

Economic and Long-term Development-oriented Perspectives of Humanitarian Aid in the Context of Humanitarian Crisis and Political Instability

Thomas Preindl

This article is a summary of the presentation and discussion on 'Economic Aspects of Humanitarian Aid' by Thomas Preindl, Caritas Austria/International Cooperation; Workshop 'Security and Development – Assessing the economic impacts of crisis response operations in the field', organised by the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management at the National Defence Academy, Vienna, Austria. This article does not necessarily represent the view of Caritas Austria.

I) Caritas – basic principles of humanitarian aid

Caritas Internationalis (CI) is an international Confederation of Catholic relief, development and social service agencies working in 198 countries and territories and is one of the largest humanitarian networks in the world. All Caritas Internationalis member organisations are bound to uphold the CI Statutes and Rules, CI Partnership Principles, the Red Cross NGO-Code of Conduct, the SPHERE Project's Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, the provision of gender equity, CI's Child Protection Policy and the protection of civilians.

CI Rules stipulate that:

'All aid by a Member Organisation must have the promotion of the poorest as its first priority, and assist the progress of the task of the local Church towards civil society as a whole, whether Christian or not'.

At the same time, CI has agreed to strive to abide by the Red Cross-NGO Code of Conduct, which is consistent with its Statutes and states that:

‘The humanitarian imperative comes first. The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle, which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. As members of the international community, we recognise our obligation to provide humanitarian assistance wherever it is needed. Hence the need for unimpeded access to affected populations is of fundamental importance in exercising that responsibility. The prime motivation of our response to disaster is to alleviate human suffering amongst those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster. When we give humanitarian aid, it is not a partisan or political act and should not be viewed as such’ [Principle 1 of the Code of Conduct].

‘Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.’

‘Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs.’

‘Within the entirety of our programmes, we will reflect considerations of proportionality. Human suffering must be alleviated whenever it is found; life is as precious in one part of a country as another. Thus, our provision of aid will reflect the degree of suffering it seeks to alleviate’ [Extract from Principle 2 of the Code of Conduct].

II) General considerations: long-term, sustainable support in crisis situations and conflict

The continuum - contiguum concept¹

Caritas is basically committed to the gradual implementation of projects and programs that build peace, as well as to humanitarian aid that fosters development. However, until the early 1990s, development cooperation and humanitarian aid were regarded as separate areas of activity carried out by separate institutions. At the most, their activities were linked on a timeline that could be seen as a *continuum* starting with emergency relief and moving through phases of rehabilitation and subsequent development. In this approach, whatever development activity may be taking place is reduced as conflict escalates and ceases completely with the outbreak of full-scale violence. A time lapse then occurs until emergency relief is provided shortly after the armed conflict reaches a culmination point, followed by rehabilitation after a cease fire is in effect. Development work is resumed only in the final phase of rehabilitation. These activities are normally undertaken by different organisations in the course of a conflict or by separate sectors within the organisations involved.

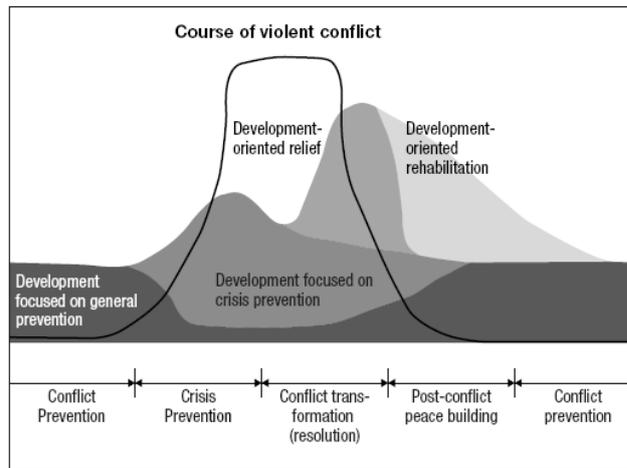
In *An Agenda for Peace*, former UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali declared in 1992 that 'Peace enforcement and peace-keeping operations, to be truly successful, must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures that will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well being among people' (Boutros Ghali, 1992). The starting point for this new approach was the realisation that management of post-conflict situations requires far more than repairing material damage and building infrastructure. The most difficult problems to overcome in post-conflict societies are the militarisation that affects society, everyday life, politics and the economy, and the trauma suffered by individuals and communities in the war-torn societies. 'Reconstruction' alone is insufficient to describe what is needed, as it focuses on repair of material damage. Terms such as 'rehabilitation' suggest an attempt to restore pre-war conditions as

well. But rehabilitation is not enough when the need is to resolve the causes of conflict in a post conflict society. Fundamental transformation and reconciliation are the only possible follow-up measures for war-torn societies. Dealing with the political, social, mental and economic problems that are frequently the causes as well as the consequences of armed conflict is the only way to prevent a renewed outbreak of violence and build lasting peace.

Today international organisations and aid donors increasingly regard crisis prevention and peace building as tasks that must be undertaken by means of development and humanitarian aid. Consequently, they are questioning the way in which division of labour between these two areas is defined in terms of concepts, time and sectoral activities. There is now a conviction that multi-sectoral activities are necessary in all phases of intra-state conflict.

The concept of a development–relief–rehabilitation–development continuum was expanded during the 1990s to a *contiguuum*. This model retains the need for continual engagement in a crisis region, but there are no longer different time periods for different activities, nor is there conceptual and institutional division between development and humanitarian aid. Instead, the *contiguuum* model takes an approach in which both areas of activities collaborate closely and are interconnected. Activities and methods involving humanitarian aid are incorporated from the outset as a part of a comprehensive long-term-sustainable, development-oriented perspective that is retained during a conflict and immediately afterwards.

Table: The continuum concept



Source: Caritas Switzerland

The World Bank has taken a similar approach, stating that ‘If anything is evident from the growth of post-conflict units it is that development agencies are seeking to merge several distinct development ‘cultures’: including conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance, human rights monitoring, and traditional development’.

Economic renewal involves much more than clearing and destroying landmines, restoring agriculture, building roads, bridges and railways, and providing telecommunication facilities, electricity and water. The first and foremost task is to transform an economy of exploitation and plundering into a peacetime economy. Macro-economic recovery and stimulus of economic activity are more than just prerequisites for the subsistence of the general population. Moreover, labour is a significant factor in processes of reconciliation and psychological stabilisation in societies that have been torn by war. In addition to destruction of production facilities national economies suffer from a politically unstable climate in the aftermath of war and from organised crime-dominated economic structures – conditions that generally keep foreign investors away.

From the perspective of development organisations, the political, social and economic transformation processes necessary for peace building require a long-term development strategy. The following summary of basic principles is based on the experiences of the *War-Torn Societies Project* (WSP, 1999) funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and others.

- Peace building requires an approach that integrates measures such as emergency relief, material and economic rehabilitation, reconciliation, demilitarisation, efforts to promote human rights, social integration and political renewal within the framework of a development programme.
- Emergency relief must be limited in time and integrated into a development programme, monitored to determine potential side-effects that could intensify conflict and must not be used as substitute for political action.
- All peace building activities must aim to strengthen the capacity for local crisis management.
- There is a need to strengthen the structure of civil society and to support the private sector, without impairing the capacity of governmental institutions to carry out their principle duties or undermining their authority.
- In view of the great importance of protecting human rights in post conflict situations, development organisations need to integrate human rights issues more completely into their programmes.
- Development organisations must focus on re-establishing social relations, restoring human dignity, fostering dialogue, and building trust.
- Post-conflict societies must not have processes of democratisation forced upon them by means of external efforts to form political parties and promote early elections. Democratisation must be encouraged from within, through decentralisation of political decision-making structures and administrative functions, and in consideration of traditional hierarchies and local elites.

- Institutional development organisations must not deprive local institutions of qualified personnel by offering unduly high salaries. The principle of ‘Do No Harm’

Humanitarian Aid is not only alleviating human misery but also inevitably has either intensifying or mitigating effects on conflict. Misuse of humanitarian aid by factions involved in violent conflict can never be a moral justification for abandoning those in need of emergency relief. But in recent years donors have become painfully aware that the aid they provide carries the risks of adverse impacts, as experience in Rwanda, Bosnia and Sudan demonstrated. Today development organisations are increasingly subjecting their programmes to so-called ‘peace and conflict impact assessments’. These are evaluations that provide information about the impacts that development projects and humanitarian aid have on peace and conflict. The Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCCP) carried out evaluations such as these in crises regions over a period of five years, in collaboration with NGOs and international organisations, and published the result in a book titled *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace or War* (M. Anderson 1999). This study, which received considerable attention, showed that there are two ways in which humanitarian aid can have the unintended effect of intensifying or prolonging conflict. The first way is through transfer of resources. The second is through the dissemination of ethical messages.

Because every conflict is ultimately a struggle over material resources and because armed conflict intensifies this struggle, it is inevitable that warring parties will make every effort to enrich themselves:

- They charge tolls and extort protection money and other ‘taxes’. Donor organisations hire local militias to guard their vehicles, thus becoming a factor in the private market of security and violence created by war.
- By importing relief goods from abroad and distributing them free of charge, donors can bring about the collapse of the local economy. The informal economy based on an arrangement of social networks can also be destroyed by the distribution of relief supplies.

Moreover, the presence of expatriates exerts an inflationary pressure on salaries and the prices of apartments, offices and storage space. Control of rented space can become an objective of conflict and intensify social inequality.

- Organisations that provide relief cannot avoid setting priorities among the target groups for whom it is intended. The selection of certain groups as beneficiaries can foster envy and mistrust. Using relief to support specific ethnic groups can endanger the process of reconciliation.
- When humanitarian aid satisfies basic human needs in terms of food, shelter, health care and education, it releases local political elites of their responsibility towards their own people.

Supporting social, economic and cultural infrastructure that fosters peace instead of war requires relief organisations to perceive conflict from within. The LCCP arranged the results of its study in an analytical table that introduces relief organisations to the socio-economic infrastructure of war and allows them to identify potential capacities for peace. Markets, informal trade, and infrastructure for providing electricity, water and communications connect people beyond the lines of battle and make it possible for them to cooperate and pursue common interests.

The challenge lies in recognising which institutions, attitudes, interests and experiences divide people in crisis regions, and which unite them. Humanitarian aid can serve either to strengthen or to weaken these capacities.

III) Designing humanitarian aid projects – Securing livelihoods

Caritas like many other NGOs is very much involved in projects concerned with the protection and promotion of livelihoods. Livelihoods can be understood as all means of individuals/families/communities of making a living. Livelihood strategies refer to the way in which individuals (households or communities) use and combine their assets

within a particular institutional and vulnerability context in order to achieve desired outcomes (e.g. food security). The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (including the livelihoods framework) developed by DFID (Department for International Development, UK) is one way of analysing and understanding people's livelihoods and corresponding strategies.

Besides communities, much attention is often paid by NGOs to households as the smallest coherent economic unit. Save The Children UK defines a household as a group of people who contribute to a common economy and share food and all income. Consequently a household economy can be defined as the sum of the ways in which the household gets its income, its savings and asset holdings, and its consumption of food and non-food items. A household is most often, but not necessarily, a family (Save the Children UK, 2002).

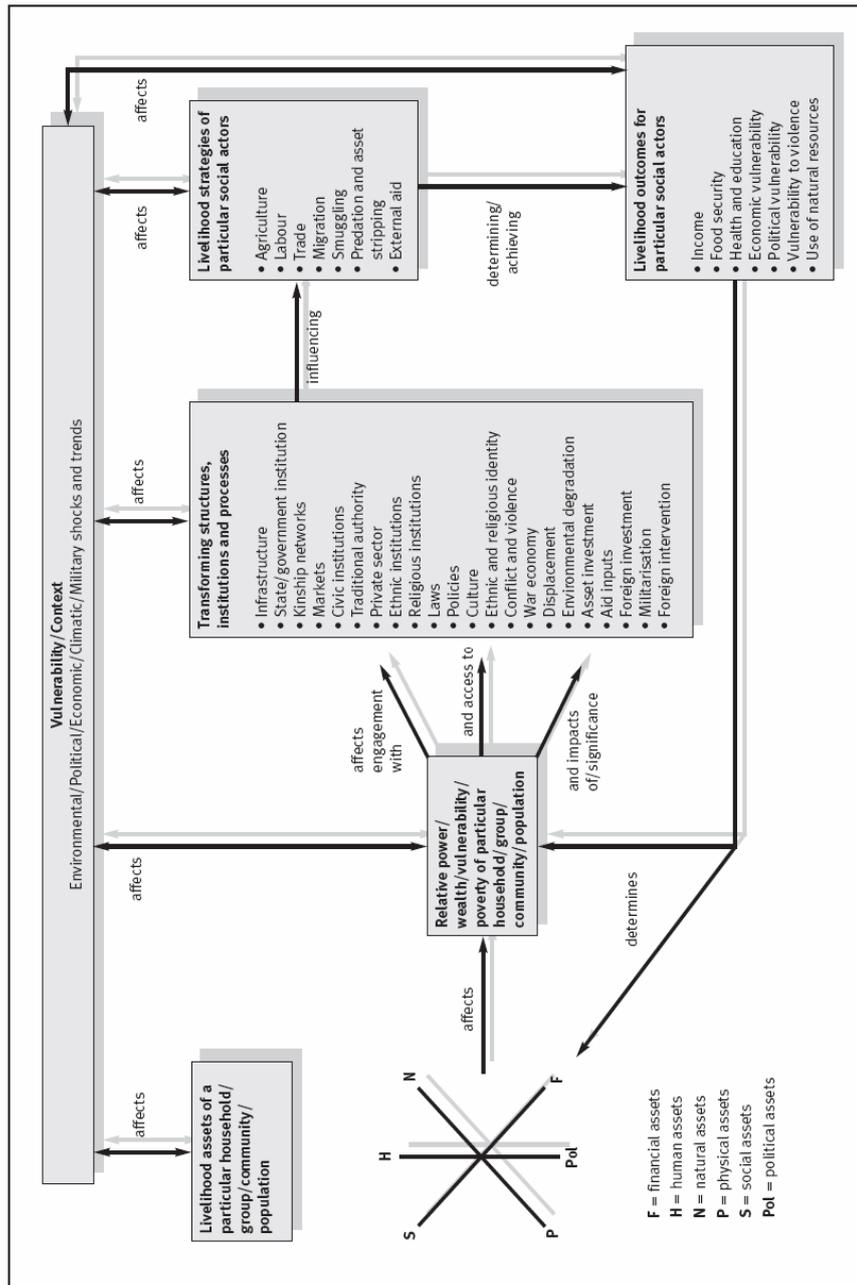
Developing livelihood security projects at the household level requires, therefore, a profound understanding of intra-household management of production and income (medium and long-term strategies). This implies understanding how households choose between the different options for production and income and how they allocate resources within the household. In times of a crisis situation (e.g. political instability, conflict and violence) it is of critical importance for humanitarian agencies to understand when and under which circumstances families are forced to abandon their medium- and long-term strategies and to apply short-term strategies for survival (e.g. migration). These short-term strategies can be understood as coping mechanisms to address a given crisis situation.

Basic coping mechanisms become very problematic if households start selling productive assets such as land or seeds, which, thus, contributes to (extreme) poverty and often to long-term dependence on foreign aid. This in turn can contribute to increased instability and to the escalation of conflict. In this case humanitarian assistance is required to help families develop and apply coping mechanisms that do not undermine their productive assets in the long run (e.g. distribution of seeds).

An adapted livelihoods framework by Collinson et al. (2002)³ can be used to support analysis in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.

Livelihood approaches are thought to be particularly helpful in promoting greater synergy or coherence between aid relief and development models. However effective intervention in livelihoods means also engagement in the social, political and economic structures that create poverty.

Table: Adapted livelihoods framework



Source: Collinson et al. (2002: 26)

Websites

Non-governmental Organisations

Caritas Internationalis	www.caritas.org
Caritas Austria	www.caritas.at
Caritas Switzerland	www.caritas.ch
Save the Children	www.savethechildren.org

Governmental

DFID	www.dfid.gov.uk
------	--

Endnotes

- 1) Alliances for Peace, Caritas Switzerland; Caritas Publications, Lucerne Switzerland (2001).
- 2) The Household Economy Approach, Save the Children UK, 2002; abbreviated.
- 3) Politically Informed Humanitarian Programming: Using a Political Economy Approach, Paper 41; Collinson, S. et al. (2002); London: Humanitarian Practice Network.