

In 1991 the UN Secretariat Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) was given the mandate¹ of humanitarian coordination certainly within the UN and to a lesser but no less important extent with the NGO and bilateral humanitarian assistance. What they were not given was the ability to coordinate by command. The reasons for this are obvious inasmuch as existing players both UN (eg. UNHCR), nongovernmental (eg. ICRC), and bilateral donors (eg. USAID), were not about to allow themselves to be subordinate to an arm of the UN which had both limited resources and capacity, and of which they had little indication of its intentions whether it had any empire building proclivities.

There is no indication, nor is it immediately apparent, that such power could or should be delegated to DHA. Its operation for Rwanda, specifically UNREO, has by all accounts been successful in the initial stages of the crisis. However such success has tended to be the result of the fortunate mix of personnel, and as the large agencies such as UNHCR, Oxfam, Care, MSF, and ICRC have become larger and larger players in and around Rwanda, UNREO's role has been increasingly minimized. Such an evolution is not necessarily incorrect, assuming that logical and informed decisions were taken as to who would become lead organizations in particular situations, or how other ad-hoc cooperation arrangements could be produced.

Theoretically the role of DHA as a coordinator of humanitarian efforts is as a neutral broker facilitating and coordinating the efforts of UN and other agencies. This model breaks down however when large agencies such as UNHCR evolve programs in the field and become an overwhelming presence either geographically or on one aspect of humanitarian assistance, then the role of DHA units such as UNREO in the Rwandan context become extremely problematic.

If DHA through field units similar to UNREO or from New York or Geneva attempts to create any substantive program capacity, then it will inevitably enter into competition with the program delivery components of the UN such as UNDP, UNICEF, or UNHCR. Rather what is needed is the ability of a handful of extremely knowledgeable individuals to deploy to the field within days of a crisis with the aim of pulling out almost completely as soon as they can hand over activities to appropriate program delivery organizations from either the UN, governmental, or non-governmental sectors. Only in this way will those latter organizations see DHA as non-threatening and with a limited hidden agenda to fear. If however DHA is developing its own long-term program delivery capacity, then they will be perceived as attempting to further their own programs as opposed to allowing the others to stay the lead organizations.

The type of knowledge they need to bring to the situation is largely three-fold. First the team must have in-depth knowledge of the country or regions, both historical and political. Secondly they must be thoroughly versed in the components, capacity, and politics of the UN, including peacekeepers. Thirdly they must have a similar knowledge of the NGO community that will be

¹ GA Res 46/182 Dec. 17 1991 (Strengthening of the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations) which mandates the "coordinating and facilitating" of UN emergency response but does not give DHA any directing mandate.