Building bridges from conflict to reconciliation: After the chaos of conflict, how can humanitarian organisations help those affected by war rebuild their lives and livelihoods, overcome hatred and suspicion, grieve for those who have died and care for those who survive? There will be physical demands – water, food, shelter, medicines – and other needs – care for those suffering stress and trauma. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and NGOs have a critical role to play in helping families and communities rebuild

Carrying water, Sarajevo, 1993. Paul Lowe/Magnum

Addressing humanitarian needs around conflicts

The challenge of mounting effective humanitarian action amid conflict is formidable, especially as the geo-political context of conflict is changing, the nature of conflict is changing, and the roles and options of humanitarian organisations are changing most rapidly of all. Conflict increasingly preoccupies all humanitarian operators: United Nations (UN) officials, donor governments, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This chapter reviews recent attempts to cope with the challenge conflict presents, highlighting the activities of NGOs, including the geographical and conceptual context of their work. Examples are given of peace-building activities, from traditional relief delivery to the newer areas of conflict resolution and conflict prevention.

A new context for conflict

There has been a dramatic increase in the incidence of wars since World War II. Despite – perhaps because of – the end of the Cold War, the international community is beset by proliferating armed conflicts. Some in the south – Afghanistan and Somalia, Liberia and Rwanda, Haiti and Guatemala – others in the north – former Yugoslavia and across the former Soviet Union.

It is not all grim. In the Occupied Territories, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland people are already finding, in the words of one commentator, that "a peace deal today really is a bargain" as energies begin to be redirected into long-deferred economic and social reconstruction

Conflict constitutes an enormous challenge The ever-increasing number of civilians pinned down by warfare, and refugees and others displaced by fighting, is taxing the resources and the inventiveness of the world's humanitarian system as never before.

Philosophical discussions about the ethics of triage have become pragmatic debates about criteria for allocating limited resources. Questions of how to ensure equitable attention to each humanitarian crisis are giving way to what can selectively be achieved. The right to humanitarian assistance, like the right to asylum, faces hard times as the numbers of claimants overwhelm the capacity, or more accurately, the willingness, of an over-extended system to cope.

Beyond issues of global capacity, the international community is challenged by the nature of conflict, as a rising proportion of the rising number of wars are internal, not international

International organisations and outside governments, stewards of the concept of state sovereignty that is central to the current global political system, were generally reluctant during the Cold War to assume responsibility, even temporarily, for threatened internal populations Humanitarian institutions usually waited until civilian populations crossed international borders.

Aid agencies now confront situations in which the greatest need is inside countries in conflict, often in contested areas or combat zones Activities that once awaited the end of fighting are now mounted to reach civilian populations in the crossfire. A sovereign nation's consent to international presence is, in some cases, considered less sacrosanct, particularly where state structures cease to exist

The system is rebuilding itself to work amid internal armed conflicts. Terms of reference and relationship – not only for humanitarian organisations but also for the military and the media – are being restructured. UN agencies are becoming more field-oriented NGOs, traditionally more operational and less bound by issues of national sovereignty, have assumed even greater programme responsibilities.

Creating new terms of engagement has been difficult for NGOs, whose trademarks have been responsiveness and action, not strategic planning and coordination. The problems of humanitarian action in "natural" disaster and development

situations are compounded in more complex emergencies

NGOs confront the reality that, as Mark Duffield of Birmingham University has put it, "aid is now integrated with the dynamics of violence to an unprecedented extent". The issue is not whether humanitarian action has political effects, but the nature and extent of these effects. The larger and longer the outside aid supply, the more influential the political economy of relief. Humanitarians pride themselves on mitigating the effect of conflict; they are being forced to acknowledge that their actions may keep conflicts alive or tip the balance to one side or another.

Practitioners are also developing more realistic views of conflict Given the propensity for conflict in many societies, particularly those undergoing rapid social and economic change, humanitarian organisations are striving to address its causes and redirect the energies it commands away from destructive civil strife. Since violence limits or destroys humanitarian efforts, NGOs and others are giving overdue priority to conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

NGOs are repositioning themselves not only in relation to warring parties and the dynamics of conflict but also to their humanitarian partners. Oxfam's director, David Bryer, notes: "What's changed for Oxfam as a result of external military intervention in Somalia and Bosnia is that on top of the normal incidental risks of operating in an insecure environment, our aid workers are increasingly seen as targets of violence," largely because "in the eyes of the local population and militias, they are indistinguishable from the international governmental intervention effort".

Where international interventions have generally succeeded, as in northern Iraq, Cambodia and El Salvador, associated humanitarian actions have benefited High-profile failures in Somalia and Bosnia have undercut NGO efforts. NGOs are being forced to take more seriously a need for security that they can rarely provide They admit the need to be clear about how coercive strategies advance humanitarian interests. The consequences of economic sanctions and military force – sometimes salutary but often devastating for civilian populations – raise practical and conceptual questions.

Successful relief strategies have to take into account the political and military objectives of warring parties if they are to contribute to durable benefits for those in need. Carried out capably, they can hasten the advent of peace. Relief activities need to be seen in the context of, and in support of, efforts to promote conflict resolution.

NGO humanitarian activities increasingly seek to help peace-building. NGOs are restructuring traditional roles, exploring the connections between relief activities and conflict resolution and prevention. They are being drawn into new areas, including conflict resolution, reconciliation, and advocacy.

Well before the UN or donor governments began foreign assistance activities, the Movement and NGOs were on the front line, giving life-saving assistance and supporting community-based reconstruction and development. In three traditional roles – managing relief and development programmes, protecting human rights and mobilising resources – NGOs have contributed broadly to peace-building.

The *World Disasters Report 1994* noted: "Service delivery is likely to remain the largest role played by international and indigenous NGOs." Yet there is evidence that relief and other activities can contribute to peace-building by promoting greater understanding among communities, reducing their vulnerability and strengthening local leadership structures.

Traditional roles and choices

Behind most failed states lie failed development strategies. There is a growing sense that effective development can help avoid conflicts, by providing a sense of participation in fragile political economies and reinforcing negotiated arrangements to end warfare. The Haiti intervention highlights not only poverty and human rights abuses but also failed development efforts by UN organisations, donor governments and NGOs.

An example of relief activities assisting development and peace is a Danish Red Cross Society project in the town of Kutina, Croatia. Begun in mid-1992, the effort drew on the resources of a consortium of Danish Refugee Council-related agencies, Danish Aid Agency (DANIDA) funds, International Federation technical support, and cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross, the local municipality and the Croatian government's Office of Displaced Persons and Refugees.

The project was designed to provide services for Croatian and Muslim refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina who had fled to Croatia, and "development-oriented relief work was the overall strategy", reports a Danish Red Cross study To assure an even-handed approach to ethnic groups, camp construction and management were retained by the Danish Red Cross. Camp activities helped bridge tensions between the two refugee groups and between refugees and the permanent population.

Children attended local schools rather than special facilities. Community gardens became a vehicle not simply for supplementing diets but also for social interaction. Summer camp gave young people a change of scene and an opportunity to make friends across ethnic lines. "The establishment and development of social activities constitute a dynamic process, which must not be underestimated as a conflict-preventive and conflict-solving remedy," the study says. The project also

facilitated efforts by the town council to encourage participatory decision-making and aided problem-solving.

Not all relief activities are set in a development and peace context. In Ethiopia in the 1980s, almost all international relief resources were channelled through – or at least alongside – the Mengistu regime's structures, reflecting the predisposition of the UN and governments to work through government channels. Civilians in areas under Eritrean and Tigrayan liberation movements' control were shortchanged. NGOs mounted cross-border operations from Sudan, working with the movements' humanitarian wings to prevent starvation and promote self-reliance.

Relief assistance directly and indirectly assisted the war efforts of all sides. Former Mengistu officials confirmed the regime's widespread abuse of international food aid. The liberation movements, having toppled the Mengistu government, thanked humanitarian organisations for help in winning the war.

In Central America in the 1980s, relief activities both hindered and helped the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Assistance was provided in ways that reinforced the existing politicisation, which was a factor in sustaining the wars. However, humanitarian efforts also strengthened indigenous capacity and conveyed international concern, serving as an impetus to – and benefiting from – the initiative by regional political leaders to end the conflicts.

Two projects in Sri Lanka provide good examples of how development activities can reduce or foster conflict. The Gal Oya water project helped lessen tensions by enlisting upstream Sinhalese and downstream Tamils in joint management of limited water resources. Conversely, the Maduru Oya dam and irrigation project exacerbated tensions by resettling Sinhalese in numbers that altered the existing inter-communal balance and fuelled suspicion.

In conflicts, NGOs have three basic choices, each displayed in the former Yugoslavia: to stay out of the front line, to work at the front line but to ignore the conflict context, or to understand fully the political and military dynamics in order to work where relief will be most effective.

Insecurity and the risk of co-option by belligerents makes most choose the first path, away from front-line activities. Of Zagreb's 100-plus NGOs, only a minority mounted programmes in Bosnia's active combat zones.

In Sarajevo, a number of NGOs providing nutrition and medical services have taken the second path, concentrating on the humanitarian imperative of delivering relief, leaving to others the question of how to end the siege. Ignoring questions about keeping people alive to become sniper victims, one NGO official spoke for many agencies and constituencies when she insisted: "At the end of the day, we simply have to help people."

But a World Vision International executive, Steve Commins, sees a danger that "NGOs will become the soup ladle of the global soup kitchen. Are we working for fundamental changes in the lives of people or simply handing out services?"

The third approach offers a middle road – operational activities informed by thorough analysis. To achieve humanitarian objectives, aid organisations must be familiar with the political and military terrain. Gayle E. Smith, now with the US State Department, has written: "Aid providers must understand military strategy. [They] must know enough to ensure that they are neither manipulated nor used unwittingly to affect the balance of power."

Given the dangers – of damaging programme operations and of exacerbating conflict – this third option requires complete comprehension of the risks of engagement, or of the termination of operations whose integrity is undermined. A Refugee Policy Group study of Somalia and the abuse of aid efforts by warring factions from late 1992 to mid-1994 asked: "Should the international assistance agencies have left under these circumstances?" Answer: "Probably yes." Most agencies elected to stay the course.

Agencies which study the terrain, accept the risks and chart a careful course can make an important contribution. In Cambodia, the International Federation was welcomed by the UN as it orchestrated the reconstruction of Cambodia. With contacts in Khmer Rouge zones, the International Federation made a special contribution in resettling returnees from the Thai border into areas beyond government control.

Beyond relief and development programmes, other areas of traditional NGO work figure prominently in current efforts to address human needs in conflicts.

Human rights and humanitarianism

Human rights have traditionally been the preserve of "human rights" NGOs. For years, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Alert, African Rights and others have monitored treatment of minorities. Working outside and inside affected countries alongside NGOs, religious and civic groups, academics and the media, they have alerted governments, the UN and the media to abuse and the need for international action.

Recent conflicts have confronted human rights groups with complex challenges. "Having developed excellent methods for monitoring human rights abuses and advocating their rectification during periods of relative stability," notes Kumar Rupesinghe, Secretary General of International Alert, "human rights organisations are, like relief agencies, beginning to shift their attention to the gross abuses that occur during conflicts".

He adds: "Up until now, the human rights community has been paralysed when violence erupts... unable to intervene and often the targets of the parties in conflict." Today's scale of human rights abuses in conflicts such as Rwanda has combined with an erosion of state sovereignty to override resistance from host political authorities to international involvement.

UN peacekeeping operations now routinely include mandates in human rights monitoring. In Cambodia, monitoring human rights was one of the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia's (UNTAC) seven components, along with repatriation and rehabilitation. The UN mission in El Salvador had a mandate to "take any steps it deemed appropriate" to protect human rights, and it oversaw the work of human rights and reconciliation commissions.

Humanitarian rights

Like relief organisations, human rights groups must decide what relationship, if any, to have with multifunctional UN operations. The problems are two-fold. First, the UN human rights component often has limited resources and mobility compared with the military side of its peacekeeping operations. After more than two years, the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had only a handful of human rights personnel, and none in Bosnia. "Human rights have been treated as a dispensable luxury, not as a central element, in the success of UN peacekeeping and humanitarian operations," concluded a recent study by Human Rights Watch

Second, the process of documenting human rights abuses may not always be compatible with the overarching political objectives of a UN peacekeeping initiative. In UNPROFOR's case, confronting authorities in the former Yugoslavia with human rights abuses in which they were implicated, it was felt, risked delaying a negotiated settlement. As a result, human rights NGOs have maintained a certain independence from UN human rights efforts.

Earlier distinctions between "human rights" NGOs and "humanitarian" NGOs are blurring. Access to humanitarian assistance is a fundamental human right, just as respect for basic human rights has a positive correlation with government policies that address essential human needs. "Humanitarian action" includes both assistance and protection Denial of the right to food as an element of political or military strategy represents a clear violation of a fundamental human right. Organisations providing emergency food, medicine and shelter often witness deprivations of other basic human rights. Human rights monitors often find people with unmet basic needs.

The dynamics of internal armed conflicts also make emergency assistance and human rights protection inseparable. NGOs involved in relief activities which regarded human rights concerns as dangerously political are increasingly aware of the political implications of aid. NGOs who had given protection priority over assistance have seen the importance of sustaining those protected from abuse. Human rights abuses may well be early warnings of later displacement requiring relief.

In conflicts that render assistance and protection difficult, both groups increasingly view their activities as mutually reinforcing. That realisation does not mean that "humanitarian" NGOs will necessarily become directly involved in protection or "human rights" NGOs in assistance. Denouncing human rights abuses might deny the former access to those in need. Managing aid programmes might diffuse the latter's critical function. Each set of activities requires special competencies and a special approach in dealing with political authorities. Both share an interest in the success of humanitarian action.

Rwanda's crisis prompted initiatives across the relief assistance-human rights divide. In the first few months, UN monitoring of – let alone protection against – human rights abuses was conspicuously absent. In autumn 1994, several aid agencies took action. Oxfam and Save the Children Fund UK donated cash to underwrite deployment of UN Human Rights Commission monitors. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contributions also improved recruitment and deployment.

NGOs play a critical role in mobilising resources for relief and development. In rich and poor countries alike, NGOs have nurtured a constituency. In countries such as the United States, where government-to-government "foreign aid" has lacked an enthusiastic following, NGO people-to-people channels enjoy continuing support.

NGOs have questioned the view that "donor fatigue" is a major constraint on humanitarian action. A 1994 study of trends in the member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) concluded that "public support still far outstrips criticism, and the universal picture of aid fatigue is not borne out by opinion polls which continue to show that public support is founded on humanitarian concern".

Compassion fatigue might more accurately be called "compassion confusion", a widespread anguish about how to contribute most effectively. Governments that wish to retrench on aid may be misreading the signs to mistakenly confirm their lack of political will.

Mobilising public support to address humanitarian needs amid conflict presents a more formidable challenge to NGOs than they have experienced in the past. Given the complexity of issues – the causes of conflict and the difficulty of finding the

right interventions to address them – the public education and resource mobilisation tasks require great attention.

Increasingly, articulate southern partners are holding northern colleagues to higher standards of accountability in how resource mobilisation is carried out. Southern NGOs want a more direct role in operating programmes, and take a dim view of fundraising images that portray them as helpless and hopeless. For more than a decade, fundraising pictures of starving babies – the "pornography" of deprivation – have drawn southern protests.

Southern governments increasingly insist that traditional relief approaches are counterproductive, marginalising those who should be empowered and diverting resources from essential long-term work. Ghana's UN Ambassador, Kofi N. Awanoor, believes: "Development is the only instrument that will remove the stigma of charity that accompanies all humanitarian relief efforts." Conveying that view to northern publics and governments – driven by more and more horrific media images to respond to the latest disaster – is a massive challenge.

Non-traditional roles

Efforts to address changing humanitarian needs in conflict are altering the way NGOs work, encouraging them to consider new roles. Four such roles with major potential for peace-building are conflict resolution, conflict prevention, reconciliation, and advocacy.

A 1994 meeting of member agencies of InterAction, the US NGOs' professional association, discussed conflict resolution. Agency after agency reported efforts by field staff, mostly informal, at peace-building. Most had no formal agency policy encouraging involvement. Only a few had programmes with earmarked resources, generally modest and discretionary.

Even rhetorical NGO interest in conflict resolution represents a major change in attitude. In the late 1980s, an NGO with a massive relief programme in southern Sudan was asked by a coalition of peace groups to make a small financial contribution to efforts to help members of both sides in the civil war to meet informally. The NGO country office rejected the request, pleading lack of discretionary funds. The agency is now among those energetically promoting NGO peace-building activities in Sudan.

But interest is not staff or resources. NGOs face real difficulties in moving in new programme directions. These include problems in knowing how to make a real difference, the ostensibly political nature of such activity and the pressure from constituencies to deploy all available resources toward activities that directly alleviate suffering.

Both the problems and the promise of a broader agenda are captured by the Sudan Council of Churches executive director, Bishop Ezekiel Kutjok. Appealing in 1989 to UN officials to match their efforts in assisting the civil war's victims with finding a political resolution to the conflict,

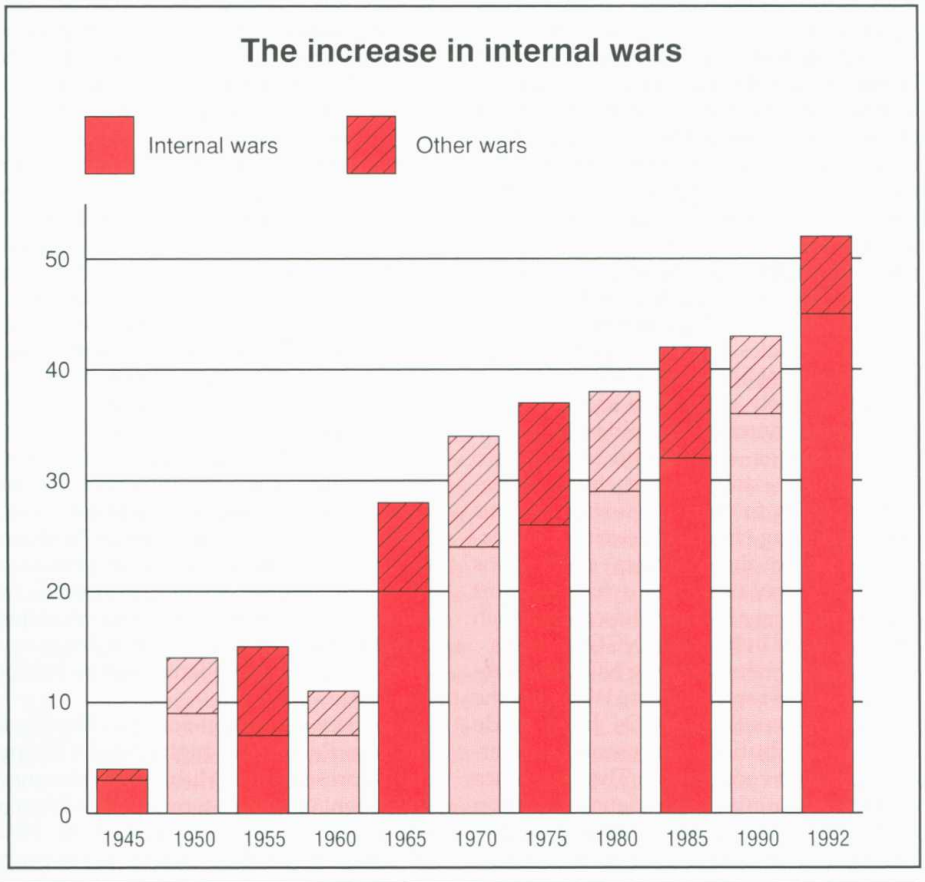

Figure 1.1 Conflict goes local: Increase in internal wars. There are more conflicts today than at any time since World War II, and almost all of these are internal wars. Civil strife, violence and uncertainty have become the norm for millions of today's disasters victims. Helping people before, during and after conflict has become a major area of involvement for humanitarian agencies.

Source: Gantzel, K.J. 1994. Paper delivered at the symposium on Ethnicity and War, San Marino Center for Interdisciplinary Research on Social Stress.

he had been told that peace was not in their mandate.

Meeting with NGOs five years later – the civil war unabated and international aid unable to keep pace with the violence – Bishop Kutjok said: "It's easy to do relief, but it's more difficult to bring about peace." He recalled a revered Dinka chief saying that "relief makes our people learn to receive, but peace enables them to work...to return to their villages, to start their cattle camps again".

Better than resolving conflicts is preventing them. In the same month that InterAction members discussed conflict resolution, the International Federation's Secretary General, George Weber, chaired a meeting on the Role of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Conflict Prevention, held at the International Institute of Humanitarian Law (San Remo).

He suggested three roles. When conflicts are still in their infancy, he suggested National Societies might serve as neutral intermediaries to bring parties together. In countries where inequalities among regions, races or ethnic groups are a fertile ground for hostilities, National Societies might play a more proactive role, helping defuse problems before they erupt. Finally, in peacetime, National Societies can deliver humanitarian assistance in ways that promote understanding and thus reduce the risk of conflict.

Speakers advocated greater involvement in conflict prevention, while not compromising the Movement's fundamental principles, including impartiality, neutrality and independence. "Let us learn to walk before we start to run," observed one participant.

The meeting's report noted that "all National Societies present accept that we already do conflict prevention work through our programmes of support for international humanitarian law and humanitarian action. In both areas, there is room for expansion and creativity.(..) Conflict prevention can take place at the community and individual levels without entering into the realm of politics."

As with conflict resolution, there are serious obstacles to greater NGO engagement. National NGOs often share the limitations of their respective societies. The role of government and political figures in some countries – Serbia and Montenegro for example – inhibits the ability of national NGOs to start or sustain serious peace-building efforts. Offsetting such parochialism are the countries' connections to international networks, which support and insist upon a less politicised approach on the part of indigenous NGO partners.

A third area of growing NGO involvement is that of reconciliation. Whatever the stage of a conflict, NGOs have made unique contributions to promoting understanding and cooperation. Their presence within communities experiencing tension and their ability to move among people irrespective of their affiliation are characteristics not shared by UN organisations and donor governments.

Encouraging initiative

At their best, NGOs help foster a sense of humanity across walls of hostility. They encourage war-torn societies to take initiatives, activating resources within nations and communities for conflict resolution and reconciliation. If outside NGOs are bearers of extraneous agendas, they may retard the peace process. The commitment expressed in the new *Code of Conduct* for agencies in disaster relief to avoid using aid to further a particular political or religious viewpoint or to act as instruments of government foreign policy is critical.

An example of an NGO initiative that led to the reknitting of communities occurred in the Croatian town of Pakrac in UN Protected Area West. Beginning in late 1993, following two years of ethnic cleansing, Croatian NGOs enlisted and trained international volunteers, who live with local families, to participate in work camps to rebuild gutted homes and community buildings. Begun in Croatian neighbourhoods, activity expanded to include Serb families. Labour and materials were channelled from European NGOs; assistance was also provided by the UNDP Office in Vienna as part of its Social Reconstruction Programme.

Reviewing this initiative, a Croatian NGO official noted: "The large international organisations are very important when it comes to organising mass support in the form of funds, food and shelter. But for reconciliation you must work with individuals and on the local level. This the United Nations can't really organise."

In another example, the Mozambican Red Cross Society sought to lay the groundwork for reconciliation after ten years of civil war. They staged role-plays in reception centres for the benefit of returning refugees and displaced people who, arriving home, might find their homes inhabited by the former enemy.

Women have an important role in conflict resolution. Etched into international consciousness are demonstrations of Bosnian Serb women barring access by international relief organisations to Muslim enclaves where their men had been killed or imprisoned. Yet, on the other hand, women have played an indispensable role in promoting reconciliation in Northern Ireland. "Reconciliation is a process – house by house, street by street," explained Irish author Elizabeth Shannon. "That's what women have been doing anyway. They are the silent soldiers behind this peace."

As they must be in Somalia. The *World Disasters Report 1994* highlighted UN Special Representative Muhamad Sahnoun's enlistment of Somali women and elders in his effort to end the conflict in 1992. "Women have been instrumental in push-

ing reconciliations," he explained. "They are deeply involved. They need to be, for survival. Women also have an instrumental role in the economy. They are at the core of many village and town markets."

Relief, reconstruction and development programmes can be designed and implemented to foster reconciliation. This is a positive by-product of the clear connection between human needs activities and the political situation, whether in pre-conflict, conflict, or post-conflict stages.

"Reconstruction and politics necessarily overlap," observed journalist Iain Guest, speaking of Sarajevo's future. "Somehow, the Bosnian Serbs must be co-opted into rebuilding the city they destroyed. The Serbs and Muslims of Sarajevo drink the same water, burn the same gas, use the same electricity. Peace, in the long term, can only be a cooperative venture." While continued conflict renders the future uncertain, the challenge facing the Bosnian capital is reminiscent of the one successfully met in Sri Lanka, when Sinhalese and Tamils jointly managed water resources.

Since conflict also destroys society's structures, reconciliation should encompass social institutions. In the early 1990s, the International Federation, with the ICRC, facilitated the reunification of the Cambodian Red Cross Society, whose divisions during the previous decade mirrored those of the entire country. Reunification represented a major accomplishment, though only three of four splintered parts were reincorporated into a new National Society. Humanitarian agencies in societies rent by conflict in Central America faced similar rebuilding tasks.

Connections such as these between relief assistance and reconciliation are increasingly the subject of discussion and research. In Britain, the Conflict and Development Network is meeting regularly, drawing together relief and human rights NGOs and academics to explore the issues. Canadian academics, NGOs and government officials are making an extended effort to improve their policies and activities. After a seminal work with Peter Woodrow, of Harvard University, on the interaction between relief and development, Mary Anderson, an American economist, is following it up with a series of case studies exploring the interaction between aid and peace.

NGOs are also becoming more engaged in advocacy. Activities to influence the policies of donor and host governments and UN organisations have been an agenda item of some NGOs for years. With the 1990s upsurge in complex emergencies has come the realisation that human choices play a major role in creating and resolving humanitarian crises.

NGOs

In the 1980s, US NGOs became concerned about the politicisation of aid. The US government provided "humanitarian assistance" to Nicaraguan contras – in reality, boots, tents and communications gear to topple the Sandinista government. This trend also called into question the work around the world of US-based relief groups or those using US government resources.

In late 1986, after more than a year's study, an InterAction delegation met senior administration officials. While the NGOs were unanimous in questioning US government aid policies, some had serious misgivings about the extent to which criti-

Box 1.1 Camp violence – five ways to reduce tension

As fear and violence in the refugee camps increased and threats to aid workers grew, a substantial number of aid agencies threatened to pull out of the Zairian camps in November 1994 unless security was improved.

Their first concern was for the security of the refugees, for those in need of humanitarian assistance. Their second concern was to find a way to guarantee sufficient security for their staff so that they could continue to provide the humanitarian assistance.

While the pros and cons of peace-keeping forces or international policing forces were being discussed, the International Federation pursued a second complementary line to achieving increased security for its programmes.

Experience in previous operations has shown that security comes primarily not from the barrel of a gun but from the way aid workers behave. Five key elements seem to enhance security:

- Open and continuous dialogue with the beneficiary community. When agencies take the time to painstakingly explain what they are doing, how the aid system works and what refugees will get, problems of confrontation and misunderstanding decline;
- True partnership with host-country and refugee nationals in relief operations. Where local people are involved as equals alongside foreign relief workers, there is much less tension;
- Experienced and older staff. Age makes a difference. With age comes experience and a more cautious attitude towards unnecessary risk. Community leaders also trust older people more;
- Committed long-term agenda. Agencies which demonstrate a willingness to stick by the refugees and plan for long-term involvement gain the trust of the people more easily than those that leave once the first flood of funding dies down;
- Clear humanitarian agenda. It is hard to separate humanitarian from political and military issues, particularly in the minds of those who have suffered at the hands of political and military forces. Agencies which stick to a clear and open humanitarian agenda are less likely to be targeted with violence than those which try to practice a broader mandate. ■

cisms might appropriately be extended to US foreign and military policy.

A decade later, some agencies that hesitated then are involved more regularly in advocacy efforts. NGOs regularly testify on broad policy concerns before US congressional committees, meet administration officials and alert the media. In many other countries, similar changes are taking place. The *Code of Conduct* for disaster relief agencies has annexes of recommendations to host and donor governments and intergovernmental organisations.

But many NGOs are still cautious about advocacy, as they are about conflict resolution, conflict prevention and reconciliation. Their concerns include uneasiness about engaging in politics, difficulties in framing useful recommendations and problems in consensus-building.

So the progress of peace-building as an NGO activity is slow and uneven. While some NGOs are engaged in activities such as those described above, many have yet to make them central and explicit in their policies and programmes, staff selection

Box 1.2 Somalia – working in the grey zone

Somalia has endured more than three years of conflict and famine without any government, or law and order. More than 500,000 have died, a third of the population is displaced or a refugee and the people's needs are enormous No all-out war, no peace, instead a confusion of unpredictable insecurity and shifting alliances. The only certainty: those most likely to suffer are the young and the old, the sick and the poor.

As peace-keepers depart and the UN despairs, the total disaster that is Somalia has forced almost all agencies to pull out. Unable to abandon Somalia, the Movement has faced dilemmas that challenge its traditional mandates – the ICRC as service provider in conflict, the International Federation in natural disasters and National Societies as auxiliaries to government in war and peace.

Somalia has benefited from great achievements provided by a Movement working to its limits. The Somali Red Crescent Society has never stopped working, as the only national organisation to survive and deliver services throughout the fighting. In partnership with the National Society and its countrywide network of branches, the ICRC delivered massive amounts of aid and saved many thousands of lives, while the International Federation moved in swiftly to support rehabilitation efforts.

But Somalia has confronted the Movement, by demanding that all of its components live up to their Fundamental Principles while, at the same time, attacking them at every turn With Somali fighting Somali and no government to intervene, how could the National Society maintain unity and independence? With armed clans and factions on every side, how could the ICRC be impartial when many were beyond reach? As the International Federation moved in to work wherever fighting faded, how could it operate with neutrality and also be considered by a majority of Somalis as a neutral entity?

Fundamentally, how should the Movement work when everything undermines its humanity, and where the crisis calls out for dissemination of principles and values but needs demand pragmatic solutions? And after Somalia, how will the Movement manage in the era of total disaster and the grey zone of constant conflict?

In 1991 as the Somali government fell, the ICRC embarked on its massive programme of food aid in a political vacuum where international humanitarian law had no meaning to heavily armed militias. Aid delivery in this unpredictable environment, with looting and attacks, saw abuse of the Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and violations of neutrality. For the first time in the Movement's history, armed guards and convoy escorts were deployed to protect supplies, premises and people. Stepping up protection may acknowledge failure, yet the Movement's priority obligation is to the vulnerable.

As civil war slowed yet peace refused to overtake it, whose mandate applied? Unusually, all three parts of the Movement were operating at the same time in the same place. Even working together, the solutions were not easy, especially with a legacy of precedents, including enforced use of hired vehicles, huge rents for premises and engagement of armed guards whose employment was extremely difficult to terminate.

Given the hostility of Somalis resulting from the confusion between the humanitarian and military mandates of the UN's operation, the Movement's relations with the UN have been distant. Relations with other agencies have sometimes been even colder. Impartial, neutral and unable to leave, the Movement is rarely as outspoken as other agencies; yet its silence may suggest to perpetrators and partners alike that the Movement condones unacceptable acts.

As the end of simple blocs makes a more complicated world, we realise how complex the Somali situation is. in a country of pastoralist nomadic warriors and their clans, few are impartial, even when working as a Red Cross or Red Crescent guard. Those affiliations may even make what is defended a target for others who are not at all impartial and cannot conceive of a Movement that is neutral, especially when it employs their enemy.

Somalia has also demonstrated once again the way an unpredictable and threatening environment – growing to be the norm not the exception – requires innovative, complementary and often overlapping action between the three parts of the Movement.

In 1994, the Kismayo Federation sub-delegation working with the Somali Red Crescent branch was asked by the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) – in the absence of the ICRC – to take responsibility for the dead and wounded because of the sniper threat to UN staff. ICRC field officers helped the International Federation train first-aid volunteers in treatment of war wounded and burial of bodies, a traditional ICRC action.

The Movement quickly adapts to situational needs and works in harmony for the benefit of the most vulnerable. Somalia – like the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and others – forces the Movement to learn and change to serve the needs of victims of the future. ■

and training, constituency education and accountability.

The international Mennonite community is an exception. Reflecting the theology and traditions of a historic "peace church", Mennonite institutions have developed a multi-track approach to peacebuilding, for example in the Somali emergency.

Groups such as the Mennonite Central Committee mounted relief and development programmes among Somali refugees and displaced people. A programme administered by Mennonite colleges in Canada and the US brought together Somalis in exile to explore peace strategies Educational and advocacy efforts were mounted in Europe and North America and at the UN. Within Somalia, Mennonite organisations promoted grassroots conciliation efforts The Mennonite International Conciliation Service supported non-violent peace-keeping The Life and Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, played a role in several of these initiatives.

John Paul Lederach, one of the architects of the Mennonite strategy, notes the conscious choice "to place primary importance on efforts that strive to achieve peace and reconciliation, rather than on delivering food aid. However, at a time when the news media is portraying the sensationalist and often superficial views of famine, and the international community moves with military force to protect humanitarian aid deliveries, our position represented a minority voice."

Mennonites are concluding, however, that integrating conflict resolution and peacemaking perspectives with the more traditional categories of relief and development is attracting interest well beyond the peace churches. UN officials, who in 1991/92 had little time for Mennonite initiatives in Somalia, are now, in the wake of their own difficulties, more interested

Where now?

Because of conflict, these are times of great change for all in the humanitarian field. Given the pressures of delivering aid amid growing conflict, as the humanitarian gap widens between needs and resources, NGOs increasingly acknowledge the need for new kinds of activities and for a new context for traditional ones. Yet many policy and institutional questions abound.

Is service delivery NGOs' distinctive contribution, and if so, should it be delivered as contractors for UN organisations and donor governments or as independent entities? Does relief delivery open the door to, or complicate, their eventual involvement in other areas? Are NGOs evolving differently: some prepared to mount programmes in active wars, others deciding to wait until the fighting has subsided; some willing to function under a UN peacekeeping umbrella, others desiring greater independence?

NGOs are struggling to preserve their apolitical and needs-oriented approach even as they explore new roles. As the political economy of relief becomes a major factor in many crises, they are asking and being asked tough questions about alternative approaches to massive infusions of relief which, however useful in the short term, raise long-term problems. Can they assure that relief supplies in civil wars do not fall into the wrong hands? Why has the situation in Somalia seen little improvement? Why does ethnic cleansing persist in Bosnia?

Caught up in the accelerating trend towards intervention in societies in crisis and witnessing the expanding military role in humanitarian operations, NGOs are wrestling with questions of what job to do and how to do it well. As current responses become more costly, reactive, selective and unsustainable, an equitable and serviceable international humanitarian system is seen to require a better balance between anticipation and reaction, outside agencies and inside resources, coercion and persuasion.

What is emerging is a new sort of organisation with a comprehensive vision of humanitarian action, encompassing assistance and protection, mediation and reconciliation. Whether performing relief delivery or taking on conflict-related roles, the NGOs manage activities within their broadest political context, considers their peace-building effects, and maintains professionalism and accountability. In the final analysis, peace-building is a risky process – but ultimately no more so than other humanitarian tasks ■