SPECIAL ISSUE: MASKING A POLICY VACUUM?
REVIEWING THE LESSONS OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE RWANDA CRISIS

Guest Editor: John Borton

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Between April and July 1994 an estimated 500,000–800,000 people were slaughtered in the genocide in Rwanda. The efficiency of the killing machine set in motion following the shooting down of the presidential plane on 6 April, was astonishing and to many literally incredible. Despite the international revulsion at the events which took place in Rwanda in 1994, the tragedy of the Great Lakes continues to unfurl without any clear strategy for its resolution. As this special issue of Disasters goes to press, in Burundi the attempts to secure a regional peace accord has been hampered by the presidential coup, while the presence of armed groups from the former Rwandan government in refugee camps, particularly in Zaire, continues to exert a destabilising influence throughout the region.

Alongside the massacres of Srebrenica, Bosnia-Hercegovina in 1995, the plight of the Kurds in 1991 and the events in Somalia during 1991/2, the Rwandan tragedy has become a milestone in contemporary humanitarian history. Each of these crises has attracted massive relief interventions; each has marked a new innovation in the evolution of the international relief system; each has exposed the scope and limitations of existing conceptual and programming approaches to humanitarianism in the absence of wider political and security interventions.

In this special issue of Disasters, we present some of the findings of an evaluation which itself might be considered one of the milestones in the international response to the humanitarian crisis in Rwanda, and indeed in disaster studies. The Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda comprised four studies, employing a total of 52 researchers. Study I set the scene. It describes the historical origins of the Rwanda crisis and examines the multiple causes of the genocide (Sellstrom and Wohlgemuth, 1996). International conflict management strategies, including the doomed Arusha peace accords, and early warnings of the impending genocide were the focus of Study II (Adelman and Suhrke, 1996). This issue of Disasters focuses primarily on the findings of Study III, which analysed humanitarian aid and its effects (Borton et al., 1996). The fourth study, examined international efforts at rebuilding post-genocide Rwanda (Kumar and Tardiff-Douglin, 1996). The key findings and the recommendations of these reports are summarised in a synthesis volume, which completes the series (Eriksson, 1996). The reports were prepared during 1995, and were published in March 1996. This mammoth undertaking cost approximately US$1.5 million, 0.1 per cent of the estimated $1.4 billion spent by the international community on humanitarian aid in the period April–December 1994.
It was with some caution that we decided to publish the key findings of an evaluation in which the home institute of the journal (but not its Editors) was involved. Self-publicity is, after all, the enemy of any self-respecting and journal-publishing institution! However, we have done so for three reasons. First, the scale of the Rwandan disaster and of the international humanitarian response meant that it could not and should not be ignored. The long history of violence, inequitable development and militarisation which has characterised much of the Great Lakes region for decades, reached its climax with the assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi in early 1994. As Adelman and Suhrke describe in this issue, despite clear warnings by the head of the UN peace-keeping force of an impending catastrophe, and despite its obligations under the Conventions on Genocide, the international community, and in particular the Security Council, scaled down the UNAMIR peace-keeping operation after the withdrawal by Belgium of its contingent at a time when the need to provide protection was critical. While extensive indicators existed of a growing crisis in the region as a whole and in Rwanda in particular, the response of the United Nations and its Member States to translate information into preventive action was deeply flawed.

The failure of the peace process and of international action to prevent the genocide resulted in a dramatic intensification of the humanitarian crisis in the Great Lakes region. As a result of the genocide and the war which left the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in power, massive population flows took place in and out of the country in the late Spring and early Summer of 1994. Two million people, predominantly Hutu, crossed into Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi, and large numbers of people were displaced inside Rwanda itself. Considerable problems, particularly regarding land ownership, have emerged as refugees who had sought asylum in Uganda and Burundi during previous periods of anti-Tutsi violence have returned to their country.

Between April and December 1994, humanitarian aid valued at nearly $1.5 billion flowed into the region. As Borton describes in his paper (see p. 305), the scale of the response, and the diversity of relief agencies engaged in the operation — NGO, UN, bilateral and military — placed considerable strain on existing relief coordination mechanisms both inside and outside Rwanda.

A second factor encouraging us to publish a special issue reporting on the multi-donor evaluation of Rwanda is the significance of the evaluation itself. Niels Dabelstein, the Head of Evaluation at Danida, the Danish Government’s aid wing, initiated the process. As he describes in his paper (see p. 287), the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance in Rwanda differed from previous evaluations of relief responses in two important respects. First, it was a system-wide evaluation; rather than centring on one agency or type of intervention, it sought to establish the efficacy and synergy of the efforts of all the actors — humanitarian, political and military — engaged in the response to the Great Lakes emergency. Second, it established a unique framework for the management of the evaluation process which was to sustain the integrity and independence of the studies, and served to establish international ownership of its often critical findings. The effectiveness of this strategy in enabling evaluation findings to be translated into future policy is indicated not only by the wide citation of the reports, but more widely in their contribution to ongoing debates within the donor, UN and NGO communities to discuss such wide-ranging issues as the definition of humanitarianism and monitoring of humanitarian standards; the
establishment of common financial reporting and evaluation of relief programmes; and the reform and strengthening of humanitarian co-ordination structures. While it might be argued that the reports have simply added fuel to ongoing debates, the amount of energy released by this single study is probably unprecedented in the history of disaster studies.

Third and most importantly, we publish the findings because of their quality and significance. Many of the themes highlighted by the evaluation will be familiar to observers of disasters and disaster response. Lack of political will; poor co-ordination; lack of professional and ethical standards; the vulnerability of internally displaced persons; the poverty of the information base which guides policy and planning, are some of the familiar themes which cut across the papers. Rarely, however, have these themes been so comprehensively explored and so vigorously underpinned by extensive documentary and field-based analysis.

The key finding of the multi-donor evaluation is that relief aid did not and cannot substitute for political action. In the context of Rwanda, without political and military action to prevent the genocide and to provide a comprehensive framework for protection, all that relief aid could do was to pick up the pieces.

Clearly, the effectiveness of relief interventions mattered in mitigating the worst effects of the events following the genocide. As Shoham (see p. 338) reports, in contrast to similar refugee crises in Somalia and Liberia, very high levels of malnutrition and starvation were averted, in significant part by the effective response of the World Food Programme and UNHCR. Interestingly, Shoham notes the difficulty of measuring the precise contribution of food aid interventions per se in maintaining adequate nutrition of war-affected populations. Particularly inside Rwanda, he suggests that it was the availability of standing crops and people’s own coping strategies which were the primary determinants of nutritional status. This suggests the need to develop more sensitive methods of analysing the food security and nutritional status of refugee and conflict-affected populations. The food economy approach, pioneered by SCF-UK in Ethiopia promises to become a valuable tool in the Great Lakes in this respect. Similarly, food basket monitoring proved an effective means of testing the equity of food distribution systems.

Despite the success of relief agencies in averting significant malnutrition rates, particularly in the camps, inter-agency tensions contributed to duplication of effort and subsequently significant programme inefficiencies. It is this failure to achieve inter-agency coherence in planning approaches, and its implications for ensuring accountability of the UN relief system which leads Borton to propose a merger of all UN specialist emergency agencies.

What emerges from the papers presented is a need for greater coherence, both between the different elements which comprise the international relief system, but also between and within the humanitarian, political and security spheres.

At the micro-level, Pottier (see p. 324) highlights how lack of analysis of the political and social structures which emerged in the refugee camps enhanced the scope for manipulation of aid resources by those most implicated in the genocide. That these structures were challenged by some agencies through effective programming strategies, for example by organising distribution of relief resources through households rather than through political ‘leaders’, is testimony to the importance of incorporating political and social analysis into aid practice. Pottier also examines how information flows between the aid system and aid beneficiaries.
also forms part of a wider political dynamic. Lack of clear information flows between aid agencies and refugees served to fuel the propaganda of political leaders in the camps about the risks of returning to Rwanda and that the international community was biased in favour of the Tutsi. As papers in the previous issue of *Disasters* (20(3)) highlighted, the fate of information in the disaster zone is of more than academic interest; the manner in which disasters are defined by outsiders influence their response and, in turn, alter the dynamic of the disaster itself.

At the international level too there is an urgent need to reexamine how the construction of disasters and relief as technical, material events, continues to relegate humanitarianism to the domain of 'low politics', a relatively cheap and expedient alternative to serious foreign and security policy. Defining the terms on which coherence can be established between humanitarian, foreign and security policy, is arguably one of the greatest challenges facing the international community in the post-Cold War era. Its commitment to uphold basic international legal norms regarding war and human rights is to be judged on the basis of its response to situations as that in Rwanda (Ringmar, 1995).

Greater coherence between the political and humanitarian spheres is not without hazards, however. In particular, there is the risk that humanitarian action will be informed by the 'wrong kind' of politics, serving – rather than confronting – the interests of the politically strong not defending the rights of victims. This is the fear of those such as the Red Cross movement, who see the politicisation of aid, particularly relief aid, as threatening the neutrality of humanitarian action. However, it is the Red Cross movement which has been at the forefront of defining the principles which are likely to guide calls for the 'right kind' of politics, namely

a systematic and accountable framework for international humanitarianism. These principles are embedded in international humanitarian and human rights law which, however slowly, are being used to hold war criminals from Yugoslavia and Rwanda to account. They have yet to be used, however, to call the international political and humanitarian systems to account for their failures to prevent and mitigate the effects of conflict, human rights abuses and sustained under-development.

In this sense, the Rwanda evaluation marks a small but important step in improving the accountability of international humanitarian action. Interestingly, it was published shortly after the findings of the infamous Scott enquiry into British sales of weapons to Iraq which offered unparalleled, although often impenetrable, insights into some of the most secret processes of government decision-making. While these reports differ substantially in terms of their content (and certainly their readability!) both reflect an international mood which is more questioning and demanding of political decision-making.

The response of private citizens to the media exposure of the Rwandan crisis is indicative in this respect. Private and official contributions to the humanitarian effort were tremendous. With important caveats, the multi-donor evaluation reafirms that humanitarian action can be effective. As official aid budgets come under threat, continuing public pressure will therefore be crucial in order to ensure that adequate relief is made available to disaster- and conflict-affected communities. Even more important, however, will be the need to develop an international consensus, underpinned by a coherent political and legal framework, and sustained by public support, which provides protection from violence and serves to address its causes. In the absence of such a
framework, the international community risks missing the point of genuinely humanitarian intervention.

Joanna Macrae
Co-editor, Disasters

References


The Great Lakes region: Rwanda and neighbouring countries

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Evaluating the International Humanitarian System: Rationale, Process and Management of the Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Rwanda Genocide

NIELS DABELSTEIN, Danida

The Rwanda evaluation has been termed a landmark in evaluation, not only because of its quality and the insights it has produced. It was also an unprecedented international collaboration to learn the lessons from the immense tragedy that was the genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath. This paper reports on the rationale, process and management of the joint evaluation of the international response to the Great Lakes crisis of 1994–5.

Evaluation of humanitarian aid is becoming increasingly important for several reasons:

- The effectiveness of relief operations is crucial to the beneficiaries.
- Humanitarian operations are becoming more complex and more frequent, and the scale of humanitarian assistance has increased dramatically over the past decade, reaching 10 per cent of official aid in 1994.
- Humanitarian operations are characterised by turbulence, uncertainty, insecurity, political sensitivity and multitudes of beneficiary groups, implementing actors and funding agencies. At the operating level, the focus on immediate needs and tasks detracts attention from broader and long-term perspectives.
- Humanitarian agencies have short institutional memories. Personnel turnover is extremely rapid and the majority of field-workers are young and have a relatively short ‘lifetime’ in the field. Hard-learned lessons are not passed on.

Over the past few years, several evaluations of humanitarian aid have been conducted by various implementing and funding agencies. While indeed valuable, they mostly focus on a limited field of operation or on the operations of a single agency.

The Rwanda evaluation was the first comprehensive evaluation of collective emergency operations. While not neces-
necessarily more cost-effective than a number of individual evaluations, its value lies in the comprehensiveness of its analysis and thus in the validity of lessons learned.

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE EVALUATION

When Danida presented the concept of a joint evaluation to the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation in October 1994, the reactions ranged from enthusiastic support to rejection. The majority felt that the evaluation was both timely and relevant, while a few argued that an evaluation was premature and expressed concern that it would evaluate political processes which evaluators should keep away from. As DAC decisions are always made by consensus, the Expert Group could not carry the initiative further. Instead Danida called a consultative meeting the following month of bilateral donors, UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs.

At the meeting, consensus was reached on a general outline of terms of reference for the evaluation and on the organisational structure for managing the evaluation (see Figure 1). The Steering Committee comprised 38 members representing the international aid community. The countries of the region: Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire were invited, but did not participate until a year later when they were represented in the final meetings. Day-to-day management of the evaluation was entrusted to a Management Group made up of five overseas development agencies representing the governments of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

The Steering Committee held its first meeting three weeks later, in December

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**FIGURE 1** Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda: organisation
1995, when it approved the final Terms of Reference and drew up a short list of evaluators to carry out the evaluation. Only six weeks later, on 20 January 1995, the four evaluation teams met and the evaluation started.

Many observers have noted that the speed with which this evaluation came into being was remarkable: that such a numerous and diverse group of agencies could, in less than three months, agree to carry out a large, complex and independent evaluation of an event in which they had very different stakes. It was, indeed, a considerable achievement. Several factors were at play:

- The evaluation was initiated by, and most members of the Steering Committee were, representatives from evaluation departments which generally enjoy a certain degree of independence within their respective organisations. Through their participation in the DAC Expert Group of Evaluation, they had developed a long tradition of cooperation and mutual support and, due to a relatively slow turnover, knew each other and shared a common frame of reference: the DAC Principles for Evaluation.
- The all-inclusiveness: once the critical mass was established no one could stay out — it could be embarrassing for any one agency not to participate.
- The terms of reference were comprehensive, and the special interests of the agencies were largely accommodated.
- The participating agencies accepted the principle of independence despite their different evaluation traditions. The evaluation teams were obliged to give full and fair consideration to substantive comments from the Committee, but the responsibility for the content of final reports would belong solely to the teams.

Throughout the evaluation the participating agencies co-operated fully, providing access to information including internal and often confidential documentation. The few exceptions were political or military bodies over which aid agencies have no jurisdiction. Although the evaluation got off the ground smoothly, keeping it going and on track was by no means without problems. Discussed below are a number of issues which stand out.

MANAGING THE EVALUATION

Selecting the evaluators

In view of the diversity of the issues to be evaluated, four separate evaluation studies were to be contracted to institutions and individuals with requisite qualifications in the fields of emergency assistance planning and management; repatriation and rehabilitation of refugees; history and political economy of Rwanda and the surrounding region; institution and capacity building in development; conflict and political analysis; and/or socio-cultural and gender aspects. Institutions and individuals were also selected for their proven ability to perform high-quality, analytical and objective evaluative research. In all, 52 consultants and researchers participated in the studies, numbers of the teams ranged from four people for Study I to 21 for Study III.

A synthesis team was also formed to pull together the key findings of the four studies. The evaluation could have been carried out, on behalf of the Steering Committee, by one independent international institution. It might, however, be difficult to agree on one institution. The five-team model was chosen partly due to the magnitude of the task, partly to provide some assurance against bias towards any single line of thought.

Given the political sensitivity of the issues, great care was taken to avoid institutions or individuals who were
involved in activism or lobbying. In the case of complex crises and humanitarian issues this is particularly difficult as those who have the necessary qualifications are so often committed to a particular cause or point of view. Although several Africans participated in sub-studies, none participated in the main evaluation teams. The involvement of the ‘Panel of Eminent Africans’ did provide the teams with valuable additional perspective on some cultural and political aspects, albeit late in the process.

**Doing four studies concurrently**

Conducting the four studies concurrently did incur some difficulties. The first was that the division of labour between the teams was based on the concept of the relief-to-development continuum: starting with conflict prevention and disaster preparedness, moving on to mitigation and then to repatriation, rehabilitation and reconstruction issues. The continuum would be covered through a multidimensional approach with the four component studies each covering a dimension of the very complex emergency in Rwanda seen in a regional context.

Clearly, the Rwanda crisis does not represent a linear ‘continuum’ from crisis-to-relief-to-rehabilitation-to-development. Rehabilitation efforts necessarily began soon after the new government assumed power in July 1994. In refugee camps on Rwanda’s borders, massive relief operations continue now in 1996, two years later. In other respects, a shift from one stage to the next occurred during the fieldwork, as for example when IDPs, who had been sustained by relief for almost a year, returned home and received rehabilitation assistance. At the same time the crisis continued and many issues were at play simultaneously: conflict prevention, conflict resolution, relief and rehabilitation, though one could question whether much development has taken place.

Consequently some issues ‘fell between two teams’ while other issues overlapped. For example:

- Studies I and II overlapped substantially on the period after 1990.
- Consideration of relief-to-development issues fell between Studies III and IV, and consequently, the overall evaluation had little to say on an issue that was in high fashion.
- The issue of NGO proliferation was covered by both Studies III and IV, but it would have been more effective if done in one study.
- Some refugee issues during 1995 (as opposed to 1994) fell between Studies III and IV. While Study IV focused on barriers to repatriation, Study III did not adequately cover relief effectiveness during 1995.
- The roles of UNAMIR and Opération Turquoise were covered both by Study II and III, but some issues, such as the effectiveness of UNAMIR II after July 1994, were not well covered.

There was also some debate as to how the four studies should be synthesised. Perceptions ranged from a summary of the four reports’ recommendations to a free-standing document building on the four reports and other sources, so going beyond what could be clearly concluded from the four studies. This led to a serious conflict between the four teams and the synthesis team.

Exchange of information between teams working on different continents — one team was even split between two — was a problem solved partly by extensive use of the Internet, and partly through meetings and workshops.

**The roles of managers**

The evaluation teams reported to the Management Group over such issues as
interpretation of, and compliance with, the terms of reference and operational matters, including time frames and budget constraints. There was a very close relationship between the members of the Management Group and the teams, in one case the (Study IV) team leader was also a member of the Management Group. While this may have impeded the breadth of view in decision-making, the advantage of managers following the evaluation so closely is obvious, and became very clear when the first draft reports were presented to the Steering Committee: the frankness of the reports and directness of critique was cause for concern for some members of the Steering Committee. Considerable pressure was exerted by the UN Secretariat, UNHCR and the Government of France to have parts of the reports removed or edited. The Management Group resisted this pressure by expressing full confidence in the quality of the work and continued to ensure the teams’ independence.

The role of the steering committee

The Steering Committee had two periods of very intensive work: to initiate the evaluation as described above, and to discuss and provide feedback on the draft reports during the period November 1995—January 1996. Both of these periods were equally important.

In any evaluation, particularly one as comprehensive as this, despite every effort to obtain all relevant information, there will be information which the team did not find, think to find or gain access to. There will inevitably be information that has been misinterpreted by the evaluators. The process of distributing the draft reports for comments and discussion is an integral part of evaluation, and proved its usefulness again in this case. The additional facts provided by the members and the lengthy discussions in the Steering Committee (one meeting was especially long when the Steering Committee was snowed-in in Copenhagen!) served to enrich the report, and ensure ownership of the report by the participating agencies. When an individual agency was dissatisfied with the treatment of a particular issue or a particular conclusion, but received no support from other members, it had to let the matter rest. There were also cases where arguments convinced the teams that a different conclusion was correct.

While not all members of the Steering Committee agreed to all the findings or ascribed to all the recommendations, they all accepted the evaluation as a thorough and comprehensive work. Only the UN Secretariat has attempted to discredit the evaluation through aggressive and inaccurate press statements.

EVALUATING AN EVENT

The Rwanda crisis and genocide was a highly dynamic event in which the international community operated without clearly defined objectives and outcomes. In this evaluation, the overwhelming reality of the genocide soon became clear in ways that had not been envisaged at the outset. As a result, the approach of a ‘traditional’ evaluation with emphasis on impact, efficiency and cost-effectiveness analysis was not always appropriate or sufficient, but had to be supplemented with qualitative analysis of cause-and-effect assessed in relation to contractual obligations or international legal norms. Results had to be measured against political and ethical standards as well as international humanitarian legal and professional standards. Similarly, the documentary research and, especially, the interviews and field-work, repeatedly demonstrated how the genocide, its victims and its perpetrators, shaped the prospects for rehabilitation and recovery for decades to come.
In conducting the evaluation, many methods were employed: documentary research of files, reports and other documents, formal and informal personal interviews, group interviews, focus group discussions and hard observation. Two issues stand out as being unique to humanitarian crisis and relief. The first is the high turnover of relief staff. Many key informants were unavailable in the field only nine months later. Although many, not all, were tracked and contacted in other locations. Second, and not infrequently, contradictory versions of the same event were given by relief workers, or sometimes there was an official version and an unofficial. Likewise Rwandan interviewees, perhaps more understandably, gave contradictory versions.

THE SENSITIVITY OF EVALUATING A COMPLEX OF POLITICAL, MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN ISSUES

Multi-agency system-wide evaluations do yield generally applicable lessons for the humanitarian aid system and, as this evaluation has proven, can focus policy discussions and achieve an impetus that is simply out of reach of any number of smaller, partial coverage studies.

The relationships between states and the UN, particularly in the Security Council, are shrouded in confidentiality and attempts to analyse dealings behind closed doors were highly sensitive. Likewise the relationships between different humanitarian agencies were often strained. It was particularly interesting that during the course of the evaluation, agencies competed for the limelight, accusing others of poor performance and complaining that their agency did not receive adequate attention. When the draft report was presented, however, agencies — particularly those within the UN — closed ranks: co-ordination and co-operation problems which were evident, and which were emphasised by many interviewees during the research period, were down-played when agencies commented officially on the draft reports.

On the other hand, given the central roles of UN agencies, and the difficulty in evaluating individual NGOs and donors (the latter more often acting as funders, rather than being operational), the UN agencies were considerably more visible in the reports than other organisations.

Many actors provided a wealth of information — but did not wish to be quoted, therefore substantial work was required to corroborate their testimony.

INADEQUATE DATA, INADEQUATE MONITORING

The availability and quality of performance data and reporting by agencies is highly variable, frequently not comparable and often not shared. There is no focal point for a database nor for dissemination. Attention to financial and cost-effectiveness analysis of humanitarian assistance has been limited due to 'ethical considerations', particularly, given the difficulties in evaluating the benefits relative to costs. There seems also to be a pervasive opinion that humanitarian aid is too important to take time out to record what you are doing, to look seriously at how much it cost, or to assess whether it could have been done more cost-effectively.

These problems are compounded by the large number of organisations involved. With the different mandates, traditions and internal structures of operational organisations, and the wide variations in reporting requirements and monitoring by donor agencies, a multitude of incomparable databases exists, making assessment of costs and of programme efficiency and effectiveness extremely difficult.
ACCESSING THE VIEWS OF BENEFICIARIES

In a dynamic, ongoing crisis it was difficult to work with the intended beneficiaries: the traumatised survivors and the intimidated refugees. Both in the refugee camps and within Rwanda, it was extremely difficult to ensure that interviews were confidential and that interviewees felt able to speak freely. Attitudes towards interviewers depended on how the interviewees perceived the status of the interviewers: Which agency did they represent? What were the markings of the vehicle they arrived in? It was also difficult for the interviewers to 'identify' interviewees: were they extremists or intimidated; victims or persecutors?

Within its time limits, Study IV was able to interview victims and returnees about their current situation and concerns, such as security, justice, land issues, assistance to vulnerable groups and seed distribution. In the refugee camps it was, however, considerably more difficult for Study III to elicit accurate information: refugees were hazy about 'historical events', many did not differentiate between agencies providing assistance, and it was difficult to determine whether they might have a special interest in arguing for or against a particular issue, such as the mode of food distribution systems.

LEARNING LESSONS WITHOUT ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ACTION

Some UN agencies, the Secretary-General and a few countries have made the point that the evaluation attempts to apportion blame in spite of the fact that the terms of reference for the evaluation spelt out clearly that it should be oriented towards lessons learned 'rather than a report oriented to assigning accountability for past actions or lack of action'.

In seeking to understand why some-thing happened as well as what happened, an objective of any sound evaluation, including this one, inevitably involves assessing causal relationships, which in turn may require assigning responsibility for actions, in particular when such action, or lack thereof, resulted in great loss of life. It would be difficult to derive lessons for the future without making such assessments.

MAINTAINING OBJECTIVITY IN THE FACE OF GENOCIDE

To be fully objective in the face of genocide is humanly impossible. All those involved in the studies, evaluators and managers alike, constantly confronted three issues.

First, why did this genocide take place? What were the factors leading to this incredibly swift, cruel and well-planned genocide? These questions stayed on the agenda throughout the evaluation. Still, we cannot provide a satisfactory answer.

Second, the field-work in Rwanda, including my own, all too brief, visit, made an indelible mark on the minds of the evaluators. As was said during the first workshop after the field-work: 'This evaluation has changed my perception of humanity and the world.'

Third, as the studies progressed and evidence showed that it was not lack of knowledge that prevented the international community from intervening in 'this little insignificant country', the indignation over the lack of political will to intervene in the genocide grew. The result is partly illustrated by some of the far-reaching recommendations for changes in the international system. However, some critics have remarked: 'These people don't understand how the world works, how the international system and governments work.' A Canadian colleague's response to such accusations of naivety captures well the evaluators' view: 'If it is generally accepted that Rwanda is an example of
how governments work then God help us — maybe we should change how governments work.'

CONCLUSION

I have, on several occasions, been asked whether a joint evaluation with its inherent laborious approach is an appropriate tool. Yes, I believe it is.

The roles of various agencies and donors are often complementary. Bilateral donors are mainly providing funds and in-kind resources, and are involved in needs assessment. UN agencies perform needs assessments, channel resources, co-ordinate and implement programmes while NGOs also perform many of these roles. These roles are interlinked and complementary, often overlapping and sometimes conflicting with each other. It is therefore difficult to determine the specific contribution of those different activities to global results or outcomes. The joint evaluation showed the synergy which exists between different agencies cooperating, therefore amplifying the power of lessons and recommendations it documented.

Joint overall evaluations will yield generally applicable lessons for the humanitarian aid system and, as this evaluation has proven, can focus policy discussions and achieve an impetus that is simply out of reach of any number of smaller, partial-coverage studies. Joint evaluations should become a regular feature of the humanitarian aid system if the system is to keep learning and improving effectively. It is important to bear in mind, however, that this evaluation was not initiated by the 'system' as a whole, but by a single agency. It is by no means certain that a similar initiative will succeed in the future.

There is a need to identify or establish an independent international unit responsible for monitoring and evaluating emergency humanitarian assistance. In this respect, lessons may be drawn from the evaluation system set up by the Global Environmental Fund.

Notes

1. Traditionally, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee Expert Group on Aid Evaluation has been a forum for joint evaluations by smaller or larger groups of donors.

2. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark (Chair), Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Commission of the EU, OECD/DAC, IOM, UN/DHA, UNDP, UNCHR, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, IBRD, ICRC, IFRC, ICVA, Doctors of the World, INTERACTION, Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, VOICE. Several other countries supported the evaluation, but did not participate actively. French participation in the Steering Committee was suspended in December 1995.

3. The credit for developing such comprehensive terms of reference in such a short time goes to Hanne Christensen, IBHI, Krishna Kumar, USAID/CDIE and Stein Villumstad, Norwegian Church Aid, who worked with me for a very intense week.

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Early Warning and Response: Why the International Community Failed to Prevent the Genocide

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'Western leadership . . . has proclaimed moral indifference to be its decent Christian right' John le Carré (1995, p. 213).

The enormity of the genocide in Rwanda demands that it be subjected to searching enquiry and that members of the international community, collectively and individually, examine their own roles in the event.

This paper draws extensively on Study II of the Joint Evaluation, and examines the effectiveness of international monitoring (early warning) and management of the Rwanda conflict. It is not intended to explore all the factors which together contributed to the genocide that were or might have been amenable to modification by the international community. The focus is on warning and response beginning with the start of the civil war in 1990, and culminating in an analysis of the international response to the genocide in April–June 1994.

INTRODUCTION

Evaluators and historians have the luxury of hindsight to criticise actions and inactions that subsequently appear inappropriate. Any search for lessons from the tragedy must, however, avoid retrospective speculation. Decision-makers were faced with often confusing signals, numerous competing demands for their attention and limitations on the resources at their disposal. Critical policy theory was used by the evaluators to weigh the formulation and execution of policies against their stated objectives as well as accepted international norms for the behaviour of states and organisations. This paper, like the study before it, is based on a number of sub-studies, secondary sources as well as considerable primary data collected through interviews and document searches in the UN system, the NGO community and visits to national capitals in Europe, North America and Africa.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVENTS OF 1959–62

Having administered the country through the Tutsi aristocracy for four decades, the Belgian colonial authorities1 turned their support towards the majority Hutu in the
late-1950s — a switch driven by the realisation of the inevitability of the de-colonisation process, the logic of democratic rule and Belgian resentment that the strongest calls for independence were coming from among the favoured Tutsi class. After the so-called ‘peasant revolt’ of Hutu against the Tutsi ruling class in 1959, during which thousands of Tutsi were killed and tens of thousands fled the country, the colonial authorities installed a military-led administration and took the opportunity of placing Hutu appointees in chief and sub-chief posts vacated by Tutsi.

The table-turning process was carried forward by the overwhelming victory of the PARMEHUTU party in the local elections of 1960, the parliamentary elections of 1961 and the referendum of 1961 which saw the massive rejection of the monarchy in favour of a republican system of government. The process was accompanied by sporadic fighting between Tutsi and Hutu, and the persecution of Tutsi as the Hutu increased their grip on power. By late 1963, at least 130,000 Tutsi had sought refuge in the neighbouring Belgian Congo (now Zaire), Burundi, Uganda and Tanzania. Some estimates of the numbers involved have been much higher.

The speed of the switch in the configuration of Rwandan politics, and an awareness that it could leave the country with an embittered Tutsi minority, provoked considerable criticism of Belgium’s policy in the UN General Assembly, and repeated calls for the encouragement of a process of national reconciliation. The Belgian administration rejected the calls, and sought to head off further UN ‘tinkering’ by organising a de facto declaration of independence in early 1961 by the acclamation of over 3,000 bourgemestres and municipal councillors. The country achieved formal independence in July 1962.

A report by the UN Trusteeship Commission in early 1961 noted:

The developments of these last eighteen months have brought about the racial dictatorship of one party. . . . An oppressive system has been replaced by another one. . . . It is quite possible that some day we will witness violent reactions on the part of the Tutsi (cited in Prunier, 1995).

By 1961, armed incursions into Rwanda by Tutsi refugees had begun; these continued until 1967. The main base for these initial attacks was Burundi which continued to be governed by a Tutsi minority. One attack into the Bugasera area in late 1963 came quite close to reaching Kigali, but mostly the attacks were neither well organised nor adequately resourced. Inside Rwanda, which had become a de facto single-party state, Tutsi were increasingly excluded from public life and armed incursions were not only repulsed, but bouts of anti-Tutsi violence flared; an estimated 10,000 Tutsi were slaughtered in the Bugasera area following the 1963 incursion (Prunier, 1995). Another wave of anti-Tutsi violence took place in 1972–3 fuelled by events in Burundi where tens of thousands of Hutu had been massacred by the Tutsi minority in a bid to remain in power.

Such repression and violence swelling the number of Rwandan Tutsi living in exile in neighbouring countries. When allowance is made for natural population growth among this group, by the 1990s the total number of refugees was in the order of 600,000–700,000 (Prunier, 1995), although the political and propaganda significance of such estimates and the difficulties of accurately measuring such a widely distributed population makes any figure a matter of dispute. With the overthrow of the Hutu PARMEHUTU dictatorship and its replacement by a dictatorship from the north-west under Habyarimana in 1973, the persecution of, though not the discrimination against, Tutsi stopped. Habyarimana, however, steadfastly refused to allow the Tutsi refugees to return.
In 1981 a small number of the Tutsi refugees in Uganda joined one of the groups opposed to the regime of President Obote. The group was led by Yoweri Museveni, who was related (though distantly) to a Rwandan Tutsi family. As the guerrilla activities increased in intensity Museveni’s links with Rwandan Tutsi led to increasing hostility between Ugandan officials and people towards the Tutsi living there in exile. This in turn led to more Tutsi joining what was now Museveni’s National Resistance Army (NRA), which eventually succeeded in ousting the Obote regime in 1986. By then a number of Tutsi had risen to very prominent positions within the NRA.

Once in power, Museveni’s position depended upon accommodating the various factions within the country who resented the connection with the Rwandan Tutsi. Seeing the direction of Ugandan politics, the Rwandan Tutsi community in Uganda became more determined to return to their own country. In 1988, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which also included some Hutu opposed to the Habyarimana regime, was formally created in Kampala with the objective not just of ensuring the return of those Tutsi in exile, but changing the political regime in Rwanda. Within Rwanda the position of the government was weakened by a combination of deteriorating economic conditions (resulting from the dramatic decline in the international price of coffee, which was Rwanda’s primary export) and opposition to regionally based, autocratic rule. Habyarimana was also coming under pressure from France and other donor countries to move away from the one-party system by allowing new political parties to develop.

By failing to deal with the festering refugee problem before 1990, both the Rwandan and the Ugandan governments, as well as the wider international community, set the stage for future conflict. Although the issue of Rwandan refugees in Uganda defied easy solution, opportunities that had existed remained unexplored or were not aggressively pursued. With the exception of Tanzania, those regional states that were not indifferent were part of the problem, while more distant states showed little interest. UNHCR, overburdened and understaffed, lacked the political or economic leverage to help resolve the issue, which, at that time, seemed minor in any global scale of refugee problems.

THE CIVIL WAR STARTS

On 1 October 1990, a well-armed force of the military wing of the RPF invaded northern areas of Rwanda from Uganda. Much of the force was composed of Rwandan Tutsi soldiers from the Ugandan army and much of their armaments were reputedly stolen from Ugandan army stores. Though repulsed, the attack signalled the start of the civil war in Rwanda: a war which was used to increase the intensity of fear and hatred and raise the stakes of political survival.

The build-up of tension leading to the 1990 invasion by RPF forces was accompanied by many tell-tale signs, which were inadequately monitored. When the invasion was a fait accompli, however, it attracted considerable international concern and reaction, both in the region and in Europe. France and Zaire came to the aid of the Rwandan government. Other actors, including Belgium, the OAU and key regional states, initiated diplomatic efforts to defuse the conflict.

The initial diplomatic efforts eventually led to a series of peace talks, initiated and led by the OAU and Tanzania and held at Arusha in Tanzania. The process, begun in August 1992, received considerable international attention, and resulted in a comprehensive settlement,
the Arusha Accords, signed in August 1993. The United Nations assumed formal responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Arusha Accords, including the provision of peace-keepers, and in the process limited the role of the OAU and local African states. As a consequence, there was a disjuncture between the mediation and implementation phases which served to undermine the Accords.

From 1990 onwards, civil violence against the minority Tutsi community and critics of the Habyarimana regime had gradually escalated. Observers commonly linked the violence to the civil war, either as retaliatory measures or as warnings to the advancing RPF forces. However, two authoritative reports — one by an independent International Commission of Inquiry (FIDH, 1993), and another prepared for the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR, 1994) — suggested a more radical and comprehensive design that fore-shadowed events to come. Both reports determined that the killings were genocidal in nature and that existing authorities were deeply involved. As the war continued and the outlines of a peace formula took shape, persistent reports indicated that Hutu extremists were organising and arming themselves to de-rail the peace process and massacre 'internal enemies'. The creation of documented structures of violence (death squads, death lists, and later, hate propaganda inciting violence) provided warnings of a potential genocide.

The UN Commission on Human Rights took little notice of its own report. Except for pointed diplomatic protests by Belgium, the findings of the international human rights inquiry were mostly buried away in national ministries and the UN system. With the partial exception of Canada, no state observed the recommendation to impose strict human rights conditionality on aid transfers. Some states were indifferent; others were concerned but concluded that the ongoing democratisation process and the peace talks required their continued economic and political support, particularly since the peace agreement under negotiation would produce a new governmental structure that, it was hoped, would address human rights abuses. In this way, donors were held hostage to their own policies.

Human rights organisations and states were also at odds over the issue of arms supplies. In 1992 and 1993, the former recommended that states (France and Uganda were obvious targets) cut off all arms supplies to the parties in the conflict. France openly defended its role and the right of a sovereign state to support a beleaguered friendly government. Uganda denied any involvement in helping the rebel army, yet its territory constituted the rear base for the RPF forces.

Would aid conditionality and an international arms embargo in the 1990–93 period have defused the conflict and prevented the genocide? Effective use of human rights conditionality is difficult, requiring fine-tuned and timely intervention. Arguably, there were windows of opportunity, particularly in mid-1992, when more pressure could have been applied to the Habyarimana regime to deal with the extremist forces as well as the critical issue of impunity. Also military assistance (direct and indirect) to the Rwandan protagonists could have been calibrated better with the continuing peace process, particularly in dealing with the central issue of extremist forces who opposed the Arusha process and resultant Accords.

Though such speculations are debatable, firmer conclusions can be drawn about what did happen. By not standing firm on human rights conditionality, donors collectively sent the message that their priorities lay elsewhere. By permitting arms to reach the Rwandan protagonists, the possibilities for demilitarising
the conflict were reduced. Arms supplies reinforced the determination of both parties to seek a military and forceful solution to a political conflict. They strengthened the RPF's ability to advance militarily. They permitted the government to equip and expand its armed forces as well as para-military units, both of which became involved in the genocide.

When, as a result of the Arusha process, the Hutu extremists were excluded from the key instruments of the transitional government and marginalised in the political process, alternative strategies were not developed to 'de-fang' those extremists. The UN force (UNAMIR) sent to oversee the implementation of the peace agreement was given a mandate tailored to a classic, minimalist peace-keeping operation. Yet the force faced a situation considered by many, including some of those who planned the operation, as dangerously unstable.

As the architects of the Arusha Accords had foreseen, conditions in Rwanda suggested a mandate with broad powers to protect civilians and seize arms caches. Further, the UN Security Council established a force that was structured and financed to satisfy a cost-conscious United States, increasingly unwilling to support UN peace-keeping, rather than to meet the needs on the ground. The force was inadequately supported (although relatively rapid given the normally cumbersome UN procedures), and only slowly deployed relative to the need for speed (considered essential to maintain the peace process). The operation had no flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, in particular those caused by the crisis in neighbouring Burundi in October 1993.

In the months immediately preceding the genocide, many additional signs indicated that the implementation of the Arusha Accords was faltering and that massive violence was being planned. The air was full of extremist rhetoric on radio, in public rallies and at official cocktail parties. There were assassinations and organised violence. Detailed intelligence reports were passed to New York and the Belgian military authorities by the unofficial UNAMIR intelligence unit documenting the military training of militias, hidden arms caches and plans for violent action. Unequivocal warnings reached the UN Secretariat on 11 January 1994 regarding a planned coup, an assault on the UN forces to drive them out, provocations to resume the civil war, and even detailed plans for carrying out genocidal killings in the capital. The cable was placed in a separate black-coloured file, designed to draw attention to the gravity of its content, and circulated to several departments in the UN Secretariat. However, senior officials in the Secretariat questioned the validity of the information and made no contingency plans for worst-case scenarios. Similar intelligence failures were evident at the state level, particularly in France and Belgium, both of which had a considerable capacity for overt and covert information gathering in Rwanda at the time.

Thus pieces of information were available that, if combined and analysed, would have permitted policy-makers to draw the conclusion that both political assassinations and genocide might occur, and that the scale would be different from past patterns (1959–63; 1991–3) of 'just' hundreds or thousands of victims. Yet this analysis was not done. Although some had available fragments of prescient and significant information, the enormity of the genocide took virtually all by surprise. The failure to anticipate planned and targeted mass murder was particularly significant given the political commitment and actual involvement of the UN in Rwanda, the legal right and moral obligation to act to prevent genocide according to the Genocide Convention, and the enormous cost of a miscalculation.
While mandated to help implement the peace agreement, the UN made no preparations to deal with a breakdown of the Accords, except to withdraw. Nor were there contingency preparations to deal with the plans to scuttle the Accords or the massive violence plotted by the extremists. Generally, the UN Secretariat interpreted UNAMIR’s mandate and rules of engagement narrowly, and on several occasions denied the Force Commander permission to search for and seize arms caches. When developments in early 1994 further eroded the peace accords, the Secretary-General and the Security Council threatened to withdraw the UN force, hence strengthening the hands of the extremists. No member of the Security Council came forward to suggest a different course of action. On the contrary, the Council kept UNAMIR on a tight leash with only a three months’ authorisation, accompanied by admonitions of caution and emphasising the importance of cost-cutting.

CRISIS AND RESPONSE: APRIL TO JUNE 1994

In the months before the crisis struck, UNAMIR’s presence contributed to a false sense of security in Rwanda. When events came to a head on 6 April, the UN collectively failed to respond. There was an absence of leadership at UN headquarters in New York. The Secretary-General, travelling at a brisk pace through Europe, misread the nature of the conflict. The understaffed and overstretched Department of Peace-keeping Operations seemed paralysed. In the Security Council, the killing of 10 Belgian peacekeepers created a political surge to withdraw, although this was not recommended by UNAMIR’s Force Commander nor by the African countries contributing troops. Information on the genocide under way was already available when the final decision was made to reduce the force drastically.

Once the direction and magnitude of the genocide became undeniable, the UN reversed itself and accepted an obligation to protect civilians. However, the realisation of this peace-keeping mission (UNAMIR II) was hampered by the unwillingness of key members to pay for or provide troops, and to match troops with equipment in an expeditious manner. The force was deployed only after the genocide and the civil war had run their course.

France’s role in Rwanda was significant in its many contradictions. While warning the Security Council in early 1993 that massacres were a real possibility, France supported a regime that was deeply compromised by human rights violations. France urged the UN, rather than the OAU, to take the lead in monitoring and implementing the peace agreement, but subsequently did little to support UNAMIR I. Nor did France pledge support for UNAMIR II, even though the French Foreign Minister was the first cabinet member of a government holding a permanent seat on the Security Council to identify the massacres as genocide (16 May 1994). With the aid of some of its African ex-colonies, France subsequently undertook a unilateral intervention, Opération Turquoise, endorsed by a Chapter VII Security Council resolution. The action saved many lives and undoubtedly prevented an additional mass outflow of refugees from the south-west of Rwanda, but came very late: two and a half months after the genocide commenced and when the civil war was almost over. Further, because of France’s historical role in the country, the intervention was open to misinterpretation, and did not serve to disarm the extremists or prevent suspected organisers of the genocide from escaping.

During the whole conflict, but especially after the coup on 6 April, the