

# THE CHALLENGES AND CONTRADICTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT AND CONFLICT

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International assistance – whether crisis relief or long-term development assistance – intends to do ‘good’. However increasing evidence suggests that all too frequently, international aid can do ‘harm’, in the sense that it can aggravate the political, social and economic factors producing conflict.

**Why** so? However it is intended and whatever project goals its planners had in mind, aid has both material value and symbolic implications which can aggravate disputes within the broad context in which it is delivered, raising ethical and practical dilemmas for programmers.

It is not the intention of this course that aid should cease: ‘do no harm’ is not ‘do no aid’. The practice of aid, rather, must be improved.

**A**gencies are increasingly seeking opportunities to reflect on these contradictions and tools which can help overcome them. This course aims to provide both. First it will offer a reflective environment in which to consider the mechanisms through which international assistance often aggravates conflicts. Second, the course will introduce the ‘Do No Harm’ approach, a widely adopted tool for improving aid programmes in conflict environments.

**T**his background paper highlights some discussion questions woven throughout the course. It also references some academic and policy materials for optional further reference.

## A 'ROAD MAP' FOR THIS PAPER

During this course, the focus, somewhat interchangeably, will be on both relief and development action, with rehabilitation assistance, sandwiched problematically 'in the middle'. How do these different spheres of assistance intersect and contrast with each other? This background paper begins by considering the differences – increasingly confused – between relief and development action.

From there, we proceed to a consideration of the different kinds of 'conflict', noting that while relief assistance tends to be enacted in situations of open and violent hostility, development aid very often is given in situations where conflicts of various kinds are simmering or where injustices are deeply structurally embedded.

In the third section, various theories and themes are reviewed which link the different kinds of aid to the aggravation of conflict. We note that this aggravation can come about both because of the material value that aid has to those who receive it (and to those who do not) and also because of the kinds of messages that aid sends out and what it symbolizes.

Fourth, this paper takes a look at some new initiatives to use development assistance more proactively for conflict prevention and peace-building. While not dismissing the possible utility of such approaches, this paper (and this course) will argue that before aid can do some 'good' with regard to conflict, we need to be very sure first that it is not already doing 'harm'.

With that caveat in mind, the paper concludes with a brief summary of what will be a major focus of the course: the 'do no harm' tool for planning aid in conflict-prone environments.

Throughout this text, discussion questions are highlighted. Only some of these are directly addressed in specific course modules; all of them will, however, haunt and dog our discussions in the course. References are also made to policy and academic materials which provide much greater detail than this paper can. A detailed bibliography is included at the end of the paper.

## DEVELOPMENT AND RELIEF

**What distinguishes relief and development?**

**What differentiates the contexts in which they are offered?**

**What differentiates the kinds of resources – financial, technical, material, human – that are deployed?**

An all too simple distinction between development and relief which still persists in many minds is based in spatial metaphors: development supposedly concerns itself with betterment, modernization, an 'upward' or 'forward' path for a society, a group or an individual. It usually, but not always, assumes that the 'developing world' must follow this upward path to reach a position at present occupied by 'developed' societies<sup>1</sup>. An important ingredient in many of the

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, Amartya Sen (2000) has proposed a definition of 'development' which attempts to side-step linear notions of improvement, preferring to think of a development that 'consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency'.

prescriptions for development has been improvement of and through technology: firstly, the continuous improvement of technology is seen, in the West, as a desirable thing in itself. Second, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the West largely remains attached to the dream that through technological improvement, most social difficulties (disease, pollution, poverty, inequality) can be overcome. Accordingly, a Western sense of technological supremacy prevails and the idea of knowledge transfer remains close to the heart of development notwithstanding critiques about 'appropriate technology' and/or knowledge imperialism (Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1996; Sachs, 1996).

Relief assistance has consumed an increasingly large proportion of international aid budgets since the mid 1980s. If the intent of development aid has supposedly been to 'move a society forwards' or 'upwards', then relief (and rehabilitation, of which more later) tries to 'return a society to where it was before', mitigating the damage done through 'natural' disasters (see Jackson and Deely [2001] for scepticism that there is anything natural about these) or conflict. Since the mid 1990s, approximately 95% of international relief expenditures are directed towards complex humanitarian emergencies. Thus, conflict-zone relief far outweighs disaster-oriented assistance and has effectively become the paradigm for relief.

### **'Relief Environments' versus 'Developmental' Ones**

Therefore, the world of international action has supposedly been divided into two rather discrete parts, relief and development, each with its own (mostly) distinct kinds of personnel. Further, this division is premised on a fundamental axiom: namely, that relief action takes place (mostly) in the context of societies which have 'broken down' in conflict while development assistance is offered in stable societies which are 'on the road to progress'.

This course will suggest that this axiom of distinction between relief and development has itself fundamentally 'broken down'. Increasingly, evidence suggests that much development assistance has been offered in the context of societies that are on the road to some form of crisis or collapse and that the development assistance itself has, on occasion contributed to that collapse (see principally Uvin, 1998, but also Ferguson, 1994).

### **The Relief / Development Continuum and its Discrediting**

For a brief period in the early 1990s, the notion of a 'continuum' from relief, through a rehabilitation phase and back to development was fashionable in policy circles. Borrowing heavily from models of recovery from 'natural' disaster (Macrae et al., 1997; Jackson and Walker, 1999), the continuum suggested that relief be seen as merely a short-term measure designed to correct a brief deviation from the true path of development and modernisation.

Almost as quickly as it was adopted, however, the continuum was discredited. Aid workers and policymakers emphasized that the course back to the 'normalcy' was hardly a sure or a linear one. The continuum glosses over complex and overlapping processes of decline and recovery and the role of aid within them. Accumulated experience indicated that in many instances, different areas of the same country might be in 'relief', 'development' or 'rehabilitation' phases at the same time. Further, the longevity of many crises and conflicts around the world (Afghanistan, Sudan, Angola, to name just a few) questions the assumption that peace and development are 'normal' and violent conflict the exception (for more, see Bradbury 1998).

**H**ow, if at all, can we then distinguish between contexts where relief, rehabilitation or development is appropriate?

### **The Differences in Relief and Development Action Remain, However**

So confused has the distinction between relief, rehabilitation and development environments become that strict academic definitions are now all but impossible. More than ever, in fact, donors and agencies are finding the need for the skills to intervene across a broad spectrum (not a continuum!) that covers relief, development, rehabilitation, and even, more daringly, human rights protection, advocacy and peace-building. However, some organizations continue to make

strong distinctions between relief and development actions, in terms of personnel, project planning and conception, and funding lines.

This paper argues that one of the sources of negative impact of aid is precisely the asserted distinctiveness of different styles of aid intervention (development, rehabilitation, relief) versus the relative political fluidity, complexity and similarity of the environments in which aid is being programmed (is Zimbabwe, supposedly a 'development environment', really at 'peace'? Is Uganda? Kenya?). Why is this? The answer relates to the different ways in which varying styles of aid engage with the politics of the contexts in which they are offered.

Peter Uvin (1999:4) argues that 'aid managers need to face up to the political nature of all aid'. Ferguson (1994) suggests that far too frequently, aid managers ignore and duck the politics of their interventions, preferring to concentrate on 'technical issues' and denying the mandate to consider politics.

How does development action engage with/ignore local and international politics?

How does relief engage with/ignore local and international politics?

## THE NATURE OF CONFLICT

All of the foregoing indicates that we must put some thought into the nature of the conflict that is present in societies in which aid is being offered. Conflict varies greatly in its manifestations...

### Different Kinds of Violence

In her powerful ethnography of Mozambique, 'A Different Kind of War Story', anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom asks:

'Exactly what is violence?

- An act, a drive, an emotion, a sensation, a relationship, an intent to harm?
- A thing, an event, a concept, a process, an interaction?
- An intangible threat, a tangible force?
- Something physically felt, something emotionally registered, something conceptually recognized?
- Something that is over with the end of the act, or something that reconfigures reality in its very occurrence, making the concept of 'over' meaningless?' (Nordstrom, 1997:16).

Nordstrom asks us, in short, to consider the widely varying forms in which violence can be understood and undergone.

In a parallel way, several theorists have suggested the concept of structural violence as a way of broadening what can be considered as a situation of violent conflict. Structural violence describes situations 'in which the poor are denied decent and dignified lives because their basic physical and mental capacities are constrained by hunger, poverty, inequality and exclusion.' (Uvin, 1998:103). Galtung (in Uvin) illustrates structural violence as follows:

'in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper class as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are no concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another'.

Khan (also in Uvin) suggests that structural violence can take any of four forms:

'(a) classical, or direct violence; (b) poverty – deprivation of basic material needs; (c) repression – deprivation of human rights; (d) alienation – deprivation of higher needs'.

Are there still further forms of violence which are not captured in these formulations?

How easy is it, given these more hidden and subtle forms of violent conflict, to distinguish between a 'non-conflict' development context and a 'conflict' relief one?

In what ways might development assistance feed into and aggravate 'hidden' forms of violence?

### Conflict Transformation

Many writers on conflict would suggest that forms of conflict are always present in any society, and that, indeed, certain kinds of conflict are a necessary and healthy part of any democratic society. Thus, they would argue, the challenge is not to prevent or resolve conflict, but rather to manage it, transforming its expression from violent to non-violent forms.

Is conflict transformation the job of aid workers? Are we skilled for it? Does it fall within our mandate?

### AID AND CONFLICT – SOME FURTHER THEMES

This next section rapidly reviews some themes connecting aid to conflict raised by academics and policy analysts.

#### Is Conflict Always Associated with 'Development'?

A number of different theorists have suggested, in different ways, that the process of development itself is inherently violent.

First, Tilly (1975) and Reyna and Downs (1999) argue that the development of the Western capitalist nation state itself has always been intimately associated with overt violence and criminal activity. *Dependencistas* such as Frank (1966) argue that the modernisationist path of development pursued by the west explicitly depended upon the immiseration and systemic under-development of the 'developing world'.

Is development an inherently conflict-prone process, then?

Second, writers such as Duffield (1998) and Chabal have provocatively imagined that the apparent 'anarchy' of states undergoing apparently chronic political instability (Sudan, Angola, etc.) in fact conceal adaptive forms of predatory political and economic behaviour by elite which, however repugnant, must also be recognized as a perverse form of 'development':

'Rather than the developmental rhetoric of scarcity or breakdown, one has to address the possibility that protracted instability is symptomatic of new and expanding forms of political economy; a function of economic change rather than a developmental malaise. It is difficult for the development model of conflict to convey such a sense of innovative expansion.'  
(Duffield, 1998:51).

Chabal (1999) suggests, similarly, that in Africa (and elsewhere) there is an increasing 'political instrumentalisation of disorder': which is to say that elites create and manipulate a climate of apparent confusion and administrative ambiguity through which to pursue power and profit. Thus, both writers point out the paradox that it is the ability of both state and non-state actors to grow in their ability to manage and make rational use of violence that has come to be one of the few forms of 'development' in many countries around the globe where aid is still being offered.

In combating poverty, what (or who?) is the enemy? 'Disorder' and 'lack of structure'? Or malignant forms of structure and order?

### **Aid Inadvertently Feeding Into Conflict**

A rather different strand of analysis has recently focused on the manner in which aid itself can play into the dynamics of violence in recipient countries. Here, the analysis (almost?) always suggests this negative impact comes about inadvertently, as an accident of good intentions.

Looking at the accidental, conflict-aggravating effects of relief, Anderson (1999) has emphasized how aid offered in the context of a conflict must necessarily become part of that conflict's broad context<sup>2</sup>. It does so because of its material and its symbolic dimensions: in almost all conflicts, economic, material resources are at stake, either because they are in short supply (land, water) or because (as in the case of conflicts driven by diamonds or oil) they are abundant. All aid to some degree represents a valuable economic resource and can enter into the war-calculus in different ways (for enormous and valuable detail on this see Le Billon [2000] together with the associated annotated bibliography) .

In what ways does aid impact the political economy of conflicts?

Equally, conflicts inherently involve contests on the symbolic or psychological plain. They involve fights over identity, meaning, cultural competence and superiority claims. Conflicts also breed a climate of existential uncertainty in which rumour and half-truths (what Nordstrom [1997:43] memorably terms '*factx*' [sic]) abound. Aid brings with it its own messages which can be misinterpreted or deliberately distorted by local actors.

What kinds of unintended message can aid send?

In both these ways, then, relief assistance can aggravate the tensions and divisions which underlie (violent) conflict.

Development assistance has equally been challenged for its contribution to the emergence of conflict. Ferguson (1994) suggests that development aid has traditionally emphasized the 'technical' issues – a better irrigation system, a sturdier variety of wheat – over political ones. It has thus acquired a systemic blindness to the possible political co-option of its project efforts and resources. In the context of 1980s Lesotho, Ferguson demonstrates how the apparent 'failure' of a large-scale World Bank development project hides the degree to which the Lesotho government was able to use the project to further its own agenda of political colonization of the rural hinterland.

Still more damningly, Uvin (1998) argues that successive decades of development assistance to Rwanda laid the foundations for the 1994 genocide. He shows how the Rwandan government systematically directed the fruits of aid flows first to a tight cabal around the President and second towards the maintenance of structured systems of injustice and state-institutionalized racism in the country as a whole. Again, like Ferguson, Uvin argues that aid workers' obsession with technical efficacy and efficiency of project interventions blinded development agencies and institutions to the broader, pernicious politics of the Habyarimana regime.

Are there other cases where development aid has directly fed into an explosion of violence?

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<sup>2</sup> Compare Uvin (1999:4): 'all aid, at all times, creates incentives and disincentives, for peace or for war, regardless of whether these effects are deliberate, recognised or not, before, during or after war. The issue is then not whether or not to create (dis)incentives but, rather, how to manage them so as to promote conditions and dynamics propitious to non-violent conflict resolution.' See also OECD/DAC (2001).

### **A Loose Categorisation of Negative Impacts of Aid on Conflict**

In short, aid of whatever character – development, rehabilitation, relief – runs the risk of aggravating conflict-prone tendencies within recipient societies. Aid on its own does not create conflict: it is important to be very clear on this point. But in principle aid can exacerbate divisions within societies and push them towards open violence in the following three ways:

- **Political Dimensions** – aid can play into a divisive politics of distribution and retribution. As in Uvin's analysis of Rwanda, aid may interact with embedded structural violence. It can be controlled and diverted to political supporters and away from opponents (Moi's Kenya, or the context of aid diversion in the war in Sudan). Or it can be hijacked to support particular political or military agendas (as in the progressive militarisation of the 'refugee' camps of eastern Zaire between 1994 and 1996) or to legitimise the power of particular state or non-state actors.
- **Economic Dimensions** – aid can be co-opted into a corrupt patrimonial politics of graft and redistribution (Mobutu's Zaire). It can become part of the 'economy of war' (Le Billon, 2000; Jackson, 2001) that develops during a conflict (Somalia 1992) or a post-conflict. Or aid can substitute (Anderson, 1999) for the responsibilities of a state, freeing up financial resources that can then be devoted to the war effort (for a recent example of this, see UN Panel of Inquiry [2001:paragraph 185] which suggests that international aid to the Rwandan and Ugandan governments in sectors such as health and education may effectively have subsidized the war effort in the DRC).
- **Socio-Cultural Dimensions** – aid can be misinterpreted as partisan support for a particular political tendency or military faction. It can send out messages of superiority and bias (religious, ethnic, national) through otherwise reasonable targeting decisions. It can enflame rumours and incite suspicions (vaccination scares in the DRC).

### **AID'S POSITIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION OR RESOLUTION**

There is considerable and growing interest in the potential for international development assistance to be used to promote conflict prevention in unstable settings, notwithstanding the evidence rehearsed in this paper that aid can often cause 'harm' as well as promote 'good' (see Ofstad [2000] for a useful illustration of these dilemmas in the context of Sri Lanka). Amongst these initiatives are those of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (OECD/DAC 2001) and of USAID (Morse, 2001; Moore, 2001). DfID and other donors are also developing guidelines in this respect.

The DAC guidelines urge the adoption of a 'conflict prevention lens' that would integrate the instinct to prevent conflict across all sectors of development activity. The guidelines note that meaningful social development requires 'structural stability' and urge that donors recognize both the potential (and the limits) of international community action to promote such stability. Specifically, in terms of priorities at the national level, they point out that donors should

'address democracy, security and better governance as major issues. To do so, they need to:

- Disentangle and analyse factors of grievance and greed at play as conflict situations evolve.
- Devise appropriate ways to evaluate, monitor and assess their action and its impact in close collaboration with developing country partners, particularly since this type of development co-operation work does not always fit a general framework for 'results-based management'.
- Extend this concern for the impact of aid on conflict to the design of policies aimed at macroeconomic stability and structural adjustment in order to encourage growth in incomes, employment and public services.
- Target assistance to help strengthen democratic systems toward the structural stability that allows for the non-violent resolution of conflicts, taking account of the distribution and the transfer of power, as well as the protection and inclusion of



minorities and marginalised groups.

- Recognise how important it is for countries to form political parties and support this step as part of a democratic process and as a way to promote the transformation from violent conflict to peace. The perspective of democratic, inclusive governance is an important aspect of this dynamic process.
- Maximise opportunities to help strengthen state capacity to respond appropriately to conflict, including support to a range of state functions and activities as well as partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs).
- Promote multiculturalism and pluralism by reinforcing activities that have a high degree of cross-ethnic group involvement and support partners working toward this goal' (OECD/DAC 2001).

The analysis (building on the findings of Uvin, 1999) argues that in programming aid, agencies should be conscious of their impact on both 'incentives' and 'disincentives' for both peace and violent conflict.

However, the DAC guidelines are also explicit about the limits, and even the dangers of aid impacting negatively on conflict. They urge two principles of action which might seem to contradict each other:

- 'Accept and manage the heightened risks encountered' in development work oriented towards conflict prevention. (OECD /DAC, 2001:paragraph 27)
- 'Ensure you do no harm, and do the maximum good' (paragraph 28).

Is the apparent tension between these two principles for aid action a productive tension or an insurmountable one?

#### THE 'DO NO HARM' APPROACH

The OECD / DAC guidelines suggest that 'with a 'culture of prevention' and in-depth analysis such as peace and conflict impact assessments and scenario building, donors can work better together to achieve sustainable peace' (paragraph 2). This course, in addition to exploring the linkages between aid and conflict discussed above, will introduce an operational planning tool which is one of an expanding family of PCIAs or 'peace and conflict impact assessment tools', which can be used for planning relief, rehabilitation or development programmes in conflict-prone environments. This is the 'Analytic Framework' of the Local Capacities for Peace Project, otherwise known as 'Do No Harm' (Anderson, 1999). This tool helps users to understand the complexity of interactions between all levels of an aid intervention and the swirling dynamics of a conflict.

The framework formalizes (and considerably deepens) an approach which can, for now, be summarized in five simple steps. When planning any aid intervention in a potentially unstable or conflicted context:

1. Identify what principal divisions and sources of tension ('dividers') characterize the conflict in the society in question.
2. Identify the factors of cohesion ('connectors') which continue to hold people together despite the dividers.
3. Arrive at a thorough understanding of all the different elements of the aid programme under consideration – its targeting, its staffing, its modus operandi etc.
4. Connect 3 to 1 and 2; that is, identify the exact mechanisms through which the proposed



aid may impact negatively or positively on the conflict dividers or connectors.

5. Identify programmatic options which avoids will reinforce good outcomes (connectors reinforced, dividers avoided or lessened) and reduce negative outcomes (connectors undermined, dividers aggravated).

This planning tool was principally developed with complex humanitarian emergency situations in mind – however, the 15 case studies and 30 or more workshops which provided the evidence from which it was devised covered a broad range of environment; pre and post conflict as well as open violence; relief, rehabilitation, development and explicitly peace-oriented programming.

In principle, the tool can be used for programming aid that has either ‘minimalist’ (programme ‘traditional’ aid in ways which simply don’t make the possibilities of conflict worse) or ‘maximalist’ goals (see if aid can be programmed in non-traditional ways in order to promote conflict prevention)<sup>3</sup>. We will look at the limits and the possibilities of both approaches in this course.

In what ways might this approach need to be adapted to focus on ‘development’ contexts when conflict is latent or structurally hidden?

## CONCLUSIONS

Increasing evidence suggests that the good intentions of all kinds of international assistance are not enough to guarantee that they will ‘do no harm’. It is the ethical responsibility of all aid workers to consider prudently the consequences of their actions with regard to the aggravation of political, economic and socio-cultural factors which lead conflict to turn violent.

However, to recognize that aid can, potentially, ‘do harm’ is categorically NOT an injunction simply to ‘do no aid’. Aid plays a vital role in mitigating the suffering of vulnerable populations around the globe and still offers the best hope that this suffering can ultimately be replaced by a just and egalitarian world. This paper and this course reaffirm a commitment to international solidarity with the poor and marginal through aid – but they both urge the vital need for radical rethinking of many of aid’s modalities.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on ‘minimalism’ versus ‘maximalism’ see Weiss (1999).

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