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**WP 2005: 14**



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## Abstract

An assumed gap between relief and development assistance was widely discussed in the 1990s. Urged to "mind the gap", the multilateral aid agencies adjusted. In terms of the initial learning phase – i.e. readiness to recognize a new set of problems and adjust objectives and programs accordingly – the agencies thus responded effectively. Functional adjustment was fostered by agency concern for their organizational standing, reinforced by inter-agency competition. Attempts by two agencies to forge a structured approach and create a regime to address "the gap" was neither successful, nor did it in the end prove necessary. The case suggests that inter-agency competition rather than cooperative regime-building is the easiest way to foster certain kinds of organizational learning.

## 1. Introduction

Discussion in the international aid community about a presumed gap between relief and development peaked in the late 1990s. The nature of the gap had been examined and, for the most part, found to exist, and there was a growing sense that adjustments in aid strategies were necessary to close it. On the intergovernmental level, the World Bank and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initiated a structured discussion in the so-called Brookings process. Some national aid agencies established special offices and budget lines to address transitional needs (e.g. the Office of Transitional Initiatives in the US Agency for International Development and the special "gap appropriation" initiated more recently by the Norwegian Minister of Development Cooperation). NGOs and multilateral aid agencies working in either the humanitarian or the development sector were adjusting their programs to move into the gap. An assessment in 2000 concluded that pursuit of *both* relief and development had become the dominant paradigm among international aid agencies working in enduring emergencies.<sup>1</sup> Gap-closing efforts also appeared in other situations where the boundary between relief, reconstruction and development was porous, notably in so-called post-conflict situations.<sup>2</sup>

This article examines the response to the gap problematique, with a focus on the multilateral aid agencies in the UN system. In a time of mounting concern about learning lessons in post-conflict situations, the identification of the gap problem and subsequent response appears as a case of functional adjustment in the international aid system to a new challenge. "Functional adjustment" here does not imply that the final outcome of the gap-addressing policies necessarily were positive, but, more modestly, refers to process. Whatever the eventual impact, identifying a problem and exploring ways of addressing it is a prerequisite for developing rational policies. In terms of policy process, this is a functional adjustment and a key element of organizational 'learning' as the concept is often used in the literature.<sup>3</sup> How, then, do we explain that this kind of adjustment or learning

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<sup>1</sup> Philip White and Lionel Cliffe, "Marching Response to Context in Complex Political Emergencies: 'Relief', 'Development', 'Peacebuilding' or Something In-between?" *Disasters*, vol 24, no. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The term "post-conflict" implies that there is a clean break between war and peace, and that societies that emerge from war do not experience continued conflict, including armed struggle. This is clearly not the case. The widespread use of "post-conflict" partly reflects the practice of the World Bank, which favored the usage for legal reasons. Its Articles of Agreement (especially Art.1(i)) do not foresee lending operations to a member at war. The terminology has operational implications, see note 8.

<sup>3</sup> The usage is found in a broad range of studies - of enterprises (Chris Argyris, *On Organizational Learning*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), of international organizations (Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge is Power*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) and of states (Jack S. Levy, "Learning and foreign policy: sweeping a conceptual minefield," *International Organization*, 48, 2 (Spring 1994).

seems to have occurred with respect to the gap between relief and development? What was the dynamic of change? Does the response appear as a concerted effort to solve a common problem - a regime building strategy, so to speak, that aims to establish norms, mechanisms and division of labor?<sup>4</sup> Or is the analogy of Adam Smith's market more appropriate? In this perspective, the actors move autonomously to achieve their interests, in the process being steered by an "invisible hand" to meet a common good. There was also a question of which interests to pursue. For the multilateral agencies, the gap problematique generated familiar dilemmas arising from a potential conflict between a desire to expand, and a concern to protect the organizational essence. What form did this conflict take and how did it affect agency response? Finally, what was the nature of the gap in the first place, and to what extent does that explain the adjustment?

## 2. The nature of the gap

As usually envisaged, the gap between relief and development assistance occurs when a humanitarian operation is about to be completed, and aid projects for reconstruction and development are about to start. The gap is seen as having institutional and financial dimensions that arise from unclear organizational mandates for the transition period, the slow process of getting reconstruction/ development projects off the ground, inflexibility in donor budgetary lines, lack of coordination among actors, and traditionally weak links among humanitarian and development agencies.

Three views of the gap towards the end of the 1990s indicate the nature of the debate and the perceived gap.

The heads of the World Bank and UNHCR - who both were active in calling attention to the gap and the need for new responses - focused on the problems of relief-to-development transitions in so-called post-conflict societies. In a joint statement issued to the Brookings-led discussion initiated at their behest, they identified two kinds of gaps.<sup>5</sup> Claiming that many unmet needs of post-conflict societies and failed transitions attest to the inadequacy of the prevailing rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches, they identified a "gap in approach" between humanitarian and development agencies. To close it required establishing operational linkages between the two types of agencies early in the transition process. Second, they identified a "level of interest gap", which reflected the variable political interests of donor countries that produced inadequate and unpredictable funding for societies emerging from war.

The analysis of an applied research organization closely associated with the Brookings process likewise claimed that many essential needs were unattended or addressed too late in the phase when humanitarian aid starts tapering off while longer-term reconstruction aid remains at the planning stage.<sup>6</sup> Several specific gaps were identified. For instance, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) return home without longer-term support for effective reintegration into the economic and social life of their communities. Human rights monitoring, police presence and other law and order

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<sup>4</sup> These were identified as key dimensions in early regime theory, see e.g. Volker Rittberger (ed.), *Regime Theory and International Relations*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, and remain central in recent work as well, e.g. in P.J. Simmons and Chantal de Jonge Oudraat (eds.), *Managing Global Issues: Lessons Learned*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Sadako Ogata and James D. Wolfensohn, *From war to peace: Improving the odds of success for war-torn societies. Some personal observations*. Presentation at the Brookings Roundtable on the Relief to Development Gap, 15 January 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Shepard Forman and Dirk Salomons, *Meeting essential needs in societies emerging from conflict*. New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 1999.

measures required to build public confidence in the early post-war phase are less likely to be funded in the transition period, and may suffer from greater delays in aid disbursement than tangible needs such as rebuilding infrastructure. Food distribution (or food-for-work type schemes) typically continues even after the immediate emergency is over, taking precedence over early measures to create long-term food security such as registration of land titles and rehabilitation of agricultural production. Local NGOs that are financed through budget lines for humanitarian aid may suddenly find their projects terminated as donors shift to public sector authorities that are favored by development agencies but typically have a slower pace of operations than private relief agencies.

A high-level UN body representing all the multilateral aid agencies in the UN system - the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (ISAC) – identified several problems in immediate post-conflict situations that involve 'gaps' of one type or another.<sup>7</sup> According to ISAC, there were *institutional* gaps reflecting the inability of agencies to cooperate effectively due to their semi-autonomous status and operations, which in turn reflected different mandates and institutional cultures. This gap appeared particularly in the relationship between humanitarian and development agencies. *Political* gaps occurred when main donors wanted to disengage from a area once the war and the humanitarian emergencies were over, rather than staying for the longer-term reconstruction process. An *authority* vacuum was characteristic of post-conflict situations where local authorities typically were fragmented, weak or had little institutional capacity, while the aid agencies were unable or unwilling to take on the responsibilities of government. *Synchrony* gap was the term given by ISAC to problems of communication and understanding between international agencies and the host government. Finally, the committee identified a *sustainability* gap which reflected the limited capacity of the host government to sustain the momentum of recovery, particularly by covering the recurrent costs of services established by the aid agencies.

Similar problems, as well as gaps arising from conceptual confusion, have been cited in much of the case study literature on aid programs or post-war transitions.<sup>8</sup> In general terms, and as they appeared during the second half of the 1990s, the gaps can be grouped into 3 main types, relating to institutions, funding and substantive issues.

*The institutional gap* reflects not merely mechanical problems of coordination between humanitarian and development institutions, but, more fundamentally, their different priorities, cultures and mandates. Most humanitarian activities are micro-oriented, providing communities or vulnerable groups with basic relief items such as food, shelter and basic health services for survival, mostly organized on a small-scale and having a short timeframe. With a traditional of focus on immediate life-saving services, humanitarians have not emphasized local involvement, sustainability and institution building, especially beyond the community level. While under pressure to change, the organizational culture of humanitarian agencies remains oriented towards speedy delivery of externally based service packages, delivered in a top-down mode<sup>9</sup> As a result, humanitarian organizations that assist in, for instance, return and resettlement of refugees and IDPs

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<sup>7</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee, *Bridging the gap*. New York, September 1999.

<sup>8</sup> An early landmark study was Krishna Kumar (ed.), *Rebuilding Societies after Civil War*, Boulder/ London: Lynne Rienner, 1997, for series, see especially the cases studies published by the Humanitarianism and War Project at Brown University, and the ODI series published by the Humanitarian Practices network. As noted above (note 2), the term "post-conflict" is misleading. The operational consequences may be inadequate attention to conflicts that persist in the immediate post-war period. Humanitarian actors often argue that this justify continued humanitarian aid, while other aid actors and often the host government wish to move rapidly towards development aid. Joanna Macrae, "Aiding peace...and war: UNHCR, returnee reintegration, and the relief-development debater," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper no. 14, Geneva: UNHCR, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Monica Kathina Juma and Astri Suhrke (eds.), *Eroding Local Capacity. International Humanitarian Action in Africa*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002.

have limited capacity to assist in reintegration and development for the longer term. The same applies to UNHCR, which, as we shall see below, has struggled to define its role and appropriate partnerships with development actors. The main UN development agency, UNDP, on the other hand, is more macro-oriented in that it works closely with government authorities. The same applies to aid agencies of national donors. Their policy guidelines typically emphasize comprehensive project and programme planning, longer-term sustainability and institution building. To the extent that they adopt a national perspective to assist all communities rather than specific war-affected or vulnerable groups, they are not always ready to continue funding programs or projects that were started in the relief phase. The history of post-conflict or post-emergency situations is littered with schools, clinics and bridges that were built in the relief phase, only to fall into disrepair due to failure to secure project funding in the development phase.<sup>10</sup> To address such problems on a strategic policy level, a 'gap-perspective' would call for integration of relief-related activities such as repatriation and reintegration of refugees with national reconstruction plans.<sup>11</sup> In practice, however, divergent institutional priorities and mandates make this difficult.

*The macro funding gap:* Slow implementation of development aid frequently create delays in financing and cause frustration in transition periods. But beyond disbursement issues of this kind is a more fundamental question. Funding for humanitarian and for development assistance typically originates from different budget lines in donor countries. Each has a distinct rationale. Humanitarian assistance is justified by saving lives in crisis and, at least in principle, is politically neutral and is allocated on the basis of need. Development aid, on the other hand, is legitimated with reference to a range of donor interests as well as recipient needs. It follows that countries which have received substantial humanitarian assistance will not necessarily receive comparable amounts for its transition and reconstruction needs. It is indicative that transitional programmes within the consolidated appeals process administered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) are typically more underfunded than the pure relief appeals.<sup>12</sup> For instance, appeals for the Caucasus region for 1999, which were primarily for consolidation and rehabilitation, were severely underfunded. Whether such disjunction indeed constitutes a 'gap' that should be closed through some form of institutionalized response has been at the heart of the gap discussion.

*New issues gap:* New issues emerged in post-war countries that were not traditionally part of either the emergency or the development portfolio. Designed in the early 1990s as measures to implement peace settlements (e.g. in Mozambique), by the end of the decade something resembling a standardized package for post-conflict situations had come into being - complete with a specialized terminology. The package typically included programs for demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration of soldiers (widely known as DDR), "security sector reform" broadly defined, governance issues, human rights, transitional justice, law and order reforms, and establishment of democratic structures and processes. Together with reforms in other areas that might have contributed to the initial conflict, e.g. land ownership patterns, such activities had by the second half of the 1990s been subsumed under the concept of "peacebuilding". Identifying the appropriate tools for "peacebuilding" became a widely shared objective in the international aid community, and spawned a growing social science literature as well.<sup>13</sup> The progressive standardization of such tasks

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<sup>10</sup> "Conflict-affected countries: Reintegration assistance, development aid and the peacebuilding process." Geneva: UNHCR, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Petrin, "Refugee return and state reconstruction: A comparative analysis" *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper no 66. Geneva: UNHCR, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Toby Porter, *An external review of the CAP*. New York: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2002.

<sup>13</sup> The range in approach and level of analysis is suggested by a few titles: Elizabeth Cousens and C. Kumar, *Peacebuilding as Politics*. Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, 2001; Michael W. Doyle and N. Sambanis, "International Peacebuilding: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis," *American Political Science Review*,



was in itself recognition that post-war transition periods entailed special problems and needs. To that extent, the development of "peacebuilding" as a distinct area of concern was part of a functional adjustment by aid agencies to the evolving situation. Yet operational gaps remained whenever new issues of this kind fell outside conventional interpretations of agency mandates and programmes, or when donors were reluctant to fund such activities for reasons of risk or other reasons.

By referring to a 'gap', advocates of special aid activities for transitional phases - whether from relief to development or from war to peace - invoked the normative power of language. In a policy context, the term has a negative connotation. A "gap" practically calls out to be eliminated; to argue that something constitutes a gap therefore implies a recommendation to close it by appropriate funding, institutional measures, or other forms of response. Particular aid actors may, of course, acknowledge that a particular gap exists, e.g. with respect to program support for reintegration of IDPs, yet decide not to participate in closing it. Yet acknowledging the existence of a gap implies that someone ought to address it. In a constructionist sense, therefore, the determination of whether or not the disconnects described above are 'gaps' must ultimately be a matter of policy judgement. An aid actor might conclude that no particular programs are necessary to reintegrate IDPs, or that there is no rationale for maintaining infrastructure built under the relief program in country Y. If so, there are no 'gaps'. If it is argued, on the contrary, that such transitional programmes are necessary, 'gaps' will appear if there is no implementation. As we shall see, the multilateral agencies were actively involved in identifying gaps and calling for them to be addressed, although some were more active than others.

### 3. The reactions and actions by the multilateral agencies

Among the multilateral agencies, UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP), OCHA and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) are considered the core humanitarian agencies, while the World Bank and the regional development banks (such as IADB, AfDB and ADB), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the specialised agencies (especially the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) are the main development agencies. WFP and UNICEF are distinct because they are mandated to cover both emergency and development activities.<sup>14</sup> With some variation, they all responded to "gaps" issues during the 1990s. We shall here look briefly at some of the UN specialized agencies: UNHCR, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP, as well as OCHA, in the UN Secretariat, and the World Bank.

**UNHCR** was a principal actor in placing the gap problematique on the international aid agenda. Already in the 1970s, the agency had been confronted by challenges of linking relief with development issues in Africa, but then in the context of soliciting donor assistance to settle refugees in countries of first asylum. In the 1990s, it was the apparent rash of peace settlements in the early part of the decade, set off by the collapse of superpower rivalry connected with the Cold War, which placed an unprecedented number of large-scale repatriation cases on its table. At the same time, UNHCR found itself confronting new types of challenges in the Balkan wars, where conventional asylum in other countries was not readily available to those needing protection, and

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94 (4): (December 2000); Steven J. Stedman et. al(eds.), *Ending Civil Wars*, London/Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002. *A Review of Peace Operations. A Case for Change*. Report from King's College, London, 2003.

<sup>14</sup> WFP considers itself to be primarily a development agency promoting food security, but during the 1990s it has channelled some 70 per cent of its resources for humanitarian purposes. For UNICEF, the major portion of its resources is for regular development programmes, and it is therefore the smallest actor in the humanitarian field.

where the agency took on an expanded assistance role for all categories of war-affected populations. The new challenges coincided with the appointment of a new High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, who was prepared to respond with daring and innovation. The result was conceptual rethinking and organizational leadership, as an agency analyst correctly noted.<sup>15</sup>

On a project level, the agency pioneered the "quick impact projects" (QIP) which supplemented the traditional repatriation assistance package and short-term food distribution with infrastructure projects to facilitate reintegration. On a policy level, the High Commissioner called for a comprehensive approach to refugee policy, which included consideration of the whole cycle of flight-related measures from pre-emptive steps to avert crisis, to post-crisis reintegration and peacebuilding.<sup>16</sup> Closing the gap between relief and development was part of this broader strategy; so was the agency's subsequent orientation towards protection-related issues in post-conflict situations. The aim was to reduce the likelihood that returning refugees would once again flee the country and end up as wards of UNHCR.

From an organizational perspective, addressing gaps in aid coverage was thus a problem-driven strategy intended to address refugee problems effectively. In humanitarian terms, this was goal was a good in itself. From an agency perspective, success would increase its organizational standing in the eyes of the donors. Being acutely dependent upon ad hoc contributions from states for core as well as emergency funding, the agency was extremely sensitive on this point. A sense of being chronically underfunded reinforced the concern to demonstrate effectiveness. Organizational expansionism played a part as well. The 1990s has rightly been called a decade marked by "the humanitarian impulse", and the new High Commissioner used a historic opportunity to give the agency a bolder and more aggressive profile.<sup>17</sup> Working from a large, new headquarters building, with unprecedented budget and staff expansion, the leadership generated speculation during the preparations for the 1997 UN reform that UNHCR sought a status as the lead UN humanitarian agency. A larger and increasingly standardized agency role in reintegration, development and protection-related areas – often under an overall UN peacebuilding agenda - were part of this trend.

An important part of the agency's strategy was to present the gap problem as a regime issue. Frustrated by the experience of working with UNDP on transitional relief-to-development issues, the agency sought a partner with a reputation for greater effectiveness and turned to the World Bank. The Bank, as we shall see below, had by this time started to address post-conflict issues as well. With two equally bold leaders, who happened to get along very well on a personal level, the two agencies moved to address gap issues more systematically. In the consequent Brookings-process they called for particular procedures to identify and address gap issues and, importantly, fresh funds and new funding mechanisms.

Not unexpectedly, the expansionary strategy pursued by UNHCR caused internal divisions and considerable soul-searching about the proper balance between the agency's functions. Would expansion in semi-development and peacebuilding activities be at the expense of protection obligations? Legal protection has traditionally been viewed as constituting the essence of UNHCR's role, the other main function being assistance. By the early 1990s critics were already concerned that assistance was expanding much faster than the protection sector. Activities further afield from

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<sup>15</sup> Jeff Crisp, *Mind the Gap! UNHCR, humanitarian assistance and the development process*, Geneva: UNHCR Working Paper, 2001.

<sup>16</sup> "UNHCR at 50: Past, Present and Future Refugee Assistance,," Special Issue *of International Migration Review*, vol 35, no 1 (2001). State of the World's Refugees, 1995. The Search for Solutions, Geneva: UNHCR, 1995.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas G. Weiss, "The Humanitarian Impulse," in the *United Nations Security Council since the Cold War*, ed. by David Malone, Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner, forthcoming.

immediately relief might infringe upon the agency's organizational essence and present it with tasks for which it had no comparative advantage.<sup>18</sup> Despite such concerns, the agency's non-protection activities continued to expand during the tenure of High Commissioner Ogata in the 1990s. The development was reflected in budgetary and staffing terms, as well as the broader range of services that the agency provided to refugees, IDPs and returnees.

**The World Bank** has moved rapidly and with considerable determination to address a series of 'gap' issues.<sup>19</sup> The bank promoted the term "post-conflict" in the aid community and helped elaborate operational implication. It established a small Post-conflict unit in 1997, and authorized a modest 'post-conflict fund' on the assumption that the immediate post-war period required flexible means of funding as well as justifying special lending criteria for lending. Earlier in the 1990s, the bank had taken the lead in coordinating international aid for reconstruction after the Oslo Accords on Palestine and the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina (although in Bosnia the EU subsequently took the lead). Throughout the decade, the bank participated in rehabilitation and reconstruction programs in virtually all post-conflict situations. In some countries it has assumed a predominant role among foreign aid actors (e.g. Afghanistan). In many cases it has expanded into non-traditional bank sectors such as security sector reform, democratization and reconciliation with programs designed to link reconstruction with much broader political aims. The bank has for instance launched programs for "community-driven development" and "community empowerment" designed to promote economic reconstruction as well as local-level empowerment and reconciliation. Building on older bank programs, such initiatives are being institutionalized (with appropriately coded designations such as CDD and CEP) – and adjusted to fit post-conflict situations. To mark the change from reconstruction narrowly understood to a comprehensive approach, the Post-Conflict Unit in Bank changed its name in 2002 to the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit.

Why did the bank move into a new area of this kind with such apparent speed and ease? As in the case of UNHCR, there were historical precedents. In the mid-1980s, the bank had worked with UNHCR to support the temporary integration of Afghan refugees in Pakistan through development-oriented projects. While not identified at the time as a "gap" filling program, it bridged conventional humanitarian assistance and standard development projects, and was hailed as an innovation in institutional cooperation in this area. There was also a logical connection with the organization's core mandate. To make the leap from reconstruction of Europe after World War II- which had been a key element of the bank's original function - to reconstruction of war-devastated areas wherever they occurred half a century later required little institutional imagination. Proponents of expansion argued that the bank had to adjust as part of its core mandates evolved and - importantly - moved to the top of the international policy agenda. Like Ogata in UNHCR, the bank's new president - James Wolfensohn, appointed in 1995 - took an expansive view of the Bank's role. In this connection he expressly supported post-conflict activities. He also agreed to co-chair UNHCR's initiative to institutionalize a collective response to gap issues through the Brookings process. When that process stalled, Wolfensohn continued to support an active bank role in post-conflict issues, as demonstrated, for instance, in the small but high-visibility case of East Timor.

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<sup>18</sup> Crisp *op.cit.*, Macrae, *op.cit.*

<sup>19</sup> For in-house assessments of the Bank's role, see Steven Holzman, *Rethinking "relief" and "development" in transition from conflict*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution Project on Internal Displacement, 1999; *Post-conflict reconstruction. The role of the World Bank*. Washington DC World Bank, *The World Bank's experience with post-conflict reconstruction*. Washington DC, May 1998. For an external analysis, see SusanL. Woodward, "Economic Priorities for Successful peace Implementation," in Stedman, *op.cit.*

Wolfensohn could draw on a precedent of a different kind as well. The bank has a long history of expansion into new issues-areas. As an ex-official recently noted, this has partly taken the form of lateral issue expansion into sectors that previously were treated as social inputs into the development process (human resources and social sector development).<sup>20</sup> Greater involvement in these input-areas in order to influence more elements of the development process could be seen as a form of organizational learning. Other issues the bank took on at least in part to co-opt critics (gender and the environment). As in the case of UNHCR, expansion has not been without considerable internal friction and complaints to the effect that the Bank's agenda has grown so complex it has become unwieldy.<sup>21</sup>

Other agencies in the UN system have been less visible in regime-development efforts, but have adjusted to the gap in other ways.

In the UN Secretariat, the **UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)** has a mandate to develop a more integrated UN-wide response to complex crises and peacebuilding. Prior to the 1997 UN reforms, however, the office (then called Department of Humanitarian Affairs) actually contributed to a sharp distinction between relief and development. The office-administered consolidated appeals (CAP) did not allow projects that were part of a more transitional and developmental phase, such as education. Only after the 1997 reforms were appeals for rehabilitation and reconstruction projects included in the CAP.

An explicit function of OCHA is to bridge the 'institutional disconnect' in complex emergencies and transitional situations. Where an OCHA-supported UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator is appointed alongside the UNDG-appointed UN Resident Co-ordinator, supported by UNDP, the office emphasizes the need to maximise linkage in transitional situations. Beyond this, there has been an ongoing debate within OCHA on how much the office should engage itself in post-war transitions. The office has not been very active in defining or promoting new issues as a gap problem. On the funding side, the official view has been that humanitarian relief, development programmes and transition projects have to be undertaken simultaneously in many complex emergencies humanitarian aid, and may be difficult to distinguish. Yet many OCHA staff have argued that CAP should retain a focus on explicitly humanitarian activities. Given limited funding, the humanitarian agencies should give priority to ongoing emergencies and limit their involvement in the relief-to-development process, it has been argued. A corollary of this view is that development agencies, particularly the World Bank, should contribute more actively to early recovery and reconstruction.<sup>22</sup>

UNDPs approach to gap issues was initially constrained by the view that its organizational essence - as expressed in its mandate - was to support development activities in member states. In the early 1990s, the agency became involved in post-conflict situations in an ad hoc manner on a country-by-country basis, e.g. in Haiti, Central America, Mozambique and Angola. Generally, however, the leadership questioned whether transitional activities formed part of its mandate and was reluctant to support, let alone push, for an expanded role. An internal evaluation later called it an "uneasy beginning" in "unfamiliar terrain".<sup>23</sup> It was only in 1995 that a new Emergency Response Division (ERD) became operational, and in 1996 UNDP started to allocate a special budget line for support to "countries in special circumstances", including post-war transitions. While the amount available

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<sup>20</sup> Jessica Einhorn, "The World Bank's Mission Creep," *Foreign Affairs*, September-October 2001.

<sup>21</sup> Einhorn, *op.cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Chr. Michelsen Institute, *Evaluation of Danish humanitarian assistance through the UN and international organisations 1992-98*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida. (Evaluation report 1999/9, Vol. 8).

<sup>23</sup> *Sharing new ground in post-conflict situations. The role of UNDP in support of reintegration programmes*. New York: United Nations Development Programme, Evaluation Office, 2000.

from UNDP's core budget has been limited, the agency has attracted additional donor funding for its new role.

After a slow start, the pace has picked up. With a new leadership in 1999 and a reorganized Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, the UNDP sought more aggressively to insert itself in post-conflict reconstruction situations. In Afghanistan, for instance, the new head of UNDP, Mark Malloch Brown, obtained a special mandate from the UN Secretary-General to be "UN Coordinator for Recovery", and the agency positioned itself to play a major role in transitional activities in the country in security (DDR), governance (including human rights) and local-level reintegration and rehabilitation (building on the previous P.E.A.C.E program).

Elsewhere UNDP has been supporting restructuring of government institutions, elections and election monitoring, reintegration of demobilised soldiers, mine action programmes, and other rehabilitation and reconciliation programmes. The Programme has recently expanded its security sector role, e.g. by adding in 2003 a new "justice and security sector reform (JSSR)" program. UNDP has been actively involved in the organisation of post-conflict Round Table donor meetings, establishing special trust funds for rehabilitation and reconstruction, and assisting countries in organising and coordinating donor support for such activities. Through the UN resident coordinator system, UNDP is the lead agency for the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF), with the task of integrating post-conflict, rehabilitation and similar "transition gap" issues into the overall planning of UN activities in a country.

As agencies with a mandate for both emergency and development tasks, **UNICEF** and **WFP** should in theory experience few constraints issuing from their organizational essence when addressing issues that straddle conventional relief-development distinctions.

An independent report for **UNICEF** nevertheless claimed that UNICEF only reluctantly became involved in emergencies.<sup>24</sup> The report argued that a reluctant commitment and engagement in situations of chronic emergencies had had a negative impact not only upon the quality of the relief interventions, but also upon the agency's capacity to conceptualise and operationalize longer term responses to chronic instability. As a result, UNICEF was seen to risk being squeezed out from its aid niche in situations of chronic instability as other relief and development agencies extended their interventions into transitional and rehabilitation programming.

The point was evidently taken. Since mid-1998 the agency has made some effort to change course. It sought to project a consistent policy position that linked UNICEF contributions before, during, and after an emergency. The underlying assumption was articulated: the distinction of emergency versus development strategies had "become *outdated* in the context of global instability, economic crisis, a proliferation of civil strife and conflict, and sudden, unpredictable natural disasters".<sup>25</sup> It was further argued that that UNICEF's long-standing development experience and the framework of the country programme provide a basis for transitional strategies to blend a range of shorter and longer-term interventions into a coherent programmatic response. The claim is supported by the agency's integrated funding structure - UNICEF appeals separately for emergency supplementary funding, but integrates all of its activities within one country program. The agency has increasingly incorporated post-conflict activities and other transitional issues into its regular programme. These include support for traumatised children, demobilisation and integration of child soldiers, reconstruction of day-care centres, schools, local hospitals and health posts, rehabilitation of water supply, and mine awareness raising.

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<sup>24</sup> Joanna Macrae and Mark Bradbury, *Aid in the twilight zone: A critical analysis of humanitarian-development aid linkages in situations of chronic instability*. London: ODI, A report for UNICEF, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> *An overview of UNICEF's humanitarian mandate and activities*. New York: UNICEF, 1999.

**WFP** has traditionally distinguished between emergency and development operations, both operationally and in financial terms. For instance, WFP programs that provided food for refugees or IDPs were long treated organizationally as “protracted emergency operations” even if they lasted for years. While food supplies for development projects generally take the form of “food-for-work” or require another counterpart contribution from the recipient, emergency food supplies are normally distributed free of charge. In protracted emergencies, however, free deliveries are often combined with counterpart schemes, including food-for-seed planting.

WFP's development projects were until the mid-1990s not designed to cater for post-conflict reconstruction needs, although there were some notable exceptions (e.g. Cambodia). In 1997-98, however, WFP produced a new policy paper, “From Crisis to Recovery” which was approved by the Executive Board in May 1998. The paper reviewed WFP's assistance to crisis-affected populations and identified lessons for better linking relief to development.

By the end of the 1990s, WFP claimed they were moving towards a better “blending” of emergency and development operations.<sup>26</sup> The agency cited lessons learned: recovery is haphazard, uneven and complex; a proper strategy for integrating developmental approaches in relief and recovery is needed; situation-specific responses work best; standards (for durability, etc) may have to be adjusted in a recovery stage; and funding arrangements should facilitate recovery. As a consequence, the agency's unit for protracted relief operations (PRO) was renamed to protracted relief *and recovery* operations (PRRO). New guidelines required that in a new emergency operation supported under the EMOP budget lines a recovery strategy must be formulated within 18 months, including early introduction of more forward-looking recovery approaches.

Summarising the development during the 1990s, we see that in the early 1990s, the agencies involved in post-war transition activities were rather few. At the end of the decade, the area had become rather crowded. Traditional humanitarian and development aid agencies had ‘moved in’, in addition, other UN offices and agencies had established themselves in post-war situations as well (e.g. UNDPA in elections, the new High Commissioner for Human Rights in justice areas had also established operational activities in post-war situations). Schematically, and allowing for type of gap areas the multilaterals had moved into, the new situation looked like this (with parenthesis indicating partial moves):

Addressing the institutional disconnect	Filling the macro funding gap	Filling the new issues gap
UNHCR OCHA (World Bank) UNDP  WFP UNICEF	  OCHA World Bank (UNDP)  (WFP)	   World Bank UNDP   (UNICEF)

<sup>26</sup> CMI, *op.cit.*

## 4. Explaining adjustment

The explanations for why the agencies by the end of the decade had all incorporated a problematique into their programs can be found on the contextual, institutional and idiosyncratic level. First, the context was clearly propitious for promoting new aid strategies that addressed transitional issues relating to relief, reconstruction and development. The international political developments in the 1990s favored a focus on humanitarian activities, and – as a number of conflicts were settled or permitted new political beginnings – on consolidation of peace processes. “Conflict prevention” became a new mainstream objective in OECD/DAC deliberations; “peacebuilding” and “post-conflict activities” dominated the aid discourse in the UN system. Huge sums of aid money were pledged to specific post-war situations, particularly in the many high-visibility cases (e.g. 4.5 billion dollars over an equal number of years in Bosnia and Afghanistan). While this was hardly new money for the multilateral agencies in an absolute sense (as it likely would eat into other aid budgets of the donors), for particular agencies and particular programs it appeared as additional funding. Against this background, the agencies obviously had incentives to define problem areas as “a gap” that must be closed in order to consolidate peace, prevent conflict, promote durable solutions to humanitarian problems, and increase the utility of aid by better linking relief to rehabilitation and longer-term development programs. Donor-promoted criteria of “coherence” and “effectiveness” in project evaluations specifically reinforced the power of a gap language.<sup>27</sup> Closing “gaps” was by definition a step towards coherent and effective utilization of aid.

The broader aid context thus favored a discourse and programmatic activity that addressed gaps between relief and development and between violence and rehabilitation in post-conflict situations. Given that all the aid agencies considered here had a humanitarian and/or development mandate, it is not surprising that they all responded by taking the gap problematique on board. Not to do so meant risk of being excluded from an emerging aid niche. The implicit rules of the competition for donor money meant that visibility was important in addition to effective and coherent programs. Since each agency was heavily dependent upon donor contributions for their core as well as program funding, - and in a general sense they competed for the same overall pool of money – they all had a general reason to take up the gap issues.

Yet, as we have seen, the agencies responded differentially. Two moved out ahead of the rest, thereby having considerable responsibility for shaping the discourse and placing the gap issues firmly onto the international aid agenda. Institutional and idiosyncratic factors are here significant. Both were ‘heavy’ agencies in their respective areas – development lending and relief assistance. One (UNHCR), had a strong problem-driven motivation in the sense that its central task (reducing the number of the world’s refugees by promoting durable solutions) was dependent upon effective responses in several related areas (e.g. reintegration, rehabilitation of refugees). Just as the World Bank earlier in a form of lateral issue expansion had taken on a range of social determinants of “development”, increasingly the UNHCR increasingly involved itself in determinants of “refugeehood”. For both UNHCR and the Bank, moving into areas they defined as “gaps” between relief and development could be seen as being logically connected to their core mandate. This facilitated an expansionary policy and helped stem internal criticism that multitasking would dilute the organizational essence and detract from competing obligations. Alongside these intuitional explanations were important idiosyncratic factors: both organizations happened to have new, strong leaders that were open to innovation.

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<sup>27</sup> The criteria are elaborated in publications by the evaluation network ALNAP, administered by the Overseas Development Institute, London. [www.alnap.org](http://www.alnap.org)

By comparison, the other agencies appeared as latecomers and less aggressive. The differential response might well be explained by idiosyncratic factor. It is indicative that a leadership change in UNDP reinforced the agency's subsequent determined move into the gap area.

## 5. Conclusions

The strategy followed by the World Bank and UNHCR in the second half of the 1990s was essentially a regime-building approach. Given the powerful sponsorship, it is remarkable that the Brookings process barely got off the ground. A main reason was that donors resisted regime development of a kind that they feared would obligate new funds and introduce an additional bureaucratic layer in the international aid system. Donors instead preferred to retain control of funding and urged the agencies to address gap issues through improved coordination.

With the regime-building strategy aborted, a competitive market process essentially prevailed. The agencies adjusted by responding individually, although within an elaborate set of rules and consultations prevailing in the UN aid system. In this sense, the functional adjustment, or learning, was a product of a competitive process and did not require a more structured regime. It should be recalled, however, that this conclusion does not necessarily apply to the policy outcome, which has not been addressed in this article. It is quite possible, for instance, that a competitive market process is sufficient for actors in a multilateral aid system to identify new problems and integrate them in their programs. Addressing the problems effectively may well require a more structured approach of a regime kind, as regime proponents indeed argue.



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## SUMMARY

An assumed gap between relief and development assistance was widely discussed in the 1990s. Urged to “mind the gap”, the multilateral aid agencies adjusted. In terms of the initial learning phase - i.e. readiness to recognize a new set of problems and adjust objectives and programs accordingly - the agencies thus responded effectively. Functional adjustment was fostered by agency concern for their organizational standing, reinforced by inter-agency competition. Attempts by two agencies to forge a structured approach and create a regime to address “the gap” was neither successful, nor did it in the end prove necessary. The case suggests that inter-agency competition rather than cooperative regime-building is the easiest way to foster certain kinds of organizational learning.

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