UN INTEGRATED MISSIONS AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Overview of Oxfam's position on United Nations Integrated Missions and Humanitarian Action

Since 2008, the UN has brought together its various functions through the principle of 'integration', typically in the form of 'integrated missions', in conflict and post-conflict situations. Its aim has been to maximize the UN's impact through greater strategic coherence. But Oxfam and other humanitarian agencies remain concerned that such integration can challenge the independence and impartiality of humanitarian action – particularly when integration goes beyond a shared vision and planning frameworks to 'structural integration', where UN humanitarian, peacekeeping and political functions are under a single management line, among other very visible forms of integration.

In 2013, the UN itself recognised the risks inherent in these approaches in its Integrated Assessment and Planning (IAP) policy.[1] The risks identified included those of military or political priorities influencing humanitarian action, including humanitarian access, and the security of aid workers and the people they seek to assist being compromised if humanitarian actors are not perceived as impartial and neutral.

That UN Policy set out safeguards to mitigate such risks. The UN should ensure, it said, that:

- Humanitarian action should normally be separate from a UN political or peacekeeping mission;
- Visible association between UN humanitarian and other objectives should be minimized in conflicts and fragile contexts;
- Before deciding on any integrated approach, a thorough assessment of risks should be made, involving national and international NGOs;
- That assessment should be regularly reviewed, leading to changes where necessary.

Whatever the arrangements adopted, the IAP Policy says that the mandates of all UN missions should take account of humanitarian principles, including that assistance should be impartially targeted based on people's need alone.

Since 2013, however, these safeguards have not been consistently applied in, for example, Mali or South Sudan, despite positive developments, such as the appointment of a stand-alone Humanitarian Coordinator in the Central African Republic.

Better compliance with the UN's own safeguards is vital. Oxfam and the whole humanitarian community should press for that consistent application, and highlight gaps that emerge. Oxfam will distinguish itself from UN missions. That does not mean not communicating at all; some engagement is vital to coordinate assistance and the protection of civilians, and Oxfam will share information on, for example, the movement of its staff and goods, and civilians in need. In doing so, Oxfam will apply Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)[2] guidance on civil-military relationships,[3] drawing on its own analysis of risks in each context.

1 Definitions

For the UN, 'integration' is a principle, not a structure; an **integrated mission** is 'the configuration of the UN system in all conflict and post-conflict situations where the UN has a country team and a multi-dimensional peacekeeping operation or Special Political Mission/office, regardless of whether this presence is structurally integrated',[4] The IAP policy set down the purpose to 'maximise the individual and collective impact of the UN's response, concentrating on those activities required to consolidate peace', and the default arrangement as a **strategic integration** that integrates assessments and planning to ensure coherence between humanitarian, peace-building, political, human rights and peacekeeping components.

A different approach, **structural integration**, however, goes further. It puts all these functions under the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), one of whose deputies usually combines the roles of Deputy Special Representative, UN Resident Coordinator (RC) and UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). This so-called "triple-hatted" arrangement has been a visible sign of integration that has raised concern among humanitarian agencies because of its significant implications for the independence of decision-making on humanitarian priorities.

The IAP policy itself recognizes the need to respect independent humanitarian action. 'Most humanitarian interventions,' it says, 'are likely to remain outside the scope of integration, which can, at times, challenge the ability of UN humanitarian actors to deliver according to humanitarian principles' – that require[5] that assistance is delivered **impartially** to those in need, irrespective of who they are, and **independent** of military or political interests.

2 Background

The impact of"triple-hatting" and other visible forms of integration

Oxfam and other NGOs are not part of the UN, but they are often associated with UN humanitarian agencies through coordination mechanisms, UN funding, and the use of UN air transport. If the UN's humanitarian activities are not clearly demarcated, therefore, NGOs' association with UN humanitarian actors can make them appear to be associated with the UN's politically-mandated missions and entities as well. Where a UN mission's mandate links it to contested political processes or to one side in a conflict, such perceptions can potentially hamper NGOs' ability to operate, as protests in the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years, for instance, have shown.[6]

Such perceptions can be made worse by practices not specifically linked to integration, such as:

- Co-locating UN humanitarian agencies and other UN actors in the same place;
- Using armed escorts for humanitarian operations;
- Presenting peacekeeping efforts or the whole integrated UN mission as 'humanitarian';
- Using peacekeepers to deliver supposedly humanitarian 'quick-impact projects' to '*build confidence in the mission, its mandate, and the peace process*'.[7]

These risks are above and beyond the danger that the 'triple-hatted' management of structurally integrated missions make it more difficult for the HC to be, or be seen to be, an independent advocate for humanitarian principles.

Managing the risks?

The UN has tried to address such concerns by specifying that integrated arrangements should 'take full account of recognised humanitarian principles, allow for the protection of humanitarian space, and facilitate effective humanitarian coordination with all humanitarian actors'.[8] Yet an independent study in 2011 found that these provisions were poorly understood and

inconsistently applied, yielding mixed results on, for example, the access of people in need to humanitarian assistance, and the security of aid workers.[9]

In 2013, the IAP policy then set out that:

• The potential risks and benefits for humanitarian activities must be considered as part of a strategic assessment to be carried out prior to any decision to establish closer integration [para. 24], in consultation with the Humanitarian Country Team (a group which normally includes NGOs) [para 17] and other 'relevant interlocutors', including national civil society [para. 32];

• Such an assessment must also be carried out following a significant change of context and prior to any substantial change in the mission's mandate [para. 35];

• A forum must be provided 'to assess these risks and benefits and decide on ways to manage them in a manner satisfactory to all UN entities involved' [para. 24].

An explanatory note on this policy, endorsed by the IASC Principals, provides further clarification. In 'high-risk environments',[10] particular caution is called for in establishing integrated arrangements which structurally subsume and/or very visibly link humanitarian actors to a political or peacekeeping mission. Such environments would include contexts of ongoing armed conflict and political fragility, particularly where the UN is overtly aligned with one side.

'In no circumstances', the IASC said in its note, 'should structural integration be recommended until the risk assessment process is complete and, if structural integration is pursued, until risk mitigation measures are identified.'[11] The note recognises that 'integration arrangements and mission design, scope and activities may have a significant impact on non-UN humanitarian actors, whether or not they are formally part of the cluster approach or other UN-led (or co-led) coordination mechanisms, and whether or not they are UN implementing partners.' The decision-making process should therefore involve consultation of a broad range of stakeholders, including non-UN actors, at all stages. Inclusive country-level mechanisms should be set up to review the impact of structural integration arrangements on humanitarian operations at regular intervals and, 'where needed, determine corrective measures to better preserve the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action'. Possible corrective measures identified include improving public messaging about the impartial character of humanitarian assistance, revisiting co-location or armed escort arrangements, clarifying modalities for humanitarian dialogue with non-state armed groups, and clarifying decision-making processes or sign-off procedures.[12]

Application of the policy up to early 2014

These safeguards have been very partially upheld. Both before and after the new UN policy was adopted in April 2013, the UN Security Council took decisions on integration arrangements in **Mali** and **Somalia** which overrode what UN assessments, endorsed by the Secretary General, had concluded. In both cases, the UN concluded that conditions were not conducive to structural integration, but UN Security Council members insisted that humanitarian leadership be structurally integrated within the political and peacekeeping mission. This was the case despite the respective UN missions' association with counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations.

At the time of writing, however, recent developments in UN practice, and public debate on the appropriateness of certain integration arrangements, suggest a degree of progress. UN Humanitarian Country Teams have become more proactive in monitoring and addressing the challenges of integration, as strongly recommended by the IASC note of 2013.[13] A standalone HC post was established in the **Central African Republic**. A new UN Handbook on Integrated Assessment and Planning was produced at the end of 2013 to provide further guidance on risk analysis and much else.[14] In early 2014, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) convened a consultative review of constraints on humanitarian space and

access in **Mali**, in the context of the integrated mission and counter-insurgency operations, with a view to adapting policies and strategies. The IASC Emergency Directors' Group has also critically reviewed the decision making processes on structural integration in Somalia, discussed the implications for humanitarian action of structural integration in South Sudan, and specifically the appropriateness of having a triple-hatted DSRSG/RC/HC. In both Mali and South Sudan, the application of global policies and guidance regarding the distinction between humanitarian action and political and peacekeeping mandates has come under intense scrutiny in this connection.

Behind all this is the question of how much information the UN has gathered on both the positive and negative impacts of integrated missions. The independent study mentioned above found little. Oxfam's own research and experience has suggested the same. But a general lack of data hampers evidence-based discussion and decision-making, and with it the consistent application of policy safeguards. Both the application of these safeguards and the impact of structural integration arrangements in particular need monitoring as a basis for corrective action where necessary.

3   Oxfam's position on integrated missions

Strategic integration may appear a logical approach to help ensure coherence of UN efforts. In common with many other humanitarian organizations, however, Oxfam sees structural integration as fundamentally at odds with the **impartial provision of assistance** based on need, and the demonstrable **independence of humanitarian actors** required to support it. Neither are served by subsuming UN humanitarian activities under 'a broader political role that dominates the UN's resources and its decision-making structures.'[15]

Effective communication between humanitarian organizations and peacekeepers or political actors can promote the protection of civilians and the recognition of their rights, but humanitarian action must remain (and be seen to remain) independent of military and political considerations. It is vital, particularly in contexts of conflict and political fragility, that the following safeguards, in line with the UN's own policy, are applied more consistently and vigorously than they have been in the past:

- **Humanitarian action should normally remain structurally separate from the political or peacekeeping components of an integrated UN mission;**

- **Visible association between a mission's humanitarian and other objectives should be minimized in conflicts or fragile contexts;**

- **Before deciding on any integrated approach, a thorough assessment should be made, involving national and international NGOs, to identify potential risks to humanitarian action and the measures needed to mitigate them;**

- **That assessment should be regularly reviewed, leading to corrective action where necessary;**

- **Whatever the integration arrangements adopted, the mandates of UN missions should take account of humanitarian principles, including that assistance should be impartially targeted based on people's need alone;**

- The UN Integration Steering Group, Integration Task Forces, OCHA and senior mission managers should ensure that IAP policy safeguards for humanitarian action are widely promoted, understood and applied, with the necessary training required;

- **The IASC's guidance on maintaining the distinction between humanitarian action and political or peacekeeping activities should be rigorously applied**, particularly where that distinction risks being clouded by UN integration arrangements. These include the 2004 guidance on civil–military relationships in complex emergencies, 2003 guidance on the use of military and civil defence assets to support UN humanitarian activities in complex emergencies,[16] and 2012 guidance on the use of armed escorts for humanitarian convoys. Awareness of these guidelines should be widely promoted, and Humanitarian Country

Teams (HCTs) should lead in keeping the *modi operandi* of civil–military relations and humanitarian distinction under review;

- **Negotiations on humanitarian imperatives (for example, to gain access to people in need) should remain separate from negotiations on political objectives**. Political negotiations should not incorporate humanitarian provisions that are contingent on political actions or agreements. Humanitarian negotiations should be led by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator or another prominent member of the humanitarian community.

On all these points, governments, including members of the UN Security Council, should encourage and support the UN to implement its policy consistently.

4   Oxfam will:

- **Distinguish itself from UN missions, while engaging as needed to promote effective coordination and the protection of civilians**. Oxfam will seek to maintain direct or indirect communication with UN peacekeeping missions in order to promote the protection of civilians. It will seek to promote effective coordination of humanitarian action through participation in UN-led mechanisms such as HCTs and clusters, whose resolutely humanitarian character Oxfam seeks to preserve. However, where the actions or configuration of a UN integrated mission present risks, Oxfam will support its managers to transparently judge how to relate to the UN mission, on the basis of cost–benefit and risk analysis and relevant IASC guidance. Such judgements may limit the sharing of information and visible association with military and civilian UN entities;

- **Promote the distinction between humanitarian action and political and/or peacekeeping functions of UN missions**, particularly where these are structurally integrated, including through wider awareness and more consistent application of IASC guidance on civil–military coordination, the use of military and civil defence assets for humanitarian activities, and the use of armed escorts;

- **Work with others** (within the IASC bodies, and within HCTs and NGO coordination groups at field level, for instance) **to promote awareness and consistent application of the safeguards for principled humanitarian action** provided for in the UN's own policy guidance on integration, and highlighting any gaps in that guidance as they emerge. It will seek to ensure that national and international NGOs are aware of and able to make use of their capacity for influence within the processes provided for, and promote a unified and consistent stance in this regard among the humanitarian community;

- **Where integration arrangements in place are judged to present risks for humanitarian action, invoke the UN's IAP policy to call for a review** of the arrangements and any mitigation measures. Promote and support the HCT-led monitoring of risks to humanitarian action resulting from UN integration arrangements as a basis for corrective action where needed;

- **Support efforts by humanitarian experts to develop field-based pre-planning crisis management exercises and training for military forces working under the UN mandate deployed on peacekeeping missions**.[17] These exercises should explain to military commanders how aid agencies assess needs and design programmes, the potential advantages humanitarians enjoy in community relations and local geographic and socio-political analysis, and the importance of maintaining a visible distinction between humanitarian and peacekeeping activities;

- **Actively call for efforts to review structurally integrated missions during their lifetimes** and encourage independent evaluation of their cost-effectiveness against the immediate and longer-term impact at the end of the mission. There should be a monitoring mechanism that allows missions to learn 'on the job', assessing what works and what does not, and allowing them to change course if necessary.

Notes

[1] United Nations (2013), 'Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning', 9 April 2013: http://undg.org/docs/13047/UN%20Policy%20on%20Integrated%20Assessment%20and%20Planning_FINAL_9%20April%202013.pdf.

[2] The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is a forum for humanitarian coordination and policy development, involving the key UN humanitarian partners as well as Red Cross and NGO representatives. The Principals are the heads of the participating agencies and networks.

[3] Please see: http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/UN-CMCoord/publications; and Oxfam's relevant Humanitarian Policy Note here: https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/hpn-provision-aid-military-forces-010412-en.pdf

[4] United Nations (2013), *op. cit.*, para 13.

[5] These principles were enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolutions 46/182 of 19 December 1991, and 58/114 of 17 December 2003.

[6] In the Lubero area of North Kivu province, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2010, for instance, popular protests against the UN's peacekeeping operation, MONUSCO, escalated into violent demands that UN agencies, international and some Congolese NGOs leave the area. Oxfam and other NGOs were forced to leave temporarily, and were only able to return after lengthy negotiations, during which they stressed their separate mandate and function from the integrated UN mission in DRC. Similar incidents have taken place in other parts of eastern DRC since that time.

[7] United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support (2013) 'Policy: Quick Impact Projects', New York, January

[8] United Nations (2008) Decisions of the Secretary-General – 25 June meeting of the Policy Committee. Decision No. 24/2008, 26 June.

[9] Metcalfe, V., Giffen, A., Elhawary, S. (2011) 'UN Integration and Humanitarian Space: An Independent Study Commissioned by the UN Integration Steering Group', Overseas Development Institute/Stimson Center, London/Washington D.C., December 2011: https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/FINAL%20Integration%20humanitarian%20space%20study%20Dec11.pdf.

[10] Risk factors are context-specific, and will include: (probability of) violent conflict and significant territorial control or influence of non-State armed groups; mission's actual/likely/perceived links to a non-UN military or peacekeeping mission engaged in active combat; armed actors challenging the mission's political/peacekeeping mandate and activities; (potential) damage to the mission's reputation implying risks of association for humanitarian actors; association of non-State armed actors with international armed groups opposed to the UN; mission association with a government not generally perceived as credible or legitimate; UN support to a contested peace process. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2013) 'Summary of IASC paper UN Integration and Humanitarian Space': Building a Framework for Flexibility', p. 2: http://somaliangoconsortium.org/docs/key/4/2013/1379068083.pdf.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 3.

[14] United Nations (2013), *Integrated Assessment and Planning Handbook*: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/publications/2014-IAP-HandBook.pdf.

[15] McAvoy, J., Charny, J. (2011) 'A Humanitarian Exception to the Integration Rule', Policy Statement, Washington D.C: InterAction, December 2011. http://www.interaction.org/document/interaction-statemetn-un-integration

[16] See also a separate paper in this series of Oxfam Policy Notes: The Provision of Aid by Military Forces, (http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/provision-of-aid-by-foreign-military-forces-115031).

[17] In particular: familiarisation with basic humanitarian principles in international humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee law; Security Council resolutions such as A/RES/46/182; humanitarian agency principles such as the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, SPHERE Humanitarian Charter; and the UN IDP Guidelines; MCDA guidelines and the IASC paper on civil–military relationship in complex emergencies; and insights into the ways in which humanitarian workers operate and which familiarise humanitarian workers with the military approach.

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