

Main findings

This study prepared by the Operations Review Unit of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate General of International Cooperation, is an evaluation of the Netherlands supported humanitarian aid to Somalia from 1991 to 1993. Its aim was to analyse humanitarian interventions within a complex emergency affecting a single nation. It was to provide insights into the way that aid was designed and delivered and into the role of the executing agencies. These general objectives were approached by employing the following research questions:

- What was the context of humanitarian assistance to Somalia?
- Were the activities in line with the Netherlands' overall policy objectives and operational criteria?
- Were the activities effective, efficient and, in the case of rehabilitation, sustainable?
- Which were the side-effects and the strong and weak points?

The evaluation was based on desk and detailed case-studies and on a general field-study. The case-studies, which covered nearly half of the total funds allocated by the Netherlands as humanitarian aid to Somalia from 1991 to 1993, are: the Lutheran World Federation's airlift (LWF), the Emergency Plan of Action of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the use of King's Recovery Food (KRF) in Concern's feeding centres, the emergency programme of Medecins sans Frontieres-Holland (MSF-H), UNICEF rehabilitation projects, UNHCR's Cross Border and Cross Mandate Operation. The main findings and lessons from the study are presented below.

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1 The context of aid delivery

The complexity of the disaster, the high levels of insecurity, the lack of counterparts, the collapse of physical, institutional and state infrastructure all made the delivery of humanitarian aid very difficult in the Somalia emergency.

A complex disaster is by its very nature difficult to tackle as it has multiple causes and its effects compound one another. Humanitarian operations were seriously impeded by continuous fighting and the breakdown in law and order. They were subject to attacks, looting, threats and extortion. As there was no public administration or national security force, the organizations involved had to negotiate both their own security and their access to target populations. They had also, for the first time in their history, to engage armed guards. Negotiations for security and access had to be backed by payments in cash and kind. Difficulties over the security of transport and other logistics formed further bottlenecks and expensive arrangements such as airlifts had to be put in place for dealing with them.

Delivery was also complicated by the differences of perception and operational norms between the Somalis and the aid community. Somali culture springs from the need for a flexible and expedient response to a harsh environment. Even the smallest social unit is in a continuous process of negotiation and renegotiation with others in a cultural tradition which is oral. Western formal, permanent and written contractual relationships, customary among the aid community, were not recognized. The aid

community was thus compelled to engage in negotiations with all the relevant actors, a process which it found difficult to address. All negotiation had a price and this price had to be paid. Other bottlenecks lay principally in the lack of information on the unfolding disaster, the subsequent lack of preparedness and the generally late response of the international community.

The study showed that the following factors are important in humanitarian interventions: understanding the culture of the country in which the emergency takes place; comprehension of the physical and socio-economic context of the emergency; knowledge of the development of the complex emergency itself. It is suggested that, as far as possible, these factors are taken into consideration in the planning and execution of humanitarian aid, and also in the preparation of staff. This presupposes an adequate initial and ongoing analysis of the emergency and its causes.

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2 Policy relevance and specific operational criteria

The case-studies showed that the activities concerned were in accordance with the Netherlands' overall policy objectives for humanitarian assistance. The Netherlands' assistance to Somalia alleviated human suffering, helped to restore human dignity and was directed to rehabilitation.

However, by and large the activities could not meet all the specific operational criteria for Netherlands humanitarian assistance as defined in the policy document *A world of difference*. These criteria comprise: immediate use and no lasting investments, clearly defined and delineated target groups, donor coordination, cooperation with local authorities and monitoring of disbursement and channel. The situation itself made it, however, difficult to follow these specific operational criteria closely, as they seemed more applicable to natural disasters than to complex, protracted emergencies. Part of the aid comprised medium- and long-term investments for rehabilitation and consisted, therefore, of items that were not only for immediate use. The requirement that target groups should be defined and delineated could not always be observed, nor was aid coordinated with other donors. Cooperation with authorities as close as possible to the target group was not possible because there were none, but, in some cases, closer contacts with local informal power structures might have been appropriate. Finally, the monitoring of disbursement and of channels could have been better.

3 Effectiveness

The channels chosen to carry out the interventions were generally considered to be appropriate. All activities studied in detail were effective in meeting the Netherlands' generalized aim of alleviating human suffering and restoring human dignity. The specific objectives of individual interventions were also largely achieved. Concern and ICRC saved many lives and delivered aid to the most vulnerable through the distribution of dry rations, wet kitchens and therapeutic and supplementary feeding programmes. The LWF airlift served its clients effectively and the establishment of the out-patient departments by MSF-H was a good performance. UNHCR effectively and professionally managed refugee camps and border sites. UNHCR set up Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) focused on infrastructure to attract and resettle returning

refugees. According to the people interviewed in the field and the evaluators about a quarter of those QIPs were considered to be good as rehabilitative interventions, about a quarter to be poor and the balance in between. The UNICEF rehabilitation projects were able to adapt to local practices.

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The UNHCR Cross Border and Cross Mandate Operation (CBO) was set up to facilitate the repatriation of refugees. Though the CBO was no doubt instrumental in this, it was impossible in Somalia to determine exactly to what extent the CBO actually made refugees decide to return. Similarly, it could not be established to what degree the UNICEF programme actually stimulated the resettlement of displaced people.

Single components of a few interventions proved less effective. In the case of the MSF-H programme, the in-patient department was ineffective as an immediate-relief intervention. However, it provided general medical treatment for about 400 patients. Initially the KRF therapeutic-food formula proved to be inadequate, but it was readjusted in the field. The tools provided by the FAO through the UNICEF programme in the North-Eastern Region were not, in view of local conditions, appropriate.

4 Efficiency

Given the overall Somali context the operations were efficiently executed and a substantial and overall improvement of operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness would have been difficult to achieve without putting lives at risk. Nevertheless, savings on individual items could have been made by better management of operations and more effective negotiation. The high costs of aid delivery in Somalia were caused by transport and security problems, the need to pay for access to the most vulnerable, and diversion. In the cases studied most deliveries of goods and services were carried out satisfactorily.

It must, however, be borne in mind that this judgement on efficiency is mainly based on qualitative evidence. The absence, in most cases, of relevant data made the calculation of unit cost per recipient impossible. Instruments facilitating the comparison of unit costs in humanitarian assistance are needed to allow for comparative statements on efficiency.

5 Side-effects

Several negative and positive side-effects were generated by the humanitarian assistance. The negative side-effects included a slow return to commercial agricultural production in parts of the country, inflated prices for labour, rent, vehicle hire and other local services. Dependency on aid agencies led to problems of disengagement.

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Positive side-effects were the creation of employment and the growth of local capacities.

Some side-effects which at first were positive became, in the course of time, negative.

For example, ICRC's policy of flooding Somalia with food in order to reach the starving increased the levels of dependency. It had the positive effect of reducing food prices in the markets. But, as time went on, reduced prices, which benefited the poor, became an inhibiting factor in re-establishing food production in parts of the country. Another example was seen in the sizeable employment provided by ICRC, NGOs and other agencies. This was of undoubted benefit to begin with, but created substantial difficulties as the various organizations began to disengage from relief activities.

Due to the size of the disaster and the response it was perhaps inevitable that certain unintended side-effects would occur. With more complete monitoring systems in place some of them would have been detected earlier and, where possible, remedied by the various agencies.

6 Sustainability

Sustainability is a relevant consideration in rehabilitation. Some rehabilitative interventions, after initial problems of adjustment in management practices and in adopting technologically appropriate designs, were sustainable, despite the fact that general conditions in Somalia were not conducive to sustainable results. For example, a number of UNHCR QIPs proved, under the prevailing circumstances, to be sustainable.

7 Strong and weak points

Operations evinced both strong and weak points. Strong points included the availability of funding for relief operations, the hard work, courage and dedication of both Somali and expatriate staff, the formation of a number of genuine local NGOs and the willingness of individual agencies to learn from experience.

Examples of the ability to learn from experience may be seen in the case of UNHCR and in that of Concern's use of KRE. Much of this learning occurred in the projects from day to day and was not always documented. It is recommended that ways of disseminating lessons, beyond the individual organization and its experiences in Somalia, be sought.

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A major weak point was the failure of the agencies to coordinate their activities. But in a situation where there are so many agencies with widely differing mandates, structures, procedures and organizational cultures, there are no easy solutions to the problem of coordination. It was compounded by the generalized use of devolved management within a loosely structured organizational framework which seemed more appropriate than centralized management. Not everyone was prepared to be coordinated and the agencies responsible for coordination or liaison lacked the capacity for the task and were therefore not accepted by some of the organizations involved.

8 Administrative aspects

A set of procedural guidelines appropriate for humanitarian assistance does not exist within the Ministry, but a routine way of working, based on past experience, is in

place. In practice, proposals were judged broadly on a number of relevant aspects and these judgements were based on experience with the executing agency and on the Ministry's general knowledge of humanitarian aid and the emergency at issue. A checklist on how to draw up the appraisal memorandum was informally applied. In-house or external technical advice was sought occasionally.

It has to be noted that the contents of proposals received both from agencies and NGOs were a complicating factor for appraisal. In the case of Somalia, data on which to base proposals or interventions were often either unavailable or hard to collect. Most proposals either did not include a rationale or objectives, or they were imprecisely defined. Many of them did not define the target group and its location, did not provide detailed budgets, approaches and work plans. In most instances the issue of gender was not addressed.

Contracts with implementing agencies did not always provide for adequate monitoring and reporting. Most progress and final reports varied in coverage, depth and frequency and were inadequate monitoring instruments for the donor. In this connection a provision for adequate monitoring could be included in guidelines and contracts with the implementing agencies. This also applies to final reporting.

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9 Staffing

Many implementing agencies found it difficult to recruit sufficient, experienced staff and also faced high rates of staff turnover. The agencies concerned were eventually able to mobilize adequate technical expertise.

The workload resulting from the disaster in Somalia, combined with other activities, could only be accommodated with difficulty by the Emergency and Humanitarian Aid Section and by the Embassy at Nairobi. It is essential that those sections of the Ministry and the embassies dealing with emergencies have sufficient staff to handle all their tasks quickly and effectively. They must also be facilitated to find the time both to plan their work and to make use of their experiences. This also includes ample capacity for monitoring and liaising in the field. When so required, additional, temporary staff could be seconded to those sections or embassies having to deal with protracted, complex emergencies.

10 Further considerations

Experiences of the Somalian emergency lead to a number of further considerations. The study of humanitarian activities in it indicated that it is relevant to distinguish the following specific elements in humanitarian aid:

- (1) an understanding of the emergency, its underlying causes and its development;
- (2) the distinction between relief and rehabilitation within humanitarian assistance which implies that the definition of the start and end of those activities be linked to a particular stage of the emergency;
- (3) the distinction of the respective procedural stages within relief and rehabilitation. These stages *per se* are similar to those discerned in the project cycle for structural development, though the content of the stages may be different.

Related to these elements, from a management point of view, is the desirable degree of formalization, documentation and rapportage in each of the procedural stages. In emergencies relief workers are, on the one hand, confronted with human misery and despair calling for instantaneous action not hampered by bureaucracy. On the other hand, limited but critical information is needed for the execution of the operations in the field. The collection of this information is not a purpose in itself but needs to be functional from a professional and managerial perspective.

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Any intervention, in this connection, would have to be based on an understanding of the nature and scale of emergencies and their causes and also take into account the vulnerability and the entitlements of target groups. Relevant information has to be collected for this purpose as soon as possible, while the development of the emergency will have to be monitored throughout. One central agency could carry out this task on behalf of the international community. On the basis of such central monitoring it could be determined which relief component will be needed. It could further indicate when the need for emergency relief is over and rehabilitation activities could start. The evaluation showed that this needs further attention: there is some evidence that the relief work of for example both ICRC and UNHCR was continued beyond immediate need and produced in certain areas negative side-effects. These included disincentives to local production, aggressive dependency and problems of disengagement which, in turn, constrained rehabilitative efforts.

The study showed that generally there was little planning and design before activities really started in the field. This is perhaps difficult to avoid in the beginning, but eventually becomes a constraint in the management of the intervention. The faster and the more general preparations have to be, and the more partial the information base, the more helpful it is to have professional monitoring systems in support of management. The systematic collection of limited, but essential data will enable management to adjust activities. It would also enable improvements in the situation on the ground to be taken into consideration and so to prepare for the termination either of components or of whole projects or programmes.

Paucity of data in the early stages was reflected in the proposals submitted to the donor which were generally deficient in a number of essential elements. It is suggested that simple checklists setting out the critical information expected from agencies applying for funds are made available and preferably be drawn up jointly with other donors and the agencies concerned. Requirements for data have always to be judged in the particular context of an emergency: what degree of detail can reasonably be asked for in emergencies which are extremely fluid, if not chaotic, and in which data are lacking and hard to come by?

Appraisals by the Ministry have to be done quickly and often on the basis of limited information. It would be helpful to formalize the minimum substantive and policy details on which decisions to support an activity are to be based, including an indication of the circumstances in which technical advice will be solicited. Maximum periods for processing would be useful and the appraisal period could perhaps be shortened by adopting the approach mentioned above. Procedures for payment are in need of revision in order to avoid the current delays in the transfer of funds.

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Since rehabilitation is not to do with an acute emergency requiring immediate action, it is evident that the degree of detail in the design and, by consequence, in the appraisal of rehabilitative activities can be much higher than for relief.

Besides the above suggestions for improving prevailing practice, moving away from dealing with individual interventions through detailed appraisal, commitment and payment procedures could be considered. Trust between donors and the implementing agencies, both at headquarters and, particularly, in the field is essential to working in an emergency. The gradual movement towards generalized allocations for organizations active in a particular emergency situation could be contemplated on the basis of good and substantiated experience with funding channels and implementing agencies. This approach could especially be expedient in acute emergencies where speed is of the essence. It is suggested that this approach be explored further. If generalized allocations were given, monitoring and reporting systems facilitating field-level management within the agencies concerned and simultaneously guaranteeing continuing transparency and accountability to donors, would be needed. Such monitoring ideally would address the information needs and the prevailing formats of the implementing agencies as well as critical donor requirements.

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