

When aid goes astray

In the camps in Zaire, just after the Rwandan genocide, many Hutus crossed the border after the rebel army took control of the country. Intermingled with the 1 million Hutu peasants were people who were involved in and committed the genocide. They lived in the camps, in fact they ran the camps, giving the impression that the UN and the NGOs were doing so. An internal UNHCR report said that a large portion of the food aid was being sold at markets and the money was then being used to purchase weapons so that the people conducting the genocide could go back and cause more chaos.

In Zaire, humanitarian aid was also used as a

weapon in a destructive way. One major NGO was providing assistance right up to the edge of the rain forest in Zaire. One of the local rebel groups that were trying to hunt down the people who conducted the genocide told the NGO to leave the camp. They did so and came back later to find a mass grave. In this case, humanitarian assistance had been used as a magnet for bringing people out of the forest and then they were surrounded and massacred and buried in this mass grave. That is not the purpose of humanitarian assistance. The aid, in that particular case, was doing harm. So understanding the context of the situation is therefore critically important.

How does USAID see the overall humanitarian challenges for the coming years?

The first is that we are putting a renewed emphasis on democracy and governance because I think many of the weaknesses in attempting to accelerate development for countries are connected to governance. Unless we focus specifically on governance and corruption, we will not succeed. Countries will not attract investment unless their governments insist on accountability, transparency, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Without investment there will be no long-term development.

We shall also focus on agriculture which has been neglected for the past decade and a half by the donor community in general and the United Nations and the banks in particular. Seventy per cent of the poorest people live in rural areas, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, the sub-continent and central Asia, the areas with the highest concentrations of poor people. Those people are primarily farmers and herders. They get their income and their livelihoods from agriculture. We need to see if we can't stimulate through various interventions

agricultural markets, agricultural production – not primarily just for food security, but for increases in livelihood and family income that will result in more prosperous communities.

Thirdly, we want to put a new focus on conflict management and litigation and on the reorganisation of the humanitarian functions with this new office on conflict. It is very important to focus on the political problems and the political instability that are the characteristics of a failed state.

We are also putting heavy emphasis on HIV/AIDS which is one of the great crises facing the developing world particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. There have been some dramatic increases in funding for health programmes, particularly HIV/AIDS programmes.

Finally, we have an initiative called the Global Development Alliance which is an attempt to take the resources of USAID and co-ordinate them with private NGO resources and foundations. We think by taking our public resources and marrying them with private resources we can increase our leverage to much greater effect.