Applied Humanitarian Logistics

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I was recently at a meeting in Washington when a senior US military officer spoke of his branch of the service's past year of activity overseas. His details on the breadth of engagement were as remarkable as the explanation of the need for repeated realignment of resources to meet new challenges. Nearing conclusion he paused and stated "we now have arrived at addressing constant conflict".

It is an important benchmark for all of us in the humanitarian services field to carefully consider these words. Only a decade ago we were addressing natural and manmade disasters primarily as unique events. Whether in unison - under a consolidated appeal and relief umbrella - or individually - with discrete funding and technical resource arrangements, we tackled instances of broad human crisis as individual events. We largely anticipated a blush of immediate service providers, emergency donor funding mechanisms and a fairly predictable process of resource build-up, service and good application, and handover in relatively dependable order (regardless of timeframe). The majority of governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental structures were designed for episodic, relatively short-term engagement and impact. We'd debate lead roles and the best array of providers; measures of success and quality control standards; how to ensure sufficient neutrality and fair divisions of limited relief. Mostly we always

were planning to one day depart. We all anticipated sufficient order returning to the region in crisis; sufficient rule of law and sufficient strength returning to the vulnerable society that our departure would typically prove to be a relatively smooth affair.

Today there are dozens of locations around the globe where significant disasters, crisis and emergencies have occurred, then only partially quieted to yet erupt again in some adjusted horrific manner. Many of the emergencies haven't ended. Many of them over time have become ever more intractable, complex and entrenched, sucking in non-combatants and neutral parties: forcing more and more people to take sides. Discrete relief activities have been equally affected by these morphing conditions and personnel frequently find themselves addressing quite different needs, conditions and even populations than originally intended. It is rare today indeed to identify a humanitarian crisis that flares, is met and is extinguished in a manner acceptable to the majority of our community. Instead there is an increasing trend for one humanitarian crisis (and set of interventions) to bleed over into other areas of discovered need and new services being proposed, funded and delivered accordingly. A cycle is born: we have now arrived at addressing constant humanitarian need.

This has everything to do with the topic of this panel: 'long-term development and humanitarian aid'. Other than immediate live-saving humanitarian services, all other foreign assistance is delivered to improve the quality of life and strengthen conditions to avoid the advent of future catastrophe. No short-term development aid should occur ignorant of, or without benefit to, long-term development goals. The 'constant conflict'

must be met with 'constant (albeit appropriate) relief' in order to provide the vulnerable society – individuals, families and groups – time and space to establish a more durable self-defined peace.

The risk to not more strongly associating individual short-term relief efforts with long-term development efforts is significant, both in financial and social terms. With the complexity of crisis-location national and regional party agendas - constantly at play off of one another; often involving violence and weapons; frequently disregarding any sanctity for humanitarian workers - any uncoordinated short-term development effort has a remarkably high chance of resources being diverted from any durable effect. Such efforts simply cannot meet the wide range of competing short-term priorities of the array of local parties involved. The financial cost for well-intended but unassociated relief efforts is collectively immense.

The social cost is of even more import. The crisis-affected population is already judging every relief effort under significant stress. Their collective sense of priority needs, humanitarian service efforts and said service effects will come to different conclusions than those of the relief providers. Their analytic choice is one of necessity: if assistance is not benefiting us then it is against us. Crisis breeds radicalization. It is essential that the humanitarian community in development services maintain a healthy perspective on doing the greatest good for the greatest number over time.

The most appreciated humanitarian aid is that which enables the receiving population to decide and prioritize what they want to do with it. It is aid whose best precondition is that it be transparently considered by a population-supported group of representative individuals and that it then be applied in a 'do-no-harm' manner that the majority of the population desire. This determinative process ensures that the aid is applied where the population believes will best serve their development track; where they believe they need to be to ensure stability and safety. It gives them, over time, a new foundation, to build further from. It strengthens continuity, self-governance and ownership.

Accordingly, health resources – beyond emergency life-saving – should be deployed to strengthen the population's health system as national representatives see fit, whether at home visit, clinic, hospital or research laboratory levels. My parent company, International Medical Corps, for example consciously seeks out national health professionals on location to best facilitate efforts in delivering what nationals consider priority aid relevant to the vulnerable population. We bring good practices; we bring resources; we don't bring prescriptive designs for application outside of what the population deems most desired and valuable.

Similarly education resources should not be prescriptive as to building type or design or concentration. They should instead strengthen the population's preferred education system as national representatives see fit, whether it is at home, in small informal groups or in more formal settings. All humanitarian resources should serve as enablers, not as end products in and of themselves. The international effort towards 'addressing constant

need' finds its own logical transition and local conclusion as assistance empowers the people to, in their own definition, sufficiently self-care.

Today we have such long-extended crisis conditions that several have spawned a full generation of people who have known nothing but the crisis. I say again that short cycle, non-cooperative humanitarian relief efforts do little to change these root conditions. Development will remain retarded when overly influenced by select parties benefiting from the confusion and wastage that lack of longer-term planning permits. The way out of this dilemma is in initiating humanitarian relief cycles of a decade; a full generation of service assistance. Past emergency, life-saving care humanitarian aid should be reshaped into what I'll call 'Generational Relief'.

'Generational Relief' has several significant attractions. First of all it repeatedly sends a message to the vulnerable population that they will not be abandoned to the whims of other fresh priority resource needs. The population learns over time that the opportunity for improvement is durable and can be trusted. This pause for peace is infectious; as nationals show other nationals the progress it affords additional nationals will join in and also believe.

The longer-term relief framework also benefits donors. They can plan in concern how to share or divide parts of aid. They can prioritize, earmark and secure support further ahead from a more robust set of sources. They can more easily measure year-on-year application of resources and population-identified developments.

Finally 'Generational Relief' benefits service providers. The cluster system of the agencies already offers a forum to discuss and decide a logical application of resources within a given service sector. Having assurance that donor support and affected population ownership will be sustained for years to come, service organizations in concert can establish more population-appropriate standards and measures of success. They can better anticipate gaps where services don't meet needs and creatively work with the affected population in addressing them. A more steady transfer of material, knowledge and skills to nationals will take root, both growing the sophistication of the aid effort and ensuring a steady handover to permit institutional withdrawal in due course.

Developing 'Generational Relief' has at least one other additional benefit. The process encourages new resources to join those institutions and instruments already in existence versus creating new and potential competitive institutions. Having a ten year horizon should embolden us to modify the existing institutions to routinely manage resource application well or, conversely, to dismantle institutions who cannot sufficiently adjust to meet the decade management needs. New institutions should only be considered where current institutions are proven unable to meet the new management needs. Logically a winnowing of less effective institutions will benefit donors, peer service providers and recipient populations alike.

If indeed we have arrived to a 'state of constant conflict' and we agree to meet this with a 'state of constant humanitarian service', it is timely to consider adjusting our relief efforts to have greatest appropriate impact. Short-term aid must more consciously string together as part of longer term aid. Development, abetted by this aid, must have resonance within affected populations.

This necessary effort at longer term continuity should resonate with the humanitarian logistics chain on several levels. I will mention three issues that preoccupy me.

Today we have in operation some impressive individual institution commodity supply chain software programs. These programs each capture data from preferred suppliers, translate the information into the institution's terms and definitions and then e-follow it (including through sub-contractors) to final application. One challenge is that such software is proprietary; even when freely given away – as much is – the receiving institution must use the same terms and definitions – the same coding – to associate their own material records to that of the larger institution. We have not yet established <u>one common language</u> that all logistics software is being built around. I suggest this should be a priority for persons looking for relevant and applicable logistics research projects. It is a first step towards reconciling differing donor requirements for removing assets from the supply chain. Currently respective donor earmarking and unique disposal policies complicate holistic tracking and reporting. A common language opens the door to consider reconciling these policies.

My second concern is the too-frequent lack of an <u>on-location common all-commodities</u> <u>database</u>. Agencies tend to establish separate warehousing and transfer points and conditions. So added to the lack of common definitions already mentioned, we have uniquely separated sets of commodities. It is extremely hard to project short or long term material impact without having knowledge of unified commodity type quantity, quality or readiness for priority application.

Finally, in consideration of long-term development, we must consider <u>commodity</u> <u>security</u>. I'm referring to the stewardship of the overall transportation, transit and the storage and distribution system, inclusive of the commodities themselves. Emergency relief often imports expertise to manage services due to the collapse or absence of local capacity. Development speaks to human capacity building and the acquisition of service management by national parties. The generation of a common logistics language and the establishment of a unified commodities database needs to include conscious affected population engagement; helping in design, helping in construction, helping in execution and helping in upgrades and revisions. The affected society needs to value the logistics chain and content as much or even more that the institutions facilitating its establishment.

I'm eager to see these challenges addressed as they certainly form an important part of our generational relief plan. I accordingly look forward to seeing an accelerated strategic and applied shift to long-term development in the logistics field.