

Roles and Activities of the Civil Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping : @PKO Now! No.24

The thoughts and views expressed in this column belong solely to the author and do not represent those of the Secretariat and the Government of Japan.

Norimasa Tochibayashi

Program Advisor

September 28, 2012

Three core roles

As I mentioned in my previous essay, "Civil Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping," UN Civil Affairs Officers play a key role in almost all peacekeeping missions and a number of special political missions (SPMs). In order to support local population as a significant actor of the missions, UN Civil Affairs Officers are deployed not only in capital city but across the country.

In 2008, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS) set out three core roles for civil affairs in UN peacekeeping missions¹:

1. Cross-mission liaison, monitoring and facilitation at the local level;
2. Confidence-building, conflict management and support to reconciliation;
3. Support to the restoration and extension of state authority.

Given these roles, the UN Civil Affairs Officers are intended to implement the mandate directly and/or indirectly.

Cross-mission liaison, monitoring and facilitation at the local level

This role consists of three major activities: local-level representation and liaison, information analysis and reporting, and coordination and facilitation.² As previously mentioned in "Civil

Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping³," UN Civil Affairs Officers are to support and strengthen capacity of the local population. The officers consistently play a significant role as an interface between the UN peacekeeping missions and the local population.

At the same time, information gathering, analysis and reporting are crucial for the peacekeeping missions to better understand the local population under post-conflict situations. In response to such needs and in order to support the missions, UN Civil Affairs Officers take responsibilities to gather and analyze information. Following this process, the officers share the compiled information with their analysis through reports, as UN places emphasis on the reports which are considered as "a major vehicle for Civil Affairs Officers to make an impact⁴." Thus, reporting is one of the most important activities of civil affairs.

UN Civil Affairs Officers also bear tasks in coordination and facilitation. The officers often facilitate local groups in conflict towards political settlement. At the same time, the officers coordinate between the peacekeeping missions and UN Country Team (UNCT), NGOs, or other partners to make their activities at a local level effective.

Confidence-building, conflict management and support to reconciliation

This role aims to enhance positive perception to the peace processes, prevent conflict to escalate towards violence, and facilitate political dialogues amongst actors within the local population. Activities of the UN Civil Affairs Officers derived from such aims include supporting dialogue among the actors in conflicts⁵.

In addition, increasingly significant and popular activity in this role is the Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). QIPs are small-scale, low-cost projects implemented by the UN peacekeeping mission, in order to benefit the local population. QIPs are usually implemented by the UN Civil Affairs Officers in peacekeeping missions as a tool for confidence-building⁶.

Support to the restoration and extension of state authority

UN Civil Affairs Officers need to take into account the four principles⁷, particularly the local ownership and conflict sensitivity. Namely, UN Civil Affairs Officers should minimize direct support towards state institutions.

From this perspective, UN Civil Affairs Officers usually take four different approaches for support, depending on with the changes of contexts: "promoting", "supporting", "facilitating", and "enabling"⁸. "Promoting" is an approach to engage the UN Civil Affairs Officers into local institutions but not to lead; "supporting" includes direct technical and logistic support; "facilitating" is to assist state institutions by providing technical advice, detailing strategies and approaches; and "enabling" is to support state authority in creating conditions of providing services⁹.

Through such given roles and activities, UN Civil Affairs Officers play a significant part in assisting and strengthening capacity at a local level within the UN peacekeeping missions.

End Notes

¹ United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, Policy Directives on Civil Affairs (New York: United Nations, 2008), 2-4.

² United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, Civil Affairs Handbook (New York: United Nations, 2012), 130-166.

³ Norimasa Tochibayashi, "Civil Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping" @PKO Now , no. 18 (August 17, 2012).

⁴ UN DPKO / DFS , Civil Affairs Handbook, 147.

⁵ Ibid., 167-184.

⁶ Ibid., 224-237.

⁷ Tochibayashi, "Civil Affairs Officers in UN Peacekeeping".

⁸ UN DPKO / DFS , Civil Affairs Handbook, 197.

⁹ Ibid., 185-223.