Early recovery: an overview of policy debates and operational challenges

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About the Humanitarian Policy Group
The Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI is one of the world's leading teams of independent researchers and information professionals working on humanitarian issues. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high-quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

Contents

List of illustrations and boxes

1. Introduction

Early recovery in conflict settings has gained momentum in policy circles, but there are divergent views on what precisely it is, and how it differs from other approaches to promoting peace and recovery, such as peace-building and stabilisation. This paper argues that early recovery has functioned primarily as a way of framing activities, strategies and approaches that take place in humanitarian and transitional contexts, and that its added value is yet to be consistently proven. As early recovery has been used as a catch-all term for a broad range of issues, policy-makers and practitioners need to explicitly define what problem or set of problems they are seeking to address.

Recent discussions on early recovery are part of long-standing debates on how best to programme assistance in conflict and transitional settings, where there are evident tensions between humanitarian, development and security-oriented approaches. Much of this thinking has focused on the interface between relief and development assistance. Linking relief and development (or 'linking relief, rehabilitation and development'[1]) has been a topic of considerable discussion and research – resulting in arguably little progress – for over two decades.[2] More recently, as addressing global terrorism and strengthening international engagement in fragile states have become dominant international concerns, the focus has widened from linking relief and development to integrating aid and security (Harmer and Macrae, 2004). Security priorities are evident in the increased attention being given to approaches which aim to end conflicts (stabilisation), institutionalise peace (peace-building) and enhance state capacity and legitimacy (state-building). Promoting peace and recovery is as high as ever on the agenda of the international community, evidenced by the surge in attention to how certain donors and the United Nations can restructure international responses in order to achieve this ambitious objective.[3]

What remains unclear is where 'early recovery' fits into these debates, particularly given the chequered history of attempts to link relief and development and ongoing parallel efforts to promote peace-building and stabilisation. Given the policy attention at this juncture, it is opportune to explore the current and potential added value of early recovery. This paper sets out to encourage such a discussion. It explores the evolution of early recovery as an approach, maps early recovery in relation to peace-building, stabilisation and state-building and examines operational issues surrounding early recovery in different contexts experiencing conflict. The paper does not endeavour to establish a definitive 'take' on early recovery, which would not necessarily be helpful given the existence of multiple interpretations, but rather seeks to inform discussions among policy-makers and practitioners about the added value of framing activities and approaches in terms of early recovery.

The focus of this paper is on conflict settings. This is not to downplay the important lessons that can be learned from recovery in the aftermath of natural disasters. Indeed, natural disasters can trigger similar processes of social and political change. While recognising the analogies between recovery from conflict and from natural disasters, it is also important to keep in mind the fundamentally different challenges that these contexts present and, consequently, the different responses that they require. The very concept of 'recovery' takes on different connotations depending on what people are actually recovering from, and the conditions under which recovery can take place. The logic of recovery in a conflict-affected society, where institutions, governance mechanisms and social relationships are radically transformed, is inherently different from recovery in a natural disaster setting, where the institutional and political environment may well be relatively stable. Early recovery may also be more intuitive in natural disaster settings, if a transition to recovery is grounded in a return to a pre-disaster 'norm'.

This paper draws on a literature review on early recovery, as well as interviews with staff from UN agencies, donors and NGOs in headquarters and field offices. Information on Darfur, Gaza, Colombia and Uganda is based on a review of available documentation on early recovery and

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[1] The term 'Linking Relief and Development' (LRRD) is primarily used by the EC. See EC COM (2001) 153 (23 April 2001).

[2] See for example Harmer and Macrae (2004); Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell (1994); Christoplos (2006); Grünewald (2008); Brusset et al. (2009).

[3] The Secretary-General's report *Peace-building in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* (UN, 2009) explores these questions.

recovery activities in each country, and interviews with in-country representatives from humanitarian and development agencies.

2. Early recovery – mapping the debate

'Early recovery' is a recent addition to the terminology on international assistance, and there is considerable confusion around what it entails. There are two commonly cited definitions, which vary considerably in their scope. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery (CWGER), led by UNDP, defines early recovery as the application of development principles of participation, sustainability and local ownership to humanitarian situations, with the aim of stabilising local and national capacities. Early recovery aims to build on humanitarian assistance, support spontaneous community recovery initiatives and lay the foundations for longer-term recovery. With its focus on emergency settings and the complementarity of development and humanitarian approaches, the CWGER's approach to early recovery is in line with previous thinking on linking relief and development.

A broader understanding of early recovery, which pulls in security and political processes, is emphasised in a report by the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) (Chandran et al., 2008). This paper describes early recovery as early efforts to secure stability; establish peace; resuscitate markets, livelihoods and services and the state capacities to foster them; and build core state capacity to manage political, security and development processes. Compared to the CWGER's approach, this dramatically increases the scope of early recovery to include processes linked to peace-building and state-building. This understanding of early recovery taps into the idea of 'transitions': how to improve international responses and the aid architecture to effectively and flexibly respond to shifting priorities in conflict and transitional settings.

Interpretations of what constitutes early recovery are many, owing to the broad range of activities that meet the criteria; the vagueness of what constitutes a transition to recovery; when an intervention can be considered 'early' (or, according to the more recently used term, 'in the immediate aftermath of conflict'); and the plethora of tools and approaches that could be used in the name of promoting peace and recovery. Neither definition of early recovery cited above introduces issues that are particularly new; rather, they bring renewed attention to well-known challenges. Humanitarian actors – with varying degrees of success – have long been concerned about supporting livelihoods and increasing access to basic services, as opposed to simply distributing food and other relief commodities as part of purely 'life-saving' interventions. Development actors – with varying degrees of conflict and post-conflict expertise – seek to initiate development activities at the earliest possible opportunity, but utilise financing mechanisms that are not well-adapted to crisis contexts. Actors involved in peace-building and peacekeeping undertake a wide variety of activities to promote peace and security in emergency settings, including using assistance as part of efforts to win 'hearts and minds'. For early recovery – a label that could cover all of these areas – there is a tension between more limited and broader understandings, not least because resources are at stake for funding designated for early recovery activities.

Early recovery came about – or at least gained traction – during the humanitarian reform process in 2005. Growing concerns with the need to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action and address gaps in response led to a number of humanitarian reform initiatives. One key reform was the establishment of the 'cluster approach' to strengthen coordination and partnerships in key sectors,[4] formalise the roles and responsibilities of UN agencies and organisations and create 'providers of last resort' to address critical gaps. The CWGER was established within the cluster approach and grew out of an earlier Interagency Working Group on Return and Reintegration (Stoddard et al., 2007). The work of early recovery clusters focuses on activities that move beyond life-saving interventions. Some are more humanitarian-oriented (e.g. livelihoods, basic services, shelter), while others are more development-oriented (e.g. rule of law, governance). In 2007, an evaluation of the cluster approach noted the conceptual challenges that the CWGER was facing in the field, particularly in countries emerging from conflict (Stoddard et al., 2007). The evaluation stressed the 'complexity of blending elements of a long-range, government-oriented, capacity-building development focus with humanitarian objectives which emphasise the immediate needs of

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[4] 'A series of IASC Working Group and UN meetings were held in the latter half of 2005 to identify nine clusters and cluster lead agencies (many more than the original "gap" sectors identified by the HRR).' Stoddard et al. (2007).

beneficiaries' (ibid.: 37). In other words, the fundamental challenges of balancing development and humanitarian approaches in crisis contexts have not been surmounted by the creation of a cluster dedicated to this task.

In 2008, early recovery gained momentum in policy circles when the UK government argued for the need to better organise international mechanisms, particularly the UN, to support stabilisation and recovery in post-conflict countries in a more timely and effective way. This push by the UK injected more security, stabilisation and peace-building elements into discussions on early recovery, which had hitherto been dominated by humanitarian and development issues. Later in the year, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commissioned the CIC study referred to above (Chandran et al., 2008). This noted gaps in strategy, capacity and financing, gaps which have subsequently been cited as priority areas to be addressed by the international community. UNDP and the government of Denmark jointly sponsored the Practitioners' and Policy Forum on Early Recovery, an international high-level event held in Copenhagen in October 2008 to find ways to strengthen international support for early recovery. However, the seemingly uncritical way in which definitions and approaches were addressed at the conference led some participants to question whether more discussion was needed to clarify the nature and value of early recovery, instead of the evident focus on supporting it.

The *Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict* (UN, 2009) looks at strengthening the UN's approach to peace-building and its role in facilitating and coordinating an earlier response with the international community. While the initial focus of the report was on addressing challenges to peace-building and early recovery, peace-building became the main focus. Early recovery is described as a component of humanitarian response that moves beyond life-saving assistance and helps to lay the foundation for faster response once the conflict ends. This suggests that, at least for UN agencies, early recovery has been subsumed under broader efforts to support peace-building, as opposed to

constituting a separate approach on an equal footing.

Given the fluidity of definitions and interpretations – ranging from a narrow focus on development/humanitarian approaches to the wider picture of programming assistance in transitional contexts, there is no single answer to the question 'what is early recovery?'. Rather, early recovery has functioned as a way to conceive of activities, approaches and strategies taking place in humanitarian and transitional settings that seek to promote and lay the foundations for recovery. The rest of this paper examines the added value of framing activities in terms of early recovery, both in comparison with other approaches to promoting recovery and in terms of improving response at the field level.

Box 1: Financing early recovery

Financing issues have been a key feature of discussions on early recovery. The need for flexible, adequate and risk-tolerant funding poses challenges to meeting needs that are not strictly developmental or humanitarian. Donors and multilateral institutions deliver financing through different internal and external agencies and channels depending on their mandates (e.g. humanitarian, development, security), the changing nature of the context (i.e. if it is relatively stable or if there are high levels of violence) and even concerns about efficiency (i.e. contributing to pooled funds to decrease transaction costs). On reaching peace agreements or similar milestones, humanitarian funding often decreases as donors look to promote recovery and development-oriented programmes. However, humanitarian needs (basic services, access to food and the protection of livelihoods, for instance) persist because of ongoing insecurity, the authorities' limited capacity to deliver services and the cumulative impact of crises on assets and wellbeing. Chandran et al. (2008) note multiple gaps in funding early efforts to foster recovery, with financing that is insufficiently realistic, flexible and responsive. Emerging findings from the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) stress that it is impossible to quantify total funding for transitional periods, and therefore to calculate absolute shortfalls in transitional funding. The findings also caution against over-emphasising funding 'gaps', which could misleadingly imply deficits that could be plugged, when more fundamental changes may be required (INCAF, 2009).

3. Wider approaches to responding to conflict and promoting recovery

Failures to promote meaningful recovery from conflict have led to the formulation of new discourses on how to overcome the challenges involved, with most donor governments and the UN calling for more 'coordinated', 'joined-up' and 'coherent' action, particularly between development, security and political actors and interventions (Patrick and Brown, 2007). This is based on the premise that stabilising fragile contexts requires early intervention and cannot be achieved with military action alone, but necessitates a combination of humanitarian, recovery, security, development and political interventions. Although coordination is necessary between these different objectives to ensure that efforts are not duplicated and are, where possible, mutually reinforcing, the reality is that coordination alone does not resolve the fundamental dilemmas between different principles and approaches (Paris, 2009; Collinson et al., forthcoming).

Responding to conflict and promoting recovery involves a web of actors, objectives and tools that are impossible to separate into neat categories: even an activity as simple as repairing a water pump takes on a different meaning if it is done by an NGO or a peacekeeping force, through or outside of government authorities, and targeted at an area because the need is there, or because doing so might build confidence in local government. Examining frameworks for assistance therefore is not a purely intellectual exercise. There are implications for how interventions are planned, executed and funded; which state and non-state institutions are supported; what principles inform the work; and how politicised the objectives are. Early recovery, in that it is concerned with the initial transition from conflict to peace, overlaps with stabilisation, peace-building and state-building. Notwithstanding

disagreements about their precise definitions and how to go about achieving their ambitious goals, the basic aims of these approaches are well understood: ending conflict (stabilisation), institutionalising peace (peace-building) and enhancing state capacity and legitimacy (state-building).

Stabilisation is often associated with security objectives, but the label applies to strategies and operations that broadly aim to end conflict and associated social, economic and political upheaval (Bensahel et al., 2009). Stabilisation manifests itself in multiple ways in conflict settings, including through UN peacekeeping operations, national government counter-insurgency measures and international armed interventions (Collinson et al., forthcoming). Stabilisation is generally understood as the necessary prelude to effective reconstruction or peace-building processes.

Peace-building involves three main transitions: 1) a social transition from violence to an end in hostilities; 2) a political transition from wartime government to a post-war government that can preserve the coalition of interests underpinning the peace process; and 3) an economic transition from wartime accumulation and distribution to equitable, transparent and sustainable development (Paris and Sisk, 2009). State-building refers to those interventions that aim to enhance the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state deemed essential for effective stabilisation and peace-building. Definitions of peace-building and state-building vary in terms of ambition and scope. The definitions in Table 1 capture the middle ground between minimal and maximal interpretations.

Table 1: Definitions and concepts related to promoting peace and recovery

Early recovery (IASC CWGER)	A multidimensional process of recovery that begins in humanitarian settings guided by development principles that seek to build on humanitarian programmes and catalyse sustainable development opportunities. Aims to generate self-sustaining, nationally-owned, resilient processes for post-crisis recovery. Encompasses restoration of basic services, livelihoods, shelter, governance, security and rule of law, environmental and social dimensions and reintegration of displaced populations.
Early recovery (broader definition)	Early efforts to secure stability, establish peace, resuscitate markets, livelihoods and services and build state capacity to manage these processes (Chandran et al., 2008).
Stabilisation	Efforts to end conflict and associated social, economic and political upheaval. Includes a range of activities from military intervention and humanitarian assistance to governance and policing (Bensahel et al., 2009).
Peace-building	Activities by international or national actors to prevent violent conflict and institutionalise peace, understood as the absence of armed conflict and a modicum of participatory politics that can be sustained in the absence of an international peace operation (Call and Couzens, 2007).
State-building	An endogenous process to enhance the capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state–society relations (OECD, 2008).

Early recovery can be understood as a tool of a broader stabilisation process, in that it seeks to lay the foundations for wider recovery from conflict, as well as being a component of a peace-building agenda, through creating visible peace dividends. To the extent that early recovery efforts build national capacities, support political settlements and are informed by development principles, such efforts overlap with state-building and development approaches. Based on Humanitarian Policy Group research on different approaches to responding to conflict and promoting peace and recovery, Figure 1 shows how these approaches have certain overlaps in terms of their tools, objectives, results and operating environment.

Figure 1: Approaches to responding to conflict and promoting peace and recovery
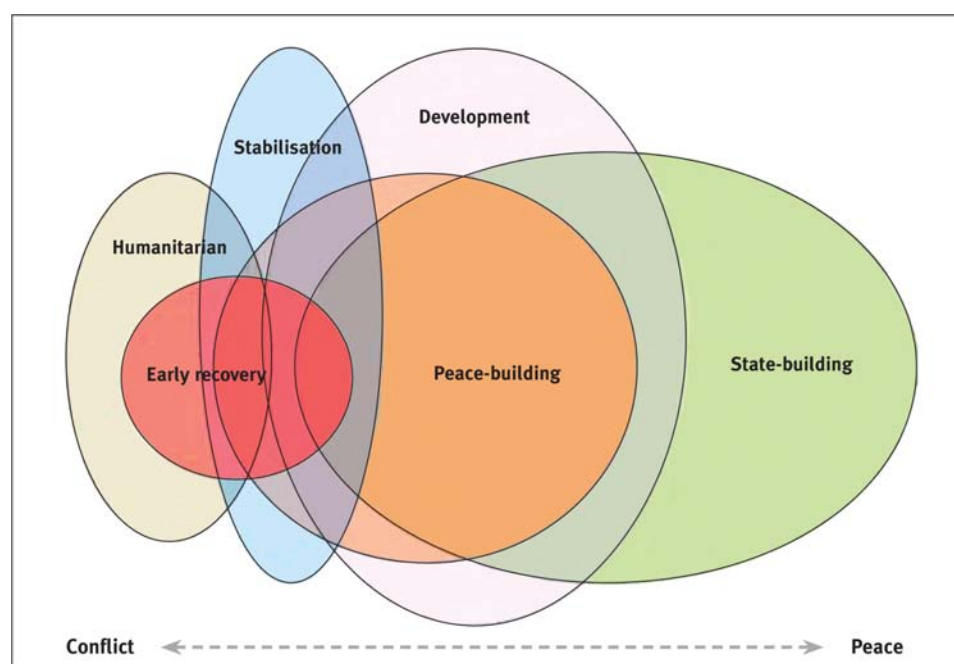
Given its overlaps with other approaches, when is it useful to conceptualise activities and approaches as early recovery, and why? The answer depends on the actor and the context. Governments affected by crisis may find value in pushing for early recovery if they believe that it will give them more authority and power within the humanitarian response. As early recovery is seen as more aid-oriented than stabilisation, many aid agencies are more comfortable with pushing for recovery strategies than for stabilisation. For humanitarian agencies who try to distance themselves from the security aspects of stabilisation and the political aspects of peace-building, early recovery could function as a middle ground for promoting livelihoods. However, at present humanitarian agencies generally remain unconvinced about the value of portraying livelihood and other activities in terms of early recovery, in no small part because early recovery is seen as more politicised than humanitarian assistance. The views of populations affected by conflict have been left out of this debate, but it is not a stretch to imagine that their main concern is receiving assistance that responds to their priority needs and evolves as these needs change. The usefulness of early recovery clearly lies in whether it can improve programming on the ground in crisis contexts.

4. Early recovery: imposing assistance in crisis contexts?

Policy discussions on early recovery have focused heavily on the 'big' questions of how to transform assistance approaches in conflict and transitional settings. Less attention has been paid to whether this policy focus is generating positive impacts at ground level. Based on a preliminary review of experiences in Uganda, Darfur, the Gaza Strip and Colombia, the added value of framing activities and strategies in terms of early recovery has not been overwhelmingly demonstrated, for three main reasons. First, the most tangible manifestations of early recovery have been within humanitarian mechanisms, which face challenges and limitations in terms of their ability to lay the foundations for recovery. Second, much is happening already: many aid agencies already work across programming divides, but not necessarily under the banner of early recovery. Finally, translating early recovery into context-specific action has not been a straightforward task for practitioners. Greater modesty is needed regarding what recovery-oriented programming can achieve in situations of ongoing conflict.

Nowhere are the limitations of humanitarian mechanisms in laying foundations for recovery more evident than in Northern Uganda. Following the start of peace talks and an improving security situation, the international community, influenced by the history of strong development donor relations with Kampala, relied on the Ugandan government to kickstart the recovery process. However, the programme initially lacked a funding mechanism, a problem of particular concern to direct budget support donors given the corruption that had affected previous recovery-oriented programmes. In the absence of clear UN leadership and funding mechanisms for recovery, the comparatively well-resourced, well-coordinated and well-led humanitarian effort identified the facilitation of recovery as one of its two overriding objectives in the 2008 Consolidated Appeal (UN, 2007). Financial support was, however, limited for what many viewed as at best an inappropriate 'stretching' of the humanitarian mandate, and at worst as an act of institutional preservation for humanitarian agencies whose roles would decrease as responses became more focused on development. As a result, many recovery-oriented projects were removed from the appeal in mid-2008. Far from serving as a mechanism to achieve greater coherence, efforts to employ early recovery as a mid-way phase between relief and development reinforced existing tensions among the various actors involved.

Early recovery clusters have been a very visible embodiment of early recovery in crisis contexts. As part of humanitarian coordination, these clusters have taken different shapes and names, incorporating livelihoods, land, governance, rule of law and environmental issues. Early recovery clusters have in some cases served an important function in providing a home for discussions on key issues not covered in other clusters. However, they have been hampered by conceptual confusion and leadership challenges. In Northern Uganda, poor roll-out, insufficient leadership and debates on strategies for governance led to a refashioning of the Early Recovery Cluster into the Governance, Infrastructure and (Non-agricultural) Livelihoods Cluster. While aid actors debated strategies for early recovery clusters, opportunities to be 'early' were overtaken as the area became more stable, requiring more recovery and developmental responses (which were not forthcoming).

In the Gaza Strip, in the absence of a political and operational space where initial recovery efforts could take strong hold, the role of the Early Recovery Cluster (renamed the 'Governance, Livelihoods, Utilities and Environment' or GLUE Cluster) was limited to information-sharing, though some aid agencies had hoped to use it as a platform to push ahead with innovative programming. In Colombia, efforts to promote early recovery through IASC groups (similar to clusters) have not led to new activities that have applied development principles to contexts with ongoing conflict. There is confusion over how early recovery can be implemented in practice, and how it differs from pre-existing approaches; implementation challenges arise related to security; and there are limited additional funds to pursue early recovery-styled activities. In Darfur, major differences of opinion regarding what early recovery should aim to achieve have been reconciled not by defining what is appropriate for the context, but rather by rolling out early recovery through clusters. This may result in early recovery focusing narrowly on transforming and transitioning humanitarian action, as opposed to involving development actors alongside humanitarian ones.

Irrespective of how early recovery is defined, it remains a highly political approach in conflict settings. In Colombia, efforts to promote recovery cannot be fully separated from the government's stabilisation agenda. The international humanitarian and development community's vision of recovery based on ownership and inclusiveness is at odds with that of the government of Colombia, which prioritises the promotion of large-scale agro-exports and the extractive industry, often at the expense of local populations' land rights and developmental expectations. In Darfur, there have been concerns about politicising aid by linking it with the peace process.

Much discussion on the need for early recovery concerns the tensions between humanitarian and development approaches, which are often portrayed as distinct silos: life-saving humanitarian action on the one hand, and participative, longer-term development activities on the other. While there are clearly distinctions and tensions, the reality is much more nuanced. Programmes moving beyond 'traditional' humanitarian assistance have not only been possible in Darfur, the Gaza Strip, Northern Uganda and Colombia, but they have been taking place for some time. In Darfur, supporting livelihoods has been a central and crucial aspect of the humanitarian response. In Northern Uganda, the return process has been supported by programmes aimed at the provision of basic services and livelihoods support. There is ample opportunity to learn from current and past efforts, including from multi-mandate non-governmental organisations implementing programmes that are neither strictly humanitarian nor developmental.

Particularly amidst ongoing insecurity, there is a need for caution about what 'development' programmes can achieve in terms of laying lasting foundations for recovery: the access constraints, high staff turnover, logistical challenges and limited resources and technical capacity facing the UNDP and other development partners all pose considerable challenges in contexts like Darfur. Interviews with field staff suggest a significant disjunction between dialogues about early recovery in donor hubs (e.g. New York and Geneva) and the complex operational realities confronting agencies in the field, where in-country capacity and leadership are often severely limited. This is one reason why early recovery is struggling to gain traction in the field and continues to be surrounded by confusion and suspicion.

5. Conclusion

The surge in attention by the international community on 'fixing' states experiencing conflict and fragility – and the security implications of these conditions for other states – has coincided with and fuelled a growing interest in promoting peace and recovery from conflict as early as possible. However, precisely how to go about doing this is a complex discussion: early recovery, stabilisation, peace-building and state-building all offer different frameworks. There are overlaps and contradictions, and even agreed definitions are lacking. All approaches raise the question of what 'recovery' looks like, the conditions under which it can take place and the limits of international efforts to promote it. This does not easily translate into blueprints for action.

Early recovery may have a role in advancing this agenda, but there is a need to move away from conceptual debates about what early recovery is and who 'owns' it. The focus should be, not on finding new overarching frameworks, but on understanding opportunities and trade-offs among different approaches (humanitarian, development, stabilisation, peace-building, state-building) and what can realistically be achieved in any given context. Moving from conflict to peace is not a technical exercise, but a highly political process in which different principles, priorities and approaches do not necessarily sit easily together. Experience has taught us that there is no magic combination of activities that will promote recovery amidst ongoing conflict and instability.

Ultimately, the many and varied instruments and objectives of aid agencies, governments and international organisations impose obstacles to coordinated efforts to foster recovery, both during outright conflict and in the 'grey area' between conflict and stability. However, short of dismantling international aid systems and recreating them from scratch, the focus has been on how to navigate around and minimise these obstacles through policy, programming and funding systems. This can only be achieved by precisely defining the problems at hand – whether aid coordination in transitional settings, risk-tolerant funding systems or synergies between humanitarian and development assistance. At present, multiple challenges and approaches are bundled together under the heading of 'early recovery'

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Annex – Country Snapshots

Uganda: too late for early recovery?

A long-standing humanitarian catastrophe was largely neglected by national and international actors until late 2003, when Northern Uganda was designated one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, and a major response was launched. Hostilities between the government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) ceased in August 2006, but a final peace agreement proved elusive. Despite this, the peace process helped to improve security: the government lifted restrictions on movement and encouraged the return of displaced populations.

Just as they were delayed in their response to the humanitarian crisis, so too the government and the international community were late in shifting to recovery-oriented approaches. As people poured out of camps from the end of 2006, aid actors became mired in conceptual debates, institutional wrangling and funding problems. Following repeated delays, the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) was launched in October 2007, aimed at consolidating state authority; rebuilding communities (including return and resettlement); revitalising the northern economy; and peace-building and reconciliation. However, there was confusion about whether this was a new strategy with new structures, a prioritised list of objectives drawn from Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) or a coordinating framework to draw together existing programmes (Oxfam, 2008). Perhaps more significantly, the PRDP lacked funding, with donors and the government each waiting for the other before committing funds.

In the end, donors turned to the UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). Activities were funded as part of the 'Parish Approach', a hurriedly devised strategy between the government and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to support basic services. More fundamental concerns were also raised that the PRDP underplayed the political complexities of recovery in communities mistrustful of the government following decades of conflict, and sidelined peace and reconciliation issues in favour of technical solutions (Dolan, 2008). Official implementation did not start until July 2008, when the government pledged 30% of the $606 million

required. With limited government commitment, donor support and government capacity on the ground, little materialised.

Meanwhile, on the humanitarian front, Uganda has played host to an array of funding and coordination pilot initiatives, including a poorly handled roll-out of the cluster approach in late 2005/early 2006.[5] 'Early recovery' was one of the initial clusters, but a number of factors – confusion about what it meant, lack of leadership by UNDP, overlapping activities between different sectors and concern that compartmentalising early recovery would undermine efforts to mainstream transitional approaches across the humanitarian response – led to it being refashioned as a Governance, Infrastructure and (Non-agricultural) Livelihoods Cluster. Humanitarian agencies began changing their approaches towards recovery in 2006–2007, but the scale of returns outstripped humanitarian capacity and demanded greater investment from largely absent development actors. This prompted greater efforts by humanitarian actors to incorporate recovery into their planning and approaches, and facilitating recovery was identified as one of two overriding objectives in the 2008 CAP. Increasing access to basic services, supporting livelihoods and rule of law and developing infrastructure and civil administration were the key priorities (UN, 2007). Financial support was, however, limited, and many recovery-oriented projects were removed from the appeal in mid-2008.

Development activities failed to fill the vacuum. Interviews and analysis consistently highlight UNDP's shortcomings in clearly articulating and leading early recovery in Uganda and supporting the transition from an internationally-led humanitarian effort to government-owned recovery (see, for example, International Alert, 2008). Concerns were also raised about how UNDP approached its role, with the deployment of a stream of headquarters-based advisors and missions but little investment in country-level institutional capacity or technical capability. Local donors were slow to support its efforts, and UNDP's 2007 early recovery strategy gained little traction. Others felt that the focus on early recovery had deflected the agency's limited

[5] See www.humanitarianreform.org.

16

capacity away from its much-needed traditional role in governance, poverty reduction and recovery.

UNDP is not the only early recovery and recovery actor. The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) – a five-year community-driven project of $131m, funded primarily by the World Bank – began in 2002 but was dogged by controversy and charges of corruption, and did little to benefit local communities. With central government efforts largely absent, two trends emerged on the part of development donors: either direct support to local government and international agencies or a continuing preference for bilateral support, which did not necessarily trickle down to recovery in the North.

Transitional programming has been possible in Northern Uganda, however, despite the strategic and institutional challenges. Although not necessarily described as 'early recovery', the return process has been supported through programmes aimed at the provision of basic services and livelihoods support (with a major emphasis on cash and vouchers for work), while camp-based distributions are being phased out. Local government capacity remains weak, but district development plans are in development. International aid actors are making greater efforts to align with these strategies, support the development of national, rather than parallel, systems (e.g. for child protection) and strengthen administrative and technical capacity through, for example, the secondment of experienced Ugandan staff. Planning is under way for the clusters, already largely co-chaired by government, to be phased out by the end of 2009 and taken over by government-led coordination mechanisms.

There are signs too that the institutional and strategic difficulties that beset early efforts to address recovery may be easing. The largely defunct PRDP strategy was relaunched on 1 July 2009, with significantly greater support from the Ugandan government (including almost $500m, monitoring and implementation mechanisms and greater governmental commitment), although concerns remain about its focus on large-scale infrastructure and economic development. The World Bank has launched NUSAF 2, which similarly takes an economically-driven approach, focusing on economic revival in the North. Following district-level consultations, the UN Country Team has devised a new UN Peace Building and Recovery Assistance Plan for

Northern Uganda (UNPRAP), aimed at supporting human rights, justice, reconciliation, local governance, social services and livelihoods and social protection (UNCT Uganda, 2009). Meanwhile, UNDP is investing greater capacity following the designation of Northern Uganda as one of six contexts where the agency would prioritise early recovery. Donors in-country appear more confident in these initiatives, although concerns were raised that there is little indication as yet that this will translate into material support. In interviews, local actors stressed that there is a 'window of opportunity' for recovery initiatives to translate into more legitimate government presence and enhanced security, service delivery and livelihoods, particularly in the context of elections in 2011. However, the time for 'early' recovery has passed.

Gaza Strip: obstacles to recovery

In December 2008, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, a large-scale military offensive in the Gaza Strip with the stated aim of halting Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups' rocket attacks on Israel. The offensive lasted for 23 days and resulted in widespread Palestinian casualties, internal displacement and the destruction of property and infrastructure on an unprecedented scale. The effects of the offensive have been compounded by Israel's economic blockade, imposed on Gaza after the Hamas takeover of the Strip. While unilateral ceasefires in January 2009 halted the offensive, military activities have continued and the blockade remains in place.

In January 2009, the Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator set up the Early Recovery Cluster and Network, with UNDP as the designated cluster lead. The Early Recovery Network comprises focal points from each of the other clusters, with the objective of mainstreaming early recovery activities and ensuring linkages across all clusters. A sub-cluster on governance, livelihoods, utilities and environment was initially established to ensure coverage of areas that were not addressed by the existing clusters. Subsequently, and in order to clear up confusion over the distinction between the Early Recovery Cluster and the Network, the Early Recovery Cluster was renamed the 'Governance, Livelihoods, Utilities and Environment' (GLUE) Cluster (UNDP, 2009).

Meanwhile, in early March 2009 the Palestinian Authority (PA) presented the Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan 2009–2010 at the

International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. The plan, developed in conjunction with UNDP, was accompanied by a report from the World Bank (World Bank, 2009) which outlined the various funding options to support a coordinated response for recovery and reconstruction. The plan detailed interventions in the social, infrastructure, economic, governance and environment sectors, aiming to address immediate needs while preparing the ground for medium- to long-term recovery and development. At the conference, donors pledged approximately $4.4 billion (ICG, 2009). However, aside from small-scale community-based projects, such as cash for work programmes, income-generation projects and rubble removal, very little materialised in a timely fashion.

Israel's blockade and related restrictions on access to cash and key inputs like construction materials are widely recognised to be the major constraint to fulfilling funding pledges, and the primary obstacle to recovery more generally. In addition, internal Palestinian divisions and competition for control of Gaza represent serious political impediments to a meaningful, internationally supported process of recovery. The fact that Hamas is designated a terrorist organisation by the US, the European Union (EU), Israel and other countries has meant a no-contact policy towards the Hamas-run government in Gaza since 2007, and financial assistance has been channelled through the PA.

Even with these political challenges and operational constraints, some aid agency staff observed that early recovery has served a useful purpose in terms of conceptualising programming. There is broad recognition that humanitarian actors in particular need to develop a longer-term perspective and become more attuned to recovery and development needs. In this sense, early recovery has provided a valuable entry point for joint discussion and action and for widening the range of possible programming options. However, despite its perceived normative value, some agencies have expressed frustration at having to divert attention from their operations to 'deal with yet another coordination mechanism'. Some also feel that early recovery structures on the ground should not be limited to coordination, but would be well-placed to take the lead in exploring innovative programming options and providing more concrete guidance to practitioners – a role

they feel early recovery clusters and networks have yet to play. Innovative projects that use recycled construction materials or initiatives that aim to increase job opportunities for the population and improve environmental conditions are seen as especially important.

Finally, concerns have been raised over the limited involvement of local civil society and private sector actors. There were no representatives from local civil society or the private sector at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference; some respondents felt that the process ultimately sidelined stakeholders who could play a key role in recovery. Others pointed to the fact that the no-contact policy with Hamas has meant that very little is known about local recovery interventions – though this constraint is hardly specific to early recovery. There is concern that approaches to recovery and reconstruction in Gaza will not be built on a full understanding of local capacities and initiatives. In the words of one UN official, the danger is that such an approach may 'overshadow what good is happening on the ground'.

Darfur: early recovery amid ongoing conflict

Now in its sixth year, the widespread government-led attacks, systematic destruction of livelihoods and mass displacement which characterised the early days of the conflict in Darfur have largely been replaced by fragmented and localised violence, including attacks on aid workers. At the end of 2008, the UN estimated that 2.7m people had been internally displaced and a further 2m were conflict-affected (UN OCHA, 2008a). This has prompted the world's largest humanitarian operation, which at its height involved more than 17,000 national and international aid workers. Humanitarian capacity was however dealt a serious blow in March 2009, when the government expelled 13 international NGOs and suspended three national NGOs (Pantuliano et al., 2009), effectively removing more than half of the humanitarian response capacity in Darfur.

The response to the Darfur crisis is notable for its incorporation of a number of longer-term approaches. In-depth research and the involvement of a range of aid actors with long experience of the region helped ensure early recognition of the connections between the conflict and people's livelihoods. This triggered a range of interventions aimed at assisting rural populations to retain access to their land and productive capacities, as well as a more recent

focus on pastoral livelihoods. The unprecedented emphasis on protection in the humanitarian response helped frame the crisis in terms of human rights violations against the civilian population, rather than simply as a humanitarian situation requiring relief. Again, a range of different activities resulted, including rule of law programming. Although undermined by the authorities, these were innovative efforts to increase justice and accountability amid ongoing violence and violations.

The current conflict in Darfur began in 2003. Intermittent peace talks and ceasefire agreements failed to stem the violence in 2004 and 2005. The Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), signed in May 2006 by some (but not all) of the warring factions, further inflamed the conflict and increased the fragmentation of non-signatory groups. Despite early signs that the DPA was going to fail, the UN, World Bank and African Development Bank (ADB), along with the signatories to the DPA, pressed on with a Darfur Joint Assessment Mission (D-JAM). The UN-led Track 1 focused on immediate and recovery activities, while the World Bank-led Track 2 focused on medium- and longer-term governance, economic reconstruction and rural development. In late 2006, the D-JAM was suspended. Two conditions were deemed necessary for its eventual relaunch: a lasting ceasefire and a credible peace process.

Concerns about the protracted nature of the crisis and its implications for a swiftly urbanising Darfuri population, in addition to growing disquiet about the sustainability of the humanitarian response, prompted efforts by the UN to salvage the early recovery elements of the Track 1 process. In 2007, the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) coordinated efforts to integrate a range of early recovery-styled approaches into the humanitarian response. 'Early recovery' activities were refashioned as 'foundational issues', owing to concerns that the D-JAM process had coloured the term 'early recovery' in the eyes of humanitarians. Activities included awareness-raising, skills and capacity-building and the piloting of programmes in areas such as livelihoods, water and the environment. In order to coordinate this integration, the RCO was to have an unprecedented role in humanitarian response, with RCO staff seconded to OCHA field offices in Darfur.

Despite innovative participatory workshops involving a wide range of international and national experts, efforts to expand the RCO's role and institutionalise early recovery proved difficult. The initiative was championed largely by a small group of individuals, but institutional backing and dedicated funding were not forthcoming and a lack of additional capacity within OCHA and the larger humanitarian community meant that the initiative petered out once these individuals left Sudan. Since then, early recovery activities have been identified as a priority in the Darfur element of the 2008 and 2009 Sudan Work Plans, and some significant achievements have been possible, despite the absence of an institutional framework and overall strategy. One notable example is the focus on the interaction of environmental degradation and conflict and the destruction of livelihoods in Darfur. Again driven largely by individual pioneers rather than institutions, this has led some humanitarians to adapt their programmes to Darfur's environmental vulnerability, particularly in water and sanitation and shelter interventions.

Meanwhile, donors have continued their search for a way of linking their ongoing investment in Darfur with the political process. In late 2007, the Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF) was established to promote peace-building and reconciliation through the implementation of community-based recovery and development activities. Designed by the RCO and hosted by UNDP, the DCPSF's alignment of assistance with political objectives proved controversial, and the direct link between the fund and the peace process was not maintained. Nonetheless, at the Sudan Consortium donor meeting in May 2008 the DCPSF was allocated $7.2 million to support activities such as youth peace-building and development activities; conflict-sensitive approaches to resource management; and peace-building between farmers and pastoralist groups.

Concerns about the orientation of the DCPSF have to some extent been mitigated by its lack of impact. Early difficulties included a lack of evidence to demonstrate whether and in what ways local peace-building efforts and economic investment in Darfur interconnect, the prioritisation of administrative and managerial functions over programming and operational issues and a lack of rigour and transparency in funding allocations. The fund's terms of reference are currently being revised to provide for a better understanding of the conflict in Darfur and to allow for greater support for interventions by national organisations. However, identifying partners with

strong capacity in community peace-building remains a challenge.

A number of other transitional initiatives and activities are being tried in Darfur. Darfur (along with Northern Uganda) has been identified as one of six focus contexts for piloting UNDP's early recovery policy, and plans for a 'cohesive and integrated early recovery programme' are under way as part of a broader cluster rollout in Sudan. A number of Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) missions have fed into the development of a locally devised early recovery strategy, which is likely to lead to a parallel coordination structure linked to humanitarian mechanisms. Coordination will be led by the RCO, with technical support provided by UNDP. The early recovery strategy is to be funded through humanitarian channels. Activities will include developing and maintaining contextual understanding, identifying opportunities for policy change and capacity-building in local government. While the identification of Darfur as a priority context for early recovery has focused renewed attention on this area, questions remain regarding UNDP's ability to deliver in such a difficult and volatile environment.

Making tough choices: stabilisation and early recovery in Colombia

Since the election of President Alvaro Uribe in 2002, there have been significant changes in Colombia's lengthy conflict. The government has implemented a 'democratic security' policy that seeks to kickstart a transition from war to peace and wider institutional and economic recovery. The aim of the policy is stabilisation – to defeat the guerrillas militarily (particularly the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC) and regain territorial control by increasing the capacity and number of military troops and police units stationed across the country. It also seeks to combat illicit crop production and drug-trafficking, considered the major source of revenue for illegal armed actors. By engaging paramilitaries in peace talks and negotiating their disarmament with relatively lenient terms with regards to justice, the government has adopted a 'softer' approach with the paramilitaries than with the guerrillas. The 'democratic security' policy also gives priority to securing the main economic centres of the country, such as urban areas, areas of oil and natural mineral exploitation and areas with actual or potential large-scale agro-export projects and other investment opportunities.

The democratic security policy was initially criticised for over-emphasising military efforts in defeating the guerrillas and lacking a clear vision for rural development, despite the fact that most fighting is taking place in rural areas that lack formal or legitimate state institutions (ICG, 2003). However, in line with new thinking in US counter-insurgency policy (Cornish, 2009) there has been a recognition that the democratic security policy needs to reinforce the political and civilian components of operations. An integrated approach has therefore been adopted through the Centre for Coordination of Integral Action (CCAI), which brings together different government institutions with the aim of stabilising and consolidating territories that have been regained from illegal armed groups.

The CCAI is headed by the Presidency's Office and sits within Acción Social, the government entity in charge of channelling national and international resources for the provision of assistance to those affected by armed violence, drug-trafficking and poverty. It aims to coordinate and consolidate government efforts to defeat the guerrillas and other illegal armed groups. It also seeks to instigate recovery processes by bringing state institutions into these territories to provide basic welfare, protect and promote human rights and implement the rule of law, in turn contributing to creating a sense of government legitimacy and a business environment attractive to foreign investment.[6] The security–development nexus is at the heart of this approach, with security understood as central to creating the space for development, and development in turn reinforcing security.

As far as aid agencies are concerned, approaches to early recovery are based on that of the global CWGER, and focus primarily on linking humanitarian assistance to wider recovery and development processes. In Colombia, the emphasis is on promoting livelihoods, income-generation, community organisation and sustainability by linking assistance to government processes and capacities. UNDP, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Mercy Corps are the lead agencies engaging in early recovery. Funds come from UNDP, the UN *Central Emergency Response Fund* (CERF) and individual agencies.

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[6] Interview with CCAI, Bogotá, March 2009.

20

Given the protracted nature of the conflict and its fluidity, early recovery efforts in Colombia are based on the premise that providing immediate life-saving humanitarian assistance is not sustainable in the long term. In practice, however, both humanitarian and development actors have struggled to understand fully what early recovery means and how it can be implemented in the context of ongoing conflict. Despite these conceptual difficulties, an assessment in 2007 by the IASC Early Recovery Group identified three areas in which early recovery could take place: Nariño, Montes de Maria and Eastern Antioquia. The funds for these activities have however been limited, and individual agencies have tended to add on early recovery to existing activities. This essentially means applying development principles to humanitarian action, but working out how to do this in practice has proved challenging.

Nariño provides an example where ongoing conflict challenges activities that promote greater autonomy, ownership and sustainability. Projects supporting the Awa indigenous community have sought to clear landmines, initiate community organisation and provide education and health services, linking these activities with regional and local government plans through co-financing. However, Nariño has seen widespread violence linked to the insurgency and organised crime, leading to civilian insecurity, forced displacement, the further laying of landmines and even a massacre of the Awa community, carried out by the FARC in February 2009. As a result, many agencies have suspended or reduced their operations, raising questions around the level of risk tolerance for recovery and development-oriented activities and how this threshold can be gauged.

Another question relates to the tensions involved for international humanitarian agencies in promoting early recovery in the context of broader state-led stabilisation efforts. Humanitarian agencies have been reluctant to directly support state efforts to promote recovery in stabilisation areas, particularly where this is being led by the military. Furthermore, these efforts have been criticised for failing to promote inclusive development. The government has often sought to favour large-scale business at the expense of the livelihoods of the population. For example, in the area of La Macarena, historically a FARC-controlled territory, the government has refused to offer land titles to the peasant population, instead favouring big agro-exporters who are able to bring in significant investments. According to one analyst, many of the peasants are then displaced, and forced to engage in the production of illicit crops in marginalised areas (Reyes, 2009). Although these are arguably valid reasons for limiting engagement with state recovery processes, this would mean that independent efforts to promote early recovery by humanitarian and development agencies will have limited impact and sustainability in the long term.