

Overcoming Bureaucratic Obstacles to the Human Security Agenda : Lessons from Conflict Management  
Antonia Chayes, *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Seton Hall University, Winter/Spring 2006.

Questions about the definition of human security are in truth peripheral. The real issue at stake is indeed whether today's international institutions can be made to embrace such an agenda, or if, on the other hand, this agenda taken literally is "so ambitious" that it will further paralyze the international community and further hamper its ability to swiftly and effectively respond to crisis situations.

"First, an unwieldy number of actors intervene in every conflict: the UN – its departments and agencies – the World Bank, regional organizations, donor organizations and NGOs." Secondly "bureaucratic rigidity and jealousy pervade this multiplicity of interveners", while mandates are often the reflection of vague and ambiguous compromises, providing no clear political direction. Finally the international community all too often focuses on "low-cost fixes" and most efforts lack patience and persistence. Scarce funds have also favored competition over collaboration. Combined with limited personnel they have also made reform efforts appear as an annoying distraction. Resistance to cooperation in the field is also reinforced by the attitudes of many of the new actors, for instance NGOs, which are "fierce defenders of their independence". In reality however with UN agencies relying on subcontracted NGOs for implementation, NGOs relying on donors for funding and on the military for logistics, most if not all actors are mutually dependent on each other rather than exclusively independent from one another.

In such a complex context a possible way forward to consider is joint planning and planned decentralization. Three different layers of joint-planning are crucial in striving towards effectiveness in post-conflict settings: at the *strategic policy planning* level, which involves all the major actors concerned (states, international organizations, NGOs); at the *operational planning* level in the field, because "day-to-day operations cannot be anticipated in advance or at headquarter level"; and at the *intra-organizational planning level*, meaning that each organization is able to undertake specific tasks with competence and adequate resources.

In combining these several layers of planning, differences in approaches can be more easily dealt with *during the planning phase* rather than during the actual *implementation*. Lack of joint planning in the early 1990s has for instance greatly impeded the achievement of peace in Bosnia and has even led to failure and withdrawal in Somalia. Since then however the international community has "demonstrated some organizational learning as they responded in the crisis in Kosovo and East Timor". Further efforts are being pursued, such as the concept of Integrated Mission Task Forces, presented in the Brahimi report. But these initiatives need renewed support, resources and commitment.

Beyond joint-planning, planned decentralization is also an important necessity, considering the impossibility of centralized micromanagement in complex and multi-actor situations. Organizational structures need to be increasingly decentralized and based on cross-functional teams in order for them to be effective in fluid situations. Planned decentralization seeks thus to systematize the best practices and lessons learned from previous occurrences of effective decentralized inter-agency coordination. In this way, early organizational chaos, as was seen in Bosnia, could be avoided.

It may seem that discussing ways to improve the performances of international organizations in conflict resolution may seem irrelevant to the theoretical issues of human security, but "if any of the goals that human security represents are ever to be realized, attention must be focused on the means to accomplish them".