau (among others), the on-going conflict in Mali, Boko Haram's reign of terror in Nigeria, the food crisis in the Sahel region and the Ebola outbreak. As a result, West Africa has morphed into a region of interconnected crises: a situation that, according to the United Na-

practices, runs governments and engages politically. See also https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/basic/faqs_answer.asp?lang=en&faq_id=42 [accessed 19 Nov 2015].

The robotics revolution can be defined as the integration of robotic systems – of various natures – into our society. These range from medical robots to military robots to robots replacing workers. For a detailed introduction to this revolution see <http://es.ndu.edu/Portals/75/Documents/industry-study/reports/2012/es-is-report-robotics-autonomous-systems-2012.pdf> [accessed 19 Nov 2015].

tions High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR 2015), will not change radically in the near future. A multitude of actors – state, non-state and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and even militaries – have been providing humanitarian assistance for affected citizens in West Africa. One particular example has been the fight against Ebola. Although the WHO is increasingly declaring nations safe, the region will remain in need of aid in the years to come (Garrett 2015). As Dennis King (2005) of the U.S. State Department's Humanitarian Information Unit notes, 'In any complex humanitarian emergency, there are certain questions that humanitarian aid organizations want answered'; information is the key to finding these answers. Indeed, John Holmes – UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs from 2007 to 2010 – noted that 'Information is very directly about saving lives. If we take the wrong decisions, make the wrong choices about where we put our money and our effort because our knowledge is poor, we are condemning some of the most deserving to death or destitution' (OCHA 2008: 2).

In order to further understand what exactly is needed (e.g. food, medical assistance, water) as well as when and where it is needed, aid organizations should seek to capitalize on the digital and robotic revolutions. These technological revolutions have the potential to enhance the information-collection efforts of aid organizations. Digital and robotic technologies could help in acquiring more, better and faster information. Such approaches have already proved effective in the Philippines, Haiti, Libya and Somalia (IFRC 2014; Meier 2011; OCHA 2014). Therefore, aid organizations active in West Africa should also consider pursuing these approaches and testing how these might be able to improve their aid operations in the region. A wide array of possibilities exist, but this article aims to list the ones that the author deems most effective and within reach of the capabilities and budgets of aid organizations. The extremely rapid expansion of technology in the region proves its potential: in the year 2000, just over 200,000 people in Nigeria had access to Internet services. Fifteen years later, nearly 93 million people were using the Internet, with the Internet access penetration rate well over 50 per cent. In the region, Nigeria is leading the technological revolution, but nations such as Côte d'Ivoire and Mali are increasingly catching up and are seeing their numbers of Internet users grow exponentially. Facebook, the world's most-used social media platform, saw a large regional increase as well: Nigeria now has more than 15 million Facebook users, a 100 per cent increase from 2012. West Africa as a whole saw the number of mobile phone users grow exponentially as well: in 2012 there were 188 million users, and this number is expected to balloon to 310 million users in 2017 (TwinPine

2012: 3). Tapping on the potential of digital communication would offer aid organizations a new approach to understanding the needs of their recipients. It would not only improve data collection and information-gathering efforts but at the same time fundamentally change the relationship between organizations and their recipients by providing recipients with better opportunities to formulate their demands and priorities (Chandran/Thow 2012: 3). Digital technology would allow those who are in the need of aid to voice their needs directly while simultaneously broadening the scope of information gathering by aid organizations. All those who have the digital capabilities will be able to voice their needs directly, saving them time and effort in finding contact points in the organizations.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DIGITALIZATION OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

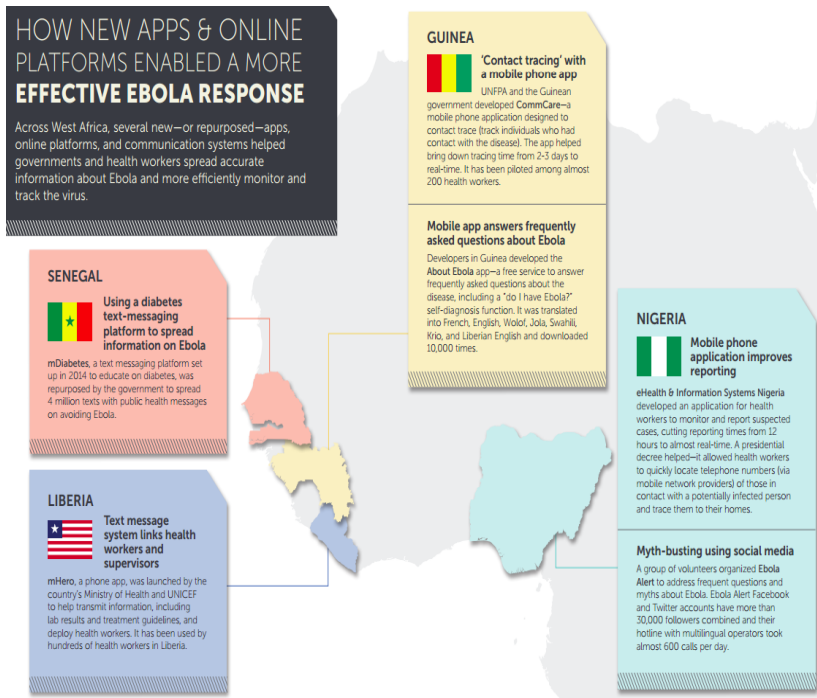
Improvement by basic digital means

In order to best utilize the possibilities of the digitalization of humanitarian assistance, a two-fold approach should be pursued. Firstly the right framework needs to be in place to better collect information, and secondly (potential) aid recipients should also have the appropriate communication systems to voice their needs. This first approach, which is focused on aid recipients, can largely be summarized as all the efforts through which recipients – or possible and future recipients for that matter – would have the possibility to voice their needs and opinions directly. This means that the initiative to provide information comes from the aid recipients themselves. The possibilities to build such a framework are numerous and range from simple actions to more advanced ones that would require a significant effort by aid organizations and cooperation with local governments. The easiest as well as most time- and cost-efficient is to set up certified accounts on social media platforms. Accounts on Facebook and Twitter, for example, would greatly enhance the means by which aid recipients can communicate (Burato 2015: 84). Similar efforts in other crises have illustrated the high value and low cost of this approach: in the aftermath of the Manila flooding in 2012 the use of the emergency hashtags (#rescueph) and dedicated Facebook pages (e.g. Flood Report Philippines) allowed the aid authorities to monitor the need for assistance in real time, to dispatch this accordingly and to provide the affected citizens with timely information (Chandran/Thow 2012: 8). This effort can be adapted practically one-to-one to the West African region, as long as aid recipients have access to the necessary communication

systems. Aid organizations could set up their regional Facebook and Twitter pages (and in some cases have already done so). Within this effort, setting up dedicated emergency pages (for example the Facebook pages MSF Ebola Liberia/MSF Sierra Leone/Ebola West Africa) and hashtags could enhance information collection. Although Internet communication would allow for improvement, one should keep in mind that despite growing mobile Internet access and increasing coverage, many pockets of the region exist with no mobile Internet access or electricity. In those cases, data collection via cellular data (for instance through cell phones) should be considered as well. There are an estimated 5 billion cell phones present in the world today, of which 80 per cent are found in the developing world, so the potential for aid organizations to acquire live data from aid recipients is huge (Letouzé 2012: 9). Setting up call centres that handle emergency hot lines and even more general informational consultations would be already a step forward. This effort can be established along the same lines as the example of Facebook pages and Twitter hashtags. The use of text messages could likewise be used for this purpose and may even be easier and more cost efficient. However, to ensure that these services are used, aid organizations need to communicate their establishment with the local population. In this regard the same networks of callers and platforms, Facebook pages and text messages could be utilized to spread the information about such services. If aid recipients seek help, they should simply call in or send a text message; aid organizations should ask them to share these initiatives and spread information about them among their communities.

The Dalberg Group, a consultancy that focuses on sustainable development, has outlined and implemented exactly such an approach. They seek to use cellular and mobile Internet communication in order combat the Ebola outbreak by raising awareness and allowing aid organizations to follow its spread (Dalberg 2015). The group seeks to learn from past experiences and aims to establish an integrated network that would help to understand future (health) crises. The following graphic illustrates the digital services and activities that have been implemented in Senegal, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria.

Figure: Digital services implemented in West Africa in response to the Ebola outbreak



Source: Dalberg Group 2015

The same techniques and applications were at the basis of all four efforts, which highlights a further advantage of the integration of digital capabilities into humanitarian assistance: once a system is proven to be functional, its technical blueprint can be easily adapted in other areas. This approach should not be limited to these four nations and the Ebola outbreak: it could likewise be applied in other countries and crises.

Advanced technological approaches for further improvement

Despite the promising possibilities, however, these approaches are mostly static in nature: a single person submits a single piece of information that needs to be analysed. Hence aid organizations would be responsible for all further communication, and this would not give voice to or empower a community of aid recipients. Additionally, processing this information is labour and cost intensive,

since aid organizations would need to employ specialized staff just for analysing data. It remains to be seen if they have the capabilities, will and budget to do so; therefore, other approaches to data analysis should be considered. One such option is crowdsourcing. Dietrich and Pawlak (2013: 1) define crowdsourcing as 'the practice of obtaining information, ideas and services from large (often online) groups of people and [...] fundamentally relies on mobile phones, Internet-capable devices, online networks, and Internet-based applications'. This could be achieved by two means. First, aid communities could actively submit data, thereby functioning as knowledge generators. Secondly, aid organizations could collect all the data and ask outside sources – e.g. existing local online communities – to help them analyse and map the data (IFRC 2013: 14, 26, 33; Meier 2011: 1249, 1250). The first approach is more advantageous as it would focus the information collection effort on aid recipients, thereby developing an online community that could increase social cohesion and resilience (Meier 2011: 1257). To date, crowdsourcing techniques have been used successfully by various aid organizations such as the UNHCR in humanitarian crises in Haiti, Libya and Somalia (Meier 2011). It has also been applied to combat the Ebola outbreak, albeit on a smaller scale (Angelakis 2014; Lansana 2014). The American Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders were leading this effort and it quickly gained further support by the European Commission (Angelakis 2014). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID 2014) was even more creative with crowdsourcing, offering a USD 1 million crowdsourcing prize for the best Ebola HAZMAT suit design. All in all, we can conclude that 'crowd-sourcing constitutes a powerful technique to solve in a rapid and effective way many of the urgent technical problems' of Ebola (Angelakis 2014: 2). Its utility can be further enhanced if combined with innovative crisis mapping efforts. Crisis mapping can be described as eyewitness reporting that is submitted via e-mail, text message and social media and subsequently plotted on interactive maps, creating a geospatial record of events in real time (Meier 2011: 1241, 1242). A particularly useful crisis mapping strategy, according to geographer Andrew Turner (2006: 2, 3), is 'neogeography'; this, Turner explains, consists of

[...] techniques and tools that fall outside the realm of traditional GIS, Geographic Information Systems. [...] Where historically a professional cartographer might use ArcGIS, talk of Mercator versus Mollweide projections, and resolve land area disputes, a neogeographer uses a mapping API like Google Maps, talks about GPX versus KML, and geotags his photos to make a map of his summer vacation. Essentially, neogeography is about people using and creating their own maps, on their own terms and by combining elements

of an existing toolset. Neogeography is about sharing location information with friends and visitors, helping shape context, and conveying understanding through knowledge of place.

This approach would allow aid organizations to share information easily visible (to both themselves and recipients) in a relatively uncomplicated manner and allows a multitude of organizations to work together to develop such mapping (IFRC 2013: 64-71; Meier 2011; Chandran/Thow 2012: 4, 28). The combination of crowdsourcing and crisis mapping have proven valuable in humanitarian assistance efforts in the Philippines and Haiti (IFRC 2013: 64-71; Meier 2011). Therefore, aid organizations in West Africa should seek to test these approaches on local crises to determine how they could improve aid efforts.

Improving financial capabilities

The utility of the digital revolution ranges beyond information collection and sharing: The delivery, use and spread of direct cash (also known as mobile money or e-money) and aid vouchers could be further enhanced via digital applications (IFRC 2013: 56-59). Mobile cash, mobile money transfer and mobile banking have developed rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa during the last decade in the absence of reliable and safe banking institutions. Aid organizations are increasingly capitalizing on this new development (IFRC 2013: 56-59; ECHO 2015). In times of crisis these systems have reduced the need for aid personnel to physically go out and provide aid recipients with money. Instead, aid agencies are able to reach a much larger audience within a very limited amount of time and thereby decrease the dependency on weak banking institutions (CLP 2013). Furthermore, the Cash Learning Partnership (CLP) and ECHO, the European Community Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department, note that humanitarian assistance in the form of mobile cash additionally strengthens a community, as it promotes resilience and empowerment among the aid recipients (CLP 2013; ECHO 2015).

Improving digital communication

Even if the digital revolution offers various opportunities for the aid sector, people who do not have access to digital networks or who are not proficient with modern technology must not be excluded. Therefore, aid organizations could run training programs on how to get online, how to use mobile phones and how to establish digital contact with the aid actors. A possible model could

be to train younger generations – who are generally more experienced with technology and more likely to have mobile (and Internet-access-enabled) phones – to share their knowledge. Additionally, the aid organizations should seek to establish working relations and cooperation with the local network providers, Internet providers and companies such Facebook, Twitter and Google. These companies could prove useful in helping set up training programs as well as to provide aid staff with skills, experience and data. Recent examples indicate that these companies have a profound interest in collaborating in non-commercial engagements: in Côte d'Ivoire, the local network provider Orange opened up its network data to researchers in the Data for Development Challenge. The aim of this challenge was to understand how data could increase societal development. Internet giant Google has a special unit that aims to provide information in the event of a crisis (Google Crisis Response) (Chandran/Thow 2012: 17). Public-private partnerships between companies and aid agencies could provide the aid organizations (partly) with the technical know-how of big data analysis, which most of them currently lack. This would ensure that the reach of 'digital smoke-signals' in humanitarian aid extends beyond those who already know how to use digital technology.

The importance of security and trust

Despite these advantages, digital humanitarianism should be pursued cautiously: it is imperative that aid organizations understand the necessity for proper cyber security. Digital safety is at the centre of such an effort. This means that aid organizations should ensure that their networks and communication are protected against hacking and intrusions. Furthermore, these cyber security measures should be communicated to the (prospective) aid audience. Building trust, particularly when sensitive aid data is submitted, is key to ensuring that aid clients keep submitting data. Protecting digital data means not only that communication systems should be secured, but also that data storage should be protected against loss and theft, and aid organizations should learn how to notice and deal with network intrusion and to recognize data manipulation. As Rachel Dette (2015) argued at the Cyberwar and Cyberpeace conference, 'Humanitarians should be more alert to cyber threats. [...]they must understand the risks that come with digitally storing sensitive information on aid programming and vulnerable populations.' The author is aware that this might not be on the priority list of aid organizations, but given the importance and sensitivity of data its security should be ensured prior to establishing a framework of data sharing. Furthermore, it is imperative that any digital active aid effort should be coordi-

nated among the (global, regional and national) aid organizations active in West Africa: if suddenly everyone sought to pursue a (complementary) digital approach to humanitarian assistance, a digital maze would rapidly develop in which aid recipients would undoubtedly get lost. The success of digital communication depends as much on security as on simplicity. Means of communication that are complicated and confusing could mean that aid recipients would be reluctant to use them and could even lose trust in them. And trust is at the basis of this digital effort.

THE POSSIBLE VALUE OF ROBOTIC SYSTEMS

Improving information collection and communication

As illustrated above, the digital revolution of the last decades has the potential to become a game changer for the humanitarian sector. However, the author believes that aid organizations could capitalize on the revolution even more if they combined it with the recent development in robotics. This revolution started in the 1980s but was rather limited in scope and at times appeared to be more like a sci-fi story about flying robots (Singer 2009). It was not until the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that Unarmed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs, also known as drones) and other robotic systems, such as advanced balloons, were used on a large scale, which led to the widespread development of robotic systems. Today, societies have become accustomed to what 20 years ago was described as ‘futurism’ (ibid.). The best-known example of this revolution is the drone, which is now widely used by civilian and military actors. However, the military use of robotics – foremost the extra-juridical CIA drone strike campaign – tainted the image of the robotics revolution and caused wide resentment in the humanitarian sector towards a possible use of robotics in humanitarian assistance operations (Center for Civilians in Conflict and Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic 2012; IFRC 2013: 149, 150, 207). Nevertheless, aid organizations have increasingly started to consider using, and even in a few cases have used, UAVs in their support operations (IFRC 2013: 147). First, UAVs can be and have been used for post-disaster assessment. This has proved highly valuable as it enables a (live, video) overview and is much more cost efficient than other observation systems such as satellite imagery (Moire 2004). In Haiti, Japan and Nepal the use of UAVs provided aid organizations with a quick and safe way to establish an initial overview of the disaster (IFRC 2013: 147; OCHA 2014: 7).

Second, UAVs and other robotic systems could be used to improve digital communication. As mentioned before, large areas still exist in West Africa

without cellular reception and mobile Internet. These pockets could be structural, as digital development has not yet reached those areas, or they could be temporary, as a result of a natural disaster that destroyed the existing infrastructure. In either scenario, UAVs or balloons could provide and enhance access to mobile Internet and cellular data. In fact, Google and Facebook are already working on projects in which UAVs and balloons could provide exactly such services. Thus it seems useful that aid organizations cooperate through public-private partnerships with them, rather than trying to duplicate these efforts.

Third, UAVs could allow for better aid delivery, for example by transporting goods. If Amazon or Google can use them in the future to deliver packages (in record time), aid organizations could also use UAVs for delivering aid. In most areas in which humanitarian assistance is needed, effective aid delivery is hampered by bad roads, broken bridges and other infrastructural and logistical problems. UAVs are not hindered by these problems, and thus could deliver goods much more quickly and cheaply, as well as reach areas that have thus far been accessible only by (costly) helicopter operations. Initial trials in Haiti and the Dominican Republic were conducted with positive results (Lichtman/Nair 2015; OCHA 2014). However, it became apparent during these trials that the current generation of systems only allows for the delivery of smaller aid packages (OCHA 2014: 2, 8). Larger logistical operations, such as envisioned and to a limited extent used by the United States Armed Forces, are far too complicated and beyond the current financial means of aid organizations (Williams 2010). Nevertheless, the author believes that UAVs present aid organizations with additional capabilities for direct and quick support: the ability to (better) provide medical supplies in the aftermath of hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis, for example, is an asset that should be considered in the future.

The importance of security and trust in robotics

Aid organizations, much like in the case of the digitalization of humanitarian assistance, should gain the trust of aid recipients before seeking to integrate robotic systems into humanitarian efforts. Digital systems already raise questions about security, privacy and data safety, but this is even more so the case for robotic systems. As a result of the military usage of UAVs, a much greater scepticism toward the use of robotic systems already exists (Lichtman/Nair 2015). In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the UN Mission uses UAVs for data collection and intelligence purposes, the general public perception was mixed (Karlsrud/Rosén 2013; OCHA 2013: 15). The negative perception was largely the result of the lack of awareness among Congolese civilians of how the UAVs

were operated and by whom (Karlsrud/Rosén 2013; OCHA 2013: 15). Aid organizations should clearly communicate to aid recipients the purposes for which the data is collected. Safeguards against data theft or misuse should be developed, transparency should be promoted and the aid agencies should ensure that the client community is engaged and generally positive about the use of such systems.

CONCLUSION

The use of digital and robotic systems could provide aid organizations with additional means to improve the quantity and quality of humanitarian assistance. These new technologies have proven to be efficient in various humanitarian assistance efforts around the world. Particularly the cases in Haiti, Japan and the Philippines have illustrated that both technical 'revolutions' can improve data collection and information sharing, which in turn enhance post-disaster assessments, increase situational awareness, offer new possibilities for direct-cash assistance and ease medical aid deliveries. Thus the usage and development of digital and robotic approaches could also help to improve humanitarian aid in West Africa. Importantly, it could change the relationship significantly between aid organizations and recipients. Digital communication, further increased by the use of robotics systems, allows aid recipients to voice their needs much more directly and thus more efficiently to the aid community. Therefore, it would turn a top-down relationship into a bottom-up one, empowering aid recipients themselves to effectively guide humanitarian assistance. That might just be the most valuable assistance that aid organizations can provide to those who have suffered and continue to suffer from the horrors of conflict, natural disasters, disease and other humanitarian crises.

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Boko Haram and the [Dis-]Integration of ECOWAS

BY CHRISTIAN C. M. ICHITE AND MONIQUE BOWMANERE

Why has the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as the primary and quintessential organization for sub-regional economic development and collective security in West Africa, thus far been unable to respond to the emerging threat of Boko Haram in the sub-region? How is the terrorist insurgency in northeast Nigeria undermining the dream of ECOWAS integration? This article attempts to provide answers against the background of a risk analysis of the Community's integration project. The evaluation takes into account existing vulnerabilities and the emergence of the threat of terrorist insurgency in and from Nigeria, one of the Community's pivotal growth poles. Such evaluation has become imperative because ECOWAS increasingly appears to demonstrate a decreasing ability to respond to this and similar threats.

The emergence of terrorist insurgents in northeast Nigeria and an upsurge in their violent campaigns since 2009 has resulted in critical threats to security and integration in the sub-region from 2012 onwards. Boko Haram has killed over 18,000 Nigerians, and until the first quarter of 2015 occupied about 18 Local Government Areas within northeast Nigeria. In consequence, Nigeria's closest neighbours, especially Chad, Niger and Cameroon, play host to thousands of refugee from Nigeria, while over 2 million people from northeast Nigeria have been displaced internally into camps and host communities in other parts of the country (IOM Report 2015).

Yet it is not ECOWAS but rather a 'coalition of the willing' – the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) – that is responding as a sub-regional force. Why is this so? Apparently, ECOWAS still boasts robust normative frameworks and plans of action to counter terrorism and contain humanitarian crises. However, other than handing out relief materials to displaced persons in camps in

Nigeria and Niger, little or no practical efforts have been witnessed on the part of this regional economic community to address the threat decisively.

In fact, ECOWAS once prided itself on being a pacesetter on the continent for sub-regional organizations' capacities to resolve conflicts within their purviews. This was clearly demonstrated by the successes of the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG) enforcement missions in the 1990s, especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

During these missions, Nigeria notably paid the bills almost unilaterally before the missions were taken over by the United Nations missions. Since then, however, ECOWAS's regional capacity to respond to emerging challenges has dwindled, despite the transformation of ECOMOG into the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF). This declining collective capacity appears to be epitomized by the erosion of respective capacities at the growth poles by internal conflicts, evidenced in a deleterious depletion of resilience in Nigeria (plagued by economic downturn and Boko Haram) and Côte d'Ivoire (grappling with internal political crisis of identity – *l'ivoirite*). Is it possible that Boko Haram's strategic planners took into consideration this growing regional capacity deficit, or is this just a coincidence?

The audacity of these insurgents may imply that the group's location in Nigeria and its evolving success with transnational operations is not a coincidence after all, but rather strategically premeditated for long-term engagement in the sub-region. Moreover, successes claimed by the group, especially in trans-boundary operations like the easy movement of abducted victims across borders, appear to leverage and abuse normative frameworks on freedom of movement within the sub-region. Furthermore, poverty has been underscored as a key factor in the group's ability to recruit and radicalize new members. These render the fate of regional integration increasingly gloomy, as the terrorist insurgents progressively capitalize on existing vulnerabilities and the abuse of some normative frameworks for integration. These are the main issues presented in this article, which is structured in three substantive sections.

The first section presents an overview of Boko Haram and ECOWAS from the perspective of an emerging threat in the sub-region. The second section examines the interaction of this threat with existing and deepening vulnerabilities in the Community as well as the consequences for the dream of regional integration. The third section briefly reviews the Community's most salient collective security efforts and responses to the threat. Finally, the conclusion sums up the perceived reasons for the lack of expected response, as well as the implications for integration and the continued relevance of this regional economic community, with a caveat on the possibility of disintegration.

ECOWAS AND BOKO HARAM: AN OVERVIEW

Why should Boko Haram constitute a security concern to ECOWAS to the extent that the Community's efforts to integrate and develop might be in jeopardy? This regional economic community does not lack the normative frameworks for collective security, having had a long history and experience with internal conflicts in most of its Member States. Moreover, the conflicts in the sub-region that were controlled by the regional intervention force ECOMOG were also trans-boundary in nature, especially in the Mano River area. Then why do the forced migration and displacements occasioned by these terrorist insurgencies pose a threat to the existence of ECOWAS? In this section and the next, this article attempts to provide answers to these questions.

The ECOWAS Community

Established by the ECOWAS Treaty of 28 May 1975 as an economic community, one of the aims of ECOWAS is to 'promote cooperation and integration that will lead to an economic union in West Africa, in order to raise the living standards of its peoples and to maintain and enhance stability and foster healthy relations among Member States for the progress and development in the African continent at large' (Article 3, Revised ECOWAS Treaty, 1993).

However, the Community began to witness critical security challenges in some Member States, which necessitated a broadening of its scope to accommodate issues of conflict resolution, management and prevention. Therefore, in 1978, the ECOWAS Protocol on Non-aggression was signed, followed by the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Assistance on Defence. In 1993, the ECOWAS Treaty itself was revised to accommodate emerging realities such as the need to facilitate inter-regional trade and transport.

Several other regional normative instruments were developed, including the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, articulated in 1999. Article 21 of the Protocol established the ECOWAS Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which became the Community's intervention force. ECOMOG has evolved into the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), one of the regional brigades that make up the African Standby Force (ASF) structure. The ASF is expected to become fully operational in 2015 (AU PSO Doctrine 2006). The other ECOWAS normative instruments that merit attention in this article are the 1979 Protocol on Free Movement, the Common Humanitarian Policy of 2012, the Common Approach on Migration and Development of 2008, and the Memorandum on Equality of Treatment for Refugees

with other Citizens of Member States of ECOWAS in the exercise of Free Movement, Right of Residence and Establishment of 2007.

ECOWAS currently comprises 15 Member States, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. The Community hosts a significant percentage of conflicts on the continent. For instance, as of June 2015, nine of the 16 United Nations missions were in Africa, and three of these were in ECOWAS Member States: Liberia (UNMIL), Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) and Mali (MINUSMA).

The Boko Haram terrorist insurgency

Cases of conflict in Nigeria have been many and varied, including a civil war from 1967 to 1970, militancy and insurgency in the Niger Delta especially in the 1990s, and various ethno-religious conflicts. However, since the year 2009, Nigeria has been grappling with containing a terrorist insurgency by an extremist Islamic sect, which calls itself the *Jama'atu Ahlissunah Lidda'awati wal Jihad* religious extremist movement in northeast Nigeria, popularly known as Boko Haram. The sect became violent in 2009, when its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, and some of his 700 adherents, were executed by the Nigerian government. Over the last five years, the sect has killed an estimated 17,000 people and since 2009 has displaced over 2 million people, mostly in 2013 and 2014 (IOM, DTM Round V Report 2015; see following table). It has also destroyed sensitive and strategic infrastructures in Nigeria.

The sect has also become active in Chad, Niger and Cameroon: this has catalysed efforts by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to destroy the sect through the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), to which the Republic of Benin is lending support. The African Union and the LCBC Member States on 19 October 2015 signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the operationalization and sustenance of the MNJTF agreement to neutralize the sect. This occasion notably coincided with the day of commencement of the AMANI AFRICA II Field Training Exercise in Lohatla, South Africa, for the operationalization of the African Standby Force. There are indications that the sect has links with international terror networks, given that some of its members had received training in Afghanistan and Mauritania just before the July 2009 uprising (Onuoha 2014).

Table: Displacements Caused by Boko Haram, 2013 – 2015 (partial list)

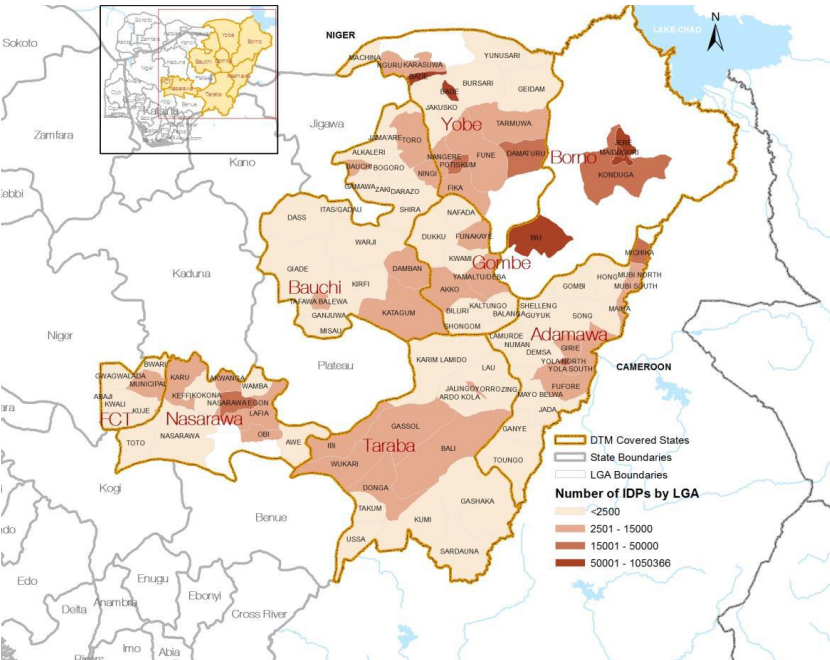
S/ N	Displacement/Forced Migration (Numbers)	Countries Displaced To	Source
1	87,000 refugees, of which 25,000 were children	Niger	News, 23 May 2013 - Dec 2014
2	More than 1 million people, of which about 25,000 were in Cameroon alone	Cameroon, Niger and Chad	UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2013, 20 Jan 2015
3	About 13,000 fled from Baga in Borno state alone	Isolated island in Lake Chad area	International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jan 2015
4	Another 16,000 refugees flee to Cameroon, bringing the total number of refugees in Cameroon to 66,000	Cameroon	UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 5 March 2015
5	No fewer than 800,000 children alone fled their homes; roughly 14,000 killed since BH attacks started in 2009	Cameroon, Niger and Chad as well as within Nigeria	UNICEF, 14 April 2015
6	Nigeria reported to harbour the third highest number of IDPs (1.5 million IDPs in Nigeria) in the world, behind Syria and Iraq	IDPs within Nigeria	National Human Rights Commission, 7 Jan 2015
7	As of June 19 2015, about 200,000 Nigerian refugees	Chad, Cameroon and Niger	National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), 19 June 2015
8	About 120,000 IDPs in 22 LGAs of Borno state	IDPs within Nigeria	Daily Trust, 1 July 2015

The communities in northeast Nigeria besieged by the terrorist insurgents, such as Kawuri, Baga, Konduga, Bama, Shuwa, Ajigin, Gamboru, Giwa, Chibok,

and Gwoza, among others, live in fear of sudden displacement or death (Salkida 2012). The region has plunged into trepidation and has since seen an increase in human rights violations, population displacement, human casualties, loss of means of livelihood, food insecurity and limited medical facilities and other social amenities.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), over 100,000 IDPs were recorded between 2009 and 2010, and from 2010 to 2011 over 130,000 IDPs were recorded. The number increased sharply between 2012 and 2014 from 130,000 to 436,608 between August and December 2014 (OCHA 2014). In 2015, the EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos Stylianides, noted that the number of IDPs and refugees displaced by the terror of Boko Haram is over 1.7 million, and that many of the IDPs live in precarious conditions in other parts of Nigeria (Aworinde 2015). According to the Human Rights Watch, high rates of human casualties resulting in thousands of deaths have been recorded from 2009 to 2014 from the attacks of Boko Haram (Hughes 2012).

Figure: Boko Haram-related displacements in states across Nigeria



Source: IOM 2015

Estimates on these displacements by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggest that, as of August 2015, about 2,150,451 displaced individuals (300,992 households) were identified in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Nasarawa and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja (see map above). About 95 per cent of these people were displaced by insurgency, and the majority of them were displaced in 2014, although the percentage of displacement recorded in 2015 has been steadily increasing; most come from Borno (85%), Yobe (6%) and Adamawa (4%). It is significant that 92 per cent of these IDPs live in host families/communities rather than in camps, according to the IOM report.

BOKO HARAM AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN WEST AFRICA

Interests in regional integration have been rekindled by the need to address the challenges emanating from the phenomenon of globalization and the liberal market economy. It has become increasingly difficult for countries to unilaterally succeed economically within the present world order, without alliances or interest blocks. Therefore, in the ECOWAS sub-region, the revival of interest in regional integration has also been inspired by the need to take greater advantage of opportunities presented by globalized liberal markets. According to the ECOWAS Commission, regional integration can be referred to as the emergence and design of common policies and governance institutions between nations in a region (UNECA 2015).

This inspiration is further reinforced by the European Union (EU) experience, which, to some reasonable extent, reflects the benefits derivable from regional unity and cooperation in the face of globalisation and competitive global market economy (Bamba 2010). However, the ECOWAS experience has been slow due to some particular challenges. These include internal conflicts, poverty, external interests, declining state capacities, the rise of new alliances of Member States with other partners and the longstanding Anglophone versus Francophone divide. The authors of this article therefore share Bamba's views on regional integration as a concept beyond mere economic integration, which refers to economic ties among nations that may or may not be geographically linked.

While ECOWAS has managed to cope reasonably well with some of the challenges enumerated above, such as political instability and coups d'état in Member States including Mali, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Niger, among others, the Community appears indecisive in engaging the emerging

threat of Boko Haram. Moreover, more than any other internal conflict in the sub-region, this insurgency has earned itself greater prominence and international recognition by having the audacity to directly challenge statehood in Nigeria, the sub-regional hegemon.

Nevertheless, the most dangerous characteristic of this emerging threat with regards to the disintegrating ECOWAS is its ability to expose and take advantage of existing vulnerabilities and weaknesses in Member States, especially the growth poles. Moreover, the sect's abuse, to its advantage, of some sub-regional normative frameworks for integration such as the Protocol on Free Movement, now evoke serious concerns about the future of integration in the Community. Therefore, Boko Haram's capacity to multiply threats to integration within ECOWAS is subsequently examined.

First, intra-regional migration configurations in West Africa were traditionally predicated on source and destination countries within the sub-region. Destination countries were the growth poles, and in this respect two countries merit special attention: Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, the two historic growth poles of ECOWAS. Nigeria was and remains the largest economy in the sub-region, and now on the entire continent. According to the World Bank (2006), Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria play a critical make-or-break role in the sub-region. While Nigeria was the largest exporter in the sub-region, Côte d'Ivoire was the second-largest exporter to countries within the Community.

While Nigeria constitutes the economic and military pivot for ECOWAS, Côte d'Ivoire was – until the onset of its internal political crisis – the lead nation for l'Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA), a subset of 8 countries in the ECOWAS sub-region, which are all part of the CFA Franc zone. 'UEMOA's health depends on a strong and peaceful Côte d'Ivoire' (World Bank 2006). However, since the early 2000s, the country has been counting on its neighbours to resolve its internal political crisis of identity (*l'ivoirite*), which has had profound repercussions beyond its borders and has weakened its capacity as a sub-regional power, especially economically.

Nigeria, on the other hand, played a leading role within ECOWAS to broker peace in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea Bissau, and in helping these Member States move out of their respective crises (World Bank 2006). Nigeria bore the largest share of the financial burden of these missions and also contributed more troops than did any other Member State. However, the recent crude oil glut has had adverse consequences on Nigeria's monolithic crude oil-dependent economy. Two such consequences are growing unemployment and expanding poverty rates, which have significantly discouraged and reduced labour migration towards Nigeria. It is within this context that the Boko Haram threat for the sub-

region has become more ominous, as it deepens these weaknesses by further escalating human insecurity and consequent recurrent expenditure on defence in Nigeria.

Second, the insurgency is reverting the status of Nigeria from a destination country into a sender country, as it sends thousands of refugees, forced and voluntary migrants out of the country and into neighbouring countries. The sect's ability to degrade state capacity in Nigeria by occupying local communities and displacing populations into contiguous countries might explain the gravity of this threat to Nigeria and, by extension, to the sub-region. Arguably, the health of ECOWAS depends significantly on peace and stability in Nigeria, as UEMOA's once depended on Côte d'Ivoire (World Bank 2006), but dwindling revenue from crude oil sales has caused Nigeria to look frantically externally for help, even in prosecuting its vital war against these insurgents. Therefore, unless there is a sudden reversal of this context, Nigeria may not be able to play its lead-nation role in the sub-region for several years to come.

Third, with a weak Nigeria, ECOWAS capacity appears weakened in consequence, at least both militarily and also economically. This could translate into increased vulnerability to threats for the entire Community, and possible regional disintegration along traditional fault lines. Such threats to integration may include the progressive strengthening of alternative groupings within ECOWAS like the UEMOA and the consolidation of new affiliations like Nigeria's Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), in its anti-terrorist collaboration with Chad, Niger, Cameroon and Benin. While the UEMOA framework is built on a common language (French), Nigeria's new affiliations or alliances are driven by interests and commitments strong enough to engender new stable alliances and to lessen the relevance of ECOWAS itself. It is difficult to foresee for how long ECOWAS could survive this diminishing solidarity among Member States.

Fourth, the forced migrations and displacements engendered by Boko Haram-related violence are accompanied by a rise in criminality in host communities. This has already elicited hostile receptions and forced repatriation. Reports of forced repatriation of refugees from Member States to their supposed countries of origin, on the basis of increasing criminality and decreasing capacity for humanitarian assistance, pose serious challenges to the ECOWAS dream of integration. Furthermore, this is an indictment on the Community against the background of its normative instruments on Free Movement, the Humanitarian Policy and the Common Approach to the Management of Refugees. The Protocol on Free Movement was conceived as an instrument to enable free movement

of ECOWAS citizens within the sub-region. The adopted Protocol relates to the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment.

Fifth, the Protocol emphasized the right of the citizens of ECOWAS to enter, reside and establish economic activities in their territory, and in Article 2 it gave a clearly defined outline of a three-stage implementation period: visa-free travel, right of residence and right of establishment. The Protocol confirmed a long-term objective to establish a community citizenship that could be acquired automatically by all citizens of ECOWAS Member States, following due procedure. This implied the elimination of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods and capital in the West African sub-region. However, recent instances of forced repatriations of refugees from Niger back to Nigeria due to Boko Haram as well as the very stringent conditions for admittance of migrants from Nigeria into Niger and other Member States (iDMC 2013) tend to negate the dictates of this Protocol. The refusal of entry for refugees from Boko Haram-affected Member States into some States within the Community contradicts some of the objectives of this Protocol on Free Movement.

Sixth, poverty is another factor sustaining the potency of the Boko Haram-related humanitarian crisis as a threat to integration in the ECOWAS sub-region. Most of the 15 countries in the sub-region are among the poorest economies in the world and therefore display weak state capacities (Bamfo 2013: 12), especially in terms guaranteeing the economic wellbeing and human security of their citizens. Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire used to be exceptions, but internal conflicts have generated enormous economic crises in both countries. Therefore most ECOWAS States have been rendered extremely vulnerable due to very low state capacities in the face of the extra burden created by the refugee flows into Member States. For instance, communities in the Diffa region of Niger, which is host to many refugees fleeing Boko Haram, are themselves already grappling with acute food shortages due to drought and desertification. This has resulted in the hostile reception accorded refugees and the forced repatriation that has often followed.

Seventh, the emerging threat posed by Boko Haram is also becoming a frightening force multiplier for other existing threats to integration in the sub-region. For instance, ethno-religious violence and youth radicalization for conflicts in West Africa are being fed by any event that underscores the perceived irreconcilable differences between ethno-religious groups. Also, internal ethno-religious conflicts in Member States, to a large extent, have significantly hindered the progress of the ECOWAS integration process. In the same vein, the principle of subsidiarity, which remains confusing in ECOWAS-AU relations,

has also been called to question over the apparent silence of ECOWAS vis-à-vis the approval of the MNJTF by the AU.

SOME SALIENT RESPONSES TO THE THREAT FROM ECOWAS

In fairness to ECOWAS, it must be noted that the Community has managed occasional reactions. However, such responses have been mostly spontaneous, reactive, short-term, short-lived and largely unsuccessful. For instance, a new counter-terrorism strategy was adopted at the 42nd ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in February 2013. The primary aim of the declaration and strategy was to create an environment conducive to sound economic development and to ensure the wellbeing of all ECOWAS citizens by eliminating and preventing terrorism and related criminal acts in West Africa. The plans also sought to implement regional, continental and international counter-terrorism instruments and to provide a common operational framework for action (Adigbuo 2015: 49). Unfortunately, this strategy has yet to be accorded due implementation.

Similarly, frameworks for humanitarian assistance in the ECOWAS Community are many, varied and robust. A Humanitarian Policy was articulated in 2012, and there are the Humanitarian Response Mechanism and the Plan of Action on Implementation of International Humanitarian Law, among others. Moreover, humanitarian assistance is understood in the Community as alleviating the suffering of affected populations, and between 2010 and 2015, ECOWAS has provided over USD 50 million in humanitarian assistance to Member States, including populations affected by Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The ECOWAS Commission achieves this assistance particularly by activating the ECOWAS Emergency Response Team (EERT), as it awaits the definitive establishment of a humanitarian depot in Bamako, Mali. In addition, the ESF, with its supposedly three standing components – military, civilian and police – is also expected to assist in providing humanitarian assistance, especially by protecting the civilians and humanitarian actors affected. Furthermore, ESF military assets may also be used to support humanitarian relief delivery.

Regrettably, these have yet to generate expected results against the threat of terrorist-insurgency in the sub-region. Therefore, the Community's lack of requisite collective capacity to respond to the threats posed by Boko Haram still constitutes critical negative consequences for the dream of integration in the sub-region.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the danger posed by Boko Haram to the progressive weakening of integration in practice within the ECOWAS sub-region. In this assessment, the terrorist insurgency stands out as a dangerous threat multiplier, riding comfortably on existing vulnerabilities in Member States; this suggests that the sect's strategists took these into consideration. Therefore, challenges in the region such as internal conflicts, poverty, rise of alternative alliances within the region, external interests, and, above all, the erosion of capacities at the two key growth poles, have combined to provide a formidable foundation for Boko Haram, empowering it to pose threats beyond Nigeria, and even to threaten the very dream of sub-regional integration in ECOWAS.

In this light, the Community appears to have been rendered incapable of responding to the threat of Boko Haram as a collective mechanism for intervention because of existing weaknesses and the economic demise of the former growth poles, especially Nigeria. Whether the sect's strategists took into account these weaknesses before starting their insurgency is inconsequential; what is crucial is that the weaknesses and vulnerabilities provide enough reason for their impudence. These fault lines provide the insurgency ample ground for undermining integration and the continued relevance of this Regional Economic Community. This portends a lesson on the need to understand emerging threats thoroughly, so as to enforce stronger measures within the Community that discourage such threats from gaining traction.

This understanding, in the case of ECOWAS, must lead to a re-evaluation of the Community's approach to addressing such emerging threats, because its current strategies as encapsulated by the ECOWAS Standby Force/African Standby Force framework imply short-term, quick-action military-heavy solutions, which are progressively being defied and frustrated by the challenge of terrorism, which is largely long-term and targeted at civilians. Terrorists are becoming less prudent in the face of short-term military strategies of states and regions, meaning that the end of terrorist insurgency might not yet be in sight within this geographical realm, or in the rest of the world.

However, one critical factor that might effectively place this disintegration trend in check could be external interests that may insist on and encourage the continued existence of regional or sub-regional integration. Such external factors include the World Bank's Africa Action Plan to support regional integration for economic opportunities for the private sector (World Bank 2006). The World Bank Board reviewed its Regional Integration Assistance Strategy (RIAS) for the West Africa sub-region in 2001. Other initiatives that may con-

tinue to encourage such integration include the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which has regional integration as a core objective and encourages regional economic communities like ECOWAS to promote open regionalism as a means for improved competitiveness in global markets.

In conclusion, this discourse underscores the need for a caveat to the potentially destructive consequences of the Boko Haram threat for ECOWAS integration. This emerging threat has proven to be rendering visible and reinforcing existing vulnerabilities in pivotal Member States. While these weaknesses are potentially debilitating for the Community's dream of integration, there appears to be a progressively weak capacity in ECOWAS for collective security and humanitarian assistance, which are both crucial for successfully countering these threats.

These frameworks, though robust in their formulations, find little expression in reality due to dwindling capacities of Member States to address this unique two-pronged challenge of human insecurity and humanitarian crisis. ECOWAS must make a concerted effort to reverse the current trend of diminishing resilience and growing vulnerabilities in the context of emerging threat multipliers such as terrorist-insurgencies within the Community.

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Unwilling Partners: Opportunities and Problems of Civil-Military Cooperation in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies

BY ALOIS A. HIRSCHMUGL

Natural and man-made disasters occur frequently all over the world. Yet various studies and statistical analyses have shown that, in recent years, the frequency of disasters has increased and will continue to increase in the future. In response to these emergencies, militaries – in addition to the large number of (civil) humanitarian aid organizations – have become increasingly involved in humanitarian action, whether bilaterally or through international coalitions or organizations. This raises a question about military possibilities for crisis response as well as the available capacities (Military and Civil Defence Assets, or MCDA) of the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to be mobilized and deployed in these crisis situations. Furthermore, one has to consider the practices and strategies for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and/or Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord). At the UN, the latter (UN-CMCoord) is understood as international humanitarian assistance and international disaster relief, which is aimed at providing aid to crisis-affected people on the ground. UN-CMCoord ‘facilitates dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors’, which is ‘essential to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals’. The goals of the Civil-Military Co-operation at NATO (NATO-CIMIC), on the other hand, are military in nature. The cooperation between aid organizations and military forces in the setting of conflicts or natural disasters poses the question whether civil and military actors are ‘partners against their will’, working together only for the sake of providing relief to victims of disasters. Moreover, could the increased involve-

ment of military actors destabilize the situation and lead to greater insecurity for the aid workers on the ground?

In humanitarian assistance, the lines between military and civilian activities have become blurry, as military personnel increasingly take on ‘civilian tasks’ while civilian actors, like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), engage in security issues such as recruiting private security companies to provide security for their staff. Especially in crisis situations after natural disasters a large contribution of military resources and personnel is generally apparent. For example, during the response phase after the tsunami in South-East Asia in December 2004, military air forces flew 5398 hours, transported 6399 tonnes of cargo and 6359 persons and rescued 16,343 people. In comparison, NGOs flew 2170 hours, transported 1511 tonnes of cargo and 3620 persons, and rescued 208 people.

Therefore, one should think of and manage possible means of cooperation before the emergencies occur, while at the same time making sure not to undermine the original function and duties of each actor and organization.

This article outlines the possible models and means of cooperation according to international standards between military forces and civilian actors in humanitarian emergencies. It will use past co-operations to make recommendations that can be adopted in other parts of the world, such as in humanitarian crises in West Africa. Especially the Great Flood in Mozambique in 2000 will demonstrate ways to use the military in disaster response operations in Africa.

THE NECESSITY OF COOPERATION IN DISASTER RELIEF

Around the world, the risk profile has changed considerably during the past several years. Today natural disasters, nuclear power plants, epidemics and the consequences of international terrorism are classified as threats. Moreover, added risks include the increasing volume of vehicular traffic and the possibility of a breakdown of vital infrastructures, such as large-scale power outages. The explosion at a naval base in Cyprus in 2011, which destroyed the power plant in Vasilikos and within seconds triggered a power breakdown in 60 per cent of Cyprus, served as a warning to world leaders of the swift and broad consequences of individual disasters.

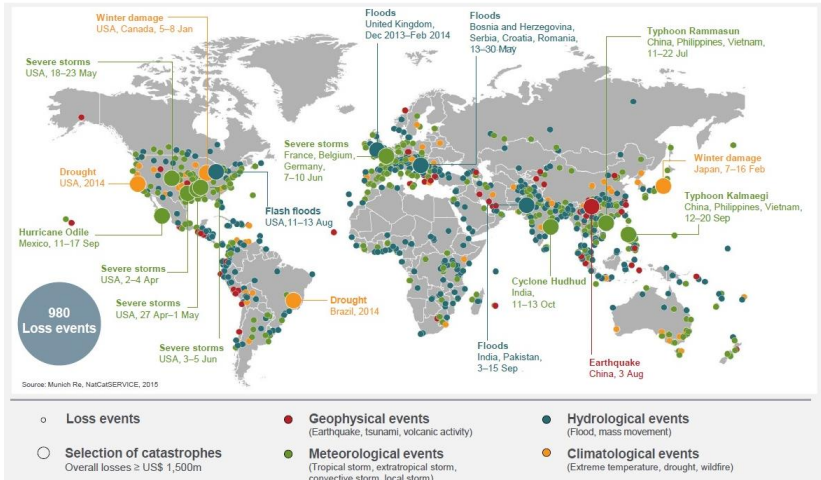
Generally, as a consequence of climate change, the frequency and intensity of natural disasters has been growing. Figure 1 illustrates the high number and severity of natural disasters in 2014 alone. In coastal West Africa, mostly floods, mass movements and storms occurred.

Figure 1: World map of natural disasters in 2014

NatCatSERVICE

Loss events worldwide 2014 Geographical overview

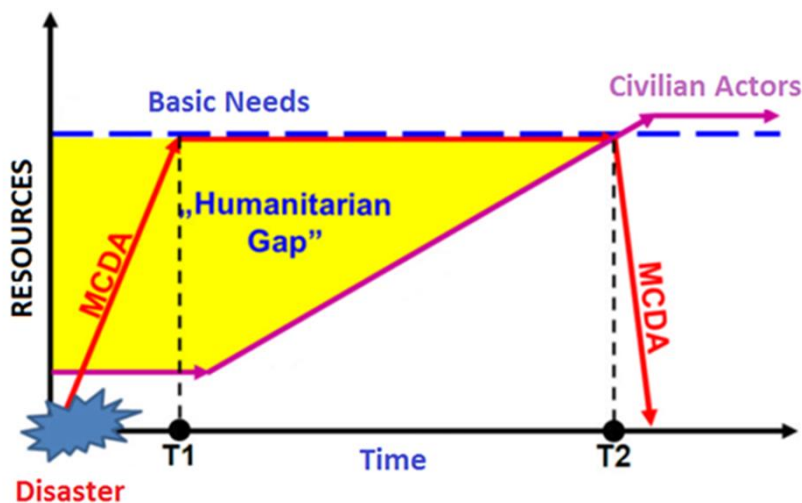
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Source: Münchner Rückversicherungs-Gesellschaft 2015

In order to cope with current and future needs for humanitarian relief, most international and regional organizations such as the UN, EU and NATO, as well as their member states individually, are considering possible avenues for mutual assistance. The involvement and use of military personnel and means in disaster relief is particularly significant for closing the so-called ‘humanitarian gap’.

In case of disaster, civilian actors, due to flexible structures, can provide immediate relief by covering some of the basic needs of crises-affected populations, for instance through the provision of food, water or medical supplies (i.e. T1 in Figure 2). However, civilian stocks and capacities are very limited and basic needs cannot be covered over a longer period, if at all. At this point the military can step in with its Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA), which can be mobilized and deployed rapidly and fill the gap that aid organizations leave in the immediate aftermath (i.e. T1 in Figure 2). Civilian actors re-enter the stage and provide assistance over a longer period of time (i.e. T2 in Figure 2) after acquiring new funds and mobilizing human and technical resources.

Figure 2: The Humanitarian Gap

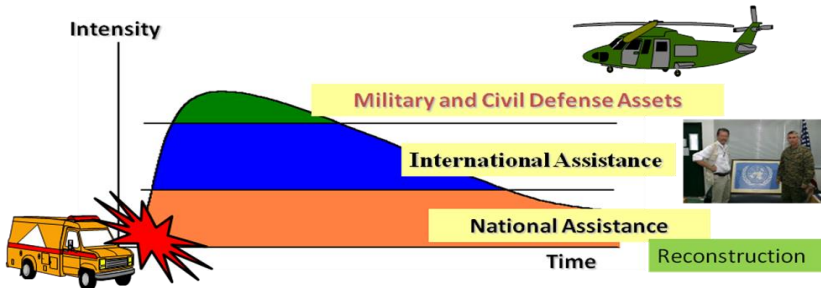
Source: Hirschmugl

Austria has a long tradition in some aspects of this field. The D-A-CH Co-operation Initiative between the national disaster relief agencies of Germany (Federal Agency for Technical Relief), Austria (Austrian Forces Disaster Relief Unit) and Switzerland (Swiss Disaster Relief) in 1991 resulted in the foundation of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), whose goals are to further develop and increase the efficiency of international disaster relief after natural and technical catastrophes, for instance in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR).¹ Another example is a 1992 initiative by the Austrian Armed Forces, which was founded through the UN Guidelines DPR 213/3 on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA Guidelines).² The aim was the coordination of military and civil protection forces in international disaster relief, based on technical standards and more efficient arrangements of norms. The MCDA guidelines are still in force today.

¹ See GA Res 57/2002.

² Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (2006/07)

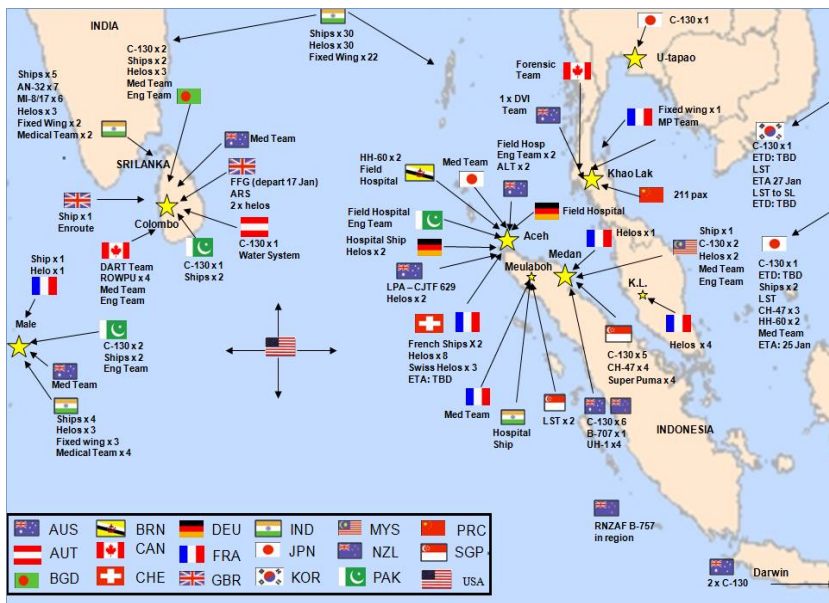
Figure 3: Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) after an event



Source: Hirschmugl

In the aftermath of the tsunami in South-East Asia of December 2004, there was a very large deployment of military forces for disaster relief, with over 35,000 soldiers from 30 nations. The involvement of so many different actors and militaries gives rise to questions about the kind of support that foreign militaries can provide and how they cooperate with other military forces and civilian organizations, as well as where the limits of cooperation lie. In the following, the mechanisms for cooperation in humanitarian assistance are outlined.

Figure 4: Deployed military forces after the tsunami in South-East Asia, January 2005



Source: Shaw 2014

UNITED NATIONS – UN OCHA

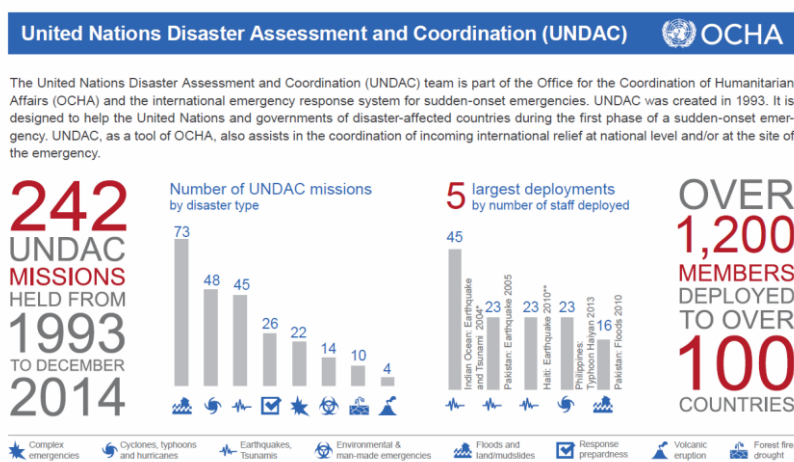
In 1993, the Department for Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) – now the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), was founded on the basis of the General Assembly Resolution 46/182 on the ‘Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the UN’.³ OCHA has three main functions, namely 1) coordination of humanitarian emergency responses, 2) policy development and policy coordination and 3) advocacy of humanitarian issues (Hirschmugl 2013: 408). As part of the United Nations Secretariat, OCHA is tasked to mobilize and coordinate collective attempts of the international community, especially of UN bodies, to immediately respond to the needs of conflict-affected populations after large-scale disasters. Various instruments are at OCHA’s disposal to respond adequately to emergencies, such as the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) stand-by team (de-

³ See <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/46/a46r182.htm>

ployable within 6-24 hours) and the UNDAC Support Module (available within 24 hours), which are sent by the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP).⁴

Furthermore, OCHA has a 24-hour service system available, as well as access to International Search and Rescue (SAR) teams, Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA), Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) capacities, environmental experts and emergency stockpiles in Brindisi.⁵ If needed, OCHA can also launch campaigns for funding; it holds regular meetings with donors and employs information management, using databases and platforms such as ReliefWeb or Virtual OSOCC.

Figure 5: UNDAC Operations from 1993 - 2014



Source: UNDAC 2014

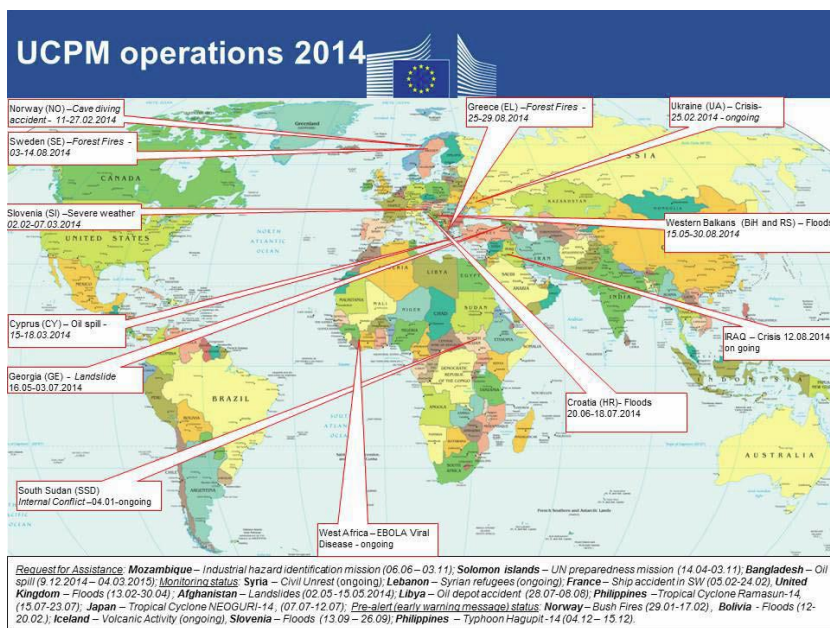
⁴ Members of the International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP) include the Danish Emergency Management Agency, Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning, Crisis Management Centre Finland, Swedish Civil Contingency Agencies, Estonian Rescue Board, German Federal Agency for Technical Relief and UK Department for International Development.

⁵ OCHA relief goods are stored in the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) in Italy at the Brindisi military airport.

EUROPEAN UNION HUMANITARIAN AID AND CIVIL PROTECTION DEPARTMENT (DG ECHO)

In 2003, the EU implemented and institutionalized the Community procedures for the promotion of cooperation in disaster relief operations,⁶ which was renewed in 2007.⁷ On 17 December 2013, the EU decided on a new Union Civil Protection (UCP) Mechanism.⁸ This decision stipulates the relevant resources available for relief operations and the founding of Emergency Response Coordination Centres (ERCC), as well as of a Common European Communication and Information System (CECIS). Furthermore, the decision established a team for assessment and coordination (Union Civil Protection Team (UCPT)) and a training programme as well as missions inside and outside the European Union.

Figure 6: EU Civil Protection Missions, 2014



Source: European Commission 2015

⁶ Decision of the EU Commission, 2001/792/EG, 29 December 2003

⁷ Decision of the EU Commission, 20 December 2007

⁸ Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism

To satisfy the requirements in international disaster relief, it is necessary to act quickly and to have sufficient UCP modules available. Additionally, relevant trainings and cooperation mechanisms need to be set up and implemented in advance, prior to emergencies. Thereby one should not neglect the improved cooperation of DG ECHO – especially in cases of catastrophes through the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) – and the European External Action Service (EEAS), in which the military staff of the EU (EUMS) is implemented under the Common Security and Defence Policy. Whenever there is a necessity for military capacities, ERCC and EUMS cooperate to effectively provide relief for those in need. This should show how a regional organization like the EU is organizing its disaster response as an example for ECOWAS, which has set up a similar rapid reaction team for disaster response. DG ECHO also provided support after floods in Nigeria in 2012 by, for example, sending a team of flood experts to advise the Nigerian government.

NATO/EURO-ATLANTIC DISASTER RESPONSE COORDINATION CENTRE (EADRCC)

In 1998, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) founded the EADRCC as NATO's civil mechanism for emergency response, involving 28 NATO allies and 22 partnering states. The centre is responsible for coordination in environmental and man-made catastrophes. During the flood in Pakistan in 2010, a discussion evolved around using NATO planes to transport relief supplies from Europe to Pakistan. The question arose whether the use of military forces was really the last resort⁹ and if neutrality could be assured as NATO was operating in the neighbouring country Afghanistan. In the end NATO bent to the pressure of several (humanitarian) organizations and brought 900 tonnes of relief supplies over 22 flights to Pakistan. In this case, the civilian organizations rented NATO military aircraft to deliver aid. The 'Lessons Learned' report of the Government of Pakistan recalled:

The first was the issue of the NATO air bridge. The Government invited NATO to assist in the transport of relief goods to Pakistan but the UN intervened against the knowledge

⁹ In accordance with the 'Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief', Rev. 1.1, Nov. 2007: Military assets should be requested only when there is no comparable civilian alternative and only the use of military assets can meet a critical humanitarian need. The military asset must therefore be unique in nature or timeliness of deployment, and its use should be a last resort.

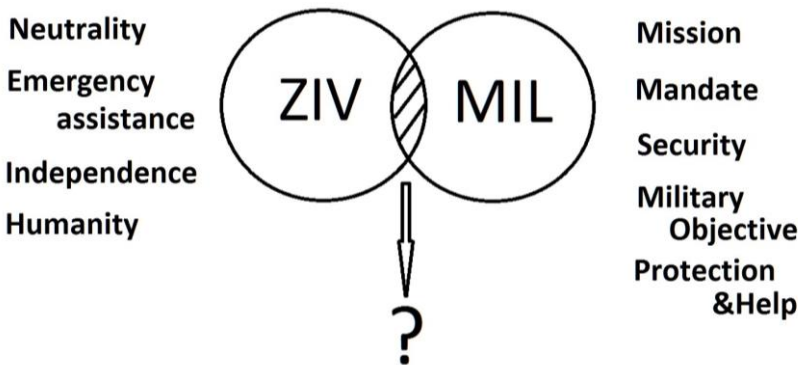
of the Government and advised NATO that they were not required. Many stakeholders identified this as an area where UN had overstepped their mandate in not respecting the wishes of the Government. The GoP ultimately accepted the NATO flights. (McKay/Rashid/Noel 2011)

Opinions vary regarding whether the use of military equipment and personnel to transport aid material from Europe to crisis areas violates humanitarian principles. The distribution of goods through soldiers on the ground could also be controversial.

PARTNERS AGAINST THEIR WILL?

Considering the mechanisms for cooperation, it becomes apparent that all three organizations – the UN, the EU and NATO – are pursuing the same strategy concerning the use of military and civilian forces in providing emergency relief. Of course, civil and military personnel are actively involved in all organizations. Thus it is important to ensure the involvement of NGOs and international aid agencies in the mandates of UN, EU and/or NATO humanitarian operations, given that the NGOs are willing to cooperate with military personnel in aid delivery. For (civilian) humanitarian actors, the norms of neutrality, independence and humanity are central to their humanitarian work. For the military, on the other hand, the central terms of their operations include protection, safety and military aims. Nevertheless, one can find common and overlapping goals and possibilities for cooperation.

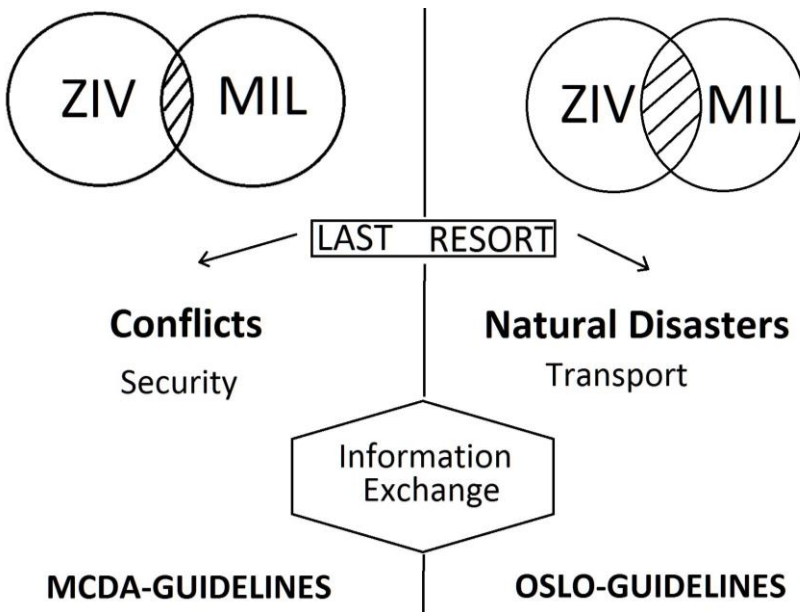
Figure 7: Opportunities and limits of Civil-Military Cooperation



Source: Hirschmugl

The common goals of military and civilian actors overlap more in emergencies triggered by natural disasters and less so in situations of armed conflict. After natural catastrophes, the role of the military is largely focused on transport (e.g. enabling the delivery of aid). In both crisis situations, information exchange between both sides is crucial.

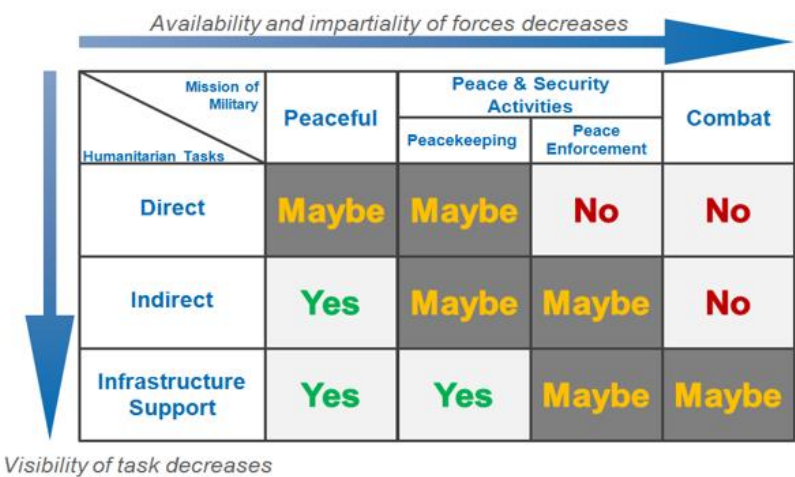
Figure 8: Opportunities and limits of Civil-Military Cooperation in conflicts and natural disasters



Source: Hirschmugl

For humanitarian aid in conflict situations, the UN established regulations such as the MCDA Guidelines or the non-binding Guidelines on the 'Use of Military or Armed Escorts for Humanitarian Convoys', whereas for natural disasters and man-made catastrophes like environmental disasters the 'Oslo Guidelines' guide military operations. In both cases, military involvement is only to be a means of last (or single) resort. Depending on the operation or mission it is possible to have direct, indirect or infrastructural support (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Appropriate relief tasks based on missions¹⁰



Source: Hirschmugl

All actors need to decide for themselves whether they want to work with the respective other military and civil organizations, following their own mandates and principles. This should be guided by common sense, in order to find a balance between the basic principles and the needs of the crisis-affected population, since it does not make sense if the organizational principles and rules are followed while at the same time people are suffering because the agencies did not cooperate with the military to provide aid. Naturally the lines between military and civilian disaster relief blur; however, contrary to oft-articulated fears that the military will assume control, the military mostly just engages in humanitarian aid. In fact, especially in asymmetrical armed conflicts, the opposite also occurs, as some NGOs have started to ‘arm’ by employing private security companies for the protection of their employees, as the past decade has seen more than 300 violent assaults against NGO staff. A great first step toward effective cooperation would be overcoming mutual stereotypical perceptions, such as the military being perceived as ‘Rambos’ and aid staff as ‘hippies’, for example.

¹⁰ Based on UN-CMCoord Officers Field Handbook, p. 14

POSITION PAPER ON CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS BY THE PLATFORM GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN AID

An Austrian working group on development and humanitarian assistance called Global Responsibility (2009) published a position paper refusing the fusion of military activities in humanitarian assistance. However, in cases of emergency, a pragmatic approach to dealing with the topic is needed in order to fulfil the central goal of humanitarian assistance, namely saving human lives and reducing suffering. Nonetheless, the involvement of the military is only regarded to be acceptable as a last resort for saving humans and alleviating suffering – in an impartial, neutral and independent manner.

Thus these principles need to be followed:

- Humanitarian aid must take place with impartiality for all groups of the population in need and based on their need. It must not be bound to political, military or any other conditions.
- Access to the total population suffering need must be permanent and according to gender (under special consideration of the UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1612 Security Council resolutions and subsequent resolutions) and must be fostered and not hindered.
- The safety of relief recipients must in no way be endangered by civil-military coordination.
- Clear distinction between humanitarian and military protagonists: humanitarian aid workers must never depict their work as part of a military operation. Military personnel must never depict themselves as civil humanitarian aid workers.
- Independence: the planning, running and control of the given aid must remain the tasks of the relief organizations. Independence of their operational and strategic decisions is to be maintained. Humanitarian relief organisations must not carry out the tasks of the armed forces or represent or implement their affairs.
- No limitation to freedom of action of the humanitarian relief organisations: e.g. freedom of movement for aid workers, the execution of independent assessments, selection of recipients according to need, selection of workers, communication flow (e.g. media).
- The following guidelines are seen as the essential principles and basis for civil-military relationships between humanitarian relief organizations and the

armed forces: Oslo,¹¹ MCDA¹² and the related guidelines of IASC¹³ or SCHR¹⁴. These are fundamentally shared by members of the Global Responsibility Working Group. (Civil-Military Relationships: Position Paper 2009)

From the point of view of the authors of the position paper, a pragmatic approach would be promising, as in the end the suffering of those in need should always be alleviated, and those who are suffering do not care from whom they get help. This is the central idea to breaking down barriers between civilian and military actors.

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¹¹ Oslo Guidelines, <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/UN-CMCoord/publications>

¹² Guidelines on the Use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (2006/07): <http://tiny.cc/Onr9k> ; Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (2003): <http://tiny.cc/KS3uo>

¹³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee: <http://tiny.cc/rPFft>

¹⁴ Standing Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) position paper: <http://tiny.cc/j1VRo>

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Authors

Allotey-Pappoe, Serwaa is a researcher with the Conflict Management Programme at the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research (FAAR), Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Ghana. Her research interests include gender and peacebuilding, mediation and peace processes and peacekeeping and conflict in West Africa. Serwaa holds an MA in Gender, Peace and Security Studies from the KAIPTC and a BA in French and Psychology from the University of Ghana, Legon.

Birk, Eva is an urban planner with over seven years of experience helping communities solve complex environmental problems. Birk received a master's degree in Regional Planning from Cornell University in 2013 and has experience facilitating participatory research in the areas of land use, land rights, community resiliency and water management. She has worked previously on land use issues as an associate researcher for the Barrier Monitoring Unit at UNRWA, as well as for the United States Environmental Protection Agency, where she facilitated the introduction of green infrastructure practices in clean water permitting.

Bowmanere, Monique is a research fellow at the Centre for Strategic Research and Studies, National Defence College, Nigeria. She holds a master's degree in International Relations and specializes in world conflict and humanitarianism.

Burgers, Tobias is a doctoral candidate at the Otto-Suhr Institute, Free University (FU) Berlin, where he researches the application of cyber, digital and robotic technologies for humanitarian purposes. He works part-time as a researcher for the NGO CRISP Berlin. In addition, Burgers has conducted a course on cyber and robotic systems in conflict and security affairs at the FU and was a visiting researcher at the Taiwan Center for Security Studies in Taiwan. There

his research focused on the perceived threat of cyber and robotic systems in conventional security situations. Burgers holds a diploma from the Otto-Suhr Institute.

Hirschmugl, Alois A. is Brigadier in the Austrian Armed Forces and humanitarian advisor for the Austrian General Staff, as well as a legal advisor. He is an expert for civil-military cooperation in disaster management and has served as the coordinator for disaster deployment at the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and as an expert in disaster risk for the EU (Civil Protection Union). Hirschmugl has worked in more than 10 international humanitarian missions, such as the disaster relief operations for the 2004/2005 tsunami in Southeast Asia and the 2010 flood in Pakistan. Alongside his work in the field, he has published a series on crisis management and peace operations.

Ichite, Christian C. M. is a research fellow and head of the Humanitarian Studies Cluster, Centre for Strategic Research and Studies at the National Defence College in Abuja, Nigeria. His doctoral dissertation 'Modeling Civil-Military Interaction in Peace Operations and Humanitarian Missions in West Africa' is on-going. He has published academic research papers and book chapters on topics including African PSOs, regionalism, forced migration, humanitarian crises, environmental security and state fragility. Ichite is consultant author to the African Union and the Al-Jazeera Centre for Studies.

Lakitsch, Maximilian has been a researcher at the ASPR since 2012. His expertise lies in the field of development aid and his theoretic work covers conflict theory, peacebuilding, religious conflicts and the Middle East. From 2011 to 2012 he was employed as project officer and researcher for the Society for Austro-Arab Relations. Maximilian holds a master's degree in Theology and in Philosophy from the University of Graz, and an MA in International Relations from the University of Krems. He wrote his PhD thesis about violence in the modern state at the University of Graz and the American University of Beirut.

Lamprey, Afua Agyeiwaa works on the Conflict Management Programme at the Faculty of Academic Affairs and Research, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC), Ghana. She holds a master's degree in International Affairs from the University of Ghana. Her research and teaching expertise are in gender, conflict, small arms and light weapons proliferation and border management issues in West Africa.

Saulle, Jessica is head of the Humanitarian Food Security and Livelihoods Team for Save the Children UK. Engaged in the humanitarian sector for more than 10 years in operations and headquarter roles, Saulle's background is in operation management, humanitarian coordination, economic programming and preparedness.

Swift, Laura is the regional food security and livelihoods adviser for West and Central Africa for Save the Children UK. Swift has been based in the field for the past eight years, implementing and providing technical support to food security and livelihoods programming. She has worked in West, East and Central Africa, as well as Haiti and the Middle East.

Wolter, Svenja works at the ASPR, supporting the KAIPTC-ASPR capacity-building project on humanitarian assistance in West Africa. Previously she has worked for the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation in Addis Ababa and interned with a peacebuilding programme of the German Development Agency (GIZ) in Colombia. Wolter holds a master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research interests include transitional justice, human rights in peacebuilding and dynamics of conflict and violence in civil wars.

Ziegler, Stefan has over 15 years of experience in the fields of research and advocacy related to humanitarian action. He currently works as an independent trainer and facilitator. Recent assignments include training communications and advocacy at the KAIPTC in Ghana and a mission to eastern Ukraine with the OSCE, where he was head of the regional reporting office. From 2008 until 2013 he established and managed the Barrier Monitoring Unit (BMU) in the West Bank, a research-based project of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Previously, Ziegler served as an Operations Support Officer for the UN and worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Georgia, Abkhazia, Palestine and the Balkans.

