1 Poverty and livelihoods

Dorothy Chiredze's story
Masvingo province in the semi-arid southern part of Zimbabwe is a hostile environment. Rainfall is low and erratic, and drought a regular occurrence. Tree cover is almost non-existent. The scrubland is largely bare except for occasional colonies of Mopane trees, known locally as 'the camels' because of their ability to survive with little water. During the long dry season the fragile top soil, unprotected from the sun, bakes into a solid concrete-like crust. When the rains come, that crust disintegrates and is transported through the deep gullies which scar the land, into fast-flowing river tributaries. These in turn feed into once mighty rivers, like the Tokwe and Runde, which carried Victorian explorers into the interior. Now little more than streams for most of the year, during the rainy season they are briefly transformed into torrents which carry the soil from Masvingo down to the Indian Ocean.

Dorothy Chiredze lives in the village of Katule, which is typical of many in Masvingo. She farms just over one hectare of land, ploughing the soil with a hoe. In April, just before harvest, her widely-spaced, thin stalks of maize wilt in the sun. They are nourished by water carried before dawn from a spring two hours' walk away. If it is a good harvest, Dorothy will grow three sacks of maize. After she has sold one to pay for school fees, seeds for next year's harvest, oil, and other basic items, she will have enough left for herself, her two daughters and one son to last until January. Then she will have to work clearing land for wealthier neighbours, or on some larger commercial farms about ten kilometres away. Dorothy also grows small amounts of millet, which she brews into beer for cash, and some green vegetables.

The poorest families in Katule, most of them headed by women like Dorothy Chiredze, typically have less than two hectares of land, and no irrigation. What sets them apart from the wealthier people in the village, most of them say, is that they do not have cattle for draught power. This restricts the area of land they are able to plough, and the amount of crops they can produce. Most cannot afford fertiliser, which explains why their maize stalks are smaller and paler than those of richer farmers. Few have savings or other assets, except a few goats, which they can sell to get through times of stress. In a good year, the poorest families will grow enough maize to feed their families for three or four months.

But many years are not good. In 1992, Masvingo experienced the worst drought of the century. Almost the entire maize crop was destroyed, and the majority of oxen died. This is how Dorothy Chiredze recounted her story to Oxfam staff one year after the drought:

Last year, the rains did not come. It was the worst we had ever seen. Our maize was destroyed. We were left only with a little millet. Even those with much land lost their crops, so there was no work for us. There was emergency food, but it came so late ... There was much hunger in our villages, some children died from dysentery. My husband used to send money from Harare. He worked in a factory. But he came home because
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there was no more work. Our children ate only one meal each day. For many weeks we just had sadza (boiled maize meal) with no meat or vegetables. Our daughter became sick. The children were too weak to walk to school. Even if they were strong we did not have enough money to send them because the school was charging higher fees. The school said they had no choice because the government was giving them less... This year we will have a small harvest. We could not buy seed or fertiliser, and we have planted less. There was no money to hire any oxen, so I ploughed the land by hand. If the rains are good, maybe we will grow two bags of maize; in a good year we used to grow three. I will have to work on the farms of others for food maybe as early as December. If the rains are bad again, I don't know if we will survive. We pray for rain... but life is hard. We struggle to stay alive, but life is so hard.

As Dorothy Chiredze's story suggests, deprivation has many dimensions. 'Absolute poverty,' wrote Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank, in 1978, is 'a condition of life so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency.' That remains a powerful description of the reality experienced by a large segment of the world's population.

But the deprivation experienced by Dorothy and millions of people like her is not a static condition. Nor is it rooted solely in inadequate income or the state of perpetual and absolute want suggested by Robert McNamara's definition. What defines the situation of the world's poorest people is their insecurity and vulnerability. When the rains failed, Dorothy's wealthier neighbours were able to maintain their food supply and send their children to school by drawing on their savings, or selling off their assets. Others perhaps had relatives in government service who were able to support them through hard times. But Dorothy's husband, an unskilled labourer, was highly vulnerable to the rising unemployment caused by the economic recession which accompanied the drought and the introduction of a structural adjustment programme. Typically, the poorest families lack the capacity to cope with stress, and suffer acute difficulties, such as sickness, physical weakness, and economic impoverishment. Such disadvantages become self-perpetuating; inadequate nutrition and ill health reduce the productivity of the poor, and lower productivity means less income and less food. Vulnerability leads to a downward spiral, as events that suddenly make people poorer also reduce their assets. In Dorothy Chiredze's case, the next year's harvest will be smaller because she was unable to plough her land with oxen, and she lacked the income to buy seed and fertiliser. As a result, she will have to spend more time working on the farms of her wealthier neighbours, and less on her own farm. This forced transfer of labour in turn undermines family production. Meanwhile, Dorothy's children have been denied schooling, diminishing their prospects of a more secure future; which illustrates the mechanisms through which poverty is transmitted through generations.

The poverty trap

Dorothy Chiredze's story reveals how natural disasters and economic crises claim their victims from among the most vulnerable sections of society. In every society, the poor live shorter, less healthy lives than those who are better off. The insecurity and vulnerability behind this grim reality has many causes. War and civil conflict are destroying the livelihoods of unprecedented numbers of people, creating vast flows of refugees. Employment is increasingly insecure in many countries and wages have fallen. State provision of health care, education, clean water, and sanitation is restricted, exposing poor people to health risks, reducing their productivity and opportunities. Geographical isolation cuts people off from social welfare provision, markets, and sources of information. More people are living in ecologically fragile areas, where they are
exposed to risks of flooding and soil erosion. Structures of social 'inferiority' related to caste, race, and ethnicity, coupled with lack of control over resources, increase the vulnerability of the poor. In rural Punjab, for instance, child mortality among the landless is one-third higher than among landowning classes. Underlying all these disadvantages is the denial of rights suffered by women, who experience systematic social and economic discrimination from the cradle to the grave.

In the world of the poor, these various structures of disadvantage interlock with one another to create an all-encompassing poverty trap. Where poor people are forced by their poverty to over-farm steep hillsides, they become the unwilling agents of a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and increased insecurity. About half of the world's poorest people live on marginal or fragile lands. The cycle of poverty and environmental degradation in which they are trapped underlies the struggle for scarce resources which is at the root of many conflicts. Conflict, in turn exacerbates poverty, as communities are displaced, crops destroyed, and livelihoods undermined.

Economic crisis is another destroyer of livelihoods and a potent source of conflict. Women bear a disproportionate part of the costs of economic recession, since it is they who assume responsibility for family survival strategies by working longer hours inside and outside of the home, caring for the sick, and raising children. When women have to devote more and more time to obtaining fuel and water, they have less time to devote to food production, to pursue their education, and to care for their children. These growing burdens can have adverse social and economic consequences for themselves and their families.

Just as poverty is not solely a matter of lack of income or perpetual want, it follows that its eradication must be achieved through strategies which enhance the ability of local communities to adapt to stress, to overcome emergencies, and to improve long-term productivity. As we suggest below, such strategies must be built upon an understanding of the complex livelihood structures of poor people. These typically encompass food production, the harvesting of common resources, and diverse forms of employment. In the sections which follow, we look at how some of Oxfam's partners are working with communities to identify and enhance opportunities for more sustainable livelihoods.

The poverty trap which destroys the lives of so many people operates at many levels, from the village economy to the international market-place. In later chapters we explain how international forces, of which the poor are only dimly aware, undermine their livelihoods. Ruinously low commodity prices, crushing external debt burdens, anarchic capital markets, failure to prevent conflicts, and misallocated aid, all restrict the prospects for poverty reduction. Future threats also loom large. Global environmental problems such as climate change, rooted in the consumption patterns of the rich world, pose an acute threat to the livelihoods of vulnerable communities in the developing world. This means that local initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable livelihoods in areas such as the Ganges Delta will count for little if sea-levels rise and the frequency and intensity of flooding increase. More directly, the consumption patterns of the industrial world are undermining livelihoods by imposing an unacceptable burden on the natural resource base of developing countries — an issue we address in Chapter 5.

At the local level, which we examine in this chapter, elements of the poverty trap include unequal rights to land and other productive resources, inadequate provision of health care and education, and the inability of the poorest to influence decisions affecting their lives. Corrupt and unaccountable governments, misplaced public-spending priorities, and development policies which marginalise poor people in the name of economic progress, are all part of the picture. Once again, the various elements interact with one another. External debt repayments and low commodity prices
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deprive countries and communities of the resources they need to invest in production and social welfare provision, increasing their exposure to economic crisis and poverty. This lethal interaction of global forces with local structures of poverty is the basis of the poverty trap.

A strategy for ending poverty

Throughout its international programme, Oxfam witnesses how local communities are attempting to force open the poverty trap at a local level, often in the face of overwhelming odds. Some of their initiatives are described in this chapter. But turning the potential created by local action into a wider movement towards poverty eradication requires the creation of an enabling environment at a national and international level. There is no simple development blueprint for achieving this objective. Indeed, the poor have long been the victims of development blueprints designed for their benefit, though typically without their consultation, by national governments, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

If there is one lesson which Oxfam has learnt from its international experience, it is that listening to poor women and men, working in support of their participation and empowerment, are pre-conditions for success in reducing vulnerability. When it comes to understanding poverty, the real experts are to be found among the poor themselves. More broadly, however, there are five building blocks upon which any successful poverty eradication strategy should be built. These are:

- **Increased equity:** Apart from being socially unjust, high levels of inequality and widespread poverty are a source of economic inefficiency since they waste human potential. Wider distribution of productive assets; secure and equitable forms of employment; and an end to discriminatory measures which benefit a small, wealthy elite but consign large numbers of people to poverty, excluding them from a share in the prosperity they have helped to create, are all important elements of a strategy to end poverty.

- **Enhanced opportunity:** poverty eradication demands that poor people have the productive assets they need to maintain sustainable livelihoods. But they also need the opportunity to develop greater autonomy through education, health care, and the provision of clean water and sanitation, and control over the common resources on which their survival often depends.

- **Peace and security:** without development there can be no lasting human security; but without peace and security, genuine human development will remain an elusive goal. Even in the absence of armed conflict, many of the poorest are prey to harassment and physical intimidation. Women are particularly vulnerable in this respect.

- **Participation:** genuine development demands that local communities have a say in shaping critical decisions affecting their lives, through open and accountable political structures from the village council up to the international level. Genuine development is concerned with enhancing people's capacity to be active participants in the process of social change.

- **A sustainable future:** to reduce the vulnerability of poor people and bring about lasting improvements in their lives, they need to have secure livelihoods. This in turn depends on making more sustainable and equitable use of finite resources, from the local to the global level.

We will now look in more detail at the structures of political and economic power which deny people productive assets and opportunities, in rural and urban contexts. In rural areas, productive assets include land, credit, and, crucially, common resources such as forests and waterways. In urban areas, the single most important asset of the poor is their labour. In both rural and urban areas, the opportunities for poor people are constrained to a considerable degree by the existence of oppressive power structures; and by the
inadequate provision of services, such as education and health care, and public utilities.

Rural poverty

In rural areas, the most crucial asset is land. Gross inequality in land ownership is a major obstacle in many countries to improved human security and to agricultural progress. The concentration of land in the hands of a few also reduces productivity and leads to an inefficient use of resources. When modernisation of agriculture takes place in this situation, it frequently results in the further marginalisation of poor people, who become landless labourers, or smallholders with insufficient land to meet family needs for food and income.

Concentration of land ownership is most marked in Latin America, where feeble efforts at land reform have left the agrarian structures inherited from Spanish and Portuguese colonialism largely intact in many countries. Ownership of land in Brazil is among the most concentrated in the world. Nearly eleven million Brazilians who work the land are either landless, or have holdings which are too small to support a family. The poorest one-third of rural families own less than 1 per cent of arable land. At the other end of the scale are the giant latifundia. With an average size in excess of 10,000 hectares, these estates control over 50 per cent of the country's farmland. The 18 largest landowners in Brazil own, between them, a land area equivalent to that of the Netherlands, Portugal, and Switzerland combined. These big estates account for the bulk of the soya, fruit, and vegetable exports which make Brazil the world's fourth-largest agricultural exporter, and one of the main suppliers of high-protein feedstuffs for the European beef farmers. In 1990, soya products destined for markets in Europe were Brazil's third-largest source of foreign-exchange earnings.

The hidden side of this economic success story is to be found in the social costs of the country's agrarian structure. Smallholder farmers have been forced off their land in the south of the country to make way for giant soya estates. Resettled in the north, these producers have joined millions of other smallholders and landless labourers, squeezed on to tiny plots or forced to work for meagre wages. The resulting poverty has forced people to migrate to already overcrowded cities or work in environmentally damaging gold-mining. It has also left Brazil with some of the world's worst social indicators. If the north-east of Brazil, where rural poverty is most concentrated, were a separate country it would rank as number 111 on the UNDP's Human Development Index (Brazil as a whole is number 63). Infant mortality is twice as high in the north-east as in the south, with rates comparable to those in sub-Saharan Africa, and life-expectancy seven years less. What such human welfare indicators suggest is that the social structure of rural Brazil is better equipped to feed Northern consumers and European cattle than to provide for Brazilians.

Agriculture in Zimbabwe

In sub-Saharan Africa, land ownership patterns are typically less concentrated, in part because traditional systems of land tenure have curtailed private ownership; and in part because it is labour rather than land which is in short supply in most countries. There are, however, important exceptions. Three hours' drive to the north of Masvingo, the province in which Dorothy Chiredze lives, is the other side of Zimbabwean agriculture. Here, in the commercial farmlands around Harare, vast estates produce wheat and maize for the domestic market, and mange tout peas and flowers for retailing chains in Europe. With their aerial spraying, computerised sprinkler systems, and highly developed marketing infrastructure, a greater contrast with the tiny, eroded plots on which people like Dorothy Chiredze eke out a living is difficult to imagine. Indeed, Zimbabwe's commercial farms would not look out of place alongside the 'grain baron' estates of East Anglia and the Paris Basin.

The two faces of Zimbabwean agriculture may appear to be worlds apart, but they are
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intimately connected through the legacy of Zimbabwe's colonial history. In the late 1920s, the country's farmland was effectively partitioned along racial lines, with white settlers being given the most fertile land in areas with the most rainfall. A vast production and marketing infrastructure was built up around this privileged community, providing them with irrigation subsidies and price support. For their part, black farmers were forced on to environmentally fragile 'native reserves', or communal areas, located in low-rainfall areas; and they were prevented from competing with white farmers through discriminatory marketing laws. While these laws have now gone, the structural inequalities inherited from the colonial era, and enshrined in independent Zimbabwe's constitution, remain firmly in place.

There are some 4,500 commercial farms in Zimbabwe, still overwhelmingly owned by white farmers, although a few black farmers have joined their ranks. The average size of these farms is about 2,400 hectares, or 800 times the average size of holdings in communal areas. The commercial farms also account for about 80 per cent of all irrigated land. Meanwhile, more than six million black farmers continue to work the land in severely-degraded, overcrowded communal areas. Even within this sector there is a stark differentiation between producers. About 20 per cent of communal farms are located in more favourable climatic zones. Although these farms occupy less than 10 per cent of the total communal farm area, they produce more than 80 per cent of the maize sold through official channels. The rest of the communal farming population is located in the parts of the country with the most inhospitable climate. The vast majority of these farmers are unable to grow sufficient food to meet their household needs, forcing men to migrate to towns.

Zimbabwe's grossly unequal agrarian structure helps to explain what has been called the 'food security paradox': the co-existence of widespread malnutrition in the midst of a food system which produces a surplus of food for export. Almost one-third of children have low height-for-age, indicating chronic malnutrition. The groups most affected are households on large-scale commercial farms, where stunting affects over 40 per cent of children. Low wages, insecurity and the seasonality of employment in the midst of vast agricultural wealth are the main causes of poverty. Amenities such as health facilities and schools are rare in commercial farm areas. Households in semi-arid communal areas are the second most poverty-prone group. In 1990, a government nutrition survey conceded that 'the prevalence of stunting does not appear to have decreased appreciably since 1980.' Like that of Brazil, Zimbabwe's agrarian structure is ill-designed to enable poor people to realise their potential. While this type of structure remains the exception rather than the rule for Africa, landlessness and increasing marginalisation are a source of mounting concern in countries such as Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa.

Insecurity and isolation

Land ownership patterns are less concentrated in Asia than in Latin America, but here too population growth, inheritance laws which encourage sub-division of land, and a shrinkage of cultivable area in some regions, make landlessness a growing problem. In India, the number of holdings smaller than two hectares grew from 47 million in the early 1970s to 63 million in the 1980s. As the number of small and marginal holding have increased, so has the number of households dependent on wage labour. Women account for a rising proportion of that labour, which is becoming increasingly casual and insecure. According to one study, the proportion of casual labourers in the agricultural work force increased from 22 per cent in the early 1970s to 29 per cent in the mid-1980s, which is significant in view of the fact that over half of casual workers live below the poverty line. In Bangladesh, 80 per cent of rural families are either landless or near landless, while 10 per cent of rural households
own 50 per cent of the cultivable land area. Geographical isolation, low income, and lack of productive assets often reinforce the effects of unequal land ownership. In Zambia, approximately 22 per cent of rural households live more than one kilometre from the nearest water source, and this is likely to be polluted. During the dry season, women can spend up to five hours each day fetching water. The time and energy spent in this task imposes an enormous burden on women, and diverts their labour from household production and childcare, increasing household vulnerability.

There is a close correlation between distance from markets and poverty. Around one-third of the poorest families in Zambia live over 20km away from the nearest food market, and cannot afford transport to these markets. Inability to obtain credit is another major problem for poor farmers, preventing them adopting new technologies. It has been estimated that as few as 5 per cent of farmers in Africa and between 15-20 per cent in Asia are able to benefit from formal credit. The remainder are excluded from credit markets or forced to borrow at excessively high interest rates. This applies especially to women heads-of-households, who often do not have the land rights which could provide collateral for borrowing.

Poor rural households are trapped in a vicious spiral of insecurity. With insufficient land, often of poor quality, unable to buy seeds or fertiliser or to use draught power, their productivity is low. Unable to produce or purchase sufficient food, they are malnourished and so more likely to fall sick. Children from poor households are more likely to work, primarily as unpaid family labourers, debarring them from opportunities for education, which may in any case be unaffordable for the poor, creating an inter-generational poverty trap.

**The power of rural elites**

Grossly unequal agrarian structures are invariably maintained through equally gross inequalities in political power. In Latin America, states have often deployed their coercive apparatus on behalf of landlords to drive small farmers off their land, to make way for big commercial estates. In the north-east of Brazil, landowners control the administration of rural areas, often running them as personal fiefdoms. Local communities have united in an effort to protect themselves and claim their land rights. For instance, the Landless People's Movement works in the state of Paraiba with people driven from their land by sugar estates and cattle farming. Under state laws, they are allowed to squat on land which has been left idle and, after cultivating it for a number of years, to claim title to it. Despite facing intimidation and threats from state authorities and landlords, they have achieved some notable successes in terms of establishing land rights.

Inequalities in political power are also significant for indigenous Indian communities. Under Brazilian law, all Amazonian Indian lands were to have been demarcated, and protected from encroachments by settlers, commercial logging operators, and gold miners, by 1993. In practice, only half of that land has been demarcated, and even this remains under threat. The National Indian Foundation, the state agency responsible for enforcing Indian claims, known by its Portuguese acronym, FUNAI, is understaffed and under-funded, reflecting the low priority attached to its work. Indian peoples such as the Yanomani, Macuxi, Kaxinawa, and Wanana, are co-operating to resist encroachments by loggers, goldminers, and ranchers, but are often faced with extreme violence. Despite this, Indian organisations, supported by Brazilian NGOs and the Catholic Church, continue to assert their legal claims, in a daily struggle for justice and survival. Euclides Perreira, a Macuxi Indian and Coordinator of the Roraima Indigenous Council, summarises the lessons learned in these terms:

*The movement has grown and strengthened because we have realised that only we ourselves can solve our problems, not the government. Nowadays, FUNAI does practically nothing for the communities because it has no money. Today, the indigenous movement is much stronger than FUNAI.*
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Efforts to establish land rights in Bangladesh have encountered similarly violent reactions from vested interests. In 1984, a government land reform ordinance provided for the distribution of state land, known as khas, to landless and marginal producers. However, much of this land has been acquired by larger farmers, often through corruption and political influence; and sometimes through violent intimidation preventing landless people from asserting their rights. Several of Oxfam’s project partners in the country are working with the landless, supporting their efforts to gain ownership of khas land. Their accounts provide testimony to the violence which often results when local communities try to claim the rights provided for in government legislation. The Association for Land Reform and Development26 recorded the consequences of one attempt by landless labourers to assert their rights to khas land:

For Abdul Hanif, aged 14, life has ceased to hold meaning. During an attack on his village, the landlords caught the young boy and chopped off his right wrist. They also stabbed him...Hanif did not know anything about the dispute. His only fault was that he was the son of a landless farmer.

Where local communities lack land rights they are often forced into highly exploitative forms of employment. In the Pakistan Province of Sindh, Oxfam’s partners work with minority groups such as the Kholis and Bhils, employed as share-croppers for landlords. They often transfer as much as three-quarters of their total harvest under this arrangement. In theory, they are entitled by law to claim tenancy rights to the plots they farm after a number of years of permanent cultivation. In practice, landlords circumvent these rights through the simple expedient of moving share-croppers from plot to plot, or transferring them between one another. Arrangements such as these increase the vulnerability of the poor by transferring a disproportionate share of the benefits of their labour to others, reinforcing their dependency in the process.27

Agricultural modernisation

Where agricultural ‘modernisation’ is superimposed on highly inequitable systems, it often serves to reinforce those systems. The Green Revolution seeds and technologies, introduced in the 1960s in various parts of the world, are an example. Large farmers were able to take advantage of the new technologies, often by consolidating their holdings, displacing small producers, and contributing to an overall decline in the demand for rural labour. The most marginal farmers were excluded from the benefits of the Green Revolution, or suffered increased marginalisation.28 There are important exceptions to this picture, especially in South India. There, the introduction of high-yielding rice and mechanised irrigation pumps increased demand for labour and, in many areas, small farmers were able to benefit from the new technology.29 At the same time, extra demand for labour at harvest time before the monsoon increased rural wages.

Common property resources

To a far greater extent than the wealthy, poor people depend for their survival on the use of common resources. They fish, hunt, produce goods for sale from leaves and fibres, make medicine from forest products, and gather nuts and berries for food.30 During the drought which swept southern Africa in 1992-1993, Oxfam staff witnessed how villagers in Zambia and Zimbabwe drew upon local knowledge of roots, leaves, and other forest products, to survive chronic food shortages. Without that knowledge, which has been passed down over centuries from generation to generation, the human costs of the drought would have been much higher. In the dryland regions of India, it has been estimated that landless labourers derive up to one-fifth of their income, along with a significant proportion of their food, medicines, and building materials, by harvesting natural resources from common areas.31 Women play a critical role in managing and conserving
such areas, and in harvesting them in a sustainable manner.

Rights of usage of common resources are enshrined in customary law. Indigenous communities, such as tribals in India, and Indians in Latin America, are able to trace these rights back through many generations. Today, however, such rights are under threat in many countries. Appropriation by the state, the intrusion of commercial interests, and the privatisation of land in the interests of the privileged, have become potent threats to the welfare of the poor.

**Forests**

The Dandakaranya forest, in the Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, is home to a large tribal population, 80 per cent of whom are estimated to live below the poverty line. Tribal communities in Gadchiroli have depended on the Dandakaranya forest for their survival for centuries. They grew crops using traditional slash and burn agriculture, in which parts of the forest were felled and burned to provide natural fertiliser, and then allowed to replenish after one growing season. They also hunted birds and wildlife, and collected edible fruits, leaves, flowers, and roots, for food and medicine, and to sell. Since the mid-1970s, however, the state government has allowed increasingly intensive commercial timber operations in the forest, to meet the demands of industry. This has brought lucrative profits for commercial companies and state authorities, who gain revenue by selling concessions. Less than 5 per cent of that revenue has been ploughed back into the district. The clash between commercial interests and customary rights has left tribal communities in the forest facing the destruction of their livelihood systems, as the fragile ecosystem of the forest is destroyed by logging operations.

**Fisheries**

Fish from coastal and inland waters are vital to the livelihoods of poor communities throughout the developing world. Yet it is here that the clash between commercial interest and customary right is at its most intense. In the Indian state of Kerala, for example, legislation is likely to be introduced which will nullify the customary rights of fishworkers to coastal waters, rivers, and lakes, with potentially disastrous consequences for the livelihoods of local communities. Mechanised trawling has already severely depleted fish stocks and reduced the catches, and hence the food supply and income, of these communities.

In the Philippines, a country consisting of 7000 islands, more than one million people are directly employed in fisheries. Widespread poverty has resulted in more and more people, from coastal and urban communities, turning to fishing for their livelihood, competing for the same shrinking natural resource base. Over the past 15 years, however, unregulated and unsustainable commercial fishing, notably by Japanese trawlers and powerful local entrepreneurs, has drastically reduced fish stocks and set in train a vicious spiral of poverty and environmental degradation. In the Philippines, a country consisting of 7000 islands, more than one million people are directly employed in fisheries. Widespread poverty has resulted in more and more people, from coastal and urban communities, turning to fishing for their livelihood, competing for the same shrinking natural resource base. Over the past 15 years, however, unregulated and unsustainable commercial fishing, notably by Japanese trawlers and powerful local entrepreneurs, has drastically reduced fish stocks and set in train a vicious spiral of poverty and environmental degradation. Local fisher-folk have resorted, out of desperation, to using dynamite and other harmful fishing methods to maintain catches in the short term, but coral reefs, where fish breed, are destroyed in the process. Poverty has also forced people into cutting mangrove trees for firewood, destroying other fish breeding sites. At the same time, the government has encouraged commercial interests to drain mangrove swamps in order to develop commercial fish farms. The overall effect has been to reinforce the pressures which cause unsustainable resource use.

Local communities are co-operating in political action to reverse this spiral and defend their customary rights. In 1990 several Oxfam partners were involved in the creation of a national fishing confederation, which took the lead in organising defensive action against commercial encroachment. Fisher-folk leaders lobbied local and national authorities for a legislative framework which would protect the traditional rights of coastal fishing communities, and actively involve them in sustainable resource management. Meanwhile,
local communities were encouraged to monitor the activities of commercial trawlers, and to sail out to sea in an effort to persuade them to leave the fishing grounds, and, in some cases, to confiscate their catch. Ingenious new techniques have been developed to regenerate reefs, with car tyres being submerged and acting as a base for the growth of corals. Mangroves are being replanted to provide the shelter and spawning grounds needed to restore fish stocks, and these are being protected through no-fishing agreements.

Urban poverty

The global poverty profile is slowing changing and taking on a more urban face. In many countries, rapid population growth, agricultural modernisation, and inequalities in land ownership are resulting in an increase in landlessness among the rural poor, and an accelerating drift to urban centres. As urban populations increase, so does the extent of urban poverty.

Most of the urban poor live in unplanned squatter settlements on the periphery of urban centres, where their lack of legal status and inadequate service provision make them extremely vulnerable.

That vulnerability is made worse by insecure, low-wage employment. The vast majority of the urban poor work in the informal sector in a variety of activities, including petty-trading and casual labour.

During the 'lost decade' of the 1980s, it was the urban poor who bore the brunt of the crisis associated with debt, deteriorating terms of trade, and the economic policy failures of governments. Rising food prices, unemployment, and a steep decline in real wages, wrought havoc in the lives of urban communities across the developing world. In some countries wages have fallen so dramatically that families can only survive through a massive increase in labour time, much of it on the part of women. For example, in 1991, average wages in Zambia were a quarter of their level in the mid-1970s, in real terms. Employment in the formal sector declined from 25 per cent of total employment in 1970 to less than 10 per cent in 1990.

Behind these cold statistics lies a human tragedy of enormous proportions, which is reflected most powerfully in an increase in the mortality rate for children under the age of five from 152 to 191 per 1000 live births between 1977/81 and 1991. In a little more than a decade, the human welfare achievements of the post-independence period, which by 1970 were on a par even with many middle-income countries, had been reversed.

Through its programme in Zambia, Oxfam has witnessed the efforts of local communities to survive in the face of continued economic decline. One example is to be found in the Kawama compound, a slum area on the country's Copperbelt, which went into steep decline as a consequence of economic mismanagement and falling world copper prices in the 1980s. Health, education, and other services collapsed as state revenues fell, and mass unemployment devastated household incomes. The Kawama Development Committee responded to the crisis by developing 'self-help' alternatives. Members of the Committee built primary health care and school facilities, and then successfully lobbied the government to staff them. They built their own roads and maintained their own water and sanitation services. More recently, they have taken to market gardening, to improve their nutrition and income. However, such initiatives can provide little more than isolated islands of hope in a wider sea of social and economic despair.

Falling wages

In Latin America, minimum wages fell on average by 33 per cent during the 1980s. As millions sought desperately to supplement their incomes, the informal sector doubled in size, while incomes in that sector fell by around 40 per cent. The resulting rise in poverty was particularly dramatic in countries such as Chile, Guatemala, and Peru. At the centre of the process of impoverishment was the labour market. In Peru, private sector wages in 1992...
were only 25 per cent of their value in the early 1970s. At the same time, there was a transformation in the labour market away from permanent contracts towards more precarious forms of casual employment. By 1993, over 50 per cent of all employment in the private sector was casual, compared to 11 per cent in 1985.\(^4\)

For some countries, the 'lost decade' is extending into the 1990s. Real urban wages in Zimbabwe have fallen dramatically over the past three years, giving rise to an increasing incidence of child malnutrition.\(^3\) Here, too, employment has become increasingly insecure, with the dilution of labour protection laws.

Changes in the structure of employment have had important implications for urban poverty. At the start of the 1980s, poverty was closely correlated with unemployment. There is still a correlation; but as wages have fallen and employment has become less secure, the proportion of employed families living in poverty has increased. In Chile, for example, inadequate wage levels are now the single most important cause of poverty; official estimates for 1992 suggest that one-third of the labour force live in conditions of poverty.\(^3\) Oxfam's partners work with some of the victims of the 'new poverty' in the Patronato district of northern Santiago, the centre of the country's textile industry. An estimated 6000 small workshops do out-work for large manufacturers, and provide employment to over 12,000 mainly female workers. Very few of these workshops meet even the minimum specifications of Chile's weak health and safety law, and accidents are regular occurrences. Most women do not have contracts, so can be made redundant without compensation. Piecework payments are so low that most women have to work shifts in excess of twelve hours, including night work. Even the most basic trade union rights are denied. Despite this, women employed in the sweatshops are organising to improve their working conditions. In early 1994, a trade union support group for women workers rented a small building for use as a canteen for textile workers in Patronato. Since then, the canteen has grown into an education centre, where the women can discuss their problems and attend courses on employment law and labour rights. Because their employment is so insecure, it is difficult for them to exert pressure for change. But there is a growing recognition among the women that collective action has the potential to improve their lives.

The economic crisis affecting so many countries has forced women and children to work longer and longer hours to generate income. The resulting costs are not reflected in national income accounts, but by other indicators, such as the psychological and physical stress experienced by women, the opportunities lost by children withdrawn from school to supplement family incomes, and the breakdown of families.

**The failure of service provision**

Like their rural counterparts, urban communities are involved in struggles to gain rights to security of tenure and to basic amenities. In Recife, Brazil's fifth-largest city, Oxfam's partners work with some of the 680,000 people who inhabit the *favelas*, sprawling shanty-towns dotted across the city. During the 1950s, Recife earned the sobriquet 'the Venice of the North' because of its canals and rivers. Today, most of the city's canals are open sewers which run through the *favelas*, where shacks made of corrugated tin, plastic, and wood serve as overcrowded homes. Unofficial estimates put the housing shortage at 400,000 homes.

The rapid growth of the *favela* community in Recife is replicated elsewhere in Brazil, and more widely throughout Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Driven to the city by rural hunger, landlessness, drought, and unemployment, the slum dwellers of Recife live on rubbish dumps, swamps, and derelict sites; victims of a social and economic order which regards them as surplus to requirements. Denied clean water, electricity, and paved roads, they are also subject to frequent displacement by police and local authorities to make way for road schemes and other amenities intended to improve life
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for the wealthy, enfranchised part of the population. But the underclass in Recife and other Brazilian cities are organising to claim their basic rights, and to resist forced displacement, provide their own services, and demand support from municipal authorities. Ivanete Tavares is president of one residents' association in Recife. Her home is a shelter made of black plastic, with an earth floor. She has no electricity or running water. These are her hopes:

*My dream for here is to have water, light, public phones, a bus route, tarmac roads, and a secondary school. And we want a block factory; not cement blocks but mud blocks which people can afford to make their homes. We want our community to exist officially. Not like now, when it's not on the map, or in the computers of the city council. We are treated like an illegitimate child, we are not recognised or registered.*

Work with the Zabaleen

Work with urban communities figures increasingly prominently in Oxfam's international programme. But as with rural projects, supporting the livelihoods of the poor is less easy to achieve in practice than is often assumed. Interventions intended to benefit the poor often fail when the communities of which they form a part, are treated as a homogenous group. For example, in 1981, Oxfam supported a recycling plant to generate income among the Zabaleen, a community living in slums on the outskirts of Cairo, which survives by collecting the city's waste and recycling it.43 The aim was to enable the Zabaleen to bypass middlemen and maximise the income staying in Zabaleen hands. In 1985, a credit scheme was set up, with loans tied to the establishment of local carpentry and processing workshops. The intention was to expand the number of products which could be recycled for sale. The failure of both interventions, revealed by later evaluations, was that most of the benefits went to the wealthier sections of the community — and almost none to women, who had not participated in discussions about the design of the project. In 1988 the credit scheme was revised. Ceilings were placed on the amount which could be borrowed, and loans were provided to groups of three to five women. The original condition that loans should be used for recycling work and sales, activities controlled by men, was waived, allowing women to use the credit in support of their own livelihood strategies. Many have used their loans to raise goats, for milk for family consumption and to sell.

Social welfare provision

Investment in the health and education of poor people can reduce their vulnerability and expand their opportunities. Good health, mental and physical, is an important determinant of employment, productivity, and income. Conversely, poor health and poverty are closely correlated in all countries. There is a wealth of evidence linking educational attainment with virtually all significant human development indicators. While improvements in human health and education are important for their own sake, they can also play a critical role in facilitating the broad-based, equitable economic environment which is vital to poverty eradication.

Investment in health care

The linkages between health and human welfare are obvious and fundamental. Most people know from their own experience that treatment of ill health is vital to their welfare. For poor people, health care is particularly important, partly because they are ill more often, and partly because their income depends critically upon physical labour. Ill health is a potential disaster for low-income families, since it can wipe out their assets as ruthlessly as a drought, and expose children to acute risks.

Sickness is part of a vicious circle. Because people are poor, they are more exposed to risk from unhealthy conditions, including inadequate water supply and sanitation. They are
also likely to suffer chronic health problems as the legacy of past illness and malnutrition. Without adequate health care, they are more likely to fall ill and to be slower in recovering, compounding the disadvantages they face.

For many people in the developing world, primary health care services are inadequate or non-existent. In sub-Saharan Africa, basic health-care provision is lacking for over 50 per cent of people. In Zambia, 30 per cent of the rural population live ten kilometres or more from the nearest health facility. Most poor people would be unable to reach a clinic this far away if they were sick. Even if they successfully negotiated the journey, few would be able to afford the treatment when they arrived. Moreover it is unlikely that the facility would have either the drugs or the trained staff needed for effective care. This situation, which is not atypical throughout sub-Saharan Africa, helps to explain the region's appalling health indicators.

Inadequate public investment in basic health exposes poor people to high risks. In Uganda, health spending per capita is less than half the level required to provide a basic primary health service. As a result, preventable diseases like diarrhoea, pneumonia, measles, and meningitis account for over half of reported hospital deaths. But the problem is not merely one of inadequate investment. Most developing countries spend considerably more on high-cost curative treatment, which benefits mainly higher-income and urban populations, than low-cost preventive treatment. In Uganda's case, ten times as much is spent on curative as on preventive treatment. In Peru, health expenditure is concentrated in Lima and almost half of the budget dedicated to the curative sector, although poverty levels are far more severe in inland rural areas. Across the developing world, it is not atypical for one or two teaching hospitals to absorb more than a quarter of the entire health budget. Quite apart from the questionable social priorities this points to, the economic logic of such an allocation of resources leaves much to be desired. According to the UNDP, it costs between $100 and $600 to save a life through preventive care, while the corresponding figure for curative care is between $500 and $5000.

There is a similarly skewed distribution of public investment in water and sanitation, which is one of the most critical forms of preventive investment. Of the $15bn spent on this area in sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s, four-fifths was on high-cost technology, primarily for the improvement of services to people who were already supplied. Such spending patterns entail a high price for the poor. For example, in Lima, Peru, poor people pay as much as $3 for a cubic metre of contaminated water from a private vendor, while the middle-class pay $0.5 for an equivalent amount of tap water.

The advantages to individuals and society of investment in health are readily apparent. Healthier people lose fewer days to sickness, live longer, are more productive, and have more opportunities for employment. Health and nutritional status also have an important bearing on educational attainment. Healthier children are better at learning and will thus make a greater economic contribution to society. For women, effective public health systems are of particular significance. The social and cultural forces which condemn women to lower nutritional status and heavier workloads than men in many societies, also increase the risk of their contracting disease. Women and girl children also assume responsibility for looking after sick relatives, adding to their already heavy workloads. Half of all women in Africa and South Asia, and two-thirds of all pregnant women in both regions, are anaemic. Primary health care systems are vital for the delivery of reproductive health care, including family planning services which enable women to control their fertility, and for providing care throughout high-risk periods such as during and after pregnancy.

Investment in education

Investment in education, especially primary education, is also one of the most important
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determinants of human welfare, opportunity, and economic growth. The linkages in each of these areas are now so well established as to be beyond serious dispute. The low earnings of poor people are partly a consequence of their low levels of skill and literacy. Studies for agriculture and industry have shown that better-educated people adapt more easily to new technologies, and have higher rates of productivity. This increases their earning capability and employment prospects, while bringing wider benefits for society. In an era of rapid technological change, the skill-base of the work force is becoming increasingly important to national competitiveness.

Investment in education is one of the best uses of its resources a country can make, as witnessed by the South-East Asian ‘miracle’ countries. According to the World Bank, investment in primary education has been the single largest contributor to the differences in growth between these countries and the rest of the developing world. When comparing South-East Asia with Latin America, one-third of the difference in growth rate can be attributed to higher investment in primary education. Because economic growth is crucial to improvement in human welfare, such investment should be regarded as central to any strategy for poverty reduction. But investment in education also enhances the quality of growth by improving equity. One study of 49 countries concluded that about one-fifth of income inequality could be explained by educational inequality.

Level of education, particularly in the case of women, plays a critical role in relation to health. Girls tend to receive less schooling than boys. Regarded as more important to household subsistence than their brothers, girls are often kept at home to perform domestic work or to care for younger siblings; and they are likely to be the first to be withdrawn from school if the family faces a crisis. Such practices have kept women trapped in cycles of poverty and illiteracy which are transmitted across generations.

Rising levels of maternal education reduce levels of infant mortality by about 8 per cent for each of the first ten years of schooling. In Peru, seven or more years of maternal schooling reduce infant mortality rates by 75 per cent. Education for women is also closely associated with later marriage and smaller family size, and enhanced maternal health.

Allocating scarce resources
The strategy of broad-based investment in primary education pursued by the South-East Asian countries drew on lessons learnt from Western Europe and, more immediately, post-war Japan. The success-story of those countries confirm that well-targeted public investment can rapidly raise the skills-base of an economy, reduce poverty and inequality, and promote growth. Despite this, many developing country governments choose to allocate resources inappropriately. For example:

- Governments in sub-Saharan Africa spend a higher proportion (4.7 per cent) of the region’s national income on education than East Asia (3.4 per cent), but a much smaller proportion goes on primary education.
- The share of public funds allocated to higher education in South-East Asia has averaged around 15 per cent for the past three decades, whereas in Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa it has averaged 24 per cent.
- While Bolivia spends 40 per cent of its education budget on primary education and has achieved commensurately low enrolment rates, Indonesia spends 90 per cent and is moving towards universal enrolment.

There are two factors which make statistics such as these a particular cause of concern. The first is that, 40 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that ‘everyone has a right to basic education’, there are 130 million children of primary-school age not enrolled in school. Unless policies change, the absolute number of children not attending school is likely to reach 162 million in the year 2015. In Africa, where 50 per cent of primary-school age children are not attending school, enrolment rates are decreasing on average,
leading to deepening poverty. On the surface the figures are more encouraging for Latin America, where only 8 per cent of children are not enrolled. However, only one-third of the countries in the region have completion rates above 80 per cent, so that the proportion of children reaching grade five is roughly the same as in Africa.55

The second source of concern is that policies appear to be moving in the wrong direction. As economic pressures have mounted since the early 1980s, public spending per child in primary education has fallen, while the share of education spending going to higher education has increased.56 Some indication of the priorities of governments in developing countries is provided by the fact that spending on defence has been increasing on average at more than twice the rate of national income growth, with overall defence expenditure now equivalent to health and education spending combined.

Inequity between men and women

Women are subject to multiple forms of deprivation from the cradle to the grave. Throughout the world, women play a key role in household livelihood systems in a productive and reproductive capacity. As producers, they provide most of the food consumed by poor households, performing more than three-quarters of agricultural labour in many countries. In addition, they manage common resources, and are responsible for collecting water and firewood. Female labour also accounts for a growing proportion of employment in commercial agriculture and industry.57

Despite this contribution, women face a bewildering array of social, economic, cultural, and religious barriers to their equal participation in society. The consequences of these barriers in terms of lost opportunities and increased vulnerability and suffering are immeasurable. But some indication of their destructive effect can be summarised in a few revealing statistics. For example:

- Out of the 130 million children not attending primary school, some 70 per cent are female. In India, boys are twice as likely to attend secondary school as girls.
- Out of the 960 million illiterate adults in the world, two-thirds are women.
- In many countries, especially in Asia, malnutrition rates are higher among girls than boys. In Bangladesh, they are three times higher. Mortality rates in early childhood are higher for women in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal.

Life expectancy is also shorter in much of Asia. Perhaps the single most telling indicator of the discrimination and neglect suffered by women
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is to be found in the fact that there are some 100 million fewer women in Asia than there would be if the region had the same male-to-female mortality rates as Africa.58

Most female labour goes undocumented and unpaid, even though it is vital to family survival and national economies, and in most cultures women have less opportunity than men to develop their capabilities. Although most food is produced by women, and female-headed households account for the majority of rural households in many countries, women lack ownership or effective control over land, water, and other resources. In Bangladesh, daughters inherit land at half their brothers’ entitlement.59 In some cases, traditional communal systems that once gave women rights of use of land, water, and trees have been replaced by private property systems which do not. In others, social and cultural barriers prevent women from realising their legal rights.

In much of Africa, women have no rights to resources such as trees or the land they cultivate.60 Partly because of their restricted land rights, women in most developing countries find it impossible to obtain credit or banking services. It has been estimated that women receive less than 10 per cent of all rural credit.61 This restricts their ability to purchase inputs which would reduce demands on their labour and raise their income. While women are forming an increasingly large proportion of the labour force in most countries, labour laws seldom give them adequate protection against discrimination, or protect their rights to employment and social security during illness and pregnancy.

The most invidious form of discrimination against women is violence in the home. One survey covering 35 countries found that an average of between one-fifth and one-half of women had suffered domestic violence at the hands of a male partner, on average three times a year.62 In Egypt and Zambia, injuries resulting from domestic assaults are the most common reason for female visits to casualty units. The attitude of authorities to this violation of women’s most basic rights is captured in this chilling account given by a Zambian woman:

My husband followed me and got me in the house and said ‘what are you doing?’ He did not wait for me to finish. He kicked me and kicked me. The children ran back to the party and told my friends ‘what are you doing standing here, daddy is killing mummy’. So they came and found me covered in blood. This time they took me to the police. When I got there I explained what happened. They said, ‘Ah kaili iwiniva muyumba’ ['another domestic problem'].

In Latin America, domestic and sexual violence against women claim more victims than political violence. In response, an active movement, spearheaded by women’s groups, is campaigning for domestic violence against women to be recognised as a fundamental issue of human rights and public responsibility. Oxfam is supporting some of these women’s groups in their campaign and in providing help to victims of domestic violence.

Investing in women

Throughout the developing world, Oxfam’s partners are working with women in an effort to remove deep-rooted structures of gender discrimination. In Bangladesh, Saptagram, one of Oxfam’s project partners, is attempting to break the cycle of deprivation, in terms of nutrition, health, literacy, and poverty, faced by women by helping them to empower themselves. Through its network of 22,000 members spread across 900 villages, Saptagram supports local groups by providing literacy training, revolving credit funds, support for clean water and sanitation programmes, and education to enable women to challenge harmful cultural practices, such as child marriage and domestic violence.63 At the heart of Saptagram’s work is a commitment to enabling women to effect change. Collective action to protest against male violence, dowry extortion, and the violation of land rights, has become widespread among the groups; each victory brings another leap of confidence.
Investment in credit is an important element in wider strategies to remove the barriers facing women, as Oxfam's work in Zambia has underlined. In the Petauke, Chipata, and Nyimba districts of Eastern province, and in the Mumbwa district of Central Province, Oxfam works with women's farming co-operatives. These women are representative of the most poverty-prone groups in the country. Yet they are excluded from official credit schemes because they do not own titles to the land they cultivate. Oxfam has provided seed and cash, which is repaid after the next harvest, to establish a revolving credit fund, which should enable these farmers to develop more secure livelihoods. One co-operative, for example, has used its loan to hire oxen for ploughing a new field which is farmed co-operatively.

Contrary to claims that poor women farmers are bad credit risks, Oxfam's credit schemes in Zambia have repayment rates of over 90 per cent. This is more than double the repayment rates of state credit-agencies' lending to more 'commercially viable' farms. However, viewed from a gender empowerment perspective, credit provision is not without its risks. One of the best known credit schemes is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which provides loans to around half-a-million members, of whom over 80 per cent are women. Once again, repayment rates are exceptionally high. But recent research has found that a significant proportion of the loans provided to women are controlled and invested by male relatives, with women bearing the liability for repayment, though not necessarily benefiting from the loan. Thus, while credit provision for women can offer valuable opportunities, without wider measures to ensure that women can control investments, it can reinforce unequal power structures within households.

Population and reproductive rights

In a similar way, unequal power relations and inadequate provision of reproductive health services are depriving women of the right to control their own fertility. Pregnancy itself is a health risk for poor women, as is unsafe abortion. In 1991, the WHO recommended action 'to encourage governments to do everything possible to prevent and eliminate the severe health consequences of unsafe abortion.' According to UNFPA, the death toll associated with abortion-related complications is 200,000 per year, and many more women suffer ill health and injury related to unsafe abortions. Those affected are overwhelmingly poor women and their families in developing countries. This underlines the need for women to receive much better reproductive health care, including information and choice over family-planning methods. Yet too often, the emphasis of official birth-control schemes has been on population control, motivated by a desire to curb population growth, rather than enhance women's reproductive rights and quality of life.

World population growth has vastly accelerated over the last century. During the 1980s, the number of people on earth grew by almost one billion, with 90 per cent of the increase in the developing world. This trend is set to continue. While fertility rates are in decline in Latin America and Asia, they remain highest in the world's poorest countries. Over the next 40 years, the population of sub-Saharan Africa is projected to treble to over 1.6 billion. In the same period, the population of Asia will rise from around 3 billion to over 5 billion. This prospect has prompted some to warn of a Malthusian crisis, with a growing population in the poorest countries placing increasingly unsustainable demands on economic and environmental resources. Catastrophic images of a population 'time-bomb' about to explode have made a significant impact on public attitudes in the North. But while there are indeed reasons to worry about the effects of rapid population growth on the environment (although there is no simple correlation between population growth and environmental degradation), there are also strong reasons for concern about the adverse effects of high birth-rates on the quality of life, especially for women. The emergency mentality generated by warnings of imminent
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cataclysm is not helpful. Rapid population growth is both a cause and consequence of poverty; and as the demographic history of today’s developed countries underlines, creating opportunities for education, particularly for women, and improving provision of reproductive health-care, can both improve human welfare and lead to declining birth rates within a relatively short space of time.

Reproductive practices are influenced by a complex interaction of social, economic, cultural, religious, and other forces, which vary from society to society. However, the persistence of poverty and deprivation are pervasive causes of high birth-rates throughout the developing world. One of the primary reasons for having large numbers of children in many countries is economic: offspring provide labour for the survival of families lacking capital and technology, as well as insurance in old age. Children in poor households in poor countries assume responsibilities for fetching water, minding animals and collecting fuelwood, in addition to caring for their parents when they reach adulthood.68 In societies where infant mortality rates are high, this creates a powerful rationale for high birth-rates. For example, in many sub-Saharan African countries poor rural women often lose one-third of their children by the end of their reproductive years.69 In such a setting, lowering infant mortality is a precondition for reducing birth-rates.

Reliable and high-quality reproductive health services, including family planning, are vital if this objective is to be realised. Yet reproductive health services are available to only half of the female population in South Asia and only one-in-ten women in sub-Saharan Africa.70 This denies women the opportunity to control their fertility, and diminishes the health and survival prospects of children. Inadequate maternal education has a similar effect.71 The demographic history of almost all countries shows that as female literacy rises, fertility rates decline, child and maternal mortality rates fall, and nutrition levels improve. According to the World Bank, fertility rates fall on average by 10 per cent for every year of schooling a women receives, with educated women more likely to marry later, to have smaller families and to space pregnancies in a manner which minimises risk to their health and that of their children.72

The apocalyptic interpretation of the population problem expounded by some commentators, has helped to mould an emergency mentality which focuses on narrowly-defined birth-control measures. In China and some Indian states, outright coercion and economic incentives have been used to spearhead strategies for achieving population ‘targets’. Aid donors are increasingly orientating their budgets towards family planning services in a bid to reduce population growth rates. In so far as this contributes to providing the safe and reliable services women need to control their fertility, it can play an important role in enhancing their opportunities and reducing birth rates. Ultimately, however, addressing population growth requires a comprehensive strategy of poverty reduction, provision of adequate health services, education (particularly for women), improving economic security, and the enhanced participation of women in employment, and decision-making. Above all, human rights must be respected. This broad approach was endorsed at the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994.

Most commentators now accept the linkage between social welfare provision and reduced birth rates. However, many insist that the resolution of the population problem cannot await the economic growth which will improve access to health and education sufficiently to effect a demographic transformation. Yet the Indian state of Kerala has shown that poverty need not be an insuperable obstacle to enhanced social welfare provision. Despite being one of the poorer states, Kerala has a birth rate which is half the Indian average and lower than China’s. This is the result not of coercion, but of investment in health and education, and of more equitable social relations. Infant mortality rates are one-quarter of the average for India.
and one half of that for China. As a result of greater gender equity, women have not suffered from higher mortality rates than men, as they have in the rest of India and China. Nor have they been subject to entrenched discrimination in education. While in India as a whole, one in two girl children drops out of primary school, in Kerala completion is almost universal. Thus despite its economic backwardness, Kerala's social development has been remarkable, and it has played a central role in reducing fertility rates to levels comparable with those in industrialised countries.

In South Korea, a combination of high economic growth (in contrast to Kerala), and the creation of universal access to primary health care, education, and employment opportunities, resulted in a dramatic decline in poverty and inequality. It also contributed to a demographic transformation which saw the population growth rate more than halved in a little over three decades, despite an increase in life-expectancy from 53 to 72: a demographic transformation which it took the industrialised world one-and-a-half centuries from the industrial revolution to complete.

Poverty, population, and environmental degradation

The concentration of poverty in ecologically fragile regions where land is least productive and in urban areas where employment opportunities are most limited, results in a downward spiral of environmental degradation, increased poverty and population growth in many countries. Yet it would be simplistic and misleading to draw global correlations between population densities on the one side and environmental degradation on the other. Were such correlations to exist, Holland would be considerably more environmentally degraded than the Sudan. Recent studies have drawn attention to the crucial importance of the policy environment in which population growth occurs. For instance, the Machakos district in Kenya was regarded before the Second World war as an environmental disaster-zone by colonial administrators monitoring rates of deforestation and soil erosion. Population density was seen as the main contributory factor. Today, the district has a far larger population, but local initiatives to conserve soils, plant trees, and develop appropriate farming systems, coupled with improved access to markets and education, have transformed the environment and repaired the damage evident 50 years ago. Similarly in Yemen, problems of soil erosion on fragile hillsides have been caused not by excessive population pressure, but by labour migration. This has resulted in the breakdown of the terracing systems previously maintained by highly labour-intensive practices. Elsewhere, exclusion from land and unequal control over resources, rather than rapid population growth, has been the major factor behind the environmental degradation. In Honduras, for example, the displacement of peasant small-holders by vast ranching estates was the catalyst for widespread environmental destruction in that country. There are, of course, many counter examples. For example, in countries such as Sudan, population pressure has been one of the factors forcing women to travel longer and longer distances to collect firewood. The crucial point, however, is that population growth is not an independent variable in determining poverty, but part of a broader set of social and economic pressures operating upon the poor.

Local action for sustainable livelihoods

The links between poverty and environmental degradation are related to poor people's rights to use and control natural resources. Often poor men and women are forced to exploit scarce natural resources or pollute their environment because they are struggling for survival. Their immediate environment is their resource base and source of livelihood, and they have no alternatives. These problems have to be tackled at many levels, starting with the local level, through the active involvement of the communities affected.
Bringing back the trees

The people of Kesharpur village, situated in the hills of Orissa state in India, provide an example of how grassroots initiatives are creating sustainable livelihoods. Twenty years ago, the once densely-wooded hills around the village were being rapidly denuded of tree cover by a combination of population pressure, fuelwood gathering, goat grazing, and commercial logging. The hills directly above the village had become so denuded of tree cover that springs had dried up, depriving the villages of water supplies. Deep gullies, caused by the rapid run-off of water during the monsoon, scarred the slopes; fertile top-soil was rapidly disappearing to expose outcrops of rocks. As the villagers grew increasingly short of fuelwood, fodder, and water, with women having to walk further and further to fetch and carry, it seemed that an unstoppable spiral of poverty and environmental degradation had been set in motion.

Without co-operative action by the villagers to reverse that spiral, it would have been unstoppable. Acknowledging that they were partly responsible for the problem, they banned goats from the most degraded areas. Then, in the early 1980s, representatives from 22 villages came together and, with the help of a local NGO, established a tree nursery and a re-planting programme. The success of that programme is reflected in the dense tree cover which today cloaks the hills around the villages. These trees provide an important source of food, in the form of edible nuts and berries, and wildlife is returning. The springs have been re-charged, and carefully-managed grazing, and the gathering of fuelwood and fodder has been resumed. Meanwhile, the villages have succeeded, through a combination of protest and lobbying, in persuading local authorities to restrict commercial logging activities. Perhaps most important of all has been the success of creating a movement of people, called 'Friends of trees and living beings', which is now active in over 320 villages in the area in promoting environmental awareness and rehabilitation. Kesharpur is a living testament to the power of local initiative, and to the ability of local communities to achieve change. Much of Oxfam's international programme is directed towards facilitating local solutions to local problems, building upon such community initiatives.

Restoring soil fertility

In southern Zimbabwe, as the story of Dorothy Chiredze recounted at the beginning of this chapter suggests, poor households face chronic problems of insecurity resulting from low rainfall, drought, and soil erosion. Masvingo province suffers some of the worst soil erosion in Zimbabwe, with losses estimated at over 50 tons per hectare every year, and double that in hilly areas. For outside 'experts', the problem is one of over-population in relation to the carrying capacity of the land. For their part, local communities see the problem as one of improving water conservation and land management, and of diversifying their livelihood system.

In 1987, Oxfam began supporting the work of the Zvishavane Water Resources Development project. This began when local farmers in the Midlands district got together to consider co-operative responses to their common problems, pooling local knowledge and expertise. The main objective was to find more effective ways of conserving water. Gullies were blocked with stones, and new systems of 'contour ridging' were developed, cutting across land gradients to slow water run-off. Labour, most of it female, was pooled to build small dams to capture rainwater. Initially, many of these failed as a result of siltation, but a solution was found in stone sandtraps planted across streams. By 1994, 87 wells, 28 small dams, and seven concrete water tanks had been built.

More effective water conservation has created new livelihood opportunities. Within 100m of a dry river bank, and beyond a massive gully parting the soil, women from the village of Chamba are to be found tending flourishing vegetables and relishes grown on neat mounds.
cutting across the slope of the field, and surrounded by a high ridge. They are members of a small scheme started with a loan from the Rural Unity Organisation for Development (RUDO), which works with 19,000 households spanning six districts. Over 70 per cent of its members are women.

One of them is Rose Mugwira. Like other women, she has four strips of garden land, each about six metres long. Each strip plays a crucial role in reducing family vulnerability. One is used to grow relish for home consumption, providing an important source of vitamins. Another two are used to grow vegetables for the local market, which enables her to buy seeds for next year and pay for school fees, clothes, and household items. The fourth is used to grow food which is sold by the co-operative to generate the funds needed to maintain the small borewell pump and water tank, and hire implements. Water conservation is maximised through the system of ridge cultivation, and through an ingenious system of clay pipes which run under the ridges. Irrigation water is poured into these pipes, instead of on to the soil surface, where it would swiftly evaporate, and is slowly released directly beside the roots of the vegetables.

Market gardening both provides for basic household needs and creates a more diverse income base. Women work on their garden plots most intensely from June to October, when many would previously have been walking long distances to work on commercial farms. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that such community initiatives distribute benefits equitably, or that they are free of problems. Male farmers have played a dominant role in many of the groups developing new conservation measures, but labour demands, for example, in plugging gullies, have fallen most heavily on women. Women also bear the brunt of the new workload imposed by market gardening. Moreover, even where women are involved in designing and implementing projects, poor women often carry less weight in decision-making and have more difficulty in obtaining loans. Despite this, the women themselves have seen important gains in terms both of household nutrition and opportunities to earn extra income.

Supporting the pastoralist way of life

Throughout the developing world, local communities have suffered from the advice of development 'experts', local and foreign, who see problems in technical terms, and propose technical solutions, to be applied regardless of culture, country, or local context. Such approaches to development seek to impose uniformity upon diversity, often under the guise of narrowly-defined objectives of 'economic efficiency'.

Pastoral farmers have suffered more than most from 'experts'. Their agricultural systems, which involve migration across large areas of land to graze animals, are adapted to the high levels of uncertainty associated with climate in arid and semi-arid areas. Yet planners and aid agencies have spent millions of dollars in imposing ranching schemes and sedentary agriculture upon pastoralists, with socially and environmentally disastrous effects.78 Oxfam's own work with pastoralists has evolved over many years, and mistakes have been made. Some of these mistakes were rooted in a failure to build sufficiently upon local knowledge in designing project interventions. Others were a consequence of paying inadequate attention to gender issues. Today, learning about pastoralism from local communities is an integral element of Oxfam's approach, in order to avoid the mistakes of the past. In the North Tokar area of Red Sea State in Sudan, Oxfam has come to understand more about sustainable livelihoods by supporting the survival strategies of Beja pastoralists.79 Successive droughts in 1980, 1984, and 1990, reduced herd sizes by more than half. At the same time, the adverse effects of drought were compounded as central government and private interests bought up land previously used for grazing, restricting the movement of herds.
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Faced with a reduction in rangeland, herd loss, and increasingly regular droughts, many Beja have opted for an agro-pastoral existence, developing sedentary agriculture while some villagers graze smaller herds for part of the year. Thus goats are replacing camels in the hierarchy of tangible assets; cultivation of land and the use of forest resources have taken on a greater significance; and wage labour in nearby Port Sudan has expanded dramatically, as has production of charcoal to generate income.

Oxfam staff have gained an insight into community priorities through participatory learning exercises, and work with the Beja now reflects the diversity of the Beja's own livelihood security strategies and includes programmes which meet the needs of women as well as men, in the following areas:

• group and family gardens; co-operative horticultural farms; seed distribution; agricultural extension; and date-palm cultivation;
• the construction of small wells, water harvesting, and irrigated horticulture
• rangeland rehabilitation, green fodder production, and small-scale restocking, including the purchase of cattle from surplus areas with grain
• veterinary services and training; poultry raising; and predator control
• natural forest management; production of charcoal and higher-value-added wood products for sale in local markets
• income-generating activities such as handicrafts and tailoring; adult education, including literacy classes, and skills training.

Taken together these activities are designed to increase the resilience of Beja groups in coping with a rapidly changing and risk-prone environment. Through diversification into agriculture, and through spreading investment more widely, the Beja should be able to reduce the length of the recovery period following droughts and to develop a wider range of survival strategies. The programme has therefore also concentrated on strengthening village institutions to help the Beja to obtain support for their initiatives from other organisations, government authorities, and technical services. Integral to this approach has been Oxfam's desire to see women guaranteed a greater role in village committees.

Creating an enabling environment

In essence, development is a process of enlarging the range of people's choices by expanding their opportunities and realising their potential. Creating productive employment and income, improving education and health care, establishing the conditions for participation and political freedom, and managing resources in an environmentally sustainable manner, are all elements in the process of human development. Local communities, as the examples cited in this chapter illustrate, are working to make genuine development possible. Supporting their initiatives and drawing upon their ingenuity, energy, and commitment, must be the starting point for international efforts directed towards poverty eradication. This applies to governments, international agencies, and NGOs alike.

But while community mobilisation is a necessary condition for development, it is not a sufficient condition. Local efforts to protect employment, improve services, and maintain security are unlikely to succeed in the face of economic crisis and the general collapse of social welfare provision. And they cannot compensate for the effects of highly unequal social systems, which exclude vast number of poor people from a reasonable share in the wealth of their society. Community initiatives can help people to cope with crisis and to survive; but it is up to governments to create the enabling environment through which such initiatives can transform societies.

In theory, Northern and Southern governments, international agencies, and international financial institutions, are all in favour of 'human development'. That is one of the reasons why the concept has become a pious hope rather than a force for change; a slogan for
recitation at UN conferences rather than an agenda for action. What local communities and Oxfam's partners want to see is principles translated into practice. Their aspirations find an echo in the industrialised countries, where people increasingly want to see a sustained assault on global poverty to create a more secure future for the world.

One widespread misconception is that the starting point for the creation of an enabling environment should be a narrow focus on the redistribution of wealth, rather than its creation. Nothing could be further from the truth. For the world's poorest countries economic growth is an imperative, not an optional extra. For them, a future without growth will be a future of deepening poverty and human misery; witness the current plight of sub-Saharan Africa. But growth alone is not necessarily a prescription for poverty reduction, and does not guarantee that there will be real improvements in people's lives. The issue, then, is not how much growth, but what kind of growth is likely to eradicate poverty. In other words, development must be concerned both with the creation of wealth and its use to maximise human capabilities.

Seen from the perspective of Oxfam's international programme, existing policies at the national and the international level create a disabling, rather than an enabling, environment for the poor. Poor people are the first to suffer during periods of economic recession, and the last to benefit from economic recovery. In some cases, economic growth actively contributes to the further marginalisation of the poor. Conversely, the rich are usually the last to suffer from economic downturn and the first to reap the benefits of national income growth. When public health systems collapse because of falling state spending, the poor pay the price in the form of increasing sickness and higher death rates; the wealthy simply attend private clinics. When adjustment policies seek to restructure economies, the poor typically lose jobs and receive lower wages; the rich make windfall gains from investing in newly-privatised companies. How can this pattern be changed to ensure that poor people both contribute to and benefit from the production of wealth?

Above all, by giving them a stake in society. Patterns of gross inequality which leave large numbers of people landless, subjected to exploitative tenancy arrangements, in insecure employment or on incomes incapable of maintaining an adequate living standard, can never provide a foundation for development. Similarly, poor levels of health care, inadequate education, and restricted provision of services, prevent poor people from fully participating in the process of economic and social development. In both areas, the priority must be to develop people's capabilities and to enable them to use those capabilities productively.

It must be stressed that this is not simply a matter of social justice and ethical responsibility, powerful as these claims for action may be. It is also a matter of economic efficiency. No society can achieve its economic potential, let alone its human potential, where large numbers of people are consigned to poverty, or where inequalities inhibit their contribution. While there are always powerful vested interests prepared to defend the existing order, it is in society's interest to overcome the obstacle to change which they represent. What is essential to achieve this change is the empowerment and democratic participation of poor men and women, who, because of their poverty or because they belong to a minority group, have no means of influencing the critical decisions affecting their lives. This enfranchisement depends on the transformation of closed, autocratic, or repressive political systems, respect for the due processes of law, a free press, freedom of speech and association, and all the other elements vital for an active civil society. Stated differently, democracy is a central part of the development process, and vital to the realisation of human potential.
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A strategy for change

In later chapters, we discuss the reforms needed to create an international enabling environment. As we move towards a genuinely global economy, international factors beyond the control of Third World governments, ranging from debt burdens to adverse terms of trade and changes in global economic conditions, have an increasingly important influence on poverty and human welfare. However, governments themselves can do a great deal to enhance the opportunities for the poor and promote equitable growth, as we outline below.

Changing the structure of agricultural production

Many governments have seen peasant producers as a source of 'surplus extraction', through manipulation of the agricultural terms of trade, forced sales of farm products at low prices to the state, and excessive agricultural taxation. Imports of cheap food have been systematically encouraged, even though these destroy markets for local producers and create an unhealthy dependence on imported foodstuffs. Such policies reflect ill-conceived development models, in which the value of peasant farmers is measured by the volume of resources they transfer to industry. The consequent stagnation in the rural economy has deepened rural poverty and impeded economic growth, in part by destroying the domestic market upon which industries depend. A policy framework that offers farmers adequate incentives to increase production is vital for a vibrant agricultural sector, rural employment, and increased self-reliance in food, all of which are necessary to reduce poverty.

Important as the macro-economic framework for agriculture may be, it will count for little as a mechanism for poverty reduction if it is not accompanied by agrarian reform and wider redistributive measures. It is frequently argued that equitable patterns of land ownership are bad for efficiency, on the grounds that bigger farms enjoy economies of scale which enable them to invest and produce more efficiently, especially for export. Such arguments are often based on questionable economic theories or are a defence of vested interests. In reality, large-scale agriculture is less effective than is often assumed, for at least three reasons.80

Firstly, the costs of large-scale agriculture are considerable. Some of these costs, such as irrigation subsidies, public investment in commercial farm infrastructure, and subsidised credit and fertiliser, are obvious. Other costs, such as those associated with the use of scarce foreign exchange to buy imported equipment, are less visible. The environmental costs of using that equipment, including tractors and land-clearing machinery, on thin soils such as those in Africa, are considerable.

Second, the large-scale commercial agricultural sector is typically only weakly connected to the rest of the economy. It not only over-uses resources, such as capital and foreign exchange, which are in short supply, and under-uses local labour; but it often transfers out of the country a large proportion of the profits generated. Over half of the profit generated by foreign-owned vegetable exporters in Chile is remitted to the US; and a large share of the income generated by exporting flowers and vegetables from Africa to Europe ends up in the accounts of European transnational companies, rather than in the exporting country.

Thirdly, and most importantly, smallholder production is considerably more efficient than is often assumed. Smallholder producers in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania have increased production of food and export crops dramatically when they have had the opportunity. So have the smallholder producers of coffee with whom Oxfam works in Central America. Where smallholders have been less successful, it is because of the type of misplaced policy priorities discussed above, or because they are excluded from taking advantage of market opportunities by inadequate infra-
structure, lack of inputs, or outright discrimi-
nation.81 Many governments spend consider-
ably more on building a marketing infra-
structure around large-scale commercial farms
than they invest in assisting smallholder pro-
ducers to market their produce. This is a grave
mistake. Smallholder producers produce more
per acre than commercial producers, and they
use land more efficiently. In Zimbabwe, around
40 per cent of the country's commercially-owned
farmland, its prime agricultural asset, is not
utilised. The land which is used absorbs vast
amounts of public subsidies and is, in many
cases, managed in an environmentally ruinous
manner, being over-irrigated or over-grazed.82

Here, as in other countries, there are sound
ecological reasons for favouring smallholder
producers. Labour-intensive production, the
sustainable management of water and common
resources, and cropping systems geared towards
the long-term maintenance of soil fertility, all of
which are characteristic of smallholder produc-
tion, bring important social, economic, and
environmental benefits.

Land reform

Agrarian reforms leading to more equitable
patterns of ownership and more efficient use of
resources are indispensable to poverty reduc-
tion and broad-based agricultural growth. The
experiences of many developing countries bear
ample testimony to this. As the post-war
histories of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan
have shown, land redistribution can produce
increased incomes which are equitably distrib-
uted, and can thus be consistent with the
objectives of economic growth and of poverty
reduction. There are, however, distinct region-
al and country-specific requirements. In most
of Latin America, where land ownership
patterns defy in equal measure the principles of
economic efficiency and social justice, there is a
clear case for redistribution. However, govern-
ments remain loath to move in this direction
because of the entrenched power of vested
interests. In sub-Saharan Africa, land redistrib-
ution is vital in Zimbabwe and a small number
of other countries. Elsewhere, the aim must be
to prevent the privatisation of land rights from
leading to an unacceptable concentration of
land ownership.

In South Asia, effective legislation to strength-
en tenancy laws, protect landless labourers and
enhance the position of share-croppers is vital.
The Indian state of West Bengal has shown
what is possible in this area, introducing
tenancy legislation which recognises the rights
of 1.4 million tenant farmers, and redistri-
buting land to 2.5 million farmers following the
introduction of land-ceiling legislation.83 Sub-
stantial social benefits have resulted without any
loss of production, underlining again the
linkages between equity and efficiency. What is
most distinctive about West Bengal's experi-
ence, however, is the critical role which village-
level mobilisation has played in achieving the
implementation of agrarian reforms, under-
lining the fact that community empowerment is
central to any strategy for poverty reduction.84

Though other states have adopted land reform
measures of similar design, in most cases a
combination of vested interest and inadequate
community participation has rendered them
ineffective.

To make land reform effective, a wide range of
supportive mechanisms are required. The
promotion and enforcement of women's land
rights, increased public investment in marketing
infrastructure in marginal areas, improved
availability of inputs and new technologies, and
investment in storage to counteract post-harvest
crop-losses, are all necessary. So is support for
local production systems. Too often, agricultural
extension is seen as a matter of providing
improved varieties of seed, and fertiliser and
pesticides, rather than of listening to small-
holders and supporting their efforts to develop
local seed varieties and environmentally sustain-
able inter-cropping patterns. In southern
Africa, many of the poorest farmers grow cow-
peas between their maize to fix nitrogen in the
soil. Yet agricultural extension agencies provide
them with little support in the production and
marketing of this crop, preferring to promote
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packages of hybrid seeds and imported nitrogen fertiliser. There is also a clear need to expand the availability of credit at affordable rates. Change in each of these areas will require the adoption of new priorities. But it will also require institutional reform. The decentralisation of extension services, more participative structures, and investment in staff training are necessary in many countries.

Changing the structure of employment

Like their rural counterparts, poor urban populations need a viable macro-economic framework to give them a share in national prosperity. The focus should be on the creation of secure employment at wage levels compatible with the maintenance of reasonable living standards. In the past, permanent and indiscriminate protection of capital-intensive industries has failed to achieve this objective. Today, the deregulation of imports and the parallel deregulation of labour markets, whether undertaken by governments under their own volition or prompted by conditions attached to loans, is increasing insecurity and reducing wage levels.

Once again, there are no simple prescriptions. However, the selective and temporary protection of potentially competitive labour-intensive industries is vital. So, too, is the promotion of a manufacturing base capable both of competing with imports and expanding exports. One of the most significant factors in South-East Asia’s economic success was the provision of targeted credit to export industries, coupled with an active policy of carefully regulated protection, control over foreign investment, and the promotion of indigenous industries producing high-tech goods.

In many countries, labour market deregulation has been carried to excess. Starvation-level wages are not only socially unjust, they are inherently inefficient, for the simple reason that malnourished workers are not productive. The establishment of minimum wage levels, regulations to protect health and ensure safety, and equal pay for men and women doing equal work, should be the touchstones of modern employment policy. Instead, most governments and international financial institutions are promoting labour-employer relations in which the scales are heavily weighted against the weak in favour of the strong.

The effective alleviation of urban poverty will also require action at several other levels. Recognition of the rights of urban settlements to improved housing and public utilities is vital. So, too, is the withdrawal of unfair restrictions on the informal sector, including zoning regulations designed to prevent petty-trading. In many cases these regulations, which in Africa’s case were drawn up during the colonial period, have been designed to protect the interests of established large-scale traders. Measures to provide credit and other forms of marketing support to the informal sector are also necessary, to expand employment opportunities.

Changing spending priorities for social welfare

For reasons which we have outlined in this chapter, social welfare provision is central to poverty reduction and economic growth. Healthy and educated people can, through productive employment, contribute effectively to economic growth. They can also benefit more from that growth. It is often argued that developing countries lack the resources substantially to improve the health care, education, and nutrition of poor people. But what is actually lacking in most cases is the political will to make these resources available and to invest them in an equitable manner.

Collectively, developing countries spend around 10 per cent of their government budgets on social priority areas. Doubling this to 20 per cent, as the UNDP and UNICEF have proposed, would generate approximately $30bn: a sum which would be sufficient to meet
the minimum targets set for improving human welfare at the World Summit for Children. This target could be met through a combination of raising increased revenue, transferring expenditure from non-priority to priority areas, and greater financial accountability. As we argue in Chapter 6, debt relief and well-targeted development assistance also have a significant role to play.

Changing taxation structures

The scope for increased revenue generation is particularly extensive in Latin America, which currently has the world's most inequitable income distribution and least progressive taxation system. Taxation in the region generates the equivalent of just under 4 per cent of GDP, which is 2 per cent lower than the average for developing countries as a group. Personal income tax is less than half the developing country average, while the proportion of tax revenue generated by sales duties (which have a regressive effect) is rising. Bringing Latin American taxation levels up to the average for developing countries would generate more than enough resources to achieve universal provision of basic health care, primary education, and clean water and sanitation.

Clearly, any prescription for raising taxes must consider the wider economic implications, especially for investment and employment. In most countries, however, there is scope for additional revenue creation. For example, the taxation of commercial farm land would both provide a progressive source of tax revenue, and discourage large-scale landlords from leaving it unused. In Brazil, where an estimated 30 per cent of the land owned by cattle ranchers is not utilised, such a tax could provide a significant source of revenue for investment in social priority areas.

An example of what can be achieved has been provided by Peru. In 1990, tax revenue in that country had fallen to its lowest-ever proportion of GDP, representing less than 5 per cent of national income. Three years later, it had doubled to more than 10 per cent. This transformation was achieved partly through radical institutional reforms, which established the tax authority as a credible and independent body, and gave it wide-ranging powers of collection.

During the 1980s, Burkina Faso, one of the world's poorest countries, protected social-sector expenditure during a protracted economic crisis in part by almost doubling its tax revenue. Duties on commercial property, urban rental income, and imported luxury goods all contributed.

Such examples suggest that it is possible for governments to address simultaneously the task of reducing budget-deficits and protecting social welfare by expanding revenue. However, under structural adjustment policies negotiated with the World Bank, there has been an impetus towards the lowering of tax rates on corporations, foreign investors, and higher-income groups. This approach has been driven by a perception, informed by economic theories popular in Europe and North America during the early 1980s, that high taxation has been a major deterrent to investment. In many cases, however, taxation has been a minor deterrent to investment in comparison with infrastructure collapse and low skills-levels, which require public spending for their correction. Where structural adjustment policies result in massive gains for upper-income groups, they should be subject to a new windfall-gains tax. Examples would include the high rates of return generated for large-scale commercial agricultural exporters from currency devaluation and increased rights to hold foreign currency; the profits generated by privatisation and short-term speculative capital flows; and trading profits associated with the opening up of markets for imported luxury goods.

Reducing military spending

Military spending represents a massive diversion of resources from investment in human capacity, throughout the developing world. Over the past two decades, that spending has
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risen twice as fast as national incomes, and represents around $120bn. Even more disturbing than this overall figure, is the proportion of national resources diverted to the military in some of the world's poorest countries. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, devotes on average 3 per cent of its regional income to military expenditure. However, in the case of individual countries, the picture is even worse. For example, in Sudan, the Government allocates 16 per cent of its budget to the military, most of which goes towards financing a war against its own people in the southern part of the country. The health budget, by contrast, accounts for 0.3 per cent of expenditure. This is in a country where life expectancy in the southern region is 36 years: one of the lowest in the world. In 1991, the Nigerian government purchased from Britain 80 battle tanks at a cost which would have enabled them to immunise all of the two million un-immunised children in the country, and provide universal primary education in its poorest state.

While military spending has fallen by 20 per cent in the industrialised world since 1989, it has declined by less than ten per cent in the poorest countries. Citizens in the developing world suffer in a dual sense from the preoccupation of their governments with military hardware. First, they may become the victims of its deployment, since governments in the developing world are far more likely to use the military machines against their own citizens than against other nations. Second, military expenditure entails reduced provision of welfare services which are vital to poverty reduction. Governments may stress the need for defending the 'security' of their countries by military means. But whose security are they talking about? Citizens in the developing world are 33 times more likely to die because they lack a supply of clean water and sanitation, than as a result of conflict. When they do die during conflict, it is relatively rare for their deaths to be caused by external aggressors.

Overall, African governments were able to find $8bn for military spending in 1991, despite the pressing social needs of their peoples. To put this figure in context, it was equivalent to roughly three-quarters of the aid received by the region; or slightly less than the sum needed to meet the minimum targets for improving nutrition, basic health, education, water and sanitation, and improved health care for women agreed at the World Summit for Children. African governments are not alone in their addiction to costly military hardware. Between them, India and Pakistan account for just under half the total number of people in poverty. They also account for just under one-fifth of world arms imports. During the 1980s, Pakistan spent six times as much of its budget on the military as on health, education and agriculture combined. As a consequence, the country has some of the world's most impressive fighter jets, tanks and anti-aircraft systems, and some of its most depressing social indicators. These include infant mortality rates which are 9 per cent higher than the average for low-income countries, and primary school enrolment rates which are 25 per cent lower. Out of 177 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index, Pakistan rated 132. For its part, India in 1992 spent more purchasing 20 MIG aircraft from Russia than it would have cost to provide primary education to the fifteen million girls who get none.

Reducing military expenditure in developing countries by 25 per cent would release extra resources which could double special priority spending. As we argue in Chapter 2, impressive human welfare gains could result from lowering military spending, although the vested interests involved in this sector are politically powerful. Northern governments could assist in the task of reducing military budgets both by providing financial support for demilitarisation, and by curtailing their arms exports. In Oxfam's view debt relief and development assistance should be linked to targets for reducing military expenditure. The peace dividend thus released should be used to finance the attainment of targets for improvements in social welfare agreed under the
National Plans for Action drawn up after the World Summit for Children. It might be suggested by some that this amounts to a violation of sovereignty. However, excessive military spending represents an obstacle to the attainment of the fundamental human rights enshrined in the UN Charter, which all governments have a responsibility to uphold.

Redirecting government spending

Almost all Third World governments need to undertake a fundamental review of their social spending allocations. Currently, most concentrate expenditure in areas where the returns to society are lowest, and the returns to the wealthy are highest. In Latin America, over half of government spending on education is directed towards the children of families who come from the wealthiest fifth of the population. In sub-Saharan Africa, university students receive levels of investment which are 60 times higher per student than for primary school children. Such expenditure patterns, repeated in the health sector, again protect the vested interests of the powerful, but represent a wasteful use of scarce resources in terms of the needs of society as a whole.

In many developing countries, misuse of public resources for extravagant or corrupt purposes is widespread. An impressive monument to excess is to be found in Côte d'Ivoire, where the late President, Houphouët Boigny, built a vast Catholic basilica, modelled on St Peter's in Rome, in his home village. Finished in Italian marble and trimmed with stained French glass, the church cost the equivalent of twice the combined budgets for health and education. This is in a country where seven million people have no basic health services and where an estimated one million children are malnourished.

In some cases, Third World governments have treated their country's wealth as a personal treasury, to be plundered and transferred to foreign bank accounts. In Kenya, financial fraud involving the falsification of export and import invoices in connection with structural adjustment loans, cost the country an estimated $430m between 1991 and 1993; more than the combined health and education budgets.

Successive Nigerian governments have enriched elites, and failed to account for large amounts of public funds. During the Gulf War a special government account was created to hold the windfall gains resulting from the rise in prices for the country's oil exports. These reached an estimated $12.4bn. In 1994, however, a Central Bank panel investigating the account revealed that $12.2bn had been spent without authorisation. Some of that money was doubtless directed towards legitimate items of public expenditure, but much of it was directed towards foreign bank accounts. The head of the Central Bank panel summarised the economic costs of this misuse of public funds in stark terms:

Figure 1.2 Comparative spending on primary and secondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP</th>
<th>Percentage of education budget allocated to basic education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Had these resources, or even only a significant proportion of them been paid into the external reserves, the impact on the exchange rate, on the attitude of our external creditors, on the credibility of Nigeria and on the environment for foreign investors would have been incalculable.9*

The benefits of directing even a small part of the funds into priority social investment would have been similarly incalculable. Around 7.5 million Nigerian children under the age of five are malnourished, and the social welfare indicators in large parts of the country are appalling; if the state of Bendel were a country, it would rank bottom of the UNDP's human development index.

Changing political structures

Whereas authoritarian regimes have been replaced by formal democracies in much of Africa and Latin America, this is not sufficient to guarantee respect for basic rights. The resulting political structures of the 1990s are fragile, often corrupt, and impunity is still enjoyed by the powerful, including the military. Lack of an independent judiciary capable of implementing the rule of law heightens the need for information and education about rights. The newness of 'democracies' makes education for citizenship important to encourage active participation in processes of development and democratisation. For example, in Latin America many of the organisations Oxfam supports are working to encourage participation, community action, new moral values of responsibility and solidarity, and a new relationship with the state. The policy reforms needed to make genuine development a possibility will not be sustained without transparency and accountability on the part of governments, and genuine democratisation. Democratic institutions and popular participation in decision-making are therefore essential. If a government is to mobilise a country's resources in the interests of poverty eradication, it needs to interact with the people it represents. Once again, there are no ready-made models. Multi-party elections can play an important role in improving accountability, but they are not synonymous with democracy. Nor are periodic elections, however free and fair, sufficient to secure genuine participation. Political systems need to be shaped by local needs and circumstances and democratically accountable local, regional and national institutions. People should have the freedom to determine in broad terms who forms the government, what the government does, and to influence the decisions it takes on their behalf. The vital preconditions for democracy are to be found not in unthinking transplantation of Western models, but in respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic principles.

All too often governments violate these principles, citing the supposedly 'special characteristics' of their people, or the imperative need to suppress political freedom in the interests of achieving higher rates of economic growth. Such arguments, popular with governments in South-East Asia, are usually a smokescreen for autocracy and vested interest, and they offer a lame rationale for political systems which suppress public participation in the interests of powerful elites. As Wangari Mathai, founder of the Kenyan Green Belt Movement, and herself a victim of political autocracy has put it:

Dictators will continue to argue that democracy is a Western value which cannot work in Africa. But at the same time they deny citizens the right to have constitutional conventions to decide for themselves what type of democracy they want...The truth is that Africans, like all other human beings, want justice, equity, transparency and accountability...They want to create a strong civil society which can hold its leaders accountable and responsible.9'

Wangari Mathai's words have a global relevance, underlining the importance of strengthening civil and political rights in order to tackle effectively the underlying causes of poverty and injustice and create a more sustainable future for all.
2 A world at war

The nations and people of the United Nations are fortunate in a way that those of the League of Nations were not. We have been given a second chance to create the world of our Charter that they were denied. With the Cold War ended, we have drawn back from the brink of confrontation that threatened the world and, too often, paralysed our organisation.

BOUTROS-BOUTROS GHALI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The world has suddenly become unusually complex and far less intelligible. The old order has collapsed, but no one has yet created a new one.

VACLAV HAVEL, PRESIDENT OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

We women do not make war ... we are the ones who have to leave, the ones who have to fight for the survival of our children. We are tired of running, tired of not knowing what the future will bring, tired of not being able to plant. Why don't these people sit together and talk, why are the international organisations not helping the poor?

ELISABETH ALEK, DINKA WOMAN FROM SOUTHERN SUDAN

Introduction

The UN system was, in essence, a product of the bloodletting which made the first half of the twentieth century the most murderous in human history. The failure of the League of Nations to avert a recurrence of global hostilities became a symbol of the wider political failure of the inter-war years. The founders of the UN saw conflict prevention as the ultimate criterion against which the post-war order would be judged. Thus the UN Charter pledged to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', its first Article committing governments to 'maintain international peace and security, and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace'.

Fifty years after the Charter was adopted, the world's citizens are in greater need of a collective security system than ever. Throughout the world, the level of human rights violations resulting from current conflicts and rising violence is unprecedented. The costs are to be measured in deaths, broken lives, the destruction of livelihoods, loss of homes, and increased vulnerability. Yet as the human suffering mounts, the international community's response to conflict appears ever more inadequate.

Among the victims of conflict, the poor are disproportionately represented. Forced to become refugees or displaced within their own
countries, millions of the world's poorest people have been pushed, by conflict, to the very margins of survival. At the same time, resources for development are being diverted from efforts to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and injustice, to conflict-related emergency response. Oxfam's international programme is a microcosm of this trend, with spending on emergency responses to conflict rising faster than spending on long-term development work.

People in the industrial world are increasingly aware of the human consequences of conflict. The public has responded to scenes of horror and suffering in countries such as Bosnia and Rwanda with an outpouring of compassion and support for the communities affected. There is less awareness of how such conflicts can cause an accelerating cycle of deepening poverty, insecurity, and violence which ultimately threatens us all.

The nature of current conflicts

In 1911, the Encyclopedia Britannica offered its readers a definition of 'civilised' warfare. Such activity, it suggested, was 'confined, as far as possible, to disablement of the armed forces of the enemy; otherwise war would continue until one of the parties was exterminated'. Three years later, Europe hosted its last great 'civilised war', as millions of young men marched off to die. Civilian casualties accounted for fewer than 5 per cent of fatalities.

Contemporary conflicts are, on the Encyclopedia Britannica's definition, distinctly uncivilised. Today, four out of every five casualties are civilians, most of them women and children. According to UNICEF, warfare claimed the lives of 1.5 million children between 1982 and 1992, and left another 4.5 million disabled. Civilians are not, it must be stressed, 'accidental' victims caught in the cross-fire. In many recent conflicts, the systematic killing and terrorisation of civilians, and the destruction of their livelihoods, has been a central element in the strategies of government forces and paramilitary groups. Warfare, as we approach the twenty-first century, is waged primarily against non-combatants.

It is not only in the profile of their victims that modern conflicts differ from those of the past. The UN system was designed to defend the territorial integrity of its members from outside intervention. This reflected its origins in the security perceptions of Western states, themselves shaped by the rival territorial claims of princes, emperors, and empires. Today, however, violent conflict is predominantly an intra-state affair. Of the 82 major armed conflicts which took place between 1989 and 1992, all but three occurred within states. These conflicts, often between 'non-traditional' forces under dubious political control, have left more than 40 million people as refugees or internally displaced in their own countries — double the number of a decade ago. Unless the conflicts which have caused these refugee flows are resolved, the number of refugees could rise to 100 million by the year 2000.

Causes of conflict

The causes of conflict are diverse, and every conflict arises from a different combination of circumstances. Ethnic tension, denial of political rights, poverty, and competition over scarce resources can all fuel conflict, and weaken the fabric of nation states, many of which were built on fragile and artificial foundations in the colonial period.

For example, in Rwanda, the occupation classifications drawn up by the Belgian colonial authorities, which divided the population on the basis of asset ownership, provided the grounds for a Tutsi supremacist ideology, and a Hutu backlash. The genocide in 1994 was instigated by members of the Hutu political elite, who feared losing power, and were able to exploit ethnic tensions and fear with terrifying effect. Underlying social and economic pressures increased their ability to manipulate the thousands of young Hutus who carried out the
massacres. Rapid population growth in Rwanda had contributed to chronic land shortage. Rural poverty was further accentuated by the sharp fall in international coffee prices in the late 1980s and the subsequent collapse in employment and social services. These economic pressures created a fertile ground for the growth of genocidal violence.

Elsewhere, it is the breakdown of systems of political control that has led to the emergence of conflict. The demise of the former Soviet Union, while it marked an end to the Cold War, resulted in an intense struggle for control over resources, often under the banner of competing ‘nationalisms’ or ‘ethnicities’. For example, in the Transcaucasus region, nationalist movements have sprung up and war has ravaged the economic foundations of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Group identity has become an increasingly important — and violent — focal point for dissent and political aspirations.

One hundred years ago, war in the Balkans heralded the collapse of empires, the birth of nations, and, ultimately, the First World War. Now the region is again the setting for conflict associated with the disintegration of states and
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the rise of nationalism. The breakdown of the system of federal checks and balances maintained by Tito unleashed ethnic tensions and competing claims over land and property. Notions of a 'Greater Serbia' and 'Greater Croatia', supposedly rooted in the mists of Balkan history, have been used to justify territorial expansionism and 'ethnic cleansing'.

'Ethnic cleansing': Rwanda and Bosnia

The horror of modern conflict was presented in its most extreme form by the genocide which swept Rwanda in 1994, when around a million Tutsi were killed by gangs of militia, acting on the orders of the government, armed with machetes, nailed clubs, and fragmentation grenades. One report has compared the scale of the genocide to that of the Nazi death camps; and this in a country lacking the infrastructure and technology of mass extermination. Words can never describe the suffering experienced by the people of Rwanda. An Oxfam staff member witnessed one Interahamwe massacre:

They sought out and killed seven members of the Tutsi nurse's family... Those killed included a three-year-old boy, his skull split open with a machete blow, and a pregnant woman whose body was split open and the unborn baby exposed... we all witnessed the elderly mission cook being beaten to death.

Media images of the slaughter in Rwanda briefly diverted public attention from Bosnia, where the term 'ethic cleansing' was introduced into the vocabulary of modern warfare. Almost a quarter-of-a-million people have been killed and 2.5 million displaced. Civilian populations have been subjected to bombardment, torture, mass rape, and killing designed to achieve the expansionist designs of nationalist Serbs and Croats. The Bosnian conflict has given rise to the re-emergence on European soil of vast ghettos, deliberately fashioned so that the communities trapped within them can be terrorised, starved, and demoralised, and their will to resist destroyed.

Though no side has entirely refrained from committing atrocities, the Bosnian Muslims have suffered most. The Muslim districts of towns such as Mostar, Gorazde, Sarajevo, and Kosevo, and towns such as Bihac, for example, have been the targets of relentless bombardment and sniping, often under the gaze of UN troops designated to protect 'safe areas'. Food, water, and electricity supplies have been cut and hospitals destroyed. Humanitarian relief to these ghettos has been systematically disrupted. In December 1993, for example, Oxfam was involved in delivering food and clothing to the citizens of Tuzla. However, staff reported that less than 14 per cent of the minimum food requirements were allowed through Serbian militia lines.

Women and war

Women have been the targets of particularly sadistic forms of violence, intended to degrade and terrorise them. In 1993, the UN Economic and Social Council, which sent a delegation to Bosnia to investigate that violence, concluded: 'rape has been used as an instrument of ethnic cleansing...In this context, rape has been used not only as an attack on the individual, but is intended to humiliate, shame and terrify the entire ethnic group.' Estimates of the number of women raped in former Yugoslavia range from 50,000 to 80,000. In Rwanda, too, women have suffered terrible ordeals. The extent of rape by militiamen may never be fully known because of the stigma that disclosure brings. But it is clear that thousands of women were raped. Today many face the trauma of bearing the offspring of men who killed their families, and of being infected with HIV/AIDS.

The role of the media

We live in a world of global communications, and our perceptions of that world are increasingly shaped by news reports and television images. News coverage of the genocide and
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subsequent refugee crisis in Rwanda played a vital role in influencing public opinion. The images of refugees dying in the town of Goma elicited an overwhelming public response, which generated record levels of donations to agencies such as Oxfam, and demands for international action.

Amidst the carnage in Bosnia, it was a single act of destruction which brought the reality of the civil war to the attention of the Western public. The slaughter perpetrated by Bosnian Serbs who fired a single mortar shell into a Sarajevo bread queue in February, 1994, was not, by their grotesque standards, an exceptional act. But its capture on film generated an unprecedented wave of revulsion. It also prompted a threat of military action by NATO to defend civilian populations.

The media have become powerful vehicles for change. Yet the media's preoccupation with 'news' stories with a novel interest for Western audiences has contributed to a perception of conflict as a passing phenomenon, which ceases to be of relevance once past its news 'sell-by date'.

Forgotten wars
Many conflicts barely register on the scale of international concern, either because they are considered unimportant to the West, or because they are regarded as yesterday's news. From Mali to Peru to the Transcaucasus, conflicts continue hidden from the glare of international attention. Yet these conflicts are destroying lives, displacing populations, and ruining livelihoods on a vast scale. In the Peruvian cities of Lima and Ayacucho, Oxfam works with local NGOs which are responding to the needs of over half-a-million people driven from the countryside by government forces and the Sendero Luminoso guerilla movement. In Burundi, where inter-ethnic violence again threatens to engulf the country, Oxfam responded to the conflict in 1993 which left over 50,000 people dead and many more displaced. In Angola, approximately 500,000 people were killed in the two years of war following the breakdown of the accord between the Government and rebel UNITA forces. Angolan cities, such as Huambo, Cuito, and Luenga, are scenes of destruction reminiscent of Stalingrad. Such conflicts cause immense human suffering, yet they have gone largely unreported in the industrial world.

The public concern generated by media coverage in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia also contrasts strongly with apparent indifference towards other countries, such as Afghanistan. Five years after the departure of Soviet troops, that country remains trapped in a vicious civil war between the various Islamic groups which overthrew the previous regime. Backed by a variety of regional powers, including Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, these groups conduct their struggle for control of Kabul, mainly by firing unguided missiles into the civilian populations living in areas controlled by their opponents. Oxfam works with some of the two million people who have fled Kabul, supporting their efforts to survive. Each has a harrowing tale to tell. Many have seen relatives killed, some 20,000 civilians having died in the past two years. Among the displaced survivors are families who have had to endure winters of sub-zero temperatures living in tents.

The media has a vital role to play in raising awareness of suffering, and in generating the public pressure needed to influence governments. But the absence of Western cameras should not be allowed to consign the victims of many of the world's most brutal conflicts to the margins of international concern. The media-driven public perception of conflict as a brief emergency, to be followed by rehabilitation and the return of normality, is far from the truth. In many of the countries in which Oxfam works, conflict is now a permanent reality to which communities adapt through elaborate survival strategies.

Permanent conflicts
One such conflict is taking place in southern Sudan. It is a conflict which has rarely figured on
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the Security Council agenda, perhaps because it has not attracted the attention of CNN. Yet for the past 12 years, communities in this region have been trapped in the midst of one of the world's most brutal and least reported civil wars, which ranges different groupings in the south against the Government in Khartoum. At least a million people have died, and another 1.5 million have been driven from their homes either into camps, across borders or into the bush. Behind these statistics are the stories of people like Amer Kuay, a young Dinka woman from the Upper Nile District. This was her testimony to an Oxfam staff member:

We were attacked by cattle raiders working for the government. They took all of our cattle. They burned our houses. They took all our belongings...We were left with no tools and hardly any seed, so we harvested very little. By February we started to starve. There were still attacks by Nuer raiders. So we decided to cross the Nile to Yirol District where it was safer. We had to wait in the marshes for some time to get a fishing boat to take us across. We had no money to pay, so I had to give my daughters' clothes to the fisherman. Some of the people in our group were dying of hunger even as we started to walk from our village. Young children and old people died. I lost my youngest girl. She was just two years old.

Both government and separatist forces in Sudan have shown themselves willing and able to violate the most basic rights of people in pursuit of their military goals. In the Lakes Province of Bahr el Ghazal, where Oxfam is involved in supporting relief and rehabilitation work, civilians have been subjected to attack and aerial bombardment. All factions in the conflict have been responsible for burning villages, stealing or destroying crops and livestock, and raping women. Long-standing tribal rivalries and disputes over cattle and grazing rights, previously contained by traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms, are being integrated into a wider conflict; and they are being settled by automatic weapons. The Nuer tribe which attacked Amer Kuay's village were both cattle raiding and exacting reprisals. Such atrocities are not new. What is new is the destructive capacity of all sides in the conflict, and their willingness to use that capacity ruthlessly.

Conflict and the destruction of livelihoods

The conflict in Sudan illustrates how tribal and ethnic tensions can underlie strategies designed to disrupt food systems, destroy social life, and rob people of their means of survival. These strategies have left some 7.5 million people vulnerable to the effects of conflict and drought — among them people like Amer Kuay. Like many other women in southern Sudan, she has been displaced many times over and has not seen her husband for several years.

Nobody is immune to the effects of large-scale violence, especially in poor communities. The destruction of assets, crops, and food marketing systems makes communities intensely vulnerable. For the pastoral communities with which Oxfam works in southern Sudan, northern Uganda, and Kenya, conflict is the most pervasive threat to day-to-day survival. Grazing ranges have become inaccessible, people have lost animals, and are therefore less able to withstand adverse conditions such as drought. At the same time, the constant uprooting of communities hampers efforts to develop health care and education, and improve production, to strengthen survival strategies.

Within this broad picture, women suffer disproportionately from the effects of conflict. The loss of male labour forces women to take on more tasks in addition to those of household manager and care provider, often in traumatic situations with little support. Over 80 per cent of refugees are women and their children, and refugee women are especially vulnerable since the traditional support and kinship structures which offered them some protection at home have often broken down. According to one study carried out on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 200 cases of rape were recorded in the refugee
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camps of north-eastern Kenya during the first half of 1993 alone. (The study concluded that the real rate was probably ten times higher.)\textsuperscript{16} Women also bear the wider costs of maintaining family welfare when men leave their villages to join the ranks of combatants, or are killed. In many countries, women face cultural and legal barriers in asserting their rights to resources. In southern Sudan, for example, where over half the households are female-headed, widows often face competing claims for ownership of livestock from the husband’s family.\textsuperscript{17}

Anti-personnel mines and livelihoods

Anti-personnel mines have come to symbolise the all-pervasive nature of modern conflict. They were invented as a defensive, tactical battlefield weapon designed to delay and demoralise advancing armies. But today, mines are used as indiscriminate weapons of terror to render fields uncultivable and roads and paths unusable.\textsuperscript{18} They disrupt supplies and destroy food systems — and they kill and maim people. Afghanistan is the most heavily mined country in the world, followed by Angola. In Cambodia, where there are two mines for every child, one person in every 236 is an amputee, and mines claim over 500 victims a month.\textsuperscript{19}

Unlike armed forces, mines do not respect peace settlements. Even after peace returns, civilians continue to be killed and maimed by anti-personnel mines as they try to reclaim their lands. In Mozambique, the South-African-backed rebel movement, Renamo, and government forces, systematically laid mines to disrupt food production in territories under their rival’s control.\textsuperscript{20} Mines were a major hinderance to the development of Oxfam’s programme in Zambezia Province, prior to an extensive demining programme carried out by the Halo Trust. In Afghanistan, there are estimated to be 10 million mines in the fields, and irrigation channels, making it impossible to resume normal life or restart production. The tragedy of one family of returned refugees, interviewed by Oxfam staff in 1993, illustrates the plight of many: within hours of returning, after more than a decade in exile, their daughter was killed when she stepped on a mine. According to British deminers in Afghanistan, it can take six weeks to clear an area the size of a football pitch; at present rates of progress, it will take thousands of years to demine the country.

Structural violence and livelihoods: the Occupied Palestinian Territories

One effect of the television images of current conflicts is that people in the North think of conflict in terms of violent death and destruction. That is the reality in some countries. In others, however, conflict has less visible effects, destroying livelihoods and causing human suffering through forms of structural violence which are no less real, but which lend themselves less readily to sensational news coverage. One powerful example of such violence is to be found in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where Palestinian livelihoods have been systematically undermined by the policies of the Israeli authorities.

Land is one of the issues at the heart of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Since 1967, Israeli authorities and settlers have confiscated over two-thirds of the land area in the West Bank and 40 per cent of the land in the Gaza strip, which is home to a Palestinian population of 750,000 people.\textsuperscript{21} This loss of control over land has been accompanied by a loss of control over the most vital and scarce resource for agricultural production: water. Less than 85 per cent of the aquifer system under the West Bank is used by Palestinians. The rest is diverted through a system of aquifers and deep wells to Israel, which derives a quarter of its water from the West Bank, and Israeli settlements on the West Bank, where water consumption per head is eight times higher than among the Palestinian community. Over half of Palestinian villages have no piped water supply, leaving them dependent on rainfed springs and increasing their vulnerability to water shortages.
The loss of Palestinian control over land and water has been reinforced by Israeli control over markets. Exports of Palestinian fruit and vegetables to Europe have been tightly controlled in the interests of protecting markets for Israeli producers. At the same time, Palestinian exports to Israel have been limited by import controls, whereas Israeli agricultural exports to the OPTs have not been subject to restriction. The destructive effects of this unbalanced trade regime on Palestinian rural livelihoods have been compounded by the Israeli government’s policy of agricultural subsidisation. Cheap credit, minimum price support, investment in marketing infrastructure, and massive irrigation subsidies have meant that Israeli farmers on average receive subsidies equivalent to one-third of the value of their output. Inevitably, these policies have resulted in a decline in agricultural output and employment, and a loss of autonomy for communities in the OPTs.

As agricultural production has declined, Palestinians have become increasingly dependent on employment in Israel. In the mid-1980s around 120,000 people from Gaza crossed into Israel every day to work in factories, fields, and on construction sites. However, as the intifada rebellion against Israeli control spread after 1987, many work-permits for Palestinians were withdrawn. Today, fewer than 20,000 permits are distributed. The results have been devastating. Unemployment in the Gaza strip exceeds 60 per cent, factories and workshops have closed due to the loss of purchasing power, families have been forced to sell off their assets to survive, and social welfare indicators among children have worsened.

Discriminatory economic and social policies have been coupled with a failure to invest in social welfare provision, amounting to a failure to recognise the basic rights of Palestinians to health care. Whereas per capita spending on health for an Israeli citizen is $350, the figure for Palestinians is $35. Poverty, contaminated water supplies, and poor sanitation, mean that preventable diseases such as gastroenteritis, respiratory infections, and diarrhoea are major killers of Palestinian children. Symptoms of malnutrition are found in around one-third of Palestinian children and several epidemic diseases have not yet been eradicated, including typhoid and infectious hepatitis. According to the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, one of Oxfam’s project partners, infant mortality rates are some five times higher in the OPTs than in Israel.

Palestinian civic organisations are attempting to address some of these problems. The Palestinian Hydrology Group is working in the northern part of the West Bank, rehabilitating natural springs and constructing cement storage tanks in districts, such as Tulkarm and Jenin, which suffer from chronic shortages. The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, is part of attempts to establish an embryonic Palestinian health system, and has set up 24 permanent health centres and a mobile clinic system, which provide antenatal care, immunisation, and other preventative healthcare services. The twin aims have been to address the pressing health needs of the Palestinian people and to create a self-reliant health-care system.

The Palestinian people have suffered deprivation and insecurity as a result of Israeli occupation. Ultimately, however, the security of Palestinians and Israelis is interdependent. Most people in both communities are now convinced of the futility of endless conflict and have expressed a willingness to live as neighbours. This new mood was reflected in the widespread support for the peace accord signed, before the assembled ranks of the world’s press, by the Israeli government and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation on the White House lawn in 1993.

Under the peace accord, intended as an interim step towards Palestinian self-rule, Palestinian authorities have recognised Israel’s right to exist in peace. This has removed one of the underlying causes of tension between Israelis and Palestinians. In return, however, Palestinians have been granted little more than restricted municipal authority over Gaza and
Jericho. If this were to be a genuine precursor to the creation of a Palestinian state, such limited beginnings might have been an integral part of a peace process. But that prospect of an independent state is becoming increasingly distant in the face of continued Israeli incursion on to Palestinian lands.

Negotiations on the final resolution of the land issue, which is of fundamental concern to Palestinians, have been deferred until 1996. On present trends, there will be very little to negotiate about by then. Since signing the peace agreement, Israeli authorities, having pledged in 1992 to halt settlement activity, have been supporting the expansion of settlements, especially around East Jerusalem (the future of which is central to the peace process). Settlements on the Green Line between Israel and the West Bank have also been expanded eastwards, in effect redrawing Israel's borders ever deeper into Palestinian territory. Seen from a Palestinian perspective, this is destroying the territorial foundations for the independent state to which they are entitled. Meanwhile, for Gazans denied the opportunity of employment in Israel, peace has meant a Bantustan existence of mass unemployment and worsening poverty, albeit under the nominal banner of Palestinian autonomy. The result is widespread disillusionment, both with the peace process and the Palestinian leadership.26

Seen through Israeli eyes, it is up to the Palestinian authorities to create the security upon which a lasting peace can be built. Faced with repeated attacks from members of militant Islamist groups, security fears in Israel have deepened since the peace accord was signed. Authorities have responded with the planned construction of a vast barbed wire fence around the Gaza strip, and restricting the movements of Palestinians on the West Bank. Yet such measures inevitably reinforce the social pressures which generate violent responses. The danger now is of both sides becoming locked in a vicious downward spiral of violence, as thwarted Palestinian aspiration and deepening Israeli security fears encourage the rise of extremism on both sides. Left unchecked, this spiral will cause the peace agreement to collapse, which would be a disaster for both Palestinians and Israelis.

The diversion of development resources

Contrary to the hopes generated by the end of the Cold War, conflict-related emergencies are absorbing a growing share of international assistance, diverting it from longer-term development. More than half of the UN's budget is now directed towards emergency relief, compared to a quarter in 1989.27 Bilateral and non-governmental aid is also being reallocated. In 1993-94, over 6 per cent of all bilateral assistance, or some $4bn, was spent on emergencies — more than double the level at the start of the decade.28 New claims from the former Soviet Union and the Balkans have added to the demands on the UN. Former Yugoslavia has now become the site of the UN's biggest peace-keeping operation. Since the end of the Cold War, UN operations have involved its diverse agencies in supplying humanitarian assistance, attempting to reduce tension, protecting civilian populations, and overseeing peace processes.

The scale of international funding for conflict-related emergencies points to one of the central dilemmas facing development agencies. As resources are transferred progressively away from longer-term development work, the capacity of the international community to address the underlying causes of conflict is diminished, making future conflict more likely. The upshot is a vicious circle in which more and more development assistance is being diverted into responding to conflicts, whilst totally inadequate resources are invested in poverty reduction, 'preventive' development, and strengthening local conciliation and peace-building initiatives. Quite apart from the human costs of this diversion of resources, responding to conflicts is considerably more costly than preventing them. For example, the
first four months of the US’s involvement in Somalia cost more than $750 million. That sum is roughly equivalent to UNICEF’s entire budget, much of which is an investment in preventing future crises.\textsuperscript{29}

Investing more effectively in conflict prevention is one of the central challenges facing the international community. It is not a question of choosing between long-term development or humanitarian relief, but of finding sufficient resources to do both. In the past, development agencies have seen emergency responses, such as the provision of clean water, public health measures, and the supply of seeds and tools, as a springboard to move from disaster relief to rehabilitation and longer-term development. In some countries — such as El Salvador and Mozambique — the resolution of conflict has at last made rehabilitation and development a real prospect. In others, however, including Sudan, Afghanistan, and Bosnia, continuing conflict makes for a semi-permanent emergency. Under these conditions, there can be no neat progression from disaster relief to development.\textsuperscript{30} Interventions have to be geared towards supporting local survival strategies, building on people’s capacities, and strengthening whatever local structures exist. Support for the efforts of women to develop coping and survival strategies is central to this task. Equally, longer-term development programmes need to build in emergency preparedness and a capacity to be flexible in responding to rising violence and impending conflict. Increasingly, international agencies and NGOs alike must grapple with the dilemma of working in conflict zones where neutrality is at best difficult to maintain, and at worst not recognised in the vocabulary of the parties to the conflict.

**Moral dilemmas of working in situations of conflict**

Long-running civil conflicts and the emergence of ever more complex man-made disasters have created new challenges both for the UN system and for NGOs. Attempts to secure the physical survival of civilians caught in conflict, through the provision of disaster relief, are fraught with difficulty and moral dilemmas. Viewed from the perspective of armed factions bent on terrorising civilian populations, there are no ‘neutrals’ in a conflict. For Serbian forces terrorising Muslim enclaves in Bosnia, for *Interahamwe* militia bent on the extermination of Tutsis, or for Sudanese factions seeking to destroy the social fabric of areas under the control of rival groups, the delivery of humanitarian assistance is inevitably perceived as an act of taking sides: hence their hostility and obstruction towards international initiatives.

What may appear to the perpetrators of terror as a hostile act may appear to the victims of that terror as an excuse for inaction in addressing the underlying causes of their plight. Humanitarian relief, most people would accept, can save lives. But a Bosnian Muslim trapped in the ‘safe zone’ in Bihac might, with some justification, question the purpose of the ‘drip feed’ humanitarian assistance provided by Western governments, when the same governments have failed to use the means at their disposal for protecting basic rights, defending ‘safe zones’, and halting ethnic cleansing.

Governments and the UN face great difficulties in resolving such ‘complex emergencies’. Where the structures of society have broken down, where the causes of conflict are manifold and interconnected, involving economic, ethnic, political, and cultural issues, there can be no simple solutions. Support for peace-making, peace-keeping, reconciliation, and reconstruction, are all vital to restore security. Unfortunately, Northern governments have seldom attempted to address these tasks in an integrated manner, especially where they do not perceive a strategic interest. Instead, they have focused on funding emergency relief, increasingly through NGOs. The danger is that NGOs are becoming a humanitarian cover for failure to address the more fundamental causes of conflicts.
Aid and neutrality

The humanitarian imperative to relieve suffering can involve agencies such as Oxfam in complex moral dilemmas, where the relative merits of action and inaction have to be considered. At what point, for example, does food aid become a means of prolonging a war which is destroying more lives than humanitarian assistance can save? Should aid agencies negotiate access to conflict zones with armed groups who have been responsible for appalling human rights violations? There are no easy answers to such questions, especially for agencies caught up in the logistics of responding to a major crisis. Sometimes people in Bosnia vent their anger on aid workers, who offer food or clothing but seem to have done nothing to try to stop the war.

The difficulties inherent in striking a balance are illustrated by events in Southern Sudan. UN agencies responded to the 1988-1989 famine by developing, in negotiation with the Khartoum Government and the SPLA, a humanitarian aid plan, known as Operation Lifeline Sudan, for delivering assistance through agreed access routes. The plan succeeded in stemming the famine and, despite frequent violations by combatants and obstructions to full access, continues today. Civilian lives have been saved in some areas; however, people in other critical areas, such as the Nuba mountains, have not received adequate aid. The food aid has also been appropriated by armed forces to maintain garrison towns, feed troops, generate income, and expand the authority of rival groups over civilian areas.

Guilty and innocent in Rwanda

Particularly stark dilemmas have faced Oxfam and other agencies in and around Rwanda. There is currently a profound debate over whether to continue providing relief to refugees in camps in Tanzania and Eastern Zaire. The camps in Zaire, holding some 630,000 refugees, are now largely controlled by those who masterminded the killing of up to one million Rwandans between April and July 1994. Having condemned the genocide and demanded that its perpetrators be brought to justice, Oxfam and other agencies have found themselves in the invidious position of delivering aid through structures controlled by the very people responsible for the crimes committed in Rwanda. Hutu militia leaders control the camps and are using them as a base from which to plan armed incursions into Rwanda, and are forcibly preventing refugees from returning home. It is difficult to imagine a graver abuse of international development assistance. Some agencies, unwilling to work with people who are guilty of genocide, have pulled out. Yet if all agencies withdraw, what would become of the hundreds and thousands of innocent and vulnerable refugees, particularly women and children, whose survival depends on the food and clean water provided by the aid agencies?

There is an additional problem. Nobody disputes the fact that there are many in the refugee camps who are guilty of genocide. But to argue, as some human rights groups do, that aid agencies should deny aid to people in the camps who are suspected of committing human rights abuse, would put agencies in the position of becoming judge, jury, and executioner, passing possible death sentences on individuals who have not had a fair trial. In theory, it is the duty of host governments and UNHCR to determine which Rwandans now living in neighbouring countries are true ‘refugees’. Dr Boutros-Ghali proposed to the UN Security Council that a security operation should be authorised to do this. Yet, despite an international campaign, the governments who could deliver the resources see Central Africa as peripheral to their interests and have failed to act on the Secretary-General’s advice.

Human rights and relief

Article Three of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: ‘Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.’ While humanitarian agencies have traditionally seen the lack of material resources (food, clean
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water, sanitation) as the most pressing concern, human rights groups have focused on violations to physical security and civil rights. This compartmentalised approach is no longer valid. The indivisibility of rights means that the right to relief, for example, is neither more nor less important than the right to protection from physical attack. Indeed, the enjoyment of one right is often conditional on the protection of the other. Difficult judgements may have to be made on what action will do most to relieve suffering, both in the short and longer terms. For example, in Kumi in 1989, Oxfam suspended relief operations in protest at aspects of the Ugandan government's anti-insurgency campaign. In this case, government policy was changed and relief operations were resumed.

Despite their different position in this debate, and despite problems of NGOs failing to coordinate their interventions, some humanitarian agencies are working together to address common concerns. In Goma, for example, MSF-Holland, MSF-Belgium, Oxfam UK/I, and others, have formed a coalition to develop a common platform and maximize their influence with UNHCR. Aid agencies from around the world are also sharing information and ideas about working in complex emergencies. Such crises, be they in Sudan, Liberia, Somalia or Afghanistan, demand the highest degree of political analysis and critical self-awareness. The debate involves a wide range of people, including human rights groups, UN agencies, UN peacekeepers and multi- and bilateral donors, and should include more people from countries in crisis.

The role of NGOs in situations of conflict

What can NGOs like Oxfam do to help people caught up in situations of conflict? A brief account of some of Oxfam's work illustrates the emergence of new challenges, the continuation of old conflicts, new opportunities for peace, and a wide range of local responses to security threats.

In Bosnia and the Transcaucasus states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, emergency relief has figured prominently, as part of a wider international effort to help people to survive in harsh winter conditions. In Azerbaijan, an Oxfam-supported water engineering project has provided water for 60,000 refugees from the Kalbajar region. Water provision has also been a large part of Oxfam's response in northern Afghanistan, providing for around 20,000 displaced people from Kabul who have fled to Pul-I-Khumri.

Many of the communities with which Oxfam works in Sudan have been displaced several times, losing their cattle, household goods, and crops in the process. For these communities, the primary concern is to reduce vulnerability. Oxfam's programme has focused on women as the most vulnerable group. During 1990-1991, Oxfam gave support to local organisations providing health services to displaced people and orphaned children, and in the following year, to local production of seeds and cereal crops. The programme also started providing basic veterinary services for cattle owners who had moved to Western Equatoria after being displaced from their traditional grazing lands. This veterinary programme, which combines vaccination against rinderpest with training in animal health, provides Dinka cattle owners with a service vital for their livelihoods.

Clean water is a scarce commodity in many of the isolated villages in Lakes Province, many wells having been destroyed or neglected during the war. Local communities, concerned at the threat posed by guinea worm and waterborne diseases, have identified the rehabilitation of boreholes as a major priority. Women attach particular importance to this, both because of the demands imposed on their time by family illness; and because they have to walk long distances to find water. In the Western Lakes area, Oxfam is working with local communities to restore primary health systems which have broken down due to the war, and in distributing seeds, tools, and fishing equipment to enable households to become more self-
reliant. Women's groups, such as those belonging to the New Sudan Women’s Association, have played a central role in identifying needs and in distribution.

Oxfam now plans to support the efforts of communities wanting to leave insecure camps in Equatoria and return home. Plans have been made to provide some 25,000 displaced Dinka women with the seeds and tools which will enable them to rebuild their livelihoods in Bahr el Ghazal. But local efforts at rehabilitation are highly vulnerable to conflict. During the first half of 1994, for example, a Khartoum government offensive led to the further displacement of 150,000 people, many of them from camps where communities had spent several years rebuilding their lives. This underlines the simple fact that, in the absence of local and international action to achieve peaceful conflict resolution, relief measures are unable to provide a secure foundation for sustainable livelihoods.

Southern Africa was the site of some of the worst emergencies witnessed by Oxfam in the 1980s. Today, there is renewed hope. The peace settlement in Mozambique has enabled work towards rehabilitation, providing seeds and tools for populations returning to Zambezia and Niassa provinces. There are hopes now that a successful outcome to peace talks in Angola will make a longer-term development programme possible in that country also. Such a programme has already begun to emerge in the town of Cubal, where Oxfam has supported an integrated water, sanitation, and health management programme, originally developed in response to a huge increase in the numbers of displaced people arriving from war zones. That programme has had a positive impact on the lives of people in Cubal. If the war continues, it will serve as a model for the development of Oxfam’s programme in other parts of the country. If the peace holds, the priority will be to support the return of the half-a-million people who have been displaced from Benguela Province, enabling them to re-establish agricultural production. Such a programme would involve not merely the distribution of seeds and tools, and provision of safe water supplies but also investment in the restoration of infrastructure and the government’s capacity to maintain it. Developments in Angola will depend, to a considerable degree, on whether the international community commits itself to supporting the peace process.

Many of the conflict-related problems faced by Oxfam’s project partners do not receive much international attention. In Peru, for example, some 600,000 people have been driven from their homes by civil war and violence in the countryside. Large numbers of these people now live in the city of Ayacucho, where Oxfam’s project partners are supporting efforts to establish land rights, providing basic housing materials, and organising therapy for children traumatised by violence.

What these local initiatives have in common is a concern to reduce the vulnerability and stress facing communities trapped in conflict. Ensuring survival is a first step. But the wider objective is to build self-reliance and enhance the capacity of people either to adapt to the insecurities associated with conflicts, or to grasp the opportunities provided by peace.

**Winning the peace**

Unless the underlying causes of violence are addressed as part of the peace process, the potential for renewed conflict will remain intact. This is powerfully illustrated by the experience of El Salvador, where forms of injustice and inequalities handed down from the colonial period to the present day fuelled the country’s civil war. Today, the fighting has stopped; but as the following quotation suggests, the struggle for peace and justice continues:

*The struggle is not over; the peace accords have brought a ceasefire, the shooting has stopped and the bombing has stopped, but the roots that gave rise to the war are still there.*

These are the words of Miriam Ramos,
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Mayoress of the municipality of Perquin. They eloquently summarise the situation in El Salvador. Much has been achieved in terms of ending the armed conflict which paralysed the country for 14 years and creating a framework for peace. The UN has played a central role in these achievements. However, the structural roots from which the conflict sprang remain intact. Social injustice and the denial of basic rights have survived the peace settlement. Grossly unequal land distribution, one of the main causes of the war, has yet to be properly addressed. Unless those issues are tackled and the foundations for a new social order established, there is a real danger that the peace will be lost.

The UN's involvement in El Salvador's peace settlement extended from peacemaking, to peace-keeping and post-conflict reconstruction. Both of the first two tasks were performed with remarkable success — a success made possible by a growing recognition on the part of the El Salvador business elite, the government, and the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) that the civil war had reached a stalemate. Pressure from the US on the El Salvador military to enter negotiations, reversing past policy, reinforced the peace process. Between 1990 and 1992, the UN monitored the ceasefire and sponsored peace talks. These culminated in a series of peace accords, covering demobilisation, the reform of the judiciary, and measures to support post-conflict reconstruction. The UN verification mission (ONUSAL) played a key role in protecting human rights and overseeing compliance with the peace accords. Demobilisation was followed by elections, which saw the FMLN force a second-round run-off in the presidential elections, and establish itself as the main opposition to the ARENA government.

In contrast to peace-making and peace-keeping, the task of post-conflict reconstruction has been less successfully addressed. The peace accords themselves speak of an approach to reconstruction which 'reflects the will of the nation'. They include a programme for land-transfer to refugees and internally displaced people previously living in former conflict zones, and a commitment to supporting community initiatives. However, two years after the accords, many of the beneficiaries of the land-transfer programme had still not received titles to land. In the province of Morazan, where Oxfam is supporting local NGOs working to resettle returning populations, no land at all had been distributed by mid-1994.

Equally disconcerting has been the adoption of a top-down approach to development, which has ignored the wealth of community initiative built up during the war years. The National Reconstruction Plan (NRP) is a blueprint for economic management drawn up by government and donors, with its focus firmly on large-scale infrastructural projects. Pro-government NGOs have received the bulk of funding for community initiatives, while many of Oxfam's partners with expertise in grassroots work with communities in former conflict zones have been bypassed. Municipalities formerly controlled by the FMLN have also faced extreme difficulty in obtaining funds.

Post-war structural adjustment

One of the reasons for the government's failure to build a new model of development from below can be traced to the economic reforms which it has embraced. Under a structural adjustment programme, negotiated with the World Bank and the IMF prior to the peace accords, the focus of economic policy has been upon export-led agricultural growth, the accelerated commercialisation of farming, a reduction in the role of the state, allied to stringent and deflationary controls over government spending. Seen through the lens of history there is something incongruous in this approach to structural adjustment. After all, post-war reconstruction in Europe and Japan was based upon expansionary economic policies designed to restore infrastructure and wider economic activity. Similarly, the state was allocated a pivotal role in developing health, education and social welfare systems. Yet in El
Salvador, where there is a vital need for planned reconstruction, the state is being pushed to the margins of economic life. Moreover, free-market growth prescriptions are being applied in a context where the vast majority of the rural poor are excluded from markets. As Miriam Ramos' observation cited above suggests, this is not a strategy for 'winning the peace'.

The failure to develop a form of structural adjustment more compatible with the needs of poverty reduction in a post-war context, reflects a wider institutional failure. Negotiations between the World Bank, the IMF, and the El Salvador government were entirely separate from the UN-mediated peace agreements. The resulting mismatch between the structural adjustment programme on the one side and reconstruction on the other represents a lost opportunity to establish a framework for poverty reduction. For the World Bank and the IMF, development in El Salvador appears to be first and foremost a matter of liberalising markets, concentrating resources on the most commercially developed areas, reducing inflationary pressure through stringent monetary management, and providing 'bolt-on' measures for poverty alleviation through social welfare programmes.

**Building on local initiatives**
The alternative approach would be to build upon the 'popular economy': the vast range of activities developed by communities to sustain their livelihoods during the civil war. An example is the Agrarian Reform Coffee Growers' Association (ARCGA), an umbrella group of 17 co-operatives supported by Oxfam. Like other smallholder producers of cash crops, coffee farmers find it difficult to get credit or to sell their produce, and are locked into highly unequal relations with powerful intermediaries, typically selling just after the harvest when prices are low, to meet immediate cash needs. Monopolistic private trading companies control coffee exports. The result is a system which transfers the bulk of the value of coffee produced by smallholders out of the local economy. The ARCG is challenging this system by providing credit through a revolving fund, market information, and processing facilities. A far higher proportion of the final export price stays in the hands of coffee growers and boosts the local economy. With the end of the war, it is precisely this sort of initiative that should be supported if reconstruction is to lay the basis for a longer-term strategy to combat poverty. Yet these small farmer and co-operative initiatives, while technically and commercially viable, cannot get credit through formal channels.

Improved health care and education is also vital. In Chalatenango, a Health Promoters' Association mobilised local communities to develop preventive health care systems during the civil war. Now that the government is refusing to support the maintenance of these systems or to assume responsibility for primary health care, the Association is continuing its work. In the capital, San Salvador, the San Luis community organised basic social welfare provision during the civil war. It is now helping to develop small-scale enterprises to generate local employment and purchasing power.

These examples could be multiplied many times over. What they illustrate is the enormous potential of vulnerable communities to tackle poverty reduction through local initiatives. However, grassroots actions must be matched with government investment to restore social and economic infrastructures. In southern San Vicente, for example, Oxfam project partners identify the need for major road repairs, electricity provision, clean water, and investment in river embankments to prevent seasonal flooding, as major priorities, which are beyond the scope of community initiatives.

Community initiatives provide a framework for a new type of development model, in which poor people act as the motor force for economic recovery and poverty reduction, rather than awaiting the benefits of growth generated by others. Government and international financial institutions have a responsibility to support such initiatives, in the interests of both peace and social justice. But little will be achieved
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without land reform. El Salvador's highly inequitable system of land ownership, in which a small oligarchy owns over three-quarters of cultivable area, was the central cause of war — and it is the biggest obstacle to winning the peace.

Cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention

There is increasing agreement among policymakers that preventive diplomacy and comprehensive policies to address the underlying causes of conflict are needed — yet these policies remain conspicuous by their absence.

Without effective conflict prevention, peace and security are bound to remain elusive goals. Once widespread violence is taking place, death, destruction, and suffering are inevitable, and it becomes even more difficult to resolve the underlying causes of the conflict. While the international community has an obligation to ameliorate suffering where conflict occurs, armed humanitarian intervention, sanctions, appeals to international law, and UN resolutions are blunt instruments for achieving peace. There are sound economic as well as moral reasons for investment in conflict prevention. Failure to avert conflict in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia has imposed a huge financial burden on the UN and the international community. In Somalia, for every $1 in food aid which was delivered, $10 was spent on the military and administrative machine which delivered it. On economic as well as humanitarian grounds, therefore, the real battles for peace have to be fought before wars begin.

The fallacy of containment

Winning the battle for peace will require new ways of thinking about conflict. Northern governments are reluctant to commit scarce financial resources to conflicts which have not registered as a source of public concern, or do not represent an immediate threat to their peace and security. The 'CNN factor' reinforces this approach, by focusing public attention upon violence which has already escalated into killing on a large scale. Moreover, the UN system itself is not well adapted to conflict prevention. When that system was established, security was perceived as a military and diplomatic issue. The aim was to defend the territorial integrity of member-states, while renouncing the use of force in international relations, and to respond to crises as they occurred. The end result is a political and institutional framework geared towards responding to conflicts, rather than preventing them from occurring in the first place.

The United Nations Development Programme has challenged this approach by elaborating a broader concept of 'human security', which requires international co-operation to address problems of chronic hunger, environmental degradation, mass unemployment and disease. Through this focus, the UNDP has drawn attention to the profound security threat poised by poverty and social dislocation, and the widening gap between rich and poor countries and rich and poor people.

Despite the favourable prospects for growth in East Asia, the absolute number of poor people in the developing world will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. So will the gulf in living standards between the global underclass and the relatively wealthy. Proximity to centres of prosperity exacerbates the stresses associated with poverty and inequality. As Mexico is integrated into the North American economy, millions of Mexican peasant farmers face destitution. The uprising in Chiapas has already suggested that they will not accept the destruction of their livelihoods without a struggle.

Europe and North Africa

In Moroccan and Algerian cities, which lie close to southern Europe, unemployment rates range from 40 per cent to 70 per cent; poverty levels are worsening, providing highly combustible levels of frustration which, given the
perceived subservience of regional governments to Western states, adds to the attraction of fundamentalist politics. The other attractive option, promoted by tempting televised portrayals of European lifestyles, is migration.

Northern governments are not unaware of the security threats posed by these trends. The European Commission, reviewing relations with the Mahgreb countries of North Africa, commented:

*At present, political, economic and social conditions in a number of these countries are sources of instability leading to mass migration, fundamentalist extremism, terrorism, drugs and organised crime.*

But while the threats to security may have registered, they have been exacerbated by political inertia. For years, the European Union and the international community ignored Algeria, refusing to reduce the country's crushing debt burden, which immeasurably deepened the poverty of its people, or to provide the development assistance and trading opportunities needed to offer hope for the future. Europe's indifference changed in 1992, when the Algerian government lost an election to fundamentalist parties which, with the European Union's implicit support, it promptly annulled. Violence between the government and its fundamentalist opponents is now claiming between 500 and 1,000 lives a week. In response, a twin-track containment strategy has been adopted. First, there has been a flurry of activity to write-off debt and provide billions of dollars in international aid through the IMF. Second, the NATO alliance has been requested to develop a security network for protecting southern Europe against instability in the region. The tragedy is that the international community seemed indifferent to the impoverishment and marginalisation suffered by Algerians, until Western governments discerned a direct threat to their own interests. Far more could have been done to address the underlying causes of conflict at an early stage. This would have averted the need for implausible and costly military plans now being considered by NATO aimed at ring-fencing North Africa to 'protect' citizens in Europe from political and economic refugees.

**The drugs trade**

There are parallels with this 'wait for the horse to bolt' approach in the response to the international drugs trade. In countries such as Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, rural poverty, compounded by debt and the collapse of commodity prices, has made the production of narcotic drugs one of the few viable means to a livelihood for small farmers; meanwhile 'drugs barons' have extended their violent sway over national economies and created a regional drugs economy now estimated to be worth $500bn. The US has attempted to address the issue through a combination of stick and carrot, financing the destruction of coca and supporting one-off payments to take plants out of cultivation. The more effective solution would be to eradicate the poverty which forces producers into drugs cultivation.

**Immigration**

Containment is also a growing feature of immigration policies in the industrialised world. Often presented through rhetoric stressing the advantages of 'staying at home', these policies are increasingly oriented towards protecting rich countries from problems of conflict and poverty. New and ingenious legal formulations have been found to deny refugees their proper rights. Refugees from Sri Lanka and Bosnian Muslims arriving in some European countries are no longer 'refugees' in law, but 'externally displaced': a subtle legal distinction which allows their deportation.* In France, the government has reversed a 200-year-old policy of giving asylum to those in need, adopting in 1993 a 'zero refugee' policy. The interdiction and forcible return of Haitian refugees by the US navy is another example. Not only are the refugee policies of Northern governments becoming less humane, but they also fail to address the underlying causes of the refugee problem: the poverty and social dislocation
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experienced in much of the Third World. Against this background, the broader measures advocated elsewhere in this report for redistributive policies, debt relief, more equitable management of global commodity markets, and improved development assistance, should be seen as part of a wider, integrated strategy for conflict resolution.

Reducing arms sales

It is sometimes objected that, in a world of scarce financial resources, it is simply not possible for Northern governments to create the social and economic conditions for conflict prevention. Perhaps not — but far more could be done. Redirecting some of the $670bn which Northern governments invest in military expenditure would create new resources for development and poverty reduction. For example, if Britain were to earmark just a quarter of the savings achieved by bringing its defence spending into line with its European partners by the year 2000, it could meet the 0.7 per cent of GNP aid target, and spend ten times more on meeting priority social needs in developing countries. Reduced military spending would also help to address another of the underlying causes of conflict: the export of weapons to the developing world.

Double standards abound in international relations; and nowhere more so than in the international arms trade. Western governments repeatedly endorse UN appeals for reduced military spending in the South, rightly pointing to its corrosive effect on development. The Security Council issues ringing appeals for world peace. Yet the world’s richest countries are responsible for promoting arms exports, sometimes diverting development assistance to do so. Sermons on peace and democracy contrast with policies which inflame conflicts by providing the means for mass death and destruction.

Between them, the five Permanent Members of the Security Council — the US, Russia, China, France, and Britain — account for over four-fifths of the weapons exported to developing countries. These weapons have wrought human destruction on a massive scale. From time to time they have also been used against UN troops, or on soldiers from the supplying country, as they were during the Gulf War and in Somalia. Apart from destroying human lives, arms exports have reinforced the underlying causes of conflict by diverting resources from development. Developing countries now account for 15 per of world military spending, or $118bn annually.

To its credit, the IMF has attempted to draw public attention to the huge wastage caused by military spending, calling for a reduction in expenditure on arms by developing countries. The Fund’s managing director, Michel Camdessus, has observed:

*In a world of scarce resources we would be derelict in our duty to our membership if we were to ignore the*
haemorrhage of financing from productive to unproductive sectors of national economies.

Governments in many developing countries have been derelict in their duty to their own citizens in this respect. But the industrialised countries, too, have been guilty of encouraging military spending.

Part of the problem confronting Northern governments is that they have developed arms industries which rely heavily upon exports to the developing world for their financial viability. Production of the European Union’s ‘Eurofighter’, designed for combat against the former Soviet Union, is going ahead, with developing countries being cultivated as export markets now that European military spending is falling. Over three-quarters of the military exports from Britain, the world’s fourth largest supplier, are destined for developing countries.42 In all, the developing world accounts for over 60 per cent of international weapons trade. These imports are sustained mainly by diverting domestic resources, but military assistance, principally in the form of cheap credit, also plays an important role.

Contrary to the claims of most Northern governments, responsibility for encouraging arms exports cannot be evaded as being a legitimate response to market demand. To some extent, they create the demand by locking countries into ruinous arms races, as each attempts to keep pace with the military hardware of the other. One such arms race is that involving India and Pakistan, diverting sufficient resources to account for one-fifth of global weapons imports.43 The purchasers must bear the main responsibility for the destruction that will occur should conflict break out, but the suppliers are not without blame for encouraging this huge diversion of resources away from priority social needs.

With the end of the Cold War and a cumulative peace dividend estimated at over $900bn since 1987, the industrial world has an opportunity to scale down its military production capacity by diverting it, through public investment, into socially useful activity.44 It also has an opportunity to take some responsibility for regulating arms exports to the developing world. Greater public accountability would be a step in the right direction.

Aid and arms

The use of British aid to smooth the way for military contracts with Malaysia drew attention to the limitation of accountability in Britain. So, too, did the Iraq 'supergun' affair. This revealed a web of intrigue, official deception, and covert assistance to provide exports to Iraq during its war with Iran, despite an official prohibition.45 Private arms traders, operating in a murky world of secrecy, represent a major problem of control in the arms trade. But what the 'supergun' affair demonstrated was the complicity of governments in allowing arms to be shipped into conflict zones, often in defiance of UN resolutions to which they are party. As the head of the public enquiry established to investigate the latter affair observed: 'citizens have a right to know what governments are doing in their names.'46 This applies even more when public funds are being used for purposes which violate the fundamental rights of citizens in other countries.

There has never been an effective system for monitoring and regulating arms exports, either nationally or internationally. The UN’s Register of Conventional Arms, established in 1991, was a step in the right direction. However, it suffers from divergent interpretations and weak reporting procedures. Arms exporters in Latin America and Asia have been particularly recalcitrant in supplying information; and few importers report their purchases. Another serious flaw is that the Register does not cover small arms, landmines, cluster bombs or fragmentation grenades: the very categories of weapons responsible for the majority of casualties in most conflicts.47

In Oxfam’s view, the UN Register should be reconstituted under a committee of high-level experts reporting directly to the Secretary-General. That committee should be given wide-
ranging powers to investigate the arms exports of major suppliers, and to develop uniform and transparent systems of accountability. It should also be empowered to investigate direct and indirect subsidies to the weapons industry, including those given through development assistance budgets. The terms of reference for reporting to the committee should be extended to include all small weapons. Such a system, together with an enforceable code of conduct on international arms transfers, could provide the framework for addressing the second major challenge: namely, a systematic reduction in the volume of military exports. It could also be used as a basis for levying a 1 per cent tax on arms exports, to be used by the UN for conflict-prevention initiatives. Without an open and carefully monitored international agreement, any attempt to limit arms exports would founder as countries sought, through covert activity, to protect themselves against loss of market share.

The UNDP has advocated a 3 per cent reduction annually in military spending up to 2000.48 If implemented, this would release some $460bn for social development and environmental improvement, providing the resources to demobilise armed forces in the South and relocate workers in the weapons industries of the North. This is a win-win option, which governments ought to endorse. However, arms exporters should also endorse a parallel commitment to reduce by an equivalent amount the value of the arms they export to developing countries and phase out all forms of assistance for military exports. Any linkage between development assistance and arms exports should be prohibited, with immediate effect; and the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD should be asked to prepare comprehensive reports on the current practices of its members in linking aid and arms.

A ban on anti-personnel mines

One category of weapons merits especially urgent action. In theory, the use of landmines against civilian populations was prohibited by the UN Convention on Inhumane Weapons which came into force in 1983. In practice, that convention is a dead letter because it does not apply to civil conflicts, has no monitoring procedure, and no system of sanctions to enforce it. All of which helps to explain why over one million new landmines are planted annually.

According to the US State Department, there are between 65-110 million mines scattered across 60 countries, most of them in unmarked sites.49 Many of them were indiscriminately scattered from the air, as they were by the Americans in Vietnam and Russians in Afghanistan. Others are deliberately planted in fields and on footpaths by government and rebel forces. What makes them particularly attractive to combatants is their price, which can be as little as $3, and their efficiency in inflicting terror. What makes them particularly hideous from a humanitarian perspective is that they are indiscriminate. Mines are unable to distinguish between the boot of a soldier and the feet of children playing or tending animals, of women collecting water, or men walking to markets.

Every day, more than 20 civilians are killed by landmines. More than double that number are severely injured. For the poor, physical trauma is compounded by the implications of amputation or blindness for their livelihoods.50 In Angola, which hosts one mine for every person in the country, an estimated 70,000 people have been maimed, blinded or severely disfigured. This is the story of one Angolan victim, José Jamie, a father of six children, who lost both legs just above the knee, recorded by an Oxfam staff member in the town of Luena:

When I met José five days after his accident he was in Luena Hospital in a great deal of pain. He was speaking in a strained whisper, barely audible above the sobbing of his wife. His legs had been amputated and his two stumps bandaged. His wife kept repeating 'how are we going to survive, we have six children.' In a town of over 200,000 people swelled by refugees fleeing the war, the only way of surviving is to grow your own food or rely on UN aid flights. Now José is no longer able to farm his land and UN food is not guaranteed.
José had no idea why the mines had been laid on a path so close to town, since UNITA forces are over 20 miles away. He whispered: 'it's like being dead, without legs what can I do?'

So much suffering is caused to civilians by anti-personnel mines, that in a civilised world, governments would have banned their production and use long ago. Their reasons for not doing so defy belief. The British Government, for example, opposes a comprehensive ban because it believes that anti-personnel mines retain a legitimate military function, and that more sophisticated versions can be programmed to self-destruct. Some mines, it seems, are less reprehensible and altogether more civilised than others. Not, however, if you have the misfortune to tread on one.

Research by the Pentagon casts doubt on the value of anti-personnel mines to the military. The faith placed in self-destruct and self-neutralising mechanisms also seems misplaced. Mines experts estimate a 10 per cent failure rate of anti-personnel mines to self-destruct or self-neutralise, leaving land contaminated and unusable. Whatever the military utility of anti-personnel mines, it is clearly quite disproportionate to the threats they pose to civilians. Their use violates the Geneva Convention, which prohibits acts aimed specifically at harming civilians, and indiscriminate killing. The actions of those who plant anti-personnel mines and those who supply them are in breach of this Convention, and should be treated as such. Governments who, by drawing unworkable distinctions which obstruct a comprehensive ban on the production, possession, use, and export of mines, are similarly in breach of the Convention, and share in the responsibility for the continuing slaughter of civilians by these indiscriminate weapons.

The UN’s role in responding to conflict

In the immediate aftermath of the cold War, amid heady talk of a new world order, there was a tendency to regard the UN as the answer to all of the world’s problems. But as intra-state conflicts expanded across the globe, and governments allowed one UN mission after another to end in disaster, this optimism quickly changed to pessimism about the UN’s ability to get anything right. Ultimately, much of the UN’s effectiveness in responding to conflict is determined by member states, and its well-publicised failures reflect the lack of political will of governments and their failure to develop coherent strategies. Like falling dominoes, these failures have had damaging knock-on effects. The fiasco of the UN’s intervention in Somalia led to an extreme reluctance to get involved in other conflicts, contributing to the woefully inadequate UN response to genocide in Rwanda. Such cycles of inaction and over-reaction are inherently damaging for international efforts to establish a credible response to conflict. What is needed is a more considered appraisal of the successes, failures, and limitations of the role of the UN, in which its deficiencies are reviewed and practical recommendations for improving its responses are developed.

Preventive diplomacy

The most urgent task currently facing the international community is the development of effective policies for averting conflict. This was recognised by the UN Secretary-General, who stressed the importance of more effective preventive diplomacy in his 1992 Agenda for Peace. Yet in reality, if not in rhetoric, the international community continues to regard investment in this area as a diversion from the more pressing concerns of responding to conflicts. This attitude, if it continues, will represent a serious threat to future peace and security.

The dangers of diplomatic inertia are nowhere more apparent than in Bosnia. In 1992, UK Prime Minister John Major opened the London Conference on Bosnia with a ringing declaration of principles: 'The international community will not accept that Bosnia can be partitioned by conquest. Those who suppose
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that they can secure international acceptance of military advantages gained by force are wrong.52 In fact, they have been proved right. Since 1992, the Bosnian Serbs have pursued with impunity their original aim of acquiring almost three-quarters of the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina to build a 'Greater Serbia'.53

Current peace plans drawn up by the 'Contact Group' of Britain, the US, Russia, France, and Germany, will leave the Bosnian Serbs in control of fourth-fifths of the territory they have gained by force — and it will leave as displaced people over one million people who have been 'ethnically cleansed' from their homes. The contrast between the high-minded resolutions of the UN and the international community's inability to stop territorial gains achieved by force of arms, has done immeasurable damage to the credibility of the UN. It has also dealt a blow to international cooperation for conflict resolution, and generated tensions between Western governments.

The virtues of different peace plans and strategies for protecting the Bosnian Muslims are open to debate. What is beyond dispute, however, is that far more could have been done to avert the crisis. For almost three decades, Bosnia's security had rested upon the principle that its three constituent elements would co-exist as equal partners within a republic which, in turn, would be represented in the complex system of federal checks and balances which underpinned the national state. With Germany's unilateral recognition of Croatia in December 1991, the entire system began to fragment into competing and hostile nationalist claims.54

Faced with the alternative of an alliance with Croatia (which would have been regarded as a hostile act by Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs), absorption into a Greater Serbia (which linked Serbian communities from Serbia proper across Bosnia and into Croatia), or independence, Bosnia chose the latter, and was recognised by the EU. Predictably, recognition of the Republics without resolving the central political questions of minority rights, acted as a green light for the territorial claims of Serbia and Croatia.

Western Europe and the US could have used their influence to help to identify a peaceful road from the former Yugoslavia, defining new borders, establishing guarantees of minority rights, and adjudicating between rival claims to self-determination. Instead, they announced their support for the two principles of self-determination and territorial integrity, without realising that, for Bosnia, the first principle was bound to contradict the second and lead to war.55 Once open warfare had started, these political questions were bound to be settled by force of arms, to the advantage of the more powerful sides. The UN declared a series of 'safe areas' and then did nothing to defend them. They proceeded to place an arms embargo on the whole of former Yugoslavia, in effect sharply discriminating against the Bosnian Muslims, who had virtually no weapons, while the Serbs controlled the massive arsenals of the former national army.

The Bosnian conflict represents in extreme form the high costs associated with diplomatic inertia and the pursuit of narrow foreign policy objectives by individual states. But it is not the only example. Had the international community been more attentive to the human and minority rights situation in Rwanda during 1993, when there was clear evidence of human rights abuse, incitement to ethnic hatred, and the training of the Interahamwe militia who were later to carry out the genocide, the tragedy in that country might have been avoided.

The UN Secretary-General attempted to address this problem by appointing a Special Representative in October 1993.56 By then, however, the peace accords made in August between the government and the Rwanda Patriotic Front had already started to unravel, exacerbating tensions. Moreover, his appointment was not followed by concerted international action to make the Rwandan government reconsider the course upon which it had embarked. The UN's failure to act in response to the widespread violence in Burundi in late 1993 probably added to the Rwandan government's conviction that there would be no effective action to restrain its activities.
If the international community believes that conflict prevention is a priority, then preventive diplomacy will have to be taken more seriously. In particular, the UN Security Council must become more alert to early warnings from a range of sources, including governments, NGOs, and the media, and urgently consider preventive action in response. This task might be facilitated by the creation of a new Office of Preventive Diplomacy; or simply by improving existing machinery. The UN should also establish a roster of human rights monitors who can be rapidly deployed to help to calm dangerous situations and provide information to guide the UN in further action. A parallel roster of experienced and competent people is needed for swift deployment as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General to undertake preventive diplomacy.

At the same time, governments, regional bodies, and NGOs, need to do more to strengthen local conciliation and peace-building initiatives, and at all times work to support, not undermine, local capacities and structures, recognising that ultimately the solutions to conflicts have to be found within the societies in which they arise.

The elements for an effective UN response

Responding to complex emergencies has presented formidable new challenges to all the major actors and particularly to the UN. Attempting to provide humanitarian assistance, resolve conflicts, and oversee peace settlements create problems which are far more intractable than those associated with traditional peacekeeping.

There are no blueprints for successful intervention in complex emergencies, each of which throws up its own challenges and problems. There are, however, lessons to be learnt from past policy mistakes. One lesson is that the threat to use force in defence of civilian populations is not effective where there is no intention of doing so. Indeed, such threats become a threat to the credibility of the UN itself when they are ignored with apparent impunity by armed militia.

This has happened in Bosnia, where UN troops on the ground and occasional NATO air-strikes have been unable to deter aggression against communities in UN-designated safe areas. Differences within the NATO alliance and the Contact Group on Bosnia have compounded the problem. The US Administration has long advocated more intensive use of air strikes and has unilaterally lifted its arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims. The European Union view is that such an approach offers little more than the hope of a 'level killing field', from which the Serbs would emerge victorious. What is not in dispute is that more concerted use of air-power would effectively terminate the UN's humanitarian mission, illustrating the recurrent tensions between providing humanitarian relief, protecting civilians, and ending conflict.

The US approach is more of an expression of moral indignation than a coherent policy for achieving a just settlement (a fact underlined by US support for a peace plan which recognises the territorial gains of the Serbs). The European alternative is scarcely more credible, not least given the limited ability of the UN to provide humanitarian assistance. What the limitations of both positions underline is the potentially contradictory character of policies designed to address different aspects of emergencies. There are, of course, no easy answers to such genuine dilemmas. However, more decisive action at an early stage of the conflict might have acted as a deterrent to aggression; for instance, the international community might have considered establishing Bosnia as a UN Trust Territory, disarming militia, and defending its borders against external aggression.

Sanctions
Sanctions can potentially play a role in creating the conditions for peace by deterring potential combatants. They could certainly have been applied more rigorously and at an earlier stage against Serbia. However, sanctions and the threat of sanctions have a murky history, and
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have in the past been manipulated in the interests of major powers. They are notoriously difficult to enforce, and not applied consistently by the international community. For example, Western governments continue to provide Indonesia with military assistance, despite its occupation of East Timor and its well-documented violation of Timorese human rights. In this case, sanctions have never been seriously contemplated, in part because Indonesia represents a lucrative market for Western arms exporters, commercial companies, and foreign investors. In contrast, Western governments have applied highly punitive sanctions against Iraq, seemingly in furtherance as much of US strategic foreign policy objectives as of UN resolutions.

The debate about the use of sanctions is a complex and difficult one, but Oxfam's particular concern is with their social consequences. In Iraq, for example, one UN observer has referred to the conditions they have created as 'pre-famine'. All observers now admit that the conditions in Iraq have become desperate for ordinary people; where they differ is on where the blame lies. Oxfam has responded by helping to supply drinking water in the south, and with an integrated rural reconstruction programme in the north.

However, it is concerned both at the disproportion between the human suffering caused and the objectives of the sanctions; and at the shifting ground which underpins their interpretation. For example, Iraq's recognition of the border with Kuwait was cited as a key condition to be met before consideration could be given to the lifting of the embargo on Iraqi oil sales. However, when Iraq did, in November 1994, recognise this border, the US then stated firmly that this was not enough and that Iraq had to comply with all relevant resolutions. Exactly what constitutes 'relevance' however, is a matter of dispute, between the US and UK on one hand, and the French, Chinese, and Russians on the other.

It seems clear that it is time for an urgent reappraisal of how sanctions are used by the international community. As Dr Boutros-Ghali suggested to the Security Council in January 1995, when sanctions are agreed, the UN should do more to protect humanitarian imports, humanitarian work, and the economies of neighbouring countries.

The need for a rapid response

Another important lesson from past conflicts is that delayed action and incoherent leadership carries with it the potential for disaster. When the killing started in Rwanda, there were over 2000 UN troops in the country, sent there to monitor the cease-fire accord between President Habyarimana and the RPF. The OAU, neighbouring governments, and agencies on the ground, including Oxfam, immediately called on the Security Council to reinforce the contingent. The Council responded by withdrawing the troops, leaving a small rump behind.

The Security Council sought to justify its action by claiming that the UN's 'blue berets' were not equipped to protect lives. Yet the small Ghanaian contingent which remained in the capital Kigali succeeded in protecting some 15,000 asylum seekers. It was not until the end of July, three months after the killing began, that the new contingent of UN peace-keepers arrived. What made the Security Council's inaction doubly inexcusable was the clear evidence, available to the Security Council, that the UN's Convention on Genocide was being violated by a government calling for the extermination of an entire community. The lamentably slow response of the UN was in sharp contrast to the rapidity with which France was able to mobilise a humanitarian force in June 1994 to protect Hutu refugees in the south-west of the country.

So comprehensive was the failure of the UN and its members that the Secretary-General was moved to issue an uncharacteristically stark condemnation. 'We must all recognise,' he said in a report to the Security Council, 'that we have failed in our response to the agony of Rwanda,
and thus have acquiesced in the continued loss of human lives. If there is one single lesson from Rwanda, it is that political inertia must never again be permitted to weaken the capacity of the UN to protect civilians.

Member states should take steps to improve the UN's capacity to prevent or respond to complex, conflict-related emergencies by establishing 'fast-track' stand-by arrangements to provide the UN with the necessary troops, civilian police, logistical support, and equipment to fulfil Security Council resolutions. These arrangements must include field commands and reconnaissance units, and pre-arranged standard fees, so that deployments are not delayed by disputes about finance. In addition, a permanent UN rapid-deployment force for preventive and peacekeeping duties should be created.

The international community could also do far more to strengthen regional capacity for conflict prevention and conflict resolution. This will require financial and logistical support from Western governments. Several African countries, including Zimbabwe and Ghana, offered to send troops to Rwanda if they were provided with the necessary financial and logistical support. Unfortunately, they were not. However, since September 1994, the UK, US, and France have been exploring with the OAU and a number of African governments how Northern governments can support African conflict-prevention and peace-keeping, and similar initiatives could be appropriate elsewhere.

The need for clear objectives

Events in Somalia during 1993 drew attention to another pervasive failure in many UN operations: the lack of clarity with regard both to political and humanitarian objectives and to command structures. The decision of the US to embark on 'Operation Restore Hope', was dictated to a large extent by the public pressure which followed news coverage of the 1992 famine. By the time the troops arrived, over 300,000 Somalis had died. The delivery of bulk food aid did save some lives, but the worst of the food crisis was over. It was replaced by a political crisis, as the UN became entangled in a military conflict with General Aideed, the leader of the largest clan faction, after the breakdown of peace talks. By launching a concerted offensive against Aideed, the UN lost any claim to neutrality, undermining its entire political strategy. It also lost public support, as civilian casualties mounted and reports of human rights abuses by UN troops became widespread. Overlapping military command structures, which resulted in UN forces and the US pursuing different and independent strategies, added to a deepening sense of confusion.

The UN's disastrous military involvement in Somalia ended as it had begun, with media images of the conflict shaping policies. News coverage of the mutilated bodies of US helicopter pilots generated overwhelming public pressure and led the Clinton Administration to fix an early date for US withdrawal. By the beginning of 1994, most UN troops were confined to their barracks. Early 1995 saw the withdrawal of these troops and the looting of what remained of the UN's presence. The failure in Somalia created a pervasive sense of disillusionment over the UN's ability to intervene politically to resolve conflict. It also highlighted the UN's cumbersome command structures and the lack of co-ordination between its different agencies.

The need for improved co-ordination

Part of the problem facing the UN is the sheer size and logistical complexity of many of its operations. To be effective in peace-keeping, these operations require an integrated and coherent command structure, which is capable of responding swiftly to volatile situations. What exists at present is an unwieldy series of chains of command involving the Security Council, national governments, and UN troops on the ground. The time-lag between establishing and deploying intervention forces is also considerable, as was seen in Rwanda.
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With regard to relief operations, governments seem to be moving away from a consensus on how to manage UN humanitarian activities. The high hopes in 1991 for a more effective international system gave rise to a British and German initiative in the G7 and UN for the establishment of the UN’s Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) in 1992. But the DHA has never been given the staff or resources necessary to co-ordinate the different UN agencies involved in humanitarian aid.

Recent experience confirms that the UN’s humanitarian operations are most successful where there is clarity among all the relevant agencies about who is co-ordinating the plan. This can be DHA, as in Rwanda or Angola, or the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), designated as the ‘lead agency’ in former Yugoslavia. An effective UN humanitarian co-ordinator can provide a single point of reference for NGOs, the host government, and other local agencies, facilitating effective co-ordination. Success depends on their having considerable delegated authority from head office in New York or Geneva and active engagement with local agencies and international NGOs.

What is most important is that, in each crisis, the best system of co-ordination should be rapidly agreed and implemented. The UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee, chaired by the head of DHA, and including the heads of the relevant UN agencies and NGO representatives, should meet immediately at the outset of each major humanitarian operation to agree precisely how co-ordination is to be accomplished. In some cases, this should quickly result in the establishment of a DHA field office, such as UNREO in Rwanda or UCAH in Angola, charged not with operational responsibilities, but with placing appropriate co-ordinating staff on the ground.

If the UN were being created today a coherent humanitarian system could be established, integrating the diverse structures needed to address complex emergencies. The problem is that emergency responses are being hampered by the activities of competing agencies with overlapping mandates. Moreover, no part of the UN has a specific mandate to address the problems of the huge and growing number of people who are internally displaced. Except where specifically designated, as in former Yugoslavia, the UNHCR does not have responsibility for people displaced within their own countries. This was one of the reasons why the international response to the enormous flow of refugees into Zaire from Rwanda in mid-1994 was slower than it could have been. Though the unprecedented scale of the crisis meant that the capacity of any system would have been severely strained, the faults of the present one were shown up all too clearly.

The crisis in Rwanda has illustrated other problems in international responses to refugee crises. UNHCR’s mandate to protect refugees is proving unworkable in the face of the former Rwanda government’s violence in the camps around Goma. This is part of a broader picture in which the realities of modern conflict are imposing demands which cannot be met within UNHCR’s existing remit. As UNCHR has expanded its operational relief role, as aid is increasingly a resource that is fought over, and as civilians have become the main targets of conflict, the agency finds it ever more difficult to fulfil its protection mandate. These failures suggest it is high time for a thorough and public evaluation of the work of all the UN’s humanitarian agencies. One task of the evaluation should be determine whether the DHA has been allowed to play an effective co-ordinating role; and if not, whether more radical reform is needed. One option would be to amalgamate the humanitarian functions of the relevant UN agencies and DHA into a single Department for Humanitarian and Refugee Affairs. This would demand political vision and practical changes, including flexibility for the department to recruit able and experienced people at every level.
Creating the conditions for conflict resolution

Where the UN has intervened as an actor in negotiations for conflict resolution and in implementing peace agreements, it has achieved mixed results. In Angola, its earlier efforts to supervise a peace accord and the transition to elections failed. Under the 1991 Bicesse peace accords, which brought a temporary halt to the Angolan conflict, the UN was given responsibility for implementing the peace agreement, including the demobilisation of UNITA forces and arranging elections. It had neither the means nor the mandate to carry out this task.

In September 1993, when the elections were held, there were only 576 UN officials in Angola (compared to the 7,150 who oversaw the transition in Namibia) and the budget for the operation was around $40m (compared to $400m in Namibia, which has a population one-ninth the size of Angola's). For a country the size of Germany, France, and Spain combined, these resources were derisory. The UN’s Representative summarised her invidious position by complaining that the UN ‘had been asked to fly a 747 but had been given fuel only for a DC3’.

To make matters worse, the UN’s mandate did not give it the authority to demand compliance with the demobilisation elements of the peace accord, increasing the risk of violence after the election. That violence duly arrived when UNITA refused to accept the result and launched a military assault on major cities, re-igniting the civil war.

The only positive aspect of this dismal experience was in the lessons learnt, which were duly applied in Mozambique. There the UN was given a central role in monitoring and verifying the ceasefire, overseeing demobilisation, and assisting the electoral process. Demobilisation was delayed, but completed before the date set for elections. One of the reasons for the relative success of the Mozambique peace process was the active involvement of the international community in the four main commissions established to oversee the peace accords. The Supervisory and Monitoring Commission, which had overall responsibility for guaranteeing the implementation of the agreement, included representatives from Germany, Italy, the UK, the US and the OAU. These countries played a critical role when deadlock threatened the electoral process. In contrast to the UN’s operation in Angola, that in Mozambique was well-financed and staffed, with over 7,500 troops overseeing demobilisation. Making the transition from the ending of armed conflict to reconstruction which is able to create the long-term conditions for peace, is the formidable challenge now facing Mozambique and Angola.

Investing in the UN

The nature of conflict in the 1990s and the demands of brokering and implementing peace agreements in countries such as Mozambique and Angola necessitate a strengthening of the internationalist vision of the founders of the UN. Yet political reality, particularly in the wake of the 1994 US mid-term elections, is ever more inwardly-focused, and dictated by domestic opinion polls. Multilateralism is being sacrificed to narrowly-defined national self-interest. In early 1995 the one superpower appears intent on undercutting the viability of the UN at a time of unparalleled need. This isolationism recalls the US decision to stay outside the League of Nations, against President Wilson’s wishes, which undermined the League and its ability to prevent the drift into conflict during the inter-war years.

Critics of the UN, especially in the US, often cite its financial costs as a reason for withdrawing support, claiming the money would be better invested at home. Such views are difficult to square with reality. Currently, the cost of the UN’s emergency, peacekeeping, and humanitarian operations is around $4bn — about the cost of operating the New York fire-brigade. The US military budget is 70 times larger than the UN budget. By any standards, investment in the UN is a small price to pay for a collective security system.
Unfortunately, however, the UN suffers both from a surfeit of expectations and a deficit of resources, because of a persistent under-financing of its operations. Many member states have accumulated large arrears, among them the world's richest economies such as the US, Japan, Italy, Germany, and Russia. These arrears now amount to more than $1.5bn, with the US owing $220m. Another problem is that humanitarian operations are financed by voluntary Consolidated Appeals, most of which — especially in Africa — fall well short of their target. The effectiveness of interventions is inevitably reduced as a consequence.

Matters are likely to get worse over the coming years. The Republican-dominated US Congress regards the UN as a costly failure. Reflecting this new mood, the Clinton Administration has unilaterally declared that it intends to cut the US contribution to peace-keeping costs from just under 32 per cent to 25 per cent of the total. This casts doubts over the capacity of the UN to respond to conflicts, let alone to invest in the diplomacy which might prevent them. With the UN system already stretched to breaking point and new demands on its resources mounting, the creation of a more secure financial base is vital. This should include an increase in the size of the Peace-keeping Reserve Fund from the current $150m to $400m, and an increase in mandatory contributions for humanitarian assistance to reduce dependence on Consolidated Appeals. Immediate payment in full of all arrears may need to be enforced by the imposition of penalties, such as the withdrawal of voting rights, for countries failing to pay; although this would carry the risk of strengthening the arguments of those wishing to withdraw from the UN.

Reform of the Security Council

Financial security is one necessary condition for the viability of the UN. Political credibility is another. Many countries continue to see the UN system, and especially the Security Council at the apex of that system, as a vehicle for the pursuit of Western self-interest. Double standards, it is claimed, abound. Bosnian Muslims contrast the UN's response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with its failure to intervene more forcefully in defending their rights; and Africans contrast the comparatively large commitment of resources to Bosnia with the lamentable performance of the UN in Rwanda.

Whatever their justification, such criticisms inevitably weaken the UN system. Reform of the Security Council is becoming increasingly important if the UN is to develop a collective security system for the twenty-first century. As the Commission on Global Governance put it:

*We believe that the Security Council is too closed a shop. Permanent membership limited to five countries that derive their primacy from events fifty years ago is unacceptable enough. Matters are made worse when working practices reduce transparency.*

The Commission on Global Governance has proposed the creation of a new class of Standing Members, followed by a full-scale review of Security Council membership in the first decade of the next century. Three of these countries, they suggest, should be drawn from the developing world, one from each region, and two from the industrial world. Japan and Germany have already staked claims for membership. Another option would be to consider representation through regional groupings, with countries rotating their place on the Security Council. This would have the advantage of giving smaller countries, presently excluded from effective participation, a wider stake in the UN system.

Conclusion

Arguably the single most important challenge facing the international community today is that of developing effective policies for preventing and responding to conflict. As we have seen in this chapter, the immediate human costs of conflict are to be measured in the suffering, loss of livelihoods, and death experienced by
vulnerable people. But in a world of porous borders, no country is immune to the destabilising effects of growing violence and social disintegration. The crisis of refugees and displaced people forced to flee from their homes, and the deepening insecurity experienced by millions of people in conflict zones unleash destructive force which cannot be contained within national borders. That was well understood by the architects of the UN system, who had the lessons of the inter-war period to draw on.

Unfortunately, those lessons have been forgotten. Most Northern governments now cling to the belief that conflict-related emergencies can be dealt with on an ad hoc basis as they arise, and that the peace and prosperity of their citizens can be protected through elaborate ring-fencing strategies. It is difficult to imagine a less promising prescription for human security into the next century.

Central to the task facing the international community is that of stopping conflicts from occurring. Once large-scale violence has broken out, conflicts become at once more difficult to resolve and more destructive in their impact. Humanitarian action may save some lives, but it is more costly and less efficient in terms of reducing human suffering than conflict prevention. The UN system has a pivotal role to play both in providing humanitarian assistance and in preventing conflict. Yet throughout the post-Cold War era it has suffered from a surfeit of expectation and a deficit in political backing and financial resources.

In this chapter we have outlined some of the reforms which are needed to make the UN a more effective instrument for peace and security. Ultimately, however, any instrument for peace will only be as effective as the political leadership which guides its action. Against this background, the gathering tide of unilateralism and loss of confidence in the UN on the part of some major Western governments represents a serious source of concern.

Even under the most optimistic scenario, however, there are limits to what external intervention can achieve. Long-standing grievances rooted in social inequalities and competing identities must ultimately be resolved within the societies in which they occur, through the initiatives of local people. This underlines the importance of all humanitarian agencies, whether UN bodies, government donors, or NGOs, working to strengthen local structures and capacities and supporting conciliation and peace-building efforts within local communities.

We have stressed in this chapter that policies for conflict prevention must look beyond the UN to address the underlying social, economic and political problems which fan the flames of large-scale violence. There can be no genuine security in a world scarred by poverty and the denial of hope to vast numbers of people. In the words of Nelson Mandela to the World Summit for Social Development: 'security for a few is in fact insecurity for all'. That is why conflict prevention must, as the founders of the UN realised, start with national and international policies, which are aimed at eradicating poverty and giving all the world's people a stake in their society.