

Conflict and Aid: Enhancing the Peacebuilding Impact of International Engagement

A Synthesis of Findings from
Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka

Jonathan Goodhand with Philippa Atkinson

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Glossary of Terms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CHAD	Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department of DFID
CPE	Complex Political Emergency
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation
DFID	Department for International Development
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HA	Humanitarian Assistance
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IECOM	Independent Elections Commission
IFES	International Foundation for Election Systems
IFRC/RCS	International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IPFK	Indian Peacekeeping Force
JPO	Joint Policy of Operations
JVP	Janatha Vimukht Peramuna (Peoples Liberation Front)
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA	People's Alliance
PCP	Principled Common Programming
PPHO	Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operations
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SELF	Special Emergency Life Food Programme
SF	Strategic Framework
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNOPS	United Nations Operations for Project Services
UNP	United National Party
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

This paper examines whether humanitarian assistance (HA) in war zones can support efforts to promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Is this an objective that should be pursued? Can it be operationalised in practice? Does this represent a more intelligent and expansive form of humanitarianism, or is it a dangerous distortion of humanitarian mandates? Our paper explores these questions and provides a synthesis of findings from country studies of Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Liberia¹.

The report is structured as follows: *Section One* sets the scene by providing a brief overview of current debates on humanitarianism, conflict and peacebuilding. *Section Two* focuses on the three case studies, mapping out the defining features of the conflicts and responses in each country. *Section Three* presents a comparative analysis of the key findings and *Section Four* outlines the main conclusions and recommendations in light of these findings.

I. Current debates on humanitarianism, conflict and peacebuilding

It is argued that a growing critique of HA in war zones during the 1980s and 1990s has broadly led to two schools of thought on the need to reform humanitarianism.

- Humanitarian maximalists – argue that ‘new wars’ require new responses which address the underlying causes of conflict. They believe that a broadening of humanitarian mandates to include developmental and peacebuilding objectives is necessary and HA should be linked to other policy instruments such as diplomacy and trade.
- Humanitarian minimalists – argue for a deepening of humanitarian mandates, which has been described as a ‘back to basics’ approach. They argue for the primacy of the humanitarian imperative and the need to keep HA separate and distinct from other policy instruments.

A number of initiatives associated with these two responses are described. It is argued that current debates have become unhelpfully polarised and both ‘schools’ have generated insights that could usefully be incorporated into current practice.

2. Summary case studies of Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Liberia

An overview of the three country studies is provided, focusing on the nature of the conflicts, the history of international engagement and the humanitarian responses. The case studies highlight contrasting challenges and dilemmas for humanitarian actors. In Afghanistan, HA is delivered in the context of a collapsed state and an ongoing civil war. In Liberia, although a ‘post conflict’ context, with HA being directed towards rehabilitation needs, underlying tensions and the threat of renewed violence remain. In Sri Lanka, with a functioning democratic state and strong social development indicators, the challenges of HA are related primarily to how agencies engage with the state when it is itself a party to the conflict.

3. Comparative findings

A comparative analysis of the case studies is divided into the following sections:

Conflict analysis: The case studies highlight the need for careful analysis of the context. Inappropriate responses were frequently based upon the non-reading or misreading of the situation. The importance of an historical analysis and an understanding of the processes underlying state formation and collapse are stressed. Also highlighted are the dynamic and 'networked' nature of contemporary conflicts, necessitating ongoing, 'live' conflict analysis and a heightened appreciation of the linkages between different actors and levels of conflict. Aid actors were found to be surprisingly weak in their analysis of non-state warring groups, in spite of the fact that they have a profound influence on aid policy and programming. Suggestions are made as to how donors and aid agencies could improve their contextual analysis.

Peace making: HA has been one of a number of policy instruments employed to address conflict and its impacts. In all three countries the international community has supported peace processes, although their engagement has rarely been coordinated and sustained. In the post Cold War world, all three have become 'orphaned conflicts', having limited geopolitical importance to the great powers.

Apart from the need for more robust political action, the cases illustrate the need for new approaches. The Afghan case study highlights the limitations of traditional diplomacy in conflicts involving multiple non-state actors who may have a limited interest in international legitimacy or the incentives that diplomats may offer. Moreover, in all three cases, civil society groups tended to be marginalised by peace processes. Peacemakers have often failed to look beyond the peace accord.

Knowing when *not* to act is another important lesson. In Liberia it has been argued that the international response may have precipitated the CPE because it stalemated a situation that otherwise would have been decided through a military takeover.

Aid responses: The importance of understanding the political economy of aid as well as the political economy of conflict is stressed. This includes an historical analysis of how aid regimes in individual countries change over time in response to international and country-level developments. The recent call for greater *coherence* between aid and other policy responses is critically examined. In Afghanistan aid became a substitute for sustained political action. On the other hand, in Liberia, at certain stages of the peace process, aid *complemented* other policy instruments and helped reinforce the peace settlement. It is argued that more thought should be given as to how HA can be kept both distinct but complementary to other forms of engagement which build or consolidate peace.

The central role played by donors within the aid systems is illustrated in all three case studies. Funding in each country tends to be highly concentrated amongst the major multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors and their influence at the operational level is growing as more conditions are placed on aid. This is accentuated by a growing NGO dependence on official funding sources, inducing a 'crisis of conformity' amongst the NGO sector. In Afghanistan, the problem appeared to be most acute where NGOs demonstrated a limited capacity to conduct independent analysis, challenge donor agendas and develop advocacy strategies accordingly. It is argued that the overbearing influence of aid donors and the lack of downwards donor accountability are systemic problems which need to be confronted and tackled.

These problems are reflected in donor understanding and approaches to conflict. Three different donor approaches to conflict can be identified:

1. Working around conflict: treating conflict as an impediment or negative externality that is to be avoided.
2. Working in conflict: recognising the links between programmes and conflict and making attempts to minimise conflict-related risks, so that aid 'does no harm.'
3. Working on conflict: conscious attempts to design programmes so that they have explicit conflict prevention and peacebuilding objectives.

It was found that, although policy rhetoric has changed, in practice, the major international donors have tended to work 'around' conflict. While it is important to keep a sense of proportion about the role of aid in fuelling conflict, donors who worked 'around' conflict, paid a lack of attention to the context and inadvertently exacerbated underlying tensions. While donors are increasingly aware of the need to work more effectively in or on conflict, what this means in practice is still not clear.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

A number of conclusions are mapped out, including:

- The need for **careful analysis** and **customised approaches**, which are calibrated according to timing and context.
- **Be realistic** about the potential of HA to influence the wider dynamics of peace and conflict. While improvements should be sought, addressing short-comings in the humanitarian response system, in itself, will rarely be enough to 'bring peace.' Much can be done to improve current policy and practice in the area of HA. However, this should not distract attention from the need to invest in more robust and sustained political and diplomatic responses.
- Develop greater **complementarity** between aid and other policy instruments. As Macrae and Leader argue (2000), perhaps we should be talking less about coherence (which may be unrealisable in practice) and more about complementarity, remembering that there needs to be something for aid to complement; a political vacuum cannot be complemented.
- Develop **targeted approaches** rather than 'across the board' negative conditionalities, sanctions and disengagement, which were found to have a limited effect on incentive systems. The only exception to this was, perhaps, the use of targeted sanctions on individual warlords in Liberia. This suggests the need to think very carefully about 'smarter' sanctions, which link into a wider response. In general, however, confrontational conditionalities have had negative impacts, while principled and consistent engagement has often produced positive effects.

- The categorical positions of humanitarian maximalists and minimalist are unhelpful. More effort should be devoted to exploring the middle ground and identifying what **enlightened humanitarianism** means in practice. What current debates and empirical studies show, is the need for donors to be more conscious and honest about the tensions and trade-offs caused by pursuing multiple objectives between, for example, peace, justice and humanitarian needs. There is a need for donors to be more transparent about how they weight different objectives and arrive at policy decisions.
- Cultivate a greater **conflict ‘mindfulness’**. It is incumbent upon donors to develop a more sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of conflict and an understanding of the linkages between aid and conflict. It is not argued that all donors be held accountable in terms of how or whether their aid contributes to peace. However donors should be able to demonstrate a cognisance of the links between aid, conflict and development, just as now, as a matter of course they are expected to show an appreciation of the gender implications of their policies and practice.

Recommendations focus on three areas:

I. Supporting an enabling environment for conflict prevention and peacebuilding

These recommendations are primarily focused at national governments and international agencies, such as the United Nations and OSCE involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding (or conflict fuelling) operations.

- Strengthen political efforts to engage with and support countries at risk of, experiencing or emerging from violent conflict.
- Develop more balanced and complementary approaches, using a range of tools, including diplomatic, military, trade and aid instruments, so that they mutually support and reinforce one another. Develop a more optimal balance between short-term and long-term interventions.
- Do not use HA as the primary or sole instrument to promote conflict resolution or peacebuilding objectives.
- Be prepared to work collaboratively and sacrifice sovereignty in the interests of longer-term structural stability.
- Support policies that are consistent with and based on locally defined needs, rather than on external interests or domestic audiences.
- Develop regionally informed analysis and where possible, support regionally based responses.
- Develop a more optimum balance between sticks and carrots – provide positive incentives, as well as disincentives to conflicting parties.

2. Increasing the conflict sensitivity of aid donors

Develop downward accountability

The lack of downward accountability at all levels is a systemic problem, which needs to be addressed if aid is to become more responsive and consistent with local realities. Donors need to take the question of accountability more seriously; ² a number of ways might be explored to encourage this including:

- Developing codes of conduct and standards for donors in the same way that aid agencies have been developing principles and operating standards.
- An ombudsmen for donors – in which they are held more accountable for their practice and the impacts of their actions – and a complaints procedure for when donors do not meet agreed standards of practice.
- Decentralise decision-making powers to the field level and insist on greater local consultation and analysis.

Develop understanding and analysis

Donors should improve their capacity to conduct joint conflict analysis. They should:

- Develop contacts with a wider range of institutions and actors who can help deepen and broaden donor analysis
- Develop a joined up approach to analysis, which draws upon existing frameworks and avoids compartmentalised thinking and approaches.

Develop internal capacities

Donors should address internal capacity constraints in order to develop conflict sensitive approaches:

- Develop internal incentive systems which encourage learning and analysis
- Allocate more staff and resources for conflict analysis
- Free up more staff time for field visits i.e. spend more time in areas of conflict, listening to the views of those directly affected by war.

Develop new modalities

Donors need to develop new modalities to respond to the challenges of working in or working on conflict. This means customising policy and practice to specific contexts and phases of conflict:

- Develop more flexible systems, which are adapted to the need for transitional forms of funding, which are neither 'pure' relief or 'pure' development
- Provide longer term, multi-year funding
- Provide organisational funding, as well as project-based funding
- Support strategies and processes, as well as just projects

Strengthen investments in capacity building

Capacity building tends to be neglected in areas of conflict. The imperatives for speed marginalise local actors. International organisations often tend to absorb local capacities, rather than build them. Donors should be prepared to provide the time and the resources for capacity building:

- Identify and support institutions that can manage and mitigate conflict
- Develop broader and deeper relationships with civil society organisations, which extend beyond capital city-based, English speaking NGOs
- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of impact which accounts for the impacts of programmes on organisational ‘norms, as well as forms’

3. Enhancing the peacebuilding potential of HA

Mainstream conflict sensitivity

Agencies attempting to develop more conflict sensitive approaches to HA should:

- Put a greater investment into political and social analysis
- Incorporate conflict analysis into strategic planning processes
- Develop a greater awareness of the distributional impacts of policies and programmes

NGO capacities

NGOs should develop their capacities to act as a counter weight to donor pressures and to engage with policy debates. Specifically they should:

- Invest in high quality and independent analysis, which draws upon the views and needs of the communities they work with
- Be prepared to take risks and challenge the policy responses which are not consistent with local realities and needs
- Develop their advocacy strategies and skills so they are better able to influence policy debates

Chapter One: Current Debates on Humanitarianism, Conflict and Peacebuilding

This section provides a summary of current debates on humanitarianism, conflict and peacebuilding. We have attempted to distil the essence of a complex and multifaceted debate, which on occasion has produced more heat than light.³

1.1 New Thinking on Conflict and Aid

During the 1990s there has been a growing body of work on the political economy of conflicts⁴. This work has highlighted the links between conflict, globalisation and the emergence of non-state entities, which are sustained by expanding networks of parallel (illegal) and grey (semi-legal) economic activity⁵. The development of war economies based upon diamonds, drugs or cross border smuggling are manifestations of the emergence of new forms of political economy that are highly adaptive and self sustaining. Recent analysis of 'new wars' has helped move understanding beyond traditional neoclassical analysis, which viewed conflict as irrational and inexplicable. Political economy perspectives emphasise the functionality of conflict; war confers important benefits on certain individuals and groups and does not merely involve the breakdown of society, but the reordering and emergence of new structures and incentive systems.⁶ Although conflicts may crystallise around identity issues, it is argued that the underlying driving forces are political and economic. This body of work has been complemented by other writers who have stressed the sociology and anthropology of violence⁷. Such work helps us understand the meaning people attach to violent events and processes and counterbalances overly economic interpretations of violent behaviour.

It has been argued that mainstream policy responses to conflict have failed to incorporate these emerging insights; international policy is still based on a 'break down' model of conflict, which fails to understand the incentive systems and structures driving violence⁸. However, there has been increased attention to the links between humanitarian aid and the dynamics of conflict and the potential for aid to inadvertently 'do harm'. Aid workers coming back from 'hot spots' like Rwanda, Somalia or the Balkans, and writers such as De Waal (1998)⁹ and Hanlon (1991)¹⁰ have drawn attention to the 'dark side' of aid; it has been argued that aid can sometimes do more harm than good by feeding into the war economy, eroding the social contract between governments and populations, legitimating warring groups and undermining local coping strategies. Therefore, by the mid-1990s, the 'humanitarian critique' had prompted much needed introspection and self-questioning on the part of aid agencies, which in turn led to a search for new approaches.

I.2 New Approaches to Aid

A variety of relief practitioners, donors and theorists have recently urged reform of humanitarian aid in CPEs. Recommendations broadly fall into two schools of thought:

I.2.1 Humanitarian maximalists

The ‘maximalists’ argue that ‘new wars’ require new responses, which respond not only to symptoms, but which also address the underlying causes of conflict. This has led to a broadening or widening of humanitarian mandates to include developmental and peacebuilding objectives, as well as the traditional focus on humanitarian needs. Connected to this trend towards a more expansive form of humanitarianism is the belief that aid should be linked to a more co-ordinated, system wide and multi-levelled response to conflict. Therefore HA should be linked to other policy instruments such as diplomacy and trade to prevent, mitigate or resolve violent conflict.

In reality, this school represents the convergence of a variety of different actors, policies and practices rather than a unified, coherent body of knowledge and practice. Increasingly, in areas of conflict the mandates and programmes of humanitarian, development and conflict resolution actors are merging. Some now see a potential (if elusive) union between relief, development and peace, which in practice translates into ‘three way programming’ i.e. designing programmes that can simultaneously address the three objectives of responding to humanitarian needs, rebuilding livelihoods and supporting reconciliation. This kind of thinking has been reflected in institutional changes. For instance, the emergency aid department of DFID was changed to the Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD), reflecting a shift from aid as a palliative in humanitarian crises to aid playing an active role in conflict reduction.¹¹

Policy debates and approaches commonly linked to the maximalist approach are listed below in Box I along with their underlying assumptions;

Figure I Maximalist Approaches to HA

- The **relief-development continuum** and **developmental relief**: Aid should be designed to support longer-term coping strategies. Aid programmes can move beyond the provision of palliatives – from saving lives to sustaining livelihoods.
- **Do no harm**: Mary Anderson's work has been very influential within the aid community in highlighting the need to ensure that aid does not have perverse outcomes and where possible supports local constituencies for peace.
- **Conflict resolution and peacebuilding**: It is posited that aid can be used as a medium for bringing warring groups together and for engineering social harmony and reconciliation.
- **Good governance**: In addition to humanitarians expanding their mandates to include development, developmentalists have accepted conflict into mainstream development policy. Development assistance is increasingly justified in terms of good governance and as an antidote to structural conflict.
- **Structural stability**: Aid is viewed as one policy tool in an overall package, aiming to tackle the structural roots of conflict. Structural stability is defined as a "situation involving sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures, and healthy social and environmental conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resorting to violent conflict"¹².
- **Aid coherence**: Different policy instruments should work towards a coherent set of goals and not contradict or undercut one another. The Strategic Framework in Afghanistan represents an attempt to operationalise coherence, by developing an institutional link between the political and humanitarian responses to the conflict.

In spite of many of its commonsensical features, maximalist approaches have been strongly critiqued. It has been argued that aid is now being hijacked for purposes that it was never designed for, leading to the distortion of humanitarian principles. The changing global role of UNHCR may be illustrative; critics argue that its original mandate of protection is being eroded as the organisation gets increasingly drawn into a service delivery, reflecting the political shift in the West from asylum to containment. Increasingly, aid is used for achieving political purposes rather than for meeting humanitarian needs. In Afghanistan for example, conditionalities were being applied to HA to promote behavioural change within the Taliban. There are fears that 'do no harm' may be translated into 'do nothing' by governments looking for pretexts to cut aid budgets.

For these reasons, the humanitarian imperative and the 'sacred' principles of neutrality and impartiality are being sacrificed on the altar of political humanitarianism. Some commentators have argued that more expansive approaches represent an attack on the core principles of humanitarianism and they are a dangerous manifestation of the unwillingness of political actors to engage with what are intrinsically political conflicts, which require political responses¹³.

1.2.2 Humanitarian minimalists

The humanitarian 'minimalists' represent a very different response to the critique of aid. The thrust of their reform agenda is that humanitarianism should go 'back to basics', in the sense of reaffirming the core beliefs and principles of humanitarianism. This position is based on a number of assumptions and assertions. Firstly, HA is driven by the humanitarian imperative, or the primacy of human life; in other words saving lives comes first. Secondly, the key frameworks and tools for achieving this are the principles of neutrality and impartiality and international humanitarian law. These represent the tools through which agencies negotiate a framework of respect or humanitarian space for the delivery of aid. Thirdly, although it is recognised that there is a need to ensure aid 'does no harm', it is not part of its mandate to try and 'do good'. In fact, trying to 'do good' corrupts humanitarian principles and detracts from the core task of saving lives. Therefore, in essence, this approach represents a return to fundamentals; a deepening rather than a broadening of mandates.¹⁴

The 'back to basics'¹⁵ school believes the key challenge is one of reaffirming the original principles of humanitarianism, developing accountability and improving standards of relief delivery. In recent years, there have been a number of positive improvements in these areas, including the Red Cross Code of Conduct, the SPHERE programme and the Humanitarian Accountability Project. These initiatives represent attempts by aid agencies to put their own houses in order based on lessons learned during the 1980s and 1990s; however, critics of back to basics argue that in its most extreme form it can amount to a rather rigid and narrow-minded doctrine. In many respects such an approach could be even more vulnerable to politicisation from above. It is also in danger of stifling the creativity and innovation required to meet the new challenges posed by today's conflicts.

1.3 A polarised debate

As Jackson and Walker persuasively argue, the debate between the minimalists and maximalists has become unnecessarily polarised.¹⁶ Categorical either/or positions are unhelpful and create more heat than light; neither have sufficient empirical evidence to back up their claims. The maximalists probably overestimate the impact that aid can have on political processes. On the other hand, the minimalists appear to abdicate any responsibility for engaging with the wider political context, which is equally unhelpful. Both schools however, do have useful things to say and have brought important issues onto the table, many of which have filtered down into improved practice. There is probably a lot more middle ground than the purists on either side would care to admit.

In the following section we attempt to map out how these debates on HA have played themselves out in practice through an examination of case studies in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka. These particular case studies have been selected to highlight contrasting challenges and dilemmas for humanitarian actors. In Afghanistan, HA is delivered in the context of a collapsed state and an ongoing civil war. In Liberia, although a 'post conflict' context, with HA being directed towards rehabilitation needs, underlying tensions and the threat of renewed violence remain. Sri Lanka, with a functioning democratic state and strong social development indicators, provides an interesting contrast to the other two cases. Here, the challenges of HA are related primarily to how agencies engage with the state when it itself is a party to the conflict.

2.1 **Afghanistan**¹⁸

2.1.1 **Background on Afghanistan and the conflict**

Afghanistan is a largely mountainous country situated at the western edge of the Himalayan massif. Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world; ranked 170 out of 174 in the 1995 UNDP's Human Development Index¹⁹. Subsistence takes place within an economy dominated by war and under a collapsed state that is unable to provide basic services for its population. The conflict has led to the loss of nearly 1.5 million lives and the displacement of roughly eight million people²⁰.

Afghanistan brings into focus many of the challenges and dilemmas facing the international community in the 'new world disorder'. Policy makers, diplomats and aid workers have struggled to develop appropriate responses in a context characterised by state breakdown, competing military structures, a growing black economy and widespread destruction and humanitarian distress. The war has mutated over time, starting as a Cold War proxy conflict and then undergoing several phases until it now combines the characteristics of part regional proxy war and part civil war. The military situation, at the time of writing, was stalemated with the Taliban, backed by Pakistan, controlling roughly 90 percent of the territory and the Northern Alliance, supported by Iran, neighbouring Central Asian states, Russia and India occupying the remaining 10 percent in parts of the central highlands and the North East. Although the Taliban control the capital Kabul, they are not recognised by the international community and the previous government, which is now part of the Northern Alliance, occupies Afghanistan's seat at the United Nations.

Economic agendas have become increasingly important during the course of the conflict. The collapse of the state has created a power vacuum that has been filled by non-state military structures. With the end of the Cold War and the decline of Great Power patronage, local actors had to increasingly generate resources locally. The early 1990s have seen the expansion and deepening of a regional war economy based upon opium production and cross-border smuggling. From being a buffer state with closed borders, Afghanistan has become a transmission zone for radical Islamic groups, drugs and illicit smuggling. Few of the actors who profit from this regional war economy have any interest in reforming the state.

2.1.2 History of diplomatic responses to the conflict

Attempts to resolve the crisis have been ongoing. Actors and strategies have varied as the conflict itself has changed. In the Cold War years the diplomatic focus was on the US and Soviet Union, with support roles played by Pakistan and the Afghan regime. In the post Cold War years, the focus has been on the neighbouring regional powers. The UN has assumed the primary peacemaking role and unlike in Europe, Africa, or Latin America, regional organisations have tended to be weak throughout Asia.²¹

UN strategy aims to (a) achieve a cessation of hostilities, (b) seek a regional political consensus in support of the peace process, and (c) seek direct negotiations between all parties on a political settlement²². In terms of achieving these policy objectives, the UN peace process has been a failure, and Afghanistan has proven to be a “graveyard for UN negotiation”.²³ At the time of writing, the framework of talks with the six neighbouring states plus America and Russia, has had a limited impact because of the differing strategic interests of the 6 countries and because they do not influence the transnational and non state entities that are an integral part of the conflict. Such “non state actors may deny the authority of the very framework of rules and norms within which conversations between states occur”.²⁴ Although, one can be critical of the UN role, it is important to note that without the political will of the international community its impact was always going to be limited. As the UN Secretary General commented in 1997, “it could be argued that...the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan is little more than that of an alibi to provide cover for the inaction – or worse – of the international community at large.”²⁵

What emerges very clearly in our analysis of the international response to Afghanistan is that the international community does not know how to deal with dysfunctional states, particularly those of limited strategic interest. The overriding policy response from the Western powers in the post Cold War years has been either one of strategic withdrawal and containment or an aggressive single issue focus. The focus on excluding, rather than dealing with a ‘pariah state,’ is a short-sighted policy based on a poor analysis of the situation. It is not possible to ring fence the problem. Although in many respects Afghanistan is a country on the periphery of the global economy, Afghan non-state actors clearly benefit from close links to global markets. Transnational criminalised networks are undermining economies and politics within the region and beyond. The long term costs of not engaging have not entered the calculations of western governments, or at least not sufficiently to change the current policy of strategic disengagement.

2.1.3 History of aid responses

Aid in Afghanistan has a long history of politicisation. In the 1980s, refugee and cross border programs were seen by many as the non-lethal component of aid to the Afghan resistance. NGOs became the principal means by which humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance was provided inside Afghanistan. This was linked to the broader military strategy of keeping the civilian population inside Afghanistan to provide support to the Mujahideen.

There was considerable secrecy as to the involvement of bilateral donors; NGOs were seen as convenient middlemen, obscuring the original source of funding. This dilution of accountability standards probably contributed to the slow rate of professionalisation among NGOs involved in cross border operations.²⁶ A significant proportion of funding was channelled through cash for food programmes, which were often poorly monitored. SIDA, for example, is reported to have accepted ‘wastage levels’ of up to 40% on such programmes.²⁷

From 1988, the UN, with the formation of UNOCA (later to become UNOCHA), began to play a lead role in the HA programme in Afghanistan. The scaling up of the UN programme and the consequent availability of funding was the trigger for the development of NGO coordination bodies and the proliferation of Afghan NGOs. These developments occurred at a time when the political effort of the UN had lapsed and since the political and strategic stakes were unclear, humanitarianism emerged as an all-round response to state collapse and protracted conflict.²⁸

In 1994, the Taliban surfaced onto the political scene. The emergence of an assertive Islamic traditionalism has created new obstacles, further complicating international humanitarian and peacemaking programmes.²⁹ Taliban edicts, especially those regarding women, contradict international principles and make it impossible for many programmes to reach their intended beneficiaries. In addition to changing external events, the initiation of the Strategic Framework process represented another challenge for humanitarian actors. This was an attempt to link more explicitly the political and humanitarian strategies so that they could better inform and reinforce one another in the interests of peacebuilding.

2.1.4 Mapping aid in Afghanistan

We have emphasised the importance of locating HA in relation to wider policy instruments and objectives. At the time of writing, there is some consensus within donor governments about the key policy objectives; these are peace through a negotiated settlement, respect for human rights, maintaining the integrity of aid and the security of aid staff, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism and refugee return and reintegration.³⁰ There is less consensus, however, about how these policy objectives are implemented in practice. HA has increasingly become entwined with other policy objectives and has in many respects become the chief policy instrument for the international community in Afghanistan.

The main actors in the humanitarian system in Afghanistan are the bilateral and multilateral donors, the UN agencies, NGOs and the ICRC and IFRC/RCS. Aid to Afghanistan is channelled through the Consolidated Appeal, although if resources that come outside the Appeal are included, total disbursements to Afghanistan amount to approximately \$300 million per year. The principle donors in terms of funding levels are the EC, USA, Sweden, UK, Canada and Netherlands. There are fourteen UN agencies and the major actors, again in terms of funding levels, are WFP, UNOCHA, UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR. There are roughly 300 NGOs involved in programmes related to Afghanistan (252 are members of one of the five coordinating bodies).

The vast bulk of donor assistance to Afghanistan is 'humanitarian' – of both life saving and life sustaining nature – with short timeframes. A very small proportion of the assistance is labelled as 'development' (mainly community development) with multiple-year commitments. Of eleven bilateral and multilateral donors interviewed, only three (Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland) stated that they had development assistance frames for Afghanistan. Although funding levels have remained steady in Afghanistan, the Appeal is consistently under-funded for life sustaining, longer term programmes.

Figure 2 The Strategic Framework (SF) and Principled Common Programming (PCP)

The SF and PCP arose as a result of external pressures for UN reform and internal pressures from within the aid system in Afghanistan. SF defines the principles, general policies and institutional arrangements for a coherent and effective response³¹. The “overarching goal of the United Nations in Afghanistan is to facilitate the transition from a state of internal conflict to a just and sustainable peace through mutually reinforcing political and assistance initiatives”³². By contrast, the PCP applies only to the assistance sphere of the international response and it “is a mechanism for establishing the assistance community’s priorities, programmes and projects, based upon agreed goals, principles and the expressed needs of Afghans”.³³

An explicit goal behind the Strategic Framework is to overcome the disconnect between the political and humanitarian responses to the Afghan conflict. It aims to facilitate a more coherent and co-ordinated response from the international community. Some interpret this convergence of humanitarian and wider political agendas in positive terms, viewing it as an innovative attempt to develop a more ‘joined up’ strategy. Others are more sceptical, believing that an explicit link to the political strategy will distort humanitarian mandates, while a cumbersome and centralised structure will place undue limitations on aid agencies.

To an extent, the ‘jury is still out’ in terms of the lessons generated by the Strategic Framework process. While some progress has been made in the assistance sphere in terms of developing coordination mechanisms and common operating principles, there has been little progress towards the wider goal of developing greater complementarity between the political and humanitarian strategies. Ironically, one of the stated objectives of the Strategic Framework in Afghanistan was to develop a more demand driven approach; however, it has not addressed the crux of the problem, which is that of accountability.

2.1.5 Aid, conflict and peacebuilding

Donors and agencies have become increasingly aware of the potential for aid to do harm and have adjusted their practices and accountability systems accordingly. The focus has, however, remained firmly on avoiding doing harm rather than on ‘doing good’. There has in recent years been a dangerous convergence between do no harm principles and aid conditionalities on the Taliban. Support for water and sanitation programmes in Kabul is a case in point. Some argue that this represents a life saving humanitarian programme, while a number of donors argue that since it is implemented through the local administration it represents a form of capacity building which indirectly supports the Taliban and in this sense is ‘doing harm’. The difference between life saving, life sustaining and capacity building aid has become increasingly blurred as conditionalities are applied indiscriminately. Therefore, supporting a water supply department to provide potable water for a population or assisting a government-owned hospital are seen as capacity building and are to be avoided. Apart from the ethical questions this raises, it also has had limited effectiveness in terms of producing behavioural change on the part of the Taliban.

Donors who incorporate peacebuilding objectives into their assistance strategy are in a minority. Three of the donors interviewed, Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland, have consciously attempted to support their partners to mainstream conflict reduction and peacebuilding strategies into humanitarian and community development work. However, the lion’s share of funding to Afghanistan is for short-term relief and food aid. Efforts to work ‘on conflict’ are a very small part of the overall picture. A number of different approaches have been applied, including those which attempt to mainstream peacebuilding into ongoing relief and development work – for example, through community development, capacity building or human rights programmes – and those which have an explicit focus on conflict reduction and management.

Of the latter category, activities include training workshops in conflict resolution, peace education and radio programmes. Whilst case studies point to the positive impacts of low key, sensitive, community development work, in the current political environment it is unlikely that such efforts could have a cumulative impact. At best, they represent a holding operation, or help prepare the ground for peace by supporting local leadership and nurturing community level social capital.

Although the predominant practice on the ground is one of humanitarian minimalism, at the policy level conditionalities are being applied in the belief that aid can have an impact on the wider political context; either it can be withheld to promote behavioural change or it can be applied to support peace and reconciliation. This has posed ethical and practical problems for humanitarian agencies. Firstly, there is the perception that aid has increasingly moved from being needs driven to being politically driven. Secondly, the politicisation of aid has affected local perceptions of aid agencies on the ground, compromising their neutrality and impartiality. Thirdly, the practical impact of conditionalities in terms of affecting behavioural change has been limited. It is based on a misreading of the situation on the ground and a failure to understand incentive systems.

As these policies are pushed down the aid chain they encounter resistance. The closer one gets to the field, the greater the level of scepticism about the potential for aid to build peace in Afghanistan. Agencies have developed their capacities to work 'in conflict' more effectively, but few feel that the preconditions are there to justify a major investment in attempts to work 'on conflict'. If there is no process happening further up the political chain, then aid investments can have only a transitory and limited impact.

2.2 Liberia

2.2.1 Background on Liberia and the conflict

Liberia is a small tropical country on the West African coast with an estimated pre-war population of 2.2 million people from sixteen major tribes. It was established in the 1820s by freed U.S. slaves, whose Americo-Liberian descendants continued to dominate the political economy until ousted by a military coup in 1980. Deepening economic mismanagement, corruption and political repression followed the military takeover. Growing opposition to military rule led to a civil war in 1990, seen by many as the only way to oust President Doe.

The war can be divided into various phases, from its revolutionary beginnings in 1989-1990, through factionalisation and warlordism from 1993-95, to the current uneasy peace dating from late 1996. During the early years of the conflict, Taylor's slogan of 'conflict as resolution' resonated with many Liberians, particularly the rural youth and the educated diaspora, frustrated during the Doe years. This initial populism, however, was undermined by Taylor's ruthless ambition, first demonstrated by the killing of rivals for the NPFL leadership and in the techniques used in battle and recruitment.

Charles Taylor, as an individual, has always been a dominant factor in the conflict and has been consistently underestimated by his opponents and the international community. Taylor's first attempt to take Monrovia was prevented through the military intervention of regional grouping ECOWAS through Ecomog, but the creation of a relatively effective non-state polity of Greater Liberia in the rest of territory held by NPFL established his power.

Factionalisation developed as a result of the continued strong opposition to Taylor, both from Liberians and internationally, as well as the emulation of Taylor's strategy by other political and military actors. Military control of an area enabled the faction both to claim a political role, as well as to gain economic strength to support their military activities. The system that developed was to some extent a continuation, but in more extreme form, of patterns of predation from the pre-war political economy. At the height of conflict in 1993/94, levels of violence and the extent of disruption precluded economic productivity, while the extent of predation on civilians, in many areas used as slave labour, greatly damaged any attempts by factions to develop rural support bases. While economic predation was certainly a major aspect of the warlord phase, also important were the opportunities it provided, particularly for young men, to reverse existing power relationships. Therefore, psychological factors beyond greed were also motivating factors.³⁴

A range of internal and external factors contributed to the settlement of the conflict. These included the predatory methods used by factions, which meant there was 'nothing left to steal' following fighting in Monrovia in April 1996. Diplomatic action also contributed, with proactive policy from the international community and rapprochement between Taylor and the Nigerians during 1995, perhaps the most critical factor in the resolution. But despite the ending of open and protracted conflict since internationally monitored disarmament and elections in 1997, the continuation of negative patterns in the political economy from the war and pre-war years leaves the possibility of future conflict very real. There has been minimal rehabilitation and reinvestment. International aid is restricted and income from activities that have been restarted, such as logging and mineral extraction, is diverted from the public purse.

2.2.2 Diplomatic responses to the conflict

At the start of the conflict the US was seen as the natural leader of any international response, due to its close historical relationship with Liberia. The primary intervention role however, was delegated to the regional group ECOWAS, which established Ecomog to carry out a military intervention in part on humanitarian grounds and held a series of peace talks under its auspices. However, the partisan nature of the military operation, which was driven primarily by Nigeria's anti-Taylor position, left it fundamentally flawed from the outset. The prevention by Ecomog of the NPFL from taking the capital city represents for some commentators a key factor in the prolongation of the war.³⁵ Initially, the UN was little involved diplomatically, except to back the Ecomog intervention through Security Council resolution 911 in January 1991 and in a statement in May 1992.

There was growing criticism of the lack of neutrality of Ecomog following its direct action against the NPFL in late 1992 and 1993, as well as tension with humanitarian actors as the military force tried to include aid resources in its embargo on Taylor's areas. Although UNOMIL was then established in the Cotonou agreement of 1994 to oversee Ecomog, the UN force remained fairly weak, suffering from a lack of clarity on its mandate especially in its relationship to Ecomog. Following the rapprochement between Taylor and the Nigerians, Ecomog and UNOMIL were able to play an important role during disarmament and elections, highlighting the absolute necessity of strong political basis from which to mount any military intervention.

Despite earlier failures, the international community in the form of major donors (the US and EC, ECOWAS and even the OAU) did eventually play a major positive role from 1996 in pushing for resolution to the war. An increased awareness of the economic foundations of the conflict led to sanctions and threats by the OAU (Statement on 25th July 1996) and by donor groups (November 1996). While it is difficult to gauge the real impact of the policy, it undoubtedly helped to increase pressure for peace during that period. As one donor put it, "you had something to use against them if they didn't comply... these guys were concerned about their international reputations, they didn't want to be war criminals." The highly targeted nature of the sanctions, which were contingent on the fulfilment by faction leaders of the provisions of the final Abuja II agreement of September 1996, greatly helped to increase their effectiveness.

Following partial disarmament and preparations for elections, the threat of a war crimes tribunal and other sanctions were dropped. The reality of Taylor's power, as confirmed in his victory in the elections of July 1997 posed a real dilemma for the international community in terms of the unavoidable trade-off between peace and justice. While international efforts to promote the peace process were certainly positive, the question remains as to whether a more sustained focus on justice as an integral aspect of peace during that crucial period when pressure was possible, could have contributed to a better outcome. Moreover, it has been argued that early support by the international community of the partisan Ecomog intervention contributed to the length and intensity of war. Therefore the record of international intervention in Liberia is a mixed one.

2.2.3 History of aid responses

Specialist UN agencies and INGOs initiated emergency assistance programmes in refugee receiving countries and Monrovia in early 1990. By 1991, the UN and NGOs were active upcountry, although hindered by continuing insecurity, as well as NPFL perception of UN partiality.³⁶ As the conflict intensified into the warlord phase, aid delivery mechanisms came under increasing attack. The confrontation between some agencies and Ecomog over aid delivery to Taylor's territory, brought to the fore issues of partiality and fuelling conflict through misappropriation of aid resources by fighters. Following a major looting of an upcountry humanitarian base in which different factions were involved, ICRC retreated from working in upcountry Liberia claiming that its conditions for working according to humanitarian principles could not be met. A growing understanding of the nature of the war was accompanied by increasing debate among aid actors about the moral dilemmas they faced in trying to respond to real humanitarian needs, as well as about practical strategies to overcome the difficulties faced in delivery.

These debates culminated in the adoption by the humanitarian community of common operating principles based on IHL, the PPHO (Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operations) and, later, by the INGO community, the JPO, or (Joint Policy of Operations). The former set out principles of operations for agencies in order to minimise harassment and diversion of aid resources by military groups and better serve civilian populations. Adoption of the agreement led to improvements in aid delivery mechanisms, including the insistence by agencies on joint assessments before deliveries. This also contributed to dialogue between military and political actors and humanitarian ones. The JPO was a more radical attempt by NGOs to limit their service to only life saving work. In addition, it also attempted to limit the abuse of aid resources

and was a form of humanitarian sanctions on the factions following the April 1996 fighting in Monrovia.³⁷ This contributed in some degree to pressure on factions for disarmament and resolution during 1996.³⁸

Aid actors continued to play an important role during the resolution phase by linking aid resources with the disarmament process through the DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation) policy, developed by the US and EC. The strategy was based upon the foundations of effective co-ordination and strong analysis, which were developed during the PPHO period.³⁹ INGOs continued to pursue independent action within the forum of the JPO; many viewed the disarmament process as fundamentally flawed, feeling that it was *'playing into the hands of Taylor'*. Their lack of involvement in the DDR programmes undermined the effectiveness of the attempt to link demobilisation with rehabilitation, as a lack of coverage left the majority of ex-combatants and communities with little or no assistance. The main dilemma during the post settlement phase has been one of balancing humanitarian and rehabilitation goals with the dangers of reinforcing the negative dynamics of Taylor's regime.

Since disarmament and the election of Taylor, conditionality on aid has become the major aspect of policy, with the EC recently restricting their aid even further, following UK lobbying about President Taylor's on-going role in the Sierra Leone conflict. The US government has also limited its aid relationship with Liberia since the elections. Food aid, primarily for Sierra Leonean refugees, forms a large proportion of current assistance, with some funding for more political or peace building programming implemented through NGOs. All donors and agencies support some micro level rehabilitation work, but little major infrastructure development has yet been started, with restrictions on some projects due to an inability to develop effective partnerships with Taylor's government. In addition to political constraints, Liberia's large outstanding debt also limits any role for the IMF and World Bank. Aid conditionality has, however, proved to be a blunt instrument and appears to have a far greater impact on the general population than on political actors. While politicians continue to strengthen their own positions through accumulation, the general population suffers from a lack of basic services and employment opportunities or even the restoration of minimal pre-war living standards.

2.2.4 Mapping aid in Liberia

The US and EC together account for over three-quarters of all aid disbursed during the war.⁴⁰ This has mainly been channelled through WFP, with food aid accounting for 60-80% of the estimated average \$100m per year total aid. Many other government agencies have also contributed particularly the Scandinavians and Dutch, with public and private funding usually channelled through international and local NGOs. Much private aid from Europe and the US is church related, with private European donations also through the MSFs. ICRC was involved from the start, delivering food upcountry until conditions deteriorated. UNHCR has also been a major presence in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire throughout the 1990s, working through WFP, as well as INGOs and LNGOs.

Throughout the conflict, aid has been primarily humanitarian in terms of its funding and implementation, with short-term planning and policy horizons discouraging a more strategic approach until the mid-1990s. Rehabilitation programmes have been implemented in various forms, including the use of food for work as an incentive for ex-combatants and in infrastructure and livelihood rehabilitation. Programming with longer term objectives has been more widely attempted since disarmament, seen in the DDR policy implemented by the EC and UNOPS through the micro project approach, as well as UNHCR's quick impact programmes. Difficulties faced include the challenge of combining quick impact with a serious developmental approach based on participation and partnership.

Some agencies have also promoted capacity building efforts. A local NGO, SELF, has provided employment and training in skills ranging from computer data processing to community level negotiation. A number of other agencies, including UNICEF, LWS and SCF, have focused on internal capacity building, leading to more effective and locally grounded programming.⁴¹ Capacity building, however, has remained at the level of skill transfer, rather than any fundamental change in power relations. Liberian agencies still lack policy influence in relation to international organisations. This was illustrated during the JPO period, when INGOs rejected a local NGO consortium suggestion of a joint and co-ordinated advocacy strategy, subsequently seen by some as a missed opportunity.⁴² Moreover, while the wider political framework is currently so limiting, it is difficult to scale-up activities and have a longer-term impact. Although there may be some positive impacts at micro level from the various small-scale programmes, the lack of progress on political issues from natural resource extraction to regional security continues to limit the establishment of genuine and lasting peace in Liberia.

2.2.5 Aid, conflict and peacebuilding

NGOs developed innovative and effective responses during the warlord phase of the conflict, based on a sophisticated analysis of the war and improved coordination. As support for conflict resolution was stepped up, strong linkages were developed with other policy instrument, so that humanitarianism *complemented* diplomatic strategies, such as targeted sanctions. The conflict resolution strategy included support for the elections through EC funding for IECOM (Independent Elections Commission), US funding for NGOs with specific peacebuilding mandates, such as IFIES, as well as sufficient funding for ECOMOG and UNOMIL operations to supervise the process. In addition to rehabilitation programmes designed to support demobilisation and reconciliation, more direct political programmes were funded by a variety of donors. These include support by the US for an independent radio station, Star Radio (which was taken off the air by President Taylor in 2000), to UNICEF funding for children's rights advocacy NGO, Voice of the Future. Programmes focusing on press freedom and prisoners rights were also supported and contributed to real improvements.⁴³

Although the disarmament exercise itself was only partially successful, and the Taylor election victory was not the desired outcome, the resolution of open conflict has resulted in some level of peace and security for the Liberian population. Where the strategy was effective, such as in improving humanitarian access, and in the restoration of relative security, it was the result of genuine co-ordination of strategy and action between the various international actors.

Currently, the major issue in terms of peace building and aid in Liberia is the lack of coherent analysis and action. Instead of aid being used in support of other positive or at least balanced diplomatic level actions, it has become the sole focus of negative policy based entirely on conditionality. Without a meaningful rehabilitation process the risk of a return to violence is very realistic. While many agencies continue to implement micro level programmes from humanitarian to rehabilitation to peace building, many of which may be having genuine positive local impacts, the overall policy vacuum leaves existing tensions unresolved, and the political situation unchanged.

Recent attempts to broaden policy objectives, such as international restrictions on conflict diamonds, are to be welcomed, but such initiatives at the international level must be linked through donor governments to more positive action on the ground, including political engagement (and not just negative conditionalities) and the provision of resources for rehabilitation and development.

2.3 Sri Lanka

2.3.1 Background on Sri Lanka and the conflict

Sri Lanka is a lower-middle income country with an average per capita income of US\$814, ranking 91 out of 175 countries. Although Sri Lanka has been a high achiever in terms of social development (with an adult literacy rate of 91%), it has been a less than average performer in economic development. One of the principal reasons for the relatively slow rate of growth in comparison to other countries in South and South East Asia, has been the ongoing civil war⁴⁴. The war has been a crushing burden on national development efforts. Military expenditures have risen from 4 percent of total government expenditure in 1981 to 22% in 1997, crowding out various civilian expenditures.⁴⁵

The secessionist conflict began in 1983 and has undergone three phases – commonly called Ellam wars 1, 2 and 3 – interspersed with fragile cease-fires and peace talks, which have led to further and intensified violence. Between 1987 and 1990 for example, an Indian Peacekeeping force (IPKF) failed to bring peace because it became enmeshed in the conflict itself. 70,000 people have been killed by the war and over one million out of a population of 17 million have been displaced at various times. Since 1995, the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has pursued a ‘war for peace’ strategy, attempting to defeat the LTTE militarily or weaken it to the extent that it is forced to pursue peace. This strategy has failed and there appears little likelihood of a military solution to the conflict in the near future. During 2000, the LTTE made significant advances in the north-east by taking the strategically important military camp at Elephant Pass, the gateway to the northern Jaffna peninsula. The LTTE’s subsequent advance on Jaffna was beaten back after the GOSL rapidly purchased new military hardware. LTTE victories, however, have meant not only territorial gains, but also large hauls of weapons and ammunition. They are well organised and motivated and are funded by an extensive diaspora network. It was against this background that the latest Norwegian supported diplomatic initiative started in 2000.

Although the conflict is centred in the Tamil populated areas of the north-east, war-induced insecurity is experienced throughout the island, with LTTE suicide attacks in the capital Colombo, the bombing of economic targets and a growing problem of army deserters in rural areas in the South. There are also several other axes of violent conflict, some of which have become militarised (for example the JVP insurgency⁴⁶) and others, which have remained latent (for example grievances amongst the Hill Country Tamils). Therefore, militarised violence has had an impact on Sri Lankan society in its totality.

The Sri Lankan conflict can be contrasted to Afghanistan and Liberia in a number of respects. Firstly, the international dimensions of conflict have been less of a factor in Sri Lanka in the sense that it has not become entwined with superpower or regional rivalries⁴⁷. Secondly, conflict is not a cause or consequence of a collapsed state; a seeming anomaly of the Sri Lankan war is that democracy, communalism and conflict have run alongside and fed into one another. Thirdly, although Sri Lanka is a protracted conflict in which vested interests develop and profit from its continuation, the driving force behind the war continues to be political grievances rather than 'greed', which again contrasts with Liberia and Afghanistan.

2.3.2 Diplomatic and political responses to the conflict

Apart from the GOSL's military strategy, it has also attempted to push through a constitutional reform package aiming to address the underlying sources of grievance amongst the Tamil population (and in so doing undermine the LTTE's support base). Diplomatic initiatives have also been ongoing, the most recent being a Norwegian offer (with Indian backing) to facilitate peace talks.

After coming to power in 1995 the People's Alliance (PA) government put forward a political package for constitutional reform which was more far reaching than earlier initiatives. It envisaged a system of devolution requiring fundamental amendments to the constitution, and the reformulation of the Sri Lankan state from a unitary entity to a 'united and sovereign republic with a Union of Regions'.⁴⁸ This package, however, did not pass through Parliament and after new parliamentary elections in 2000, a more fragile coalition government emerged. Sufficient political consensus for the necessary constitutional change is currently unlikely.

Throughout the conflict, mixes of different approaches to the peace process have been tried, although the weighting has changed according to the ground conditions and priorities of the various actors. Common criticisms of previous negotiations have been: an absence of long-term strategic thinking and intra and inter party consensus, the lack of co-ordination between the various conflict resolution 'tracks', the critical importance of timing and the failure of actors to exploit windows of opportunity when they presented themselves, the lack of understanding of the incentives systems and structures driving conflict, an inability to appreciate the importance of 'process-based' approaches to conflict resolution. The Norwegian supported peace talks broke down in the middle of 2001, as neither side could agree on the basic preconditions necessary to begin substantive talks.

2.3.3 History of donor responses

Historically, Sri Lanka has been one of the highest aid per capita recipients. During the 1970s, the majority of economic aid was directed towards the state to fund major development projects, such as land colonisation programmes and major infrastructure programmes.

From 1977, when Jeyewardene's UNP government came to power, aid to the Sri Lankan state has supported and encouraged liberalisation of the economy, as well as investing in infrastructure and social spending. Notable among these projects was the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project, which also had an impact on the ethnic geography of the north-east, leading to land colonisation projects in which Sinhalese settlers moved into predominantly Tamil areas.

More recently, donor programmes in the 1990s have largely been designed to diminish the role and size of the state, in pursuit of further moves towards market liberalisation and away from the centralist welfare state model. Since 1983, another important dimension of donor support has been the provision of humanitarian assistance to the North East. Therefore, there is a strong spatial and institutional division of aid in Sri Lanka; in the South, development assistance is provided through the government, while in the North East relief assistance is provided, largely through UN, ICRC and international NGOs. Relief programmes have been scaled up and down according to the ebbing and flowing of the conflict, with major relief programmes in the late 1980s and mid 1990s when there was mass displacement after military operations. Rehabilitation programmes have been attempted in the lulls between the conflict or in more stable zones. In 1996 for example, the UN supported the Jaffna Relief and Rehabilitation Programme which involved a focus on longer term capacity building with the local government. There is, however, limited scope for major infrastructure investment in the north-east while the war continues.

2.3.4 Mapping aid in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka received, on average, a total of \$898 million per annum in official development assistance through loans and grants in recent years, an amount equivalent to 7% GDP, slightly larger than the government's public investment budget. Due to the significant economic impact of the civil conflict and the Government's efforts to reduce the budget deficit, donor-financed projects constitute a significant proportion of the overall public sector investment programme.

Roughly, two thirds of the funding is in the form of loans to GOSL. 85% of total funding for Sri Lanka comes from the ADB, World Bank and Japan. Aside from their financial role, these organisations have also been very influential, particularly the World Bank, in shaping government economic policy. The most significant bilateral agencies, apart from Japan, are Germany, Norway, Netherlands, USA, Sweden and UK. Other significant actors within the aid system are the United Nations, ICRC/IFRC and NGOs. Unlike many other areas of conflict, Sri Lanka has a thriving local NGO sector working throughout the island in a variety of sectors, including community development, relief, human rights, conflict resolution and policy advocacy.

There are basically three types of aid to Sri Lanka: (1) conventional development assistance channelled through GOSL, with primary focuses on structural adjustment, liberalisation, government reform and infrastructure investment. (2) Humanitarian assistance provided to the North East, most of which comes out of separate, short-term humanitarian budget lines and aims to address the social costs of the conflict. (3) A number of smaller bilateral donors, such as Norway, Canada, Netherlands and Germany provide assistance to civil society organisations focusing on areas such as human rights, conflict resolution, capacity building and judicial reform. Although the level of funding is small in relation to donor support in the first category, these bilateral donors have had an important influence by introducing alternative approaches and raising questions on issues like human rights and peacebuilding that the more government focused donors are reluctant to do.

Although funding levels have remained constant in recent years, in the medium term they are expected to decline. Aid is likely to decline in significance as foreign direct investment becomes more important and donors withdraw, either because the conflict prevents them from achieving their objectives or because once Sri Lanka achieves middle income status, it is no longer a priority country. As this happens, the potential for aid to have an impact on peacebuilding processes is likely to decline. In the short term however, aid is a significant policy instrument in the Sri Lankan context and can have an important influence on the incentives systems and structures of the conflict. It has not been lost on a number of donors for example that aid disbursements are roughly equivalent in total to the GOSL's military spending.

2.3.5 Aid, conflict and peacebuilding

Broadly donors have responded to conflict in three ways: (1) the predominant approach has been to work *around conflict* i.e. conflict is a disruptive factor to be avoided. Therefore donors avoid working in conflict-affected areas and development aid is put on hold in the North East. If a link between conflict and development is acknowledged, it is that conflict is an impediment, which can be removed with greater market openness and deregulation. The major donors such as Japan and ADB have taken this line, both of whom have avoided working in the North East until the 'war is over'. Although the World Bank has, in recent years, begun to invest in the North East, this has not affected the main portfolio of programmes supported in the South, which are still in the main 'conflict blind'. (2) Agencies working in the North East have been forced to become more cognisant of the links between their programs and conflict. As a result they have adapted programs so that they can work more effectively *in conflict* by reducing conflict related risks and ensuring that aid does no harm. International NGOs such as OXFAM and CARE have analysed their programs in relation to the conflict dynamics, while UNHCR, working in Jaffna, has avoided making heavy investments that may be vulnerable to the ebbing and flowing of conflict. (3) There is a small group of bilateral donors who recognise the link between development and conflict and have an explicit focus of working *on conflict*. Norway, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and UK have all begun to identify programming opportunities for working on conflict. A range of initiatives have been funded in areas, such as human rights, poverty alleviation, good governance, education and conflict resolution, which have an explicit focus on conflict. While these initiatives are significant in terms of bringing new ideas and lessons to the donor-government table, in relation to the bulk of donor funding they are relatively small scale and are unlikely to affect wider incentives systems and structures.

Although donor aid has not fed the war economy in quite the same way as it did in Afghanistan during the 1980s or Liberia in the 1990s, poorly conceived aid programmes in Sri Lanka have tended to follow the fracture lines of the conflict. In the main, it has been donor development assistance, rather than HA that has exacerbated tensions and conflict. Donor support for the Mahawelli dam project during the 1980s was an obvious case. Donors supported this project because of its evident benefits in terms of economic growth; however, they either chose to ignore or were ignorant of the political implications and impacts of a program which redrew the ethnic geography of dry zone areas. Furthermore, support for government education programs has helped create an education system, which reinforces ethnic and language differences. The spatial and institutional separation of development aid to the South and relief assistance to the North East also feeds into the negative dynamics of the conflict by accentuating regional imbalances. Donor support for liberalisation and down sizing the state have accentuated inequalities and undermined the development gains of previous decades.

One of the chief lessons from the case of Sri Lanka, is that while efforts should be pursued to increase the conflict sensitivity of HA, most important is the need to ensure that the major development donors i.e. the World Bank, Japan and the ADB, are more conflict sensitive. Such donors have played an important role in setting the development agenda in Sri Lanka over the last three decades. Structural adjustment and liberalisation programmes have been implemented with a limited appreciation of the historical and political context or the distributional impacts of aid programmes. The key to more conflict sensitive aid in Sri Lanka is to get the 'big three' to take the issue seriously and mainstream it into their policy and programmes. A more balanced approach is required; a balance between liberalisation and social investment, between support for the state and for civil society and between investment in the South and development in the North.

Chapter Three: Findings

3.1 Conflict Analysis

The case studies highlight the need for careful analysis of the context. Inappropriate responses were frequently based upon the non-reading or misreading of the situation. The following points can be highlighted, first about the nature of conflict and second about how donors analyse it.

3.1.1 Making sense of conflict

Conflicts are multi-levelled and multi-dimensional. This calls for multi-disciplinary forms of analysis, which blend different conceptual frameworks, including; political economy to understand the functionality of violence, strategic studies to understand the regional dimensions, anthropology to understand the social structures and 'emotional economy' of violence etc. It also necessitates multi-levelled analysis. Table 2 illustrates some of the different levels or dimensions of the three conflicts.

Table 1 Dimensions of conflict in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka			
	<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Liberia</i>	<i>Sri Lanka</i>
<i>International</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ from Cold War proxy war to regional proxy war ■ role of Iran and Pakistan, central Asia – regional conflict system ■ transnational drugs, arms and smuggling networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ traditional US involvement ■ regional power influences ■ international companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ role of India – IPKF, Tamil groups in Tamil Nadu ■ Tamil and Sinhalese diasporas ■ limited interest of 'great powers' ■ impacts of structural adjustment and welfare reform
<i>National</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 'collapsed state' ■ warlordism and war economy ■ emergence of regional non state entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 'patrimonial state' ■ warlordism and war economy ■ reconstituting the state but continued structural violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 'contested state' ■ crisis of identity, policies and legitimacy ■ separatist conflict – importance of ideology ■ war for peace
<i>Local</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ identity conflicts – religion and ethnicity ■ local conflicts over resources – land pastures etc. ■ clash between tradition and modernity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Americo-Liberians ■ ethnic and inter-generational tensions ■ clientalist vertical linkages – big politics and small politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ethnic enclaves ■ disaffected youth ■ gender and inter-generational tensions

Listing the different dimensions of conflict does not, however, take us very far. The key appears to lie in understanding the relationships between these different factors and how they are weighted. Analysts increasingly use terms like 'networked' war or 'cooperative conflicts' to highlight the shifting patterns of relationships and linkages that develop within CPEs. This means understanding the vertical linkages between micro and macro level processes, such as the links between the poor opium farmer in Afghanistan, the commander who controls the local drug trade and the Central Asian drugs mafia who link into global markets. This also means understanding the horizontal relationships running across zones of conflict, for instance the transnational networks linking the Taliban with Kashmir and Chechnya, or the relationships between the Tamil diaspora and the LTTE.

There are many 'black holes' in current analyses and responses are often framed on assumptions and anecdotes, rather than on empirical evidence. The international community is several steps away from developing appropriate responses to failed states, as there is insufficient knowledge of what causes states to collapse or conflict systems to perpetuate themselves. Donors (and the international community in general) have a surprising lack of understanding of the incentive systems and structures of non-state military actors. There is limited knowledge, for example, of the motivations and internal structures of the Taliban or LTTE and yet such organisations have a huge influence over the lives of communities living in Afghanistan and Sri Lanka respectively. If we do not have an empirical understanding of such military formations, it is unlikely that outsiders will be able to affect incentive systems to transform the war economy into a peace economy or encourage the warlord to become a statesman.

Our case studies highlight the central importance of the state, both in terms of understanding the causes of conflict and in terms of identifying possible solutions. In Sri Lanka, the state remains alive and well, not least as an active participant in armed conflict and to an extent a source of obstacles to its resolution. In Afghanistan, the roots of the conflict lie in the failure of state modernisation programmes and its continuation in the vacuum left by the collapse of the state. In Liberia, the conflict cannot be understood without reference to the history of the patrimonial state and the breakdown of the conflict management mechanisms of the state. An analysis of the politics of the state is therefore not an extra dimension of the complexity which has to be analysed to get practical aid right, rather it becomes the "overriding priority"⁴⁹

Finally, the case studies highlight the dynamic nature of conflicts, which have a tendency to go through various phases and to mutate. Afghanistan is a classic example of how the main drivers behind conflict can change over time. It is also an example of how external agencies can be slow to change their frames of reference to take the new realities into account. Aid agencies in the early 1990s were slow to discard their Cold War assumptions, even though it was clear to many analysts that the conflict had entered into a new phase. Without a better understanding of the dynamics of conflict it is difficult to (a) predict the trajectory of violence (b) design interventions that will support the emergence of new, less predatory forms of political economy and (c) assess whether such interventions are making a difference or not.

3.1.2 How donors make sense of conflict

The case studies highlight the need to match responses to contexts. Although the three contexts are extremely different, donor behaviour was remarkably uniform, showing very limited adaptation to local conditions. Evidently, every context needs to be treated with respect and analysed on its own merits and donors need to think more deeply about the essence of particular conflicts. Policy response to the Sri Lankan conflict, for instance, would be very different if it was understood as essentially a crisis of the state rather than as an ethnic conflict.

Donors continue to place a greater premium on ‘doing’ than on ‘understanding’.⁵⁰ Pressures on time and internal incentives systems do not encourage sophisticated analysis. Contextual analysis is often based on consultation with a narrow group of ‘aid centric’ informants in the capital city. Too often, each donor does their own individual analysis in isolation from other donors and they define the problem primarily in terms of their capacity to respond. A poverty-focused donor may therefore understand the conflict as a problem of poverty. In Liberia, the relative success of donor and agency actions in the mid 1990s was based upon a joint analysis of conflict structures and incentives, which led in turn to coherent ‘joined up’ responses.

Box 3 highlights some of the practical implications of our findings for donors:

Figure 3 Understanding conflict – the implications for donors

- The starting point for any form of analysis should be a sense of humility and **realism**; understanding is always incomplete and partial.
- Avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach and place a greater emphasis on understanding the **historical and political context**.
- Place a greater emphasis on understanding **incentives systems**; develop an understanding of the motivations and coping strategies of those who wage war as well as those who suffer from it.
- Develop **dynamic and ‘live’ systems** of analysis that can track conflict over time and identity patterns and trends. Long lists of static indicators are of limited value.
- Think outside of ‘disciplinary boxes’; take an **eclectic approach** that draws upon and blends different conceptual tools and disciplines.
- Develop **multidisciplinary teams** who can conduct ongoing conflict analysis that feeds into donor policy.
- Develop **relationships and networks** with other actors who can provide high quality analysis, such as academic institutions, think tanks, NGOs and civil society groups.
- Place a greater emphasis on **listening** to the voices of those living in areas of conflict, which are frequently missing in mainstream analysis.
- Develop **internal incentive systems** so that high quality analysis is appreciated and rewarded.

3.2 Peace-making responses to conflict

We have stressed that aid cannot be viewed in isolation from other forms of response.

Aid, in all three countries, has been one of a number of policy instruments, including diplomatic, military, political and trade instruments, all of which are applied in response to conflict.

The three case studies highlight the difficulties associated with external interventions in conflict. The track record of conflict resolution processes and negotiated settlements to conflict is a poor one. A study conducted by Licklider (1995) found that out of 91 civil conflicts between 1945 and 1993, 76% ended when one side won a decisive victory. Of the negotiated settlements (24%), half collapsed and fighting recommenced. In Afghanistan, two decades of UN attempts to broker a settlement have failed. In Sri Lanka, fragile cease fires have been the precursors to intensified fighting. Attempts by both the warring parties themselves and third parties, such as India, have failed to deliver sustainable peace. In Liberia, peace of a kind has been delivered by 'buying out' the warlords. Whether in the long run engineering 'peace' from above will lead to long term structural stability is another question. Many argue that the original grievances that caused the Liberian war remain and further outbreaks of conflict are likely. Liberia highlights the difficulty of dealing with the 'unlike-minded', and the miscalculation by the international community of the real power base of Charles Taylor and his ability to win elections and continue pursuing predatory strategies.

In the three case studies, there are few success stories to point to in terms of peacemaking. Some argue that rather than trying to engineer shaky peace accords, which stalemate the situation, one should 'give war a chance' and allow the military action to run its course. Certainly, knowing when *not* to act appears to be an important lesson from the case studies. It has been argued that in Liberia, it was the international response that precipitated the CPE because it stalemated a situation that otherwise would have been decided through a military takeover⁵¹. Also, the military response of ECOWAS, like the Indian's IPKF intervention in Sri Lanka, was flawed because it was partisan.

The Afghan case study in particular, highlights the limitations of traditional diplomacy in conflicts involving multiple non-state actors who may have a limited interest in international legitimacy or the incentives that diplomats may offer.⁵² One is left with the impression that the international architecture for responding to such conflicts is 'behind the game'; it has not kept up with the new realities of multiple actors, transnational mutating networks and emergent political economies that are immune to the traditional carrots and sticks applied by diplomats. Diplomacy (peacemaking) and military interventions (peacekeeping/enforcing), therefore, have been flawed. Trade sanctions have been used in Afghanistan and Liberia with varying effects. In Afghanistan, blanket sanctions appear to have had limited effect, apart from increasing the vulnerability of the already vulnerable. In Liberia, more targeted sanctions on individual warlords do appear to have had an impact, and the clear lesson is that sanctions need to be smarter, more targeted and linked to a wider response.

In addition to questions about effectiveness, the case studies highlight the political and ethical challenges associated with external interventions. Important questions about who defines peace, who is included in the process and whose voices are heard, were often not asked by peacekeepers, who tended to reduce intervention to a technical set piece response – in Afghanistan this meant securing a cease fire, holding elections and providing a 'sweetener' of rehabilitation and development aid (progress has never been made beyond the cease fire stage).

In all three cases, civil society groups tended to be marginalised by peace processes. Peacemakers were perhaps constrained by sovereignty issues (as in the case of Sri Lanka) or focused more on buying-off the warlords in the interests of short term 'peace' but at the expense of justice and long term human security (as in the case of Liberia). Peacemakers have often failed to look beyond the peace accord.

The lack of concerted, long-term engagement from the international community is also another important factor behind the relative lack of success. Donors discriminate between crisis countries and their motivations and levels of engagement reflect different combinations of humanitarian, economic, diplomatic, strategic and domestic political interests.⁵³ All three case studies are testimony to the selectivity of international engagement. They are, in the post Cold War world, 'orphaned conflicts', having limited geopolitical importance to the great powers. One can contrast the international response, for example to Kosovo and East Timor, to the current policy towards Afghanistan, or Liberia, which is arms length involvement and strategic disengagement.

3.3 Aid, conflict and peacebuilding

3.3.1 Aid systems and policy coherence

In our case studies, we undertook an analysis of the architecture of aid in each country with the aim of gaining a better understanding of donor behaviour. We have mapped out the external boundaries and internal characteristics of the aid system and identified donor roles and approaches within this system. The case studies demonstrate that aid systems evolve and change according to the influence of a range of international and domestic factors. The aid regime in Sri Lanka, for example, took on a very different character after 1977 as a result of both domestic factors (the change to a liberalising government) and international factors (the growing Washington consensus on structural adjustment and liberalisation). The history of aid in any given country may have an impact on current donor behaviour. The Cold War beginnings of aid in Afghanistan had an important influence on how the aid system developed; the legacy of this continues to influence the delivery of aid today. Also important is the level of pre-war donor involvement in a country. The fact that donors were involved in pre-war Sri Lanka and Liberia may have contributed to more sensitive approaches in these two countries.

Where the state has collapsed, the aid regime tends to be dominated by international actors and this has an influence on donor behaviour. In Afghanistan, the lack of a state acting as an interlocutor and counterbalancing force, and the absence of a strong civil society sector, have perhaps contributed to less accountable and locally grounded donor behaviour, than in the other case study countries. Compare this to Sri Lanka, where there is a strong state and dynamic civil society sector and much greater Sri Lankan government involvement in the aid system, all of which is reflected in donor behaviour.

The aid regimes in all three countries are donor-dominated because of the power and resources they wield. This is increasingly becoming the case as NGOs become the contractors for official aid agencies, thus silencing the potentially 'dissident voices' within the aid system. In Afghanistan, this comes out very starkly, whereby donor agendas shape the entire system, from the UN downwards. Distortions work their way down the system and NGOs have limited capacity to counteract an environment of politicisation and confrontational conditionalities.

Understanding the political economy of a conflict should therefore be complemented with an understanding of the political economy of aid. It is necessary to ask why certain issues get on the agenda and why others are left off. Whilst it is difficult to argue with the belief that there should be greater coherence between policy instruments, what this often means in practice in fact needs to be challenged: “To argue that humanitarian and political action always should be coordinated, therefore implies that the humanitarian actors – and their state sponsors – should, as a rule, buy into whichever political logic happens to prevail in particular ‘strategic frameworks’.”⁵⁴ In Afghanistan, aid has become the primary policy instrument. As Macrae and Leader note, aid becomes the default mechanism for the international community in areas of peripheral interest.⁵⁵ Far from complementing other forms of engagement, aid has become a substitute for them, a smokescreen for inaction or withdrawal. Therefore, our conclusions from the case studies are that (a) aid cannot be a leading edge in a peace process. Its effectiveness depends entirely on action or inaction higher on the political chain. (b) In cases where other instruments are applied in an effective and coordinated way (as perhaps happened briefly in Liberia), judiciously applied aid may help *complement* these processes and tip the balance in favour of peace.

Although we have highlighted broad characteristics of aid regimes, it is important to note that there is a great deal of internal heterogeneity, with differences from country to country and donor to donor. This represents an opportunity for those attempting to identify pressure points for positive changes within the aid system.

Figure 4 Responses to conflict – implications for donors

- Aid is *only one* of a number of policy instruments and furthermore it is rather a **blunt instrument** for conflict resolution. Aid is unlikely to be a leading edge in any peace process and should not be seen as a substitute for political and diplomatic initiatives.
- There is a need to strengthen the **linkages** between different conflict resolution **tracks** (vertical linkages) and between different **policy instruments** (horizontal linkages). Complementarity may be a more realistic (and desirable) objective than overall policy coherence.
- Externally mediated peace processes have a poor track record; without a **robust and long-term commitment** they can do more harm than good.
- Appreciate the **value of restraint**; it may sometimes be better to do nothing.
- **Respect the decisions of local actors**, not because they always make the right decisions, but because they have to live with the consequences of these decisions.
- Place a greater **investment into building linkages** with other actors, including military, diplomatic and civil. Donors need to look beyond the ‘compound culture’ of the aid world.
- Be prepared to gear up activities if opportunities present themselves; **timing** is critically important.

3.3.2 The quality of funding

It is possible to map out broad differences in the overall quality of aid in the three countries. Table 2 outlines the kinds of factors that influence the quality of aid.

Table 2 Factors influencing the quality of aid		
	LOW	HIGH
Time Frames	Short term	Medium to long term
Type	Project aid High proportion of loans to grants	Project and organisational aid/ capacity building High proportion of grants to loans
Variety	Limited types of aid, e.g. 90% relief funding in Afghanistan	Range of different types of donor assistance
Level of Consultation	Limited consultation leading to limited local ownership	Investment in listening and consultation
Inter-Agency Relationships	Competition and duplication	Collaboration and common approaches
Modalities	Rigid and micro managed	Flexible – ‘light but firm’
Donor Objectives	Aid used by donors as a substitute for other policy instruments	Aid objectives are primary

At the risk of generalisation, the overall ‘quality’ of funding was highest in Sri Lanka and lowest in Afghanistan, with Liberia lying somewhere in between. The main reasons for the relatively ‘high quality’ of aid in Sri Lanka were: the history of pre-conflict donor involvement (so that the ‘knowledge bank’ was greater than in Afghanistan), the counterbalancing role of a strong state and civil society sector, leading to greater Sri Lankan involvement and ownership, an institutional framework with a high absorptive capacity, the existence of a vibrant NGO community, which created space for more innovative and creative types of programmes and funding, the active pursuit of other policy instruments by donor governments, so that aid did not become the primary tool for effecting political change – in other words, aid was not used in a threatening and confrontational way.⁵⁶

Aid quality, therefore, varied between countries, but it also varied over time within the same country. In Liberia for example, there has been a general decrease in the quality of aid since the election, with the increased application of donor conditionalities. In Afghanistan, the quality of aid improved with the end of the Cold War as aid became less politicised and donors were prepared to give longer term funding and invest in capacity building. With the advent of the Taliban and the repoliticisation of aid, however, the quality has declined sharply again.

Two features common to all three countries that affected the quality of funding were:

- (a) **Lack of funding modalities for transitional activities:** The division of budget lines between humanitarian and development assistance is an unhelpful one. In spite of debates on the relief-development continuum, few donor agencies appear to have developed the modalities for dealing with transitional situations, the grey area that falls between relief and development. In Afghanistan, agencies continue to struggle with longer-term approaches, but with the wrong type of funding. In North Eastern Sri Lanka, the major multilateral development donors refuse to engage until the war ends, while a drip feed of humanitarian funding is provided by the smaller bilaterals. In Liberia, humanitarian aid is continued for refugees, but there is limited development funding for much needed rehabilitation activities.
- (b) **Weak involvement with the civil society sector:** Donor involvement with civil society has often been ham-fisted and naïve. In Afghanistan the UN encouraged the proliferation of Afghan NGOs, but then failed to sustain their support over time. In Sri Lanka, a weak analysis of civil society leads to a policy of ‘picking winners’ and equating civil society, strengthening with support for Colombo-based anglicised NGOs. Donor agencies have a natural tendency to focus on the short-term and the easily measurable and therefore tend to concentrate on the physical infrastructure of civil society – the ‘forms rather than the norms’.⁵⁷ Few have attempted to move beyond projectised approaches into supporting strategies and processes.

3.3.3 Approaches to conflict

Broadly, three different donor approaches to conflict can be identified, each with its own set of assumptions and associated strategies:

- **Working around conflict:** treating conflict as an impediment or negative externality that is to be avoided.
- **Working in conflict:** recognising the links between programmes and conflict and making attempts to minimise conflict-related risks, so that aid ‘does no harm.’
- **Working on conflict:** conscious attempts to design programmes in such a way that they ‘do good.’

Table 3 summarises the key features, assumptions and strategies associated with these different approaches:

Table 3 Donor approaches to conflict			
Approach	Working around conflict	Working in conflict	Working on conflict
Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conflict is a 'disruptive factor' over which little influence can be exercised ■ Development programmes can continue without being negatively affected by conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Development programmes can be negatively affected by, and have a negative impact on, the dynamics of conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Development programmes can exploit opportunities to positively affect the dynamics of conflict
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Withdraw from or keep out of conflict affected areas ■ Continue to work in low risk areas on mainstream development activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reactive adjustments are made to programmes in medium and high risk areas ■ Improve security management ■ Greater focus on 'positioning' i.e. neutrality and impartiality ■ Cut back on high input programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Refocus programmes onto the root causes the conflict, e.g. governance, poverty alleviation, social exclusion ■ Attempt to influence the incentives for peace and disincentives for violence ■ Support for mediation efforts ■ Focus on protection and human rights

In reality, donor agencies tend to apply a mixture of approaches according to context and timing. The predominant approaches, however, are to work 'around' or 'in' conflict. The multilaterals in Sri Lanka, for example, have tended to work around conflict. Agencies working in areas of active conflict have attempted to mitigate conflict-related risks and also minimise the potential for programmes to 'do harm.' Few agencies, however, have focused explicitly on peacebuilding. The most significant examples of the latter have been a group of like-minded bilateral donors in Sri Lanka.

It is, therefore, difficult to identify examples of where donors have successfully 'mainstreamed' conflict prevention/peacebuilding because (a) they are not sure what this means in practice; they lack the conceptual and practical tools to operationalise it and (b) they feel more comfortable with stand alone, 'projectised' peacebuilding approaches. This is partly about modalities and the need for donors and agencies to think in terms of projects, rather than processes and strategies. It is also relates to politics; by creating a separate sphere called conflict resolution and peacebuilding, which is delinked from issues like justice and democratisation, politics and power are leached out of the process. Peacebuilding, therefore, is depoliticised. In Afghanistan, for example, donors propound peacebuilding and human rights, whilst refusing to engage with the underlying political dynamic of the conflict. In Liberia, the EC has attempted to support rehabilitation and peacebuilding strategies. In practice however, 'projectised' developmental-style programmes marginalise political processes. This is highlighted in micro projects, which, although carefully designed to include ex-combatants in rehabilitation projects to promote their reintegration, tend to ignore the negative macro level processes fed by increased cash crop production.

There appear to be contradictory processes going on; on the one hand, donors in Sri Lanka tend to be extremely risk averse and steer clear of conflict resolution as 'too political'. On the other hand, donors in Afghanistan have taken a highly politicised position with aid having explicit human rights and conflict-related objectives (although the risks associated with such a policy are taken by the aid agencies themselves rather than the donors). Neither of these two extreme positions has been conducive to more innovative and conflict sensitive approaches. One therefore needs to look towards the middle ground to find positive examples of conflict sensitive policy and programming, which is politically informed, yet not politically driven. In Sri Lanka, the most innovative donors tend to be smaller bilaterals such as Norway, Netherlands, UK, Sweden and Canada. In Liberia, there was evidence of slow and gradual processes of empowerment and local activism supported again by smaller donors. Where donors have been conscious of the need for sensitive support without building up their own profile, the results have been promising. Norwegian support for the National Peace Council has been significant in nurturing and developing a constituency for peace. DFID support for OXFAM and Save the Children's study of Listening to the Displaced and Returned has helped build linkages between communities, agencies and policy makers.

The above activities, however, tend to be exceptions to the norm. Funding levels are decreasing, while the conditions attached to aid are growing. This is not an environment that is conducive to experimentation and innovation. Donors have a monopolistic role within the aid system and their 'off-the-peg' approaches have induced a 'crisis of conformity' within the aid system. A lack of downward accountability within the aid system is extremely worrying. A lesson from Afghanistan is that seemingly benign concepts like policy coherence and peacebuilding, when implemented in practice can have perverse outcomes. There is a danger that donors will try to implement 'structural stability' in the same way as they implemented structural adjustment, following a standardised model, which takes a 'one size fits all' approach.

3.3.4 Aid and the dynamics of conflict

It is evident from the case studies that aid does have an impact on the dynamics of peace and conflict. It is part of the political landscape and does affect incentive systems and structures. In Afghanistan and Liberia, in particular, aid fed into and sustained the war economy; however, there is a need for proportionality. Aid does not start conflicts, nor does it end them (although some argue that it can sustain them, there is little empirical evidence to support this).

This study points to the limited role that aid can play in affecting the wider dynamics of conflict. If one juxtaposes the estimated \$300 million p.a. of aid spent on Afghanistan with the \$2.5 billion worth of cross border trade with Pakistan, one gets a better sense of how modest aid flows are in relation to other economic forces. The same point can be made with reference to diamonds in West Africa. In Liberia, EC aid sanctions on the Charles Taylor government have had a limited impact on incentive systems. Moreover, in contexts like Sri Lanka, even though the illicit economy is less important, aid is of declining significance in relation to foreign direct investment. Therefore, addressing faults in the response system and developing more sophisticated approaches will not in themselves bring peace; at best, aid may complement other policy instruments when they are applied in a co-ordinated and strategic way.

There is a tendency for external agencies working in conflicts to define the problem in instrumentalist terms. For this reason, development actors define the conflict as a development problem, while diplomats tend to view it as a problem related to leadership, and military actors as one of security. As Macrae and Leader argue, there has been a shift in thinking from realising that for development to be effective there need to be certain preconditions, such as peace and stability, towards believing that development aid itself can contribute to the creation of these conditions.⁵⁸ This may be the case in certain contexts, but to believe that all conflicts are the result of development malaise and can be resolved through a developmental or humanitarian fix is clearly a flawed analysis. We believe that there is the need for a more measured and honest debate on the role of HA in conflict. A necessary starting point is to make ones assumptions explicit, which is a way of identifying differences and clarifying choices and ultimately fostering debate.

Figure 5 Aid and the dynamics of conflict – implications for donors

- Be clear about your **objectives** – for example, are your aims to alleviate poverty or to end the conflict? Decide what your priorities are and be transparent in how you arrive at these priorities.
- Do not expect your partners to do things you would not do yourself i.e. do not get other to take your **risks** for you.
- Recognise that aid has the capacity to do harm and on occasion to do good, but keep a sense of proportion about the magnitude of these impacts. All donors, however, need to develop a greater sensitivity or **conflict ‘mindfulness’**. This does not mean that all donors should have an explicit focus on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.
- Improve the **quality of funding** through developing more flexible systems, longer-term funding and ‘light but firm’ accountability procedures.
- Develop better **understanding of impacts**, but this may be less about proving impact than improving processes and demonstrating an ability to learn.
- Develop the kinds of systems of consultation and **downward accountability** for yourselves, which you currently demand of the agencies that you fund.

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

The case studies highlight the differences between individual contexts and the consequent need for **careful analysis** and **customised approaches**, which are calibrated according to timing and context.

We have emphasised the need for a more **realistic assessment** of the potential of HA to influence the wider dynamics of peace and conflict. As our case studies show, other factors, both internal and external may be more important in deciding outcomes in CPEs. In most cases, HA is a rather insignificant and blunt instrument for affecting incentive systems and structures. While improvements should be sought, conquering short-comings in the humanitarian response system, in itself, will rarely be enough to 'bring peace.' While much can be done to improve current policy and practice in the area of HA, this should not distract attention from the need to invest in more robust and sustained political and diplomatic responses.

A sense of proportion should lead to a more realistic assessment of how HA can *complement* peacebuilding processes. In Liberia, for a short period, aid did appear to complement a co-ordinated political process. In Afghanistan, what appeared a laudable aim became a smokescreen for political inaction. In Sri Lanka, there has been a disconnect between the diplomatic and development processes. As Macrae and Leader argue (2000), perhaps we should be talking less about coherence (which may be unrealisable in practice) and more about **complementarity**, remembering that there needs to be something for aid to complement; a political vacuum cannot be complemented.

We found limited evidence that conditionalities, sanctions and disengagement can effect behaviour change and have a positive impact on incentive systems. The only exception to this was, perhaps, the use of **targeted sanctions** on individual warlords in Liberia. This suggests the need to think very carefully about 'smarter' sanctions, which link into a wider response. In general, however, confrontational conditionalities have had negative impacts, while principled and consistent engagement has often produced positive effects.

The categorical positions of humanitarian maximalists and minimalist are unhelpful. Each has added useful insights to the debate; Afghanistan may support the position of the minimalists, with 'peacebuilding' aid being used as a substitute for political action. On the other hand, Sri Lanka points to the potential of a maximalist position, with examples of more innovative and expansive approaches. More effort should be devoted to exploring the middle ground and identifying what **enlightened humanitarianism** means in practice. What current debates and empirical studies show, is the need for donors to be more conscious and honest about the tensions and trade-offs caused by pursuing multiple objectives between, for example, peace, justice and humanitarian needs. There is a need for donors to be more transparent about how they weight different objectives and arrive at policy decisions.

Although it may not always be possible or desirable for HA to be designed to build peace, donors working in areas of latent or open conflict do need to cultivate a greater **conflict ‘mindfulness’**. It is incumbent upon them to develop a more sophisticated analysis of the dynamics of conflict and an understanding of the linkages between aid and conflict. If you ignore the conflict, then you may actually be undermining your own goals, as in the case of Sri Lanka. Donors who ‘work around’ conflict feed into the negative dynamic of the war by accentuating regional imbalances and supporting a trajectory of development, which contributed to the outbreak of violent conflict. For this reason, we do not argue that all donors be held accountable in terms of how or whether their aid contributes to peace. What they should be able to demonstrate, however, is a cognisance of the links between aid, conflict and development, just as now, as a matter of course they are expected to show an appreciation of the gender implications of their policies and practice.

4.2 Recommendations

Aid donors represent just one small element in a very complex equation. Although this report’s primary focus is on aid donors, recommendations for improved practice cannot be made in isolation from upstream and down stream actors who have important influence on donor policy and practice. Therefore, our recommendations focus on three areas: (1) Supporting an enabling policy environment for conflict prevention and peacebuilding (2) Increasing the conflict sensitivity of donors (3) Enhancing the peacebuilding potential of HA.

1. Supporting an enabling environment for conflict prevention and peacebuilding

These recommendations are primarily focused at national governments and international agencies, such as the United Nations and OSCE that may be involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding (or conflict fuelling) operations.

- Strengthen political efforts to engage with and support countries at risk of, experiencing or emerging from violent conflict.
- Develop more balanced and complementary approaches, using a range of tools, including diplomatic, military, trade and aid instruments, so that they mutually support and reinforce one another. Develop a more optimal balance between short-term and long-term interventions.
- Do not use HA as the primary or sole instrument to promote conflict resolution or peacebuilding objectives.
- Be prepared to work collaboratively and sacrifice sovereignty in the interests of longer-term structural stability.
- Support policies that are consistent with and based on locally defined needs, rather than on external interests or domestic audiences.
- Develop regionally informed analysis and where possible, support regionally based responses.
- Develop a more optimum balance between sticks and carrots – provide positive incentives, as well as disincentives to conflicting parties.

2. Increasing the conflict sensitivity of aid donors

Develop downward accountability

The aid system is characterised by diffuse accountability mechanisms. The lack of downward accountability at all levels is a systemic problem, which needs to be addressed if aid is to become more responsive and consistent with local realities. This is certainly not the first report to have identified this problem and we do not have any radically new recommendations. Donors need to take the question of accountability more seriously; ⁵⁹ a number of ways might be explored to encourage this:

- Developing codes of conduct and standards for donors in the same way that aid agencies have been developing principles and operating standards.
- An ombudsmen for donors – in which they are held more accountable for their practice and the impacts of their actions – and a complaints procedure for when donors do not meet agreed standards of practice.
- Encourage more ‘reverse’ evaluations i.e. donors are evaluated by their government and non-government partners. Or support, system-wide evaluations, which promote system-wide learning.
- Decentralise decision-making powers to the field level and insist on greater local consultation and analysis.

Develop understanding and analysis

Donors should invest in more joint conflict analysis. Evidently it is not possible to develop conflict sensitive instruments if one does not have an empirical understanding of the dynamics of conflict. Rather than reifying conflict as another separate factor to be ‘influenced’ and ‘impacted on,’ conflict frameworks need to be linked to other existing forms of analysis including human rights, gender, governance and social development. More important than proving impact, is the capacity to improve processes and demonstrate an ability to learn.

- Develop contacts with a wider range of institutions and actors who can help deepen and broaden donor analysis
- Develop a joined up approach to analysis, which draws upon existing frameworks and avoids compartmentalised thinking and approaches.

Develop internal capacities

Many of the problems identified in the report are related to internal capacity constraints. There are a number of areas donors need to explore more seriously if they are to develop conflict sensitive approaches:

- Develop internal incentive systems which encourage learning and analysis
- Allocate more staff and resources for conflict analysis
- Free up more staff time for field visits i.e. spend more time in areas of conflict, listening to the views of those directly affected by war.

Develop new modalities

We have highlighted problems related to the quality of funding and the lack of flexible modalities. Donors need to develop new modalities to respond to the challenges of working in or working on conflict. This means customising policy and practice to specific contexts and phases of conflict:

- Develop more flexible systems, which are adapted to the need for transitional forms of funding, which are neither 'pure' relief or 'pure' development
- Provide longer term, multi-year funding
- Provide organisational funding, as well as project-based funding
- Support strategies and processes, as well as just projects

Strengthen investments in capacity building

Capacity building tends to be neglected in areas of conflict. The imperatives for speed marginalise local actors. International organisations often tend to absorb local capacities, rather than build them. Donors should be prepared to provide the time and the resources for capacity building:

- Identify and support institutions that can manage and mitigate conflict
- Develop broader and deeper relationships with civil society organisations, which extend beyond capital city-based, English speaking NGOs
- Develop a more sophisticated understanding of impact which accounts for the impacts of programmes on organisational 'norms, as well as forms'

3. Enhancing the peacebuilding potential of HA

Mainstream conflict sensitivity

Agencies attempting to develop more conflict sensitive approaches to HA should:

- Put a greater investment into political and social analysis
- Incorporate conflict analysis into strategic planning processes
- Develop a greater awareness of the distributional impacts of policies and programmes

NGO capacities

NGOs should develop their capacities to act as a counter weight to donor pressures and to engage with policy debates. Specifically they should:

- Invest in high quality and independent analysis, which draws upon the views and needs of the communities they work with
- Be prepared to take risks and challenge the policy responses which are not consistent with local realities and needs
- Develop their advocacy strategies and skills so they are better able to influence policy debates

Endnotes

- ¹ See H. Atmar and J. Goodhand, *Afghanistan Case Study*, International Alert, London, 2001, M Mulbah and C Babu *Liberia Case Study* (2000) & J. Goodhand, *Sri Lanka Case Study*, International Alert London 2001. This study has involved fieldwork in the three countries, in addition to a UK-based desk survey. It has drawn heavily upon a DFID-funded research project conducted by University of Manchester/INTRAC, entitled 'The contribution of NGOs to peacebuilding in complex political emergencies'. It also draws upon research conducted by INTRAC for CHAD/DFID on conflict assessment.
- ² NGOs have also made limited progress in developing strategic accountability in spite of interest in social auditing in the early 1990s.
- ³ See S. Jackson and P. Walker, Depolarising the 'broadened' and 'back-to-basics' relief models' *Disasters* 23:2 1999, p.112
- ⁴ See for example, M Duffield (2000) Globalisation, Transborder Trade and War Economies in *Berdhal, M & Malone (eds) (2000) Greed and Grievance. Economic Agendas in Civil Wars Lynne Reiner: ; J. Macrae and A. Zwi., 'Famine, complex emergencies and international policy in Africa: an overview' in J. Macrae and A. Zwi eds., War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, London and New Jersey, 1994. D. Keen, *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars*. Adelphi Paper, Vol. 320. International Institute of Strategic Studies, London, 1998. P. Collier, (World Bank). *Doing Well Out of War*. Paper presented at Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars. London, April 26-27 1999, etc.
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- ¹⁶ S. Jackson and P. Walker, Depolarising the 'broadened' and 'back-to-basics' relief models' *Disasters* 23:2
- ¹⁷ The following section provides a brief overview of the three case studies. For more detailed analysis see working papers 1, 2 and 3.
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- ¹⁹ Since 1996, due to a lack of reliable data, Afghanistan has not been ranked in the HDR statistics.
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