Humanitarian action, early recovery and stabilisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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HPG Working Paper

July 2011

hpg Humanitarian Policy Group

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Chapter 1
Introduction and context

The recent history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been marked by conflict, misgovernment and a massive and sustained humanitarian crisis. Decades of misrule by President Mobutu Sese Seko finally came to an end in 1997, when rebels backed by Rwanda seized the capital, Kinshasa. The conflict that followed involved an array of Congolese groups and regional actors, including Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola. While it is very difficult to judge the human toll, a mortality survey by the International Rescue Committee estimates that, between August 1998 and April 2007, conflict and state collapse led to over 5 million excess deaths (Lilly and Bertram, 2008). A peace deal signed in 2002 led to the installation of a transitional government, a new constitution was agreed in 2005 and the DRC held its first free elections the following year. Fresh elections are due later in 2011, though preparations are behind schedule and the polls may be postponed (Lancaster et al., 2010).

This is the usual summary of the DRC, but such descriptions do little justice to its complexity. Although officially a 'post-conflict' context, fighting and displacement persist in eastern parts of the country. The situation in the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale remains dire, with an estimated 1.7m people displaced, and even in relatively stable areas the humanitarian situation is very poor, with indicators of health and wellbeing as bad as or worse than areas affected by conflict. Corruption is rampant, and the security sector is in desperate need of reform. Police and soldiers routinely prey on the population, who have little trust in their government. Widespread poverty and under-development going back decades is a problem throughout the country; according to one estimate, as things currently stand it will take the DRC 50 years to reach the level of per capita GDP it had at independence in 1960 (Lilly and Bertram, 2008).

Practitioners and policy-makers have been grappling with the problems posed by protracted crises like the DRC for a very long time, and arguably to little effect. Traditionally discussions around programming assistance in conflict and so-called 'transitional' settings have focused on the interface between relief and development. More recently, as concerns around international terrorism and the problems posed by weak states have come to the fore, the focus has shifted from linking relief and development to integrating aid and security in an effort to stabilise problem states and promote early recovery (Harmer and Macrae, 2004; Bailey et al., 2009). These conceptual changes have not been matched by developments in programming, for a variety of reasons: the aid architecture is bifurcated into humanitarian and development compartments, making it difficult to move between humanitarian assistance and other approaches as circumstances change; the choice of which aid mechanisms to use is a political decision related to how donor governments want to engage with the state; and there is a lack of programming strategies for shifting between shorter-term and longer-term assistance.[1] More fundamentally, the expectation that outside assistance can have transformative effects in promoting stabilisation, security and early recovery rests on unrealistic assumptions about the impact of external interventions in conflict and post-conflict states.

This paper examines these challenges as they relate to the international response to the crisis in eastern DRC, with a particular focus on the relationship between humanitarian assistance, early recovery and stabilisation. It argues that supporting recovery in DRC requires flexible, risk-tolerant programming. All actors involved need to carefully consider the relationship between assistance, security and recovery, and move beyond simplistic assumptions about how peace and stability can be fostered and encouraged. For humanitarians, there is no time like the present to discuss how to pursue principled humanitarian action and advocate for the protection of civilians, amidst the complex interaction of aid, politics and security.

The study is based on a desk review and 48 key informant interviews with UN agencies, NGOs, the government, MONUSCO and donor officials in Goma, Bukavu and Kinshasa in April, July and October 2010. It is also informed by previous ODI research on early recovery (Bailey and Pavanello, 2009; Bailey et al., 2009).

1 See Harmer and Macrae, 2004; INCAF, 2010; Maxwell, 2009.

Chapter 2
Humanitarian assistance and early recovery

Policy discussions on early recovery are inherently about boundaries, most notably between short-term emergency response – labelled 'humanitarian' – and medium- or long-term efforts to promote recovery, and how far 'humanitarian' tools should be used to support the latter. In DRC, as in many protracted crises, this boundary is not well defined. Humanitarian assistance to DRC grew six-fold between 2002 and 2010, from $98m to $585m, according to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS). This makes the DRC the world's fifth-largest recipient of humanitarian aid. Most humanitarian funding is linked to the humanitarian appeals process, which in the DRC takes the form of the annual Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP).2 These plans are used by the international humanitarian community to prioritise objectives, monitor humanitarian response and advocate for funding.

There are three main reasons for the substantial increase in humanitarian assistance over the past decade: one, levels of aid were far too low to start with; two, the conclusion of peace accords has in no way meant the end of humanitarian need; and three, humanitarian assistance is being asked to do a wide range of things, including promoting recovery. Until 2009, nearly every humanitarian plan contained objectives related to recovery. These included 'revive local economies' (2002); reducing vulnerabilities and maximising coordination between relief, transition and development (2005); promoting stability to ensure peace dividends (2006); and supporting a return to self-sufficiency (2007). For the 2009 appeal, humanitarian donors encouraged the establishment of a separate objective to clarify the remit of humanitarian action for promoting recovery. This was driven by recognition of the importance of recovery and reintegration, as well as concerns that humanitarian mechanisms were acting as a substitute for development assistance in addressing chronic poverty and vulnerability. An objective was therefore added, often referred to as the 'fifth objective', which sought to address 'the vicious circle of crises by intervening in post- or pre-crisis situations through actions enabling the consolidation of previously provided assistance or actions preventing a new crisis' (OCHA, 2009). While the objective was described as 'short-term recovery', its emphasis on prevention reflects disaster preparedness and risk reduction aims.

In practice, efforts to promote recovery have fallen short. One prominent example is a pilot project meant to demonstrate the value of the fifth objective. Funded by the Humanitarian Pooled Fund, $2.3m was set aside to prevent, or at least mitigate, annual cholera outbreaks in a relatively stable part of Katanga province. The project failed to produce 'conclusive results' (OCHA, 2009), and lessons were not documented or shared. Several aid agency representatives queried why the Katanga project had become the focal point of the fifth objective, as there had been substantial return movements in Ituri, and the money might have been better spent on urgent reintegration activities there. Likewise, efforts to use the

Box 1: Defining vulnerability in DRC

In a context like DRC it is important to distinguish between acute and *chronic* vulnerability, and the risk factors that underlie each. Acute vulnerability, or exposure to short-term hazards, tends to be linked in DRC to localised violence, sudden displacement, natural hazards and epidemics. This form of vulnerability fluctuates over time and between different areas and populations. Chronic vulnerability, or exposure to persistent hazard, relates to multiple and continuing interacting factors, including generalised insecurity, poor health and nutrition, fragile livelihoods and long-term displacement. These are factors that, rather than representing a critical deviation from the norm, have *become* the prevailing norm for many. Many people are affected by both chronic and acute vulnerability.

Both kinds of vulnerability are in large part a function of structural factors: weak or abusive governance, corruption, impunity and the failure of basic state functions (including security and rule of law), combined with the common features of under-development and poverty: gross disparities in wealth distribution, weak infrastructure, lack of access to services, and so on … One of the features that make it difficult to design appropriate humanitarian and development responses in DRC is the complex overlaying of acute and chronic vulnerability. The use of the term 'crisis' to describe the situation in the whole of DRC, or even the situation in the eastern provinces, is in many ways misleading. It implies a constant state of acute vulnerability. But what characterises DRC is the extraordinary extent of *chronic* vulnerability, evidenced in chronically high levels of mortality, morbidity and long-term acute malnutrition. This coupled with (for many) constant exposure to violent insecurity results in a situation where *crisis* – in the sense of a dangerous deviation from the norm – is no longer an adequate term. Pockets of crisis (or 'emergencies') can be identified within the prevailing norm. In many ways, neither humanitarian nor development approaches as normally understood are well adapted to this kind of context.

Source: Darcy and Foliot, 2009.

Pooled Fund to address vulnerability in western areas have proved unrealistic. There is limited agency presence in these areas, making it difficult to find implementing partners. More fundamentally, the chronic poverty and vulnerability that drive needs in these areas require longer-term solutions.

It is not clear what 'success' would look like when it comes to the recovery, disaster prevention and vulnerability reduction objectives in humanitarian strategies. If the indicator is 'people have sustainable livelihoods' or 'there is no more need for assistance', then these objectives are almost certainly doomed to fail, as the factors underlying chronic vulnerability, such as conflict and poor governance, are still present. Any expectations that a one-year assistance project alone can achieve a substantial enough impact to stave off the need for future humanitarian interventions assume that the structural causes of emergencies can be addressed quickly and sustainably through one-off projects, when what is needed is longer-term development programming.

The 2010 humanitarian strategy scaled back its recovery ambitions, jettisoning the fifth objective and focusing instead on 'purely humanitarian objectives' (OCHA, 2009: 1). The creation of stabilisation strategies was cited as the reason, as these strategies include support to reintegration and recovery (*ibid.*). In fact, interviewees highlighted the persistent inability to demonstrate results for the fifth objective and concerns on behalf of donors about further expanding the scope of humanitarian aid. Providing such assistance through stabilisation mechanisms, which have political and security aims, also changes the objectives and principles guiding assistance. This has not been adequately recognised and will be explored in the subsequent sections. While the fifth objective is 'out', though, humanitarian response continues to have a broad focus, and support to reintegration and livelihoods recovery remains a key component. In 2011, the Humanitarian Action Plan envisions targeting one million returnees with reintegration assistance.

Despite recent changes in the humanitarian strategy, the boundaries of humanitarian assistance in DRC remain poorly defined. Humanitarian actors are being asked to respond to a wide range of needs, not only addressing acute threats to lives and livelihoods but also supporting reintegration and livelihoods recovery. Ultimately, however, the short-term nature of humanitarian response, and its focus on acute vulnerability, means that it cannot provide the longer-term solutions that are required to address recovery and chronic vulnerability. Asking how humanitarian action can support recovery has not proved particularly helpful. Instead, this could be rephrased as a series of questions: What is the most appropriate assistance given the needs, context and capacities? How can assistance have the greatest impact? How can the potential negative impacts of assistance on civilian protection and conflict be recognised and minimised? The advantage of these questions is that they prioritise an examination of the immense amount of humanitarian programming that can be done better in DRC, as opposed to trying to conceive of new categories of assistance, or piling on unrealistic expectations regarding what the humanitarian endeavour in DRC can achieve.

According to one humanitarian donor, if donors had known in 2005 that they would spend $3 billion on humanitarian assistance over the following five years they might have strategised it differently from the beginning. Given continued instability and long-standing issues around vulnerability in DRC, it is safe to assume that humanitarian assistance could total at least another $2bn over the next five years. Humanitarian tools are necessarily limited, but that is no excuse for not getting the maximum impact out of them.

Chapter 3
Stabilisation: opportunities, limitations and tensions

'Stabilisation' is a loaded term that invokes images of interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Stabilisation is a much wider concept than these military-led efforts, and one that means different things to different actors (Collinson et al., 2010a; 2010b). Stabilisation is now at the heart of the UN peacekeeping mission, and both the UN system and the government have developed stabilisation plans, which include objectives to support reintegration and recovery. This section examines what stabilisation means in the context of DRC, how fit for purpose it is for supporting reintegration and recovery, and tensions between stabilisation and humanitarian action.

3.1 Stabilisation in DRC

Stabilisation is a relatively new addition to the policy and programming context in DRC. The government and the UN have each developed stabilisation strategies, respectively the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern DRC (STAREC) and the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (ISSSS), which seek to improve stability in conflict-affected areas through a combination of security interventions (mainly security sector reform and the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration of combatants), restoring state authority in zones previously controlled by armed groups, facilitating the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees and reducing the trafficking of natural resources. The ISSSS also includes components on supporting political processes, and unlike STAREC it does not include humanitarian action under the remit of stabilisation (see Table 1 for a full list of objectives). In addition to these strategies, donors including USAID and DFID are bilaterally supporting stabilisation, peace-building and recovery programmes implemented by NGOs, including community-driven reconstruction, conflict resolution and governance activities.

The Stabilisation and Recovery Funding Facility (SRFF) was created in 2009 to mobilise funding for stabilisation strategies. The SRFF envisions a minimum timeframe of 12–18 months for activities, which appears strikingly short given the ambitious goals of stabilisation. The fund has a board co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG), and a complex governance structure bringing together the coordination mechanisms of STAREC as well as new coordination mechanisms created specifically for the SRFF. As of December 2010 $213m had been mobilised in support of the ISSSS, but most of this funding takes the form of projects that are deemed to support stabilisation objectives, as opposed to contributions specifically to the SRFF. The fund itself had only $16m in deposits, of which only $5.2m had been disbursed, suggesting that donors are unconvinced of the value of a separate fund.[3] As one donor representative put it, 'what's the point of having a fund since you just lose 7% overhead?'.

While stabilisation has emerged as the predominant framework for the UN mission in DRC, there is very little clarity about what it actually means, and whether it constitutes a genuine shift in strategy or a simple relabeling of existing political and security objectives. Even staff from UN agencies meant to be supporting stabilisation could not trace its origins or explain why strategies were being framed in terms of stabilisation, as opposed to peace-building, state-building, recovery or reconstruction. Staff in NGOs knew even less, and regarded the evolution of the stabilisation strategy in DRC as a top-down, unilateral process driven by a small number of individuals within the UN peacekeeping mission. While several NGOs offered technical input into the development of the ISSSS there was a very low level of interaction, amounting to little more than updates on progress. While MONUSCO has stepped up efforts to engage other actors, including NGOs, the extent to which different aid actors engage and buy into stabilisation strategies remains limited.

Box 2: What is stabilisation?

As with many terms and approaches, stabilisation lacks any single definition. Grounded in the security imperative of removing or reducing threats such as armed groups, stabilisation encompasses both 'hard' (military) and 'soft' (civilian) interventions. Stabilisation covers a wide range of policies, objectives and strategies, from international-/Western-led stabilisation actions in Afghanistan and Iraq to nationally-led efforts by governments in Pakistan, Colombia and Sri Lanka to defeat insurgent groups. Stabilisation approaches can be divided into two broad camps – those prioritising direct security action to counter threats and those prioritising broader peace-building, state-building and development goals. A common thread running through stabilisation policies is the supposition that development supports security and vice versa. However, stabilisation strategies often lack a strong evidence base regarding their assumptions, including the extent to which development and quick-impact projects generate security benefits. Amidst all the ambiguity, stabilisation is always essentially about the pursuit or support of a particular political order by powerful actors.

Source: Collinson et al., 2010a; 2010b.

3 See mdtf.undp.org.

Table 1: Objectives of ISSSS and STAREC

International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (ISSSS)	STAREC
Improve security Reduce threats to life, property and freedom of movement by: • Strengthening security forces • Supporting the disbanding of armed groups through either demobilisation or integration into security forces • Improving operational and internal systems for FARDC *Support political processes* Support national and provincial governments to advance peace processes by: • Helping to improve diplomatic relations between the DRC and key neighbouring countries • Identifying and sanctioning spoilers, serious human rights abusers and those involved in sexual violence, child recruitment, illicit trafficking of natural resources and breaking the arms embargo • Supporting political leaders to follow through on commitments made under key agreements. *Strengthen state authority* Restore and strengthen the state in areas where it has been weak or non-existent by: • Ensuring reliable road access • Deploying police, courts and prisons to uphold the rule of law and ensure public order • Re-establishing decentralized administrative services *Facilitate return, reintegration and recovery* Ensure the voluntary and safe return of refugees and IDPs, and sustainable reintegration by: • Addressing priority social needs, restoring basic social services and infrastructure • Promoting employment generation and agriculture • Facilitating local reconciliation and conflict resolution linked to housing, land and property issues *Combat sexual violence* Strengthen prevention, protection and responses to sexual violence by: • Combating impunity and improving access to justice • Preventing, mitigating threats and reducing vulnerability to sexual violence • Addressing sexual violence in SSR processes • Improving access of survivors to multi-sectoral services • Improving data	*Security* • Consolidation of gains made by security operations and accords with armed groups (reinforce the capacity of the FARDC, avoid the resurgence of armed groups, prevent exactions on civilians, ensure the regular payment of soldiers and their temporary lodging, restore the state through the deployment of police, judicial and civil administration) • Integration of group Armed Groups into FARDC, DDR and community reinsertion • Establishment of control mechanisms for mineral resources and forests to prevent their illegal exploitation by armed groups *Humanitarian and social* • Ensure the voluntary return of refugees and IDPs • Socio-economic reintegration of refugees and IDPs • Protection of civilians (all efforts should fully involve of the provincial governments and communities) *Economic recovery* • Re-establish conditions for sustainable economic activity (rehabilitation of road infrastructure, recovery of key economic sectors: agriculture, livestock, small industry) • Establishment of regional projects to harmonise economic relations, notably through the Economic Community for Great Lakes region (CEPGL) *Combat sexual violence* (objective added in Nov 2010)

Sources: ISSSS IPF, 2010; DRC Government, 2009; DRC Government, 2010.

3.2 Peacekeeping, counter-insurgency and civilian protection

The UN peacekeeping operation in DRC is the world's largest and, with a $1.2bn-a-year price tag, its most expensive. On its creation in 1999, the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) had a very limited mandate in the face of widespread conflict and massive human rights violations. MONUC's later mandates swung in the opposite direction, assigning robust responsibilities for the protection of civilians and security sector reform.[4] International NGOs and other actors lobbied vigorously against the withdrawal of MONUC peacekeepers in early 2010, when the mission's mandate was up for renewal. The Security Council opted for a less drastic measure than withdrawal, transforming MONUC into the United Nations Stabilisation Mission (MONUSCO) in July 2010. Time is nonetheless almost up. President Joseph Kabila has said publicly that he wants peacekeepers to withdraw ahead of the 2011 elections.

Since achieving peace and stability has been an objective for more than a decade of peacekeeping in DRC, 'stabilisation' is hardly a new objective. What is new is the shift towards supporting the DRC government to achieve it. Increasing the authority of the state through the deployment of police and other officials is a core objective of the ISSSS. Like the previous mandate for MONUC, Resolution 1925 mandates MONUSCO to ensure the protection of civilians and humanitarian personnel directly. The vast majority of the other objectives – including security sector and justice reform, the consolidation of state authority, the reduction of illegal mineral exploitation and demining – are to be pursued by supporting the DRC government, as opposed to the peacekeeping mission doing this work directly. By supporting and shifting responsibility to the government, stabilisation is to all intents and purposes an exit strategy for the UN peacekeeping mission. It has been a while in the making; MONUC began elaborating a stabilisation strategy at the request of the Security Council in July 2007, aimed at laying the groundwork for the mission's eventual withdrawal (MONUC, 2008).

As part of its support for the government's stabilisation efforts, MONUSCO has also participated in counter-insurgency operations against armed groups in eastern DRC. All of these operations are planned jointly by MONUSCO and the DRC government, with UN troops providing fire support in some cases. Amani Leo ('Peace Today'), a joint operation against rebel forces in the Kivus, was launched on 1 January 2010. Kimia II ('Calm'), involving the Rwandan army as well as Congolese troops and MONUSCO, was launched against rebels of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) in 2009. Both offensives have had very grave consequences for civilians. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), during Kimia II Congolese army troops failed to distinguish between combatants and civilians, provided no advance warning of attacks, executed hundreds of civilians and overall did not meet their obligations under international humanitarian law to minimise harm to civilians (HRW, 2009b). An Oxfam survey of 24 communities in areas affected by Amani Leo found that abuses had actually increased since the operation began, including by soldiers. All communities surveyed had experienced looting and all but one reported cases of rape; other widespread abuses include forced labour and death threats (Oxfam, 2010b). At the close of 2009, the UN Group of Experts Report noted that military operations had not succeeded in neutralising the FDLR, while at the same time exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the Kivus (Mahtani et al, 2009: 9). Meanwhile, the consolidation of state authority and the growing state presence in some areas – a key objective of stabilisation – appears to have contributed to the threats civilians face, including illegal checkpoints, illegal taxation and arbitrary arrest (Oxfam, 2010b). An initial review of the ISSSS found that the performance of the Congolese police deployed in support of stabilisation was 'unacceptable' (Strategic Review, 2010).

4 See Resolution S/RES/1906 (2009).

3.3 Return, reintegration and recovery

The stabilisation plans currently being pursued in DRC seek to ensure the voluntary and safe return of refugees and IDPs and promote sustainable socio-economic reintegration in their areas of origin by addressing priority social needs; restoring basic social services and infrastructure (e.g. schools, health centres and markets); promoting employment and agricultural productivity; and facilitating local reconciliation linked to land and property. These interventions are taking place in sectors that overlap with humanitarian interventions, including food security, health, education and protection (ISSSS IPF, 2010). The HAP and ISSSS describe these efforts as a division of labour, with humanitarian assistance responding to immediate needs and stabilisation addressing the structural causes of conflict (ISSSS IPF, 2010; OCHA, 2009).

While stabilisation ultimately seeks to improve stability, the extent to which reintegration and recovery projects being programmed under the auspices of stabilisation reflect that objective varies. PEAR (Programme of Expanded Assistance to Returnees) Plus, a multi-sector UNICEF programme, aims to support durable solutions for returning IDPs in North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga and Ituri through education, child protection, health and water and sanitation activities. Although PEAR Plus is cited as UNICEF's contribution to the stabilisation strategy (UNICEF, 2010), it does not take into account how it can mitigate conflict, and the programme has worked in areas with low risk of conflict (Izzi and Kurz, 2009). An observer would not be able to distinguish it from any 'normal' intervention to support reintegration and a transition to longer-term development. It is intended that during 2011 PEAR Plus will include conflict analysis and a stronger peace-building component.

There is an underlying expectation, among some donors at least, that projects like PEAR Plus will promote peace and decrease the likelihood of conflict. Several interviewees familiar with PEAR Plus felt that expectations that modest improvements in basic services could have this effect were misplaced, particularly since support to basic services has been provided in one form or another for years, with no discernible impact on patterns of conflict. In general there is much scepticism about the peace dividends hypothesis, and even a sense that it is condescending as it ignores the fact that the vast majority of Congolese see peace as its own dividend. Several interviewees also felt that such an approach mistakes symptoms of conflict and under-development for its causes. Evidence from elsewhere also questions assumptions about the relationship between assistance and conflict prevention in transitional contexts. One evaluation in Southern Sudan directly challenges the link between the provision of basic services and conflict prevention and peace-building, even though this is a core assumption guiding donor engagement (Bennett et al., 2010).

Other stabilisation projects promoting reintegration and recovery have explicit conflict-prevention objectives, particularly in relation to disputes over land. A UN-HABITAT- and UNHCR-supported project on land mediation in North Kivu is setting up Permanent Local Reconciliation Committees (Comités Locaux Permanents de Conciliation – CLPCs) to support STAREC in addressing problems arising as displaced people and refugees return to their villages or settle in other areas. Land is a crucial resource for warring factions seeking to bolster their political power, and land has become a primary factor in conflict in regions such as Ituri and Masisi (Vlassenroot, 2005). Understanding the role that land plays as a source of conflict and livelihoods is a weakness in the humanitarian response in many contexts, including DRC, despite the close relationship between humanitarian programming and settlement patterns and land tenure (de Waal, 2009; Pantuliano, 2009).

Increased attention to understanding and resolving land issues in DRC could represent a critical step forward. However, there are reports that the rapid creation of local CLPCs has fuelled tensions around their membership and role, particularly in Masisi territory. There are concerns that these committees have been established in haste, without due regard for local ethnic and other dynamics, and without considering pre-existing institutions that also deal with land. Insufficient attention has been paid to how the committees will interact with powerful local elites and groups with vested interests in land claims. While these committees were not specifically examined in this study, it seems likely that their limited power, legitimacy and resources would at best confine them to helping to resolve simple, local disputes, rather than getting at the drivers of conflict in any more fundamental way. At worst, these committees could exacerbate tensions more than they resolve them. Research on the formation of village committees in South Kivu to manage community reconstruction projects has found that powerful individuals such as chiefs and church leaders exerted disproportionate influence over them.5

3.4 Stabilisation: fit for purpose to support recovery?

Stabilisation is being framed as a transitional strategy for DRC – transitioning from conflict to peace, from humanitarian to development responses and from a peacekeeping mission to a post-conflict UN presence. The shift from MONUC to MONUSCO renegotiated the mission's terms. As the question of down-sizing and withdrawal is one of when and not if, 2010 and 2011 have seen a drive for the UN mission to 'work itself out of a job' by supporting the government and establishing the conditions that would enable the withdrawal of peacekeeping troops. Meanwhile, aid agencies operating under the framework of stabilisation must prove that their activities result in conflict prevention and peace-building benefits, and as such are contributing to stabilisation.

There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the impact of assistance to basic services and livelihoods on security and conflict prevention, calling into question the assumptions informing the reintegration and recovery aspects of stabilisation plans. The 'stabilisation' label risks raising unrealistic expectations about the security benefits of aid tools which have been used for years in eastern DRC, including rehabilitation of infrastructure, provision of basic services and various forms of assistance to food security and livelihoods. It is not apparent that these have had conflict prevention impacts in the past. In fact, very little is known about the impact of assistance – whether on livelihoods, markets or conflict. Understanding these issues is crucial to any efforts to build peace and promote stability. There is no question that peace-building is of critical importance in DRC, and it deserves programming that is designed specifically for peace-building objectives, rather than taking reintegration and recovery assistance as the starting-point and then expecting conflict prevention and peace-building impacts to follow.

Stabilisation funding does nonetheless provide a new avenue for transitional assistance. At the most basic level, addressing return, reintegration and recovery through stabilisation should result in timely and appropriate support that corresponds to the priority needs of populations returning and recovering from conflict. It is not yet apparent, however, that stabilisation can offer this. The SRFF attracted very little funding in its first year, and it is not clear if other activities funded under the stabilisation framework are the result of new funding or a reclassification of existing monies. The timeline for activities is not much longer than that of humanitarian projects, while the huge range of ISSSS priorities and activities – from training the police and building schools to addressing sexual violence – gives no indication of how reintegration and recovery activities will be prioritised in the future.

5 Research by Patrick Milabyo, University of Wageningen.

3.5 Tensions between humanitarian assistance and stabilisation

Stabilisation is an increasingly common way of strategising recovery and reintegration programming, particularly for UN agencies and their partners. Humanitarian assistance and stabilisation overlap in several ways: they involve many of the same actors, as UN agencies and NGOs undertake projects funded through both approaches, and they operate in the same policy and operational space. There are also, however, critical divergences. Humanitarian assistance and stabilisation programming are governed by very different principles; while both broadly speaking seek similar outcomes, stabilisation has explicitly political objectives which humanitarian assistance does not share. At its most fundamental, humanitarian aid is designed to save life and alleviate suffering; stabilisation programming, by contrast, aims to strengthen the state through the provision of outside support.

A crucial issue concerns the extent to which stabilisation impacts on humanitarian space, in the sense of the ability of international aid agencies to access populations in need and adhere to the core principles of humanitarian action, namely independence, impartiality and neutrality. The ISSSS has laid out guideline principles meant to inform stabilisation programming in DRC, including respecting humanitarian space, but it is not clear what this means in practice, particularly for UN agencies that implement both emergency and stabilisation programming. For the time being these guidelines are simply words on paper rather than a serious discussion of the potential contradictions, risks and trade-offs in humanitarian and stabilisation objectives. MONUSCO is an integrated mission and coherence between political, security and humanitarian priorities is by no means a new trend. However, stabilisation injects more of a security focus into how assistance is taken forward, moving UN aid agencies closer to the security agenda of the mission. This may be a particular issue for UNHCR and UNICEF, given their preoccupation with refugees and IDP assistance.

The 2011 HAP calls for closer humanitarian collaboration with other mechanisms, including stabilisation mechanisms, and raises no questions about the potential impact of such collaboration on humanitarian principles (OCHA, 2010). This suggests that UN-supported stabilisation is a continuation of previous coherence agendas that sought to bring together assistance, political and security goals, rather than a new trend in the politicisation of assistance. Stabilisation does nonetheless raise some new concerns, not least as STAREC includes humanitarian assistance under the rubric of stabilisation, in line with recent efforts by the DRC government to increase the regulation of humanitarian NGOs.

In addition to issues of humanitarian space, pursuing reintegration and recovery programming through stabilisation mechanisms has made some humanitarian actors nervous about how such assistance will be targeted. Humanitarian assistance is in theory targeted solely on the basis of need, and for now stabilisation strategies indicate that they will use this same principle. However, if the objective of increasing stability becomes a stronger feature of reintegration and recovery programming, then this political objective will either guide targeting or be meaningless.

Despite these challenges, stabilisation has gained momentum as a policy priority, both among international actors and for the DRC government. Given its explicitly political aims, tensions between the stabilisation project and humanitarian action are nigh-on inevitable. The most significant are not to do with reintegration and recovery; current programming in this area under the heading 'stabilisation' has been relabelled rather than fundamentally reconceived, and any tensions are probably negotiable. Other aspects of stabilisation – 'reinserting' the state and supporting government-led stabilisation operations undertaken by the Congolese army – are far more problematic. The counter-insurgency operations have had a catastrophic impact on the protection of civilians, as discussed in the previous section.

The assumption that increasing the presence of local authorities and the police increases the wellbeing of civilians ignores a history of abuses at the hands of the state apparatus, and the corrupt and clientalistic nature of governance stretching back decades. Sophisticated conflict analysis, programming and diplomacy will all be required to ensure that state-building ambitions do not have the effect of undermining civilian protection, and to manage the most sensitive aspects of highly political return processes.

Given the scale and likely duration of needs in DRC, humanitarian mechanisms are going to continue to play a significant role in the overall international response. However, humanitarian assistance is limited by its short timelines and in its ability to address the structural causes of vulnerability. This suggests the need for flexible, medium-term funding. This in turn raises the question of what role development assistance might play.

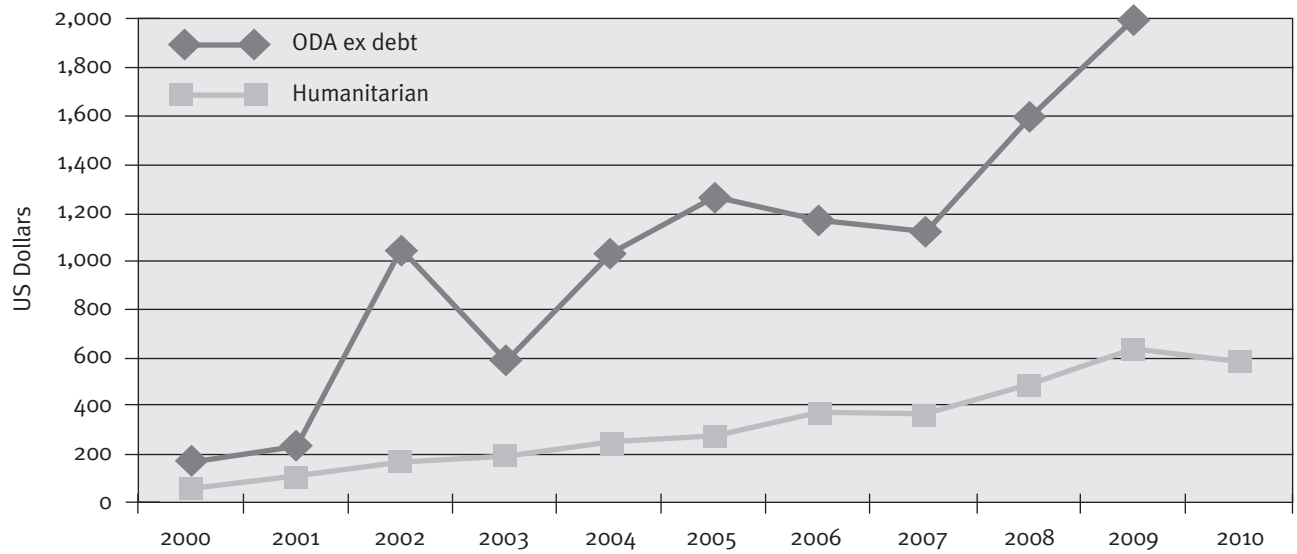
Chapter 4
Development assistance: the missing piece of the puzzle?

There is a general misconception that eastern DRC is solely the domain of humanitarian action. In terms of total financial assistance to the DRC, humanitarian aid is dwarfed by development financing (see Figure 1): roughly $2bn in 2010, against just under $600m in humanitarian aid. The DRC government reports that most of this assistance goes to the governance, health and transportation sectors (PGAI, 2009), though what actually happens is unknown as there is no accurate or comprehensive tracking of development aid (Baudienville, 2010). According to donors, there is a high fiduciary risk in providing support to the DRC, which is a polite way of saying that donors do not trust the government to use development aid properly. Corruption within the government is widespread, and its capacity to manage external assistance is very limited. As a result, donors are reluctant to provide direct budget support, and most development assistance is implemented in the form of projects, and development activities are not well integrated into an overall view and analysis of needs. This lack of trust casts a harsh light on state-building objectives and highlights the substantial limitations of state partnerships.

When discussing support to recovery in eastern DRC, representatives of humanitarian agencies frequently remarked that 'development actors need to come in earlier'. Many areas are stable enough for socio-economic activities that could address recovery and vulnerability over the longer term. It is certainly the case that humanitarian projects provide more direct assistance through the provision of services and other forms of support to livelihoods and food security, and NGOs based in the agency hubs of Goma and Bukavu find it much easier to secure funding for emergency projects than for development activities, including work related to economic recovery. Yet North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri are also the largest recipients of development assistance in DRC outside Kinshasa Province. Relatively stable provinces like Bandundu, Bas Congo, Kasai Occidental and Kasai Orientale – which receive virtually no humanitarian assistance – receive considerably *less* development assistance their eastern counterparts (see Figure 2). They have become 'aid orphans' in their own country. This shows that neither stability nor the absence of humanitarian assistance incentivises development and economic recovery assistance and reveals how flawed 'continuum' models are when conceptualising recovery in DRC. As one humanitarian donor remarked, 'development actors have their own priorities, and it's not to come in after humanitarians. Coming in after humanitarians is a priority we've assigned to them'.

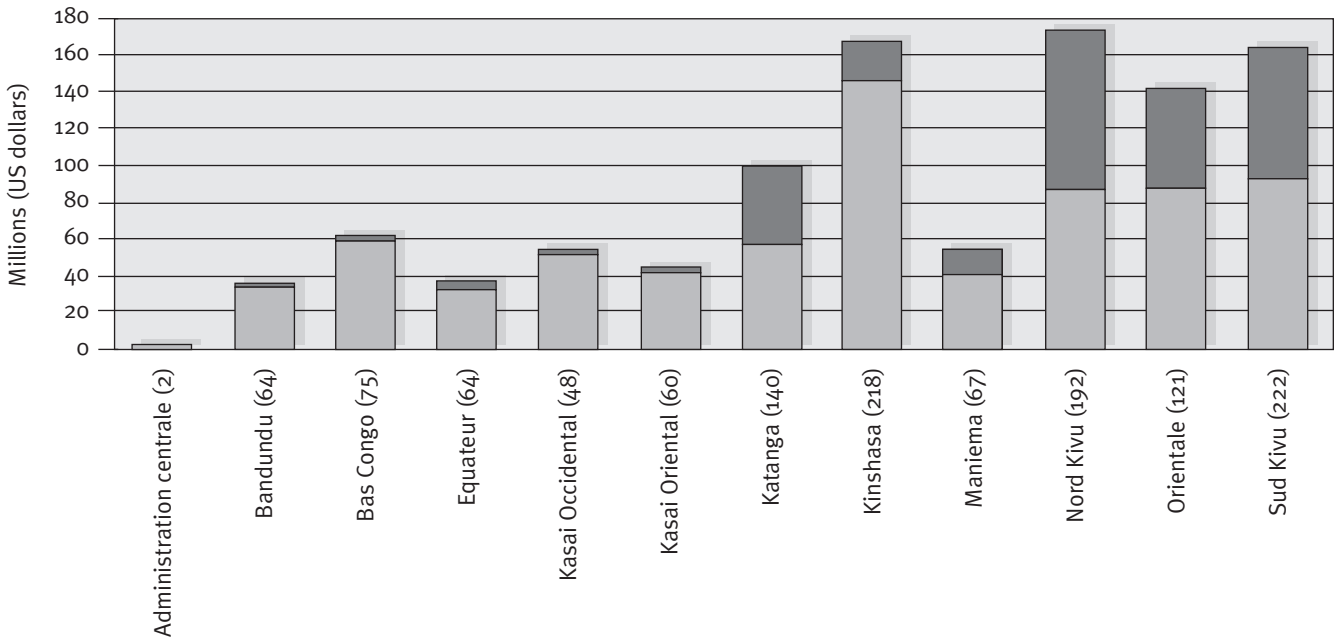
The international community is planning to address this imbalance by creating a 'peace consolidation' plan for western

Figure 1: Official development and humanitarian financing (US$ million)



Source: OECD/DAC International Development Statistics Database.

Figure 2: Development funding by province (2007–2008)



Source: PGAI, DRC government

provinces, in an attempt to attract more assistance by reframing the problems of chronic vulnerability and poverty in terms of conflict prevention. Arguably, however, it is the relative stability of these provinces that has prevented them from receiving more assistance. On the one hand, the emphasis of the strategy on fragility and state-building could enable programming that considers the interplay between governance, vulnerability and development. On the other hand, as Raeymaekers (1999) has argued, 'the permanent reproduction of "emergency" in the Democratic Republic of Congo has generated a situation that blocks, rather than favours, genuine change in this country'. Such an approach also assumes that state-building, security and development are all mutually reinforcing, when in fact such relationships are not necessarily intrinsic (Collinson et al., 2009a; 2009b). Reframing the nature of the underdevelopment problem as one of conflict prevention could have serious consequences for how programming to reduce poverty and vulnerability is pursued.

Development aid is a major form of international engagement in DRC, but what it is achieving is largely a mystery, owing in no small part to limited tracking and coordination. Understanding where it is going and what it is achieving is prerequisite to determining how effectively it can support reintegration and recovery. It is also important to understand better how development actors tolerate the risks inherent in providing development assistance in eastern DRC, including corruption and insecurity.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The long-term nature of humanitarian action makes it easy to forget that it is not meant to have a transformative impact. Donors, and also the government of the DRC, are uncomfortable with the idea of long-term humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian strategies have supported recovery in the absence of the lack of dedicated funding mechanisms for transition and recovery activities, and also because the range of needs and vulnerabilities are not strictly humanitarian. They are linked to the failure of the DRC government to provide basic functions in terms of services, infrastructure and good governance. Stabilisation provides a new entry-point for taking on these issues, but it attaches political and security objectives to the provision of assistance.

For supporting livelihoods and basic services, humanitarian programming remains a critical tool, but a limited one because funding is short-term and decreasing, acute needs are prioritised over investments in livelihoods and humanitarian interventions are not designed or implemented with a view to tackling recovery or vulnerability over the long term. Stabilisation strategies offer a new and additional avenue for broader support to reintegration and recovery. However, narrow priority axes, multiple and ambitious objectives, unrealistic timeframes, underlying security expectations and the lack of financial support thus far mean that it should not be counted on as the sole, or even primary, driver of assistance towards reintegration and recovery. To the extent that the ambiguity of humanitarian assistance has been used to address chronic vulnerability, shifting this responsibility to stabilisation funds does little to solve the problem of the need for social safety nets more broadly.

Programming that is flexible, medium-term and independent of security objectives is needed, which neither humanitarian assistance nor stabilisation can offer. It is very difficult to determine the extent to which development funding is filling this role because of the lack of coordination among development donors and the lack of tracking of development projects, but the scale of needs and underdevelopment in DRC suggests that it is falling vastly short. Finding the right mix of financing tools and programming is a pressing priority. No tools, however, can solve problems around political engagement and the capacity and willingness of the DRC government to tackle fundamental problems like reforming the security sector.

Reintegration and recovery need to be adequately supported, but support to livelihoods and the recovery of populations should not be a security agenda. Should they be informed by strong conflict analysis? Yes. Should they be based on a strong understanding of the likely impacts on the security environment and protection? Absolutely, above all given the highly political issues around displacement and return. However, looking to such programming to be a driver of stabilisation overestimates its impact, makes unverified and highly questionable assumptions about links with peace-building and shifts the focus away from the *raison d'être* of assistance – helping people who have faced one of the worst protracted conflicts of our time. There is certainly space for more peace-building activities, in particular programming that addresses local conflicts. These deserve programming designed specifically to meet conflict prevention and peace-building objectives, rather than expecting these benefits to flow from socio-economic and reintegration interventions. Reported tensions arising from the formation of conflict resolution committees underscore the sensitivity of such activities, and the risk that stabilisation activities can in fact be destabilising.

There is a real danger that stabilisation is being seen as the only vehicle for transitional programming in DRC, without recognising the tensions involved, not simply between stabilisation and humanitarian mechanisms, but also within the stabilisation agenda itself. The transformation of MONUC into MONUSCO has made state-building a priority in DRC, without any clarity as to what kind of state is being supported. The government has not lived up to basic commitments as a partner in stabilisation and pre-existing security sector reform activities, such as paying salaries for police and soldiers. Counter-insurgency operations implemented by the DRC government and occasionally supported by MONUSCO have resulted in severe human rights abuses. State-building can conflict with humanitarian objectives when what is being strengthened is a predatory state. These issues emphasise the importance of political engagement, for which assistance cannot be a substitute.

For humanitarian donors, aid workers and others involved in strategising humanitarian assistance, there is no better time than the present for renewed reflection on the role of humanitarian action in DRC: what principled humanitarian response means in the context of stabilisation, an integrated mission and (potentially) increased government regulation; the role of humanitarian agencies in promoting protection amidst failures to respect International Humanitarian Law; and how to navigate political and security agendas. Humanitarians need to go even further in taking on these issues, not by drawing lines in the sand but by understanding how they can proactively define the relationship between humanitarian and stabilisation activities, particularly in the overlapping area of reintegration. Otherwise they risk having stabilisation actors define this relationship for them. More broadly, there is a need for analysis about the relationship between aid and security in DRC. Assistance does not inherently promote stability; nor

does state-building inherently promote peace. Understanding development action is of critical importance, as there has been a tendency to focus on the role of humanitarian action in eastern DRC compared to other assistance modalities.

The breadth of the issues raised in this paper are a reminder that 'early recovery' is not a distinct set of interventions, but rather a label that encompasses the many and sometimes conflicting priorities among different actors looking to support livelihoods and promote a transition to peace and recovery. The following recommendations are intended to provide a basis for taking forward these issues, regardless of the labels attached to them. Ultimately, discussion about different frameworks for providing assistance cannot mask the fact that a main problem in assistance provision has been that too often programming has not been based on a sound analysis of the problems, including conflict dynamics, analysis of the relationship between citizens and the state and realistic assumptions about the likely performance of state institutions in the short and medium term.

5.1 Recommendations

Better understand links between assistance provision and peace-building and conflict prevention

Socio-economic assistance for recovery and reintegration, namely support to livelihoods and basic services, should not be pursued with the expectation that assistance in and of itself will contribute to conflict prevention, peace-building and stabilisation – unless there is evidence to back this assumption. The flipside, that without assistance creating peace dividends people might take up arms again, or conflict will naturally become worse, is an extreme hypothesis given the many areas and people who receive little or no assistance. The danger of such expectations is not only that they will not be met, but that unverified assumptions about links between assistance and security become the basis for strategising and targeting assistance, including in more stable provinces.

Support analysis and link it to intelligent programming

Topics like land tenure and conflict dynamics in DRC have been extensively studied but not strongly linked into programming. Integrating solid analysis in programming is challenging because it requires knowledge of political economy and local conflict dynamics, understanding competing narratives about drivers of conflict and anticipating the impacts of different response options. This sets a high bar for human resources within aid agencies. There is high turnover of international staff in aid agencies and staff are typically unfamiliar with the context. There is little accountability for poor programming and analysis when it does take place. Having a strong analytical base to programming requires constant analysis, which in turn requires investment and expertise. Solving this problem is a major priority for all assistance – humanitarian, developmental or under the rubric of 'stabilisation'. Creative solutions are needed to address long-standing criticisms about the failure to link analysis and programming, such as supporting independent analysis.

Flexible, risk-tolerant funding and programming

There exist substantial opportunities to support socio-economic recovery, development and peace-building activities that do not fit well within humanitarian or stabilisation mechanisms. Limiting the SRFF to key axes and underlying security expectations means that it cannot respond to reintegration and recovery needs on an impartial basis or with reasonable coverage. Other funding sources are also needed. These could be new sources, based on transitional and recovery funds in places like Southern Sudan, which have been evaluated. There is a body of research and evaluations on transitional financing that can be consulted.6 Alternatively, donors can provide bilateral support to aid agencies outside of pooled funding systems, as is currently done with development financing, but there is a need for better coordination and greater understanding of the reach and impact of development assistance. Not only do funding systems need to be flexible, but the programmes that they fund must be flexible as well. Longer-term programmes are typically built on strategies and log-frames that lock in agencies into approaches and intervention areas, constraining their ability to adapt programming to changing circumstances.

Maintain humanitarian funding – and take a longer-term view

Humanitarian assistance plays an important role in meeting the needs of conflict-affected people. The international community needs to maintain funding at levels adequate to respond to humanitarian needs, which are not going to go away in the near future. Donors should recognise that humanitarian and other forms of assistance will almost certainly play a role in addressing vulnerability well into the next decade. Longer-term thinking should go beyond the typical boundaries of humanitarian action and examine the potential for social protection.

Maintain a clear separation between humanitarian and stabilisation coordination mechanisms

Humanitarian and stabilisation activities are taking place in overlapping sectors and involve many of the same aid agencies. This requires coordination. The Early Recovery cluster, as well as OCHA, has a role to play in the coordination of activities between humanitarian and stabilisation frameworks. However, because clusters are humanitarian coordination tools, the boundaries between coordination mechanisms need to be clear.

Better understand the impact of assistance

In order to maximise the contribution of assistance to recovery, agencies need to develop a much better understanding of the impacts of their interventions – intended and unintended. There is a tendency to overestimate the importance of assistance. This is made clear in references in HAPs to the dangers of humanitarian assistance creating dependency

6 Including Scanteam, 2007; Fenton, 2008; INCAF, 2010.

– when in fact assistance is too small-scale, unreliable and sporadic for people to become dependent on it. Development funding in DRC far outpaces humanitarian and stabilisation streams. Exploring the potential for more risk-tolerant, flexible and longer-term funding sources requires a solid picture of development financing and its impacts. Understanding the impact of interventions on land issues is also important. The relationship between land and conflict varies between areas, as does the potential for land meditation to play a broader role in conflict prevention. Interventions must be sophisticated in their understanding of local structures. The role and effectiveness of committees being formed to support reintegration should be assessed.

Reinvigorate discussions on what humanitarian action – and humanitarian principles – mean in DRC

Humanitarian agencies have substantial leeway and access in DRC compared to contexts like Sri Lanka, where the restrictive actions and policies of the government there resulted in a situation where agencies had to severely compromise their principles to gain access to civilians. A primary challenge to humanitarian principles in DRC has been the presence of an integrated mission. Humanitarian agencies' operating space may come under even more political pressure as stabilisation strategies move UN aid agencies (and their implementing partners) closer to a 'coherence' agenda. Such a shift will require aid agencies to reflect on and negotiate their relationship with stabilisation and security objectives. Stabilisation presents an important opportunity to discuss how agencies individually and collectively pursue principled humanitarian action. There should also be a hard look at how assistance can have the maximum impact and appropriateness and a shift away from supply-driven programming.

Continue to recognise the centrality of protection in humanitarian action Protection is central to humanitarian response in DRC. Humanitarian actors must continue to speak up and advocate on key protection issues and threats, including where counter-insurgency components of stabilisation pose direct threats to civilian protection.

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