

4 CRISIS RESPONSE - Humanitarian Assistance

The humanitarian response to Rwanda is of much more recent vintage than that of conflict resolution and peacekeeping. It was triggered by the massacres and refugee flows that started only in early to mid April 1994, and so the track record is still being recorded. Nevertheless, early indicators are that the humanitarian response once it was provided with sufficient security by UNAMIR II, has been proceeding very well.

In fact, most of the success stories from the international response to the Rwanda crisis are coming from the humanitarian side. Despite the size of the disaster including the numbers of displaced people both within and without, the response of the international community has been very rapid and generous. In part this has been to assuage a certain amount of guilt about having done little to avoid the cataclysm. But whatever the reasons, the various UN agencies and NGOs have been quickly provided with most of the wherewithal to do their jobs and to date they have performed very well.

One of the success stories comes from the development of 'services packages' by UNHCR. Broadly speaking UNHCR put out a request for various services such as providing water at the Goma refugee camp or running the Entebbe or Kigali airports including air traffic control, airport security, and airport maintenance. Countries or organizations could then select which service package they would wish to carry out. The advantage for UNHCR was that that country or organization would run and pay for that particular service package. The advantage for the donors was that rather than just give money or have their nationals spread throughout a UNHCR activity, they would be able to have a highly concentrated profile from which to wave their flag. This need to get public recognition particularly back home, plays directly to the politicians and others who see tangible benefits. Without overstating it, there is a benefit in the public seeing some of their aid money going to their own national teams which can reassure them as to their larger contributions.

UNHCR has been pleased with their innovation, and plan to refine it in several ways. First of all, the service packages were too large, which made it difficult for several potential donors to 'buy in'. Secondly, they found that they needed to be much more explicit on what the service package was as the donors often had quite different interpretations so that several times foreign teams arrived on related assignments and found that they both assumed that they were undertaking a particular task. There was even confusion between the US government and the US military.