

Humanitarian reform: saving and protecting lives in DRC

by Ross Mountain

The development of synergies between different peace-keeping, humanitarian and recovery actors can improve the impact and effectiveness of efforts to assist the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other countries.

A few weeks ago, a fresh outbreak of fighting brought me back to the Congolese Province of North Kivu. This lush area is home to fertile agricultural land, vast reserves of gold and the famed mountain gorillas. It also harbours extremely violent foreign and local rebel groups as well as rival army factions. I first saw North Kivu for myself in January 2002, when the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo sent more than 200,000 residents of the city of Goma running for their lives. I came then on behalf of OCHA to help respond to the needs of the displaced population.

I returned to DRC three years later in January 2005 as Humanitarian Coordinator, amid armed conflict and acute suffering in the same area. Humanitarian actors were committed to supplying water, food and health care to the tens of thousands of women, children and men affected by the fighting. However it was apparent that above all else the population wanted us to address their pivotal need for security. They wanted to be able to sleep at night without the constant fear of being attacked, seeing their girls and women raped, their homes torched, their meagre belongings looted.

The issue of protection can exemplify the potential of UN reform if we get it right. In order to better respond to complex emergencies such as we are confronted with in DRC, efforts are now being made to apply more coherent and coordinated approaches. Through the creation of Integrated Missions, in essence the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator (who also serves as UNDP Resident Representative) is linked with the Peacekeeping Mission structure as one of the (usually)

two Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary General (DSRSG). Additional responsibilities exercised by this DSRSG within Department of Peacekeeping (DPKO) missions differ but they usually include civil affairs, child protection, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), human rights, gender, HIV/AIDS and security responsibilities – in addition to being part of the Mission's Senior Management. There is notionally a cost-saving dimension of this quadruple hatting (quintuple if one includes the security function) but, beyond the workload, this combination of roles can permit the development of synergies between different peacekeeping, humanitarian and recovery actors and can considerably improve the impact and effectiveness of our efforts to assist the people of the countries we serve. This very much applies to the protection of civilians.

The most recent Security Council Resolution continuing the mandate of the UN Mission in DRC (MONUC¹) states that, while acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, "MONUC will have the mandate, within the limits of its capabilities and in its areas of deployment, to assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo in establishing a stable security environment in the country and, to that end, to: (a) ensure the protection of civilians, including humanitarian personnel, under imminent threat of physical violence; (b) contribute to the improvement of the security conditions in which humanitarian assistance is provided, and assist in the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons."² Such objectives are of more than passing interest to humanitarians.

Military and humanitarian synergy

In DRC we have managed to exploit the capacities of the different UN actors without confusing their respective roles – to provide support and protection to civilians under physical threat of violence. Thus, humanitarian workers provide relief supplies and services while UN peacekeepers are deployed to provide area security and to deter attacks by armed men, whereas development partners address linked issues such as demobilising combatants, reforming the structures and management of the military, police and justice system, and root causes of poverty.

A few NGO partners, understandably, retain concerns about associating the operations of humanitarian workers with those of the military. In DRC, OCHA remains a clearly autonomous entity. But if our objective is really to spare the populations from violence, the willingness of the UN military to deploy for civilian protection and to expand security parameters is a major asset and – in DRC at least – more than offsets any negative consequences. Ask the population, especially IDPs, who gather around MONUC bases. This is a very practical way of saving lives and discouraging violence.

The relationship between humanitarian actors and the military – including the UN military – is often a difficult one and, yes, tensions have had to be overcome. At the onset a Protection Working Group was established which drew on UN agencies, the UN military and police, and focused on North and South Kivu, two provinces that were and are most affected by continuous strife and insecurity. This was subsequently transformed into the Protection Cluster led by UNHCR with MONUC support. Early results were realised when 4,000 IDPs living in a camp in Walungu (South Kivu province) felt sufficiently reassured to

return to their villages, after regular MONUC military patrols were introduced into their areas of origin. Such area protection was further extended by the MONUC military in both Kivus – including helicopter-borne patrols and the introduction of community alarm schemes.

Subsequently, humanitarian workers in Mitwaba in Northern Katanga asked for a blue helmet presence to discourage continued harassment of the local population by some 3,000 soldiers of a non-integrated brigade of the national army. A small contingent of South African peacekeepers (later replaced by first Uruguayan and then Beninois troops) was sent to the region and immediately the situation improved. This led to the MONUC Force Commander seeking our advice on the deployment of mobile teams in Katanga to further extend protection. These Mobile Operational Bases – an innovation in the DRC – allowed the military to reassure the populations and create access for humanitarians, who could then deliver assistance to the displaced. In Katanga, this combined effort enabled more than 150,000 Congolese (the majority of IDPs in the province) to return home. Thus human suffering was alleviated and money which would have been required to assist the displaced was saved.

This approach led first to the development of country-specific guidelines on military-civil cooperation and subsequently the issuance to the MONUC military of a

comprehensive directive on civilian protection by the Force Commander. The first such instruction in any peacekeeping mission, this commitment of the MONUC Force Commander and his team to transform the ideal of protection of civilians into concrete action has impacted on military deployments and operations across the country.

The approach agreed is based on clearly recognised complementary division of labour between the military and humanitarians. Hence, the UN military protects by patrolling areas by air, land or river, establishing safe areas or buffer zones (sometimes through Mobile Operating Bases), escorting convoys, opening corridors and training the armed forces who, in many regions, are the main perpetrators of violence against civilians. Humanitarian organisations contribute by delivering humanitarian assistance, evacuating the wounded, collecting information on violations and addressing the needs of vulnerable people, especially women and children.

At the same time, one must accept the fact that 17,000 peacekeepers spread across a country the size of Western Europe, with a population equivalent to that of the UK, and barely any transport and communications infrastructure, is woefully inadequate. Kosovo alone – roughly as large as Kinshasa province – had over 40,000 NATO troops. With 90% of its troops in the conflict-ridden eastern DRC,

MONUC has made a difference but it cannot be everywhere.

Tweaking the clusters

In installing the cluster system in DRC we felt it needed to be adapted to local requirements. For the Protection Cluster, we therefore decided to go beyond the protection of IDPs, and to expand the focus to protection against violence for all those who are subject to such attacks. Some ten clusters involving UN agencies, NGOs and in some cases local authorities have been created to coordinate humanitarian efforts. In a country the size of DRC requirements and conditions differ between and within provinces – hence the need to establish provincial-level clusters to be able to identify and respond to evolving crises.

A major support for the cluster system in DRC is provided by common funding mechanisms – the Pooled Fund, augmented by the grant facilities of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).³ The DRC Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP)⁴ – first launched in 2006 to replace the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) which was seen by many as a solely UN-driven document – defines the overall framework for humanitarian action. The identification of project priorities within the HAP is the task of the clusters. At the provincial level, the provincial inter-agency committees (CPIAs) are responsible for translating them into provincial packages. Clusters also need to provide guidance and analysis on



MONUC patrol (with Uruguayan soldiers) in a village in Ituri, DRC, 2006.

the technical feasibility of individual projects to achieve the results desired.

Resources are directly linked to funding priorities identified in the HAP and confirmed in real time by the respective clusters. In 2007, some \$175 million, approximately half of the total contributed to DRC, has been directly managed by the Humanitarian Coordinator on the advice of a Pooled Fund Board composed of representatives of donors, cluster leads and NGOs with the aim of improving targeting and maximising impact for the Congolese people.

Reform mechanisms arising from the Good Humanitarian Donorship⁵ and other initiatives at the global and institutional level have given us new tools to establish strategic plans based on regional priorities

and to better target resources through strengthened coordination. Bringing the military and the humanitarians together to provide protection has made a major difference especially to displaced and vulnerable populations in the east of DRC, while the establishment of common funding and clusters mechanisms backed by the Pooled Fund has helped to improve the response to urgent needs.

While progress has been and is being made, the recurring violence, displacement and human suffering continuously remind us that humanitarian assistance is a temporary measure pending a lasting sustainable solution to the country's problems. This involves elections, security sector reform, extension of state authority, proper public income and expenditure management, expanding infrastructure and

employment, and improvement of services to the population. In the meantime, improvements in the structure of international and UN coordination mechanisms have allowed us to improve the impact of the assistance available and reach as many of the millions of Congolese in need as resources allow.

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1. www.monuc.org
2. www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2007/sc9016.doc.htm
3. For further information on these funding mechanisms, see following article by Nicki Bennett.
4. <http://ochaonline.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?Page=1504>
5. www.goodhumanitariananddonorship.org

Assessing the impact of humanitarian reform in DRC

by Nicki Bennett

As UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in DRC, Ross Mountain, author of the preceding article, has spearheaded introduction of UN reform initiatives. What impacts have they had on the lives of people at risk?

The original version of this article draws on observations from more than 60 meetings and interviews in Kinshasa, North Kivu and Ituri in late 2006 with donors, international and local NGOs, the UN Mission in DRC (MONUC)¹, other UN agencies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Responses below also incorporate more recent developments in 2007.

Have people at risk received more aid?

Two new funding mechanisms, the CERF² and the Pooled Fund (PF), have drawn more than a hundred million additional dollars into humanitarian activities in DRC. However, there is very little transparency about how much ends up in the hands of beneficiaries and how much is getting stuck in the

new layers of bureaucracy created by these funding mechanisms.

DRC was among the first countries to receive CERF funding. Since DRC's 2006 Humanitarian Action Plan had only attracted around 40% of the money it needed, the HC applied for and received two CERF allocations (worth a total of \$38 million) aimed at covering gaps in 'under-funded emergencies'. In 2007, a further \$48 million of CERF money was allocated. Most major donors – but not the largest, USAID and ECHO – also increased the amount of funding they usually set aside for UN agencies because of the introduction of the PF. Many donors increased their contributions to DRC substantially after the introduction of the PF – but admitted that they had done so more out of a desire to be seen

to be supporting the new funding mechanism rather than as a result of any immediate evidence of its utility.

Most operational actors we interviewed had not seen any significant increases in their annual budgets or programmes. Neither the CERF nor the Pooled Fund are able to channel money directly to NGOs. Funding must flow through a UN participating agency with a minimum administration fee of 5%. Some UN agencies charge substantially more. Many NGOs feel more lives could have been saved and more assistance could have been provided if donors directed these additional resources straight to implementing NGOs. Some have suggested that the five PF donors must therefore explore reforms to the current PF structure to make disbursements more effective and less UN-centric.

Are the new mechanisms flexible and responsive?

Since the PF and the CERF do not earmark any of their funds for