Norad

# Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings

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# Summary

This report was commissioned by the Evaluation Department of Norad, which requested a synthesis report on the lessons learned in the field of humanitarian response to natural disasters. The report is intended to provide input to ongoing processes, including the preventive efforts of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and to provide basic information for interested actors in the humanitarian sector.

The scale of Western humanitarian response has grown significantly since the end of the Cold War. This growth has been followed by a rising number of evaluations of humanitarian operations and meta-analyses of the international humanitarian system. However, the evaluations and lessons learned have a tendency to remain fragmented and case-specific, despite their many similarities as regards both the themes that are emphasised in the evaluations and the weaknesses that are exposed in the humanitarian response.

Evaluations of humanitarian response to natural disasters have many features in common. This applies primarily to the themes that are emphasised, but also to the lessons learned within these thematic areas. This report underscores five general themes in the available evaluation reports. In brief, they can be summarised as the need for and experience of: (1) linking of relief, recovery and development, (2) mapping and monitoring needs and target groups, (3) synergy between local, national and international capacities, (4) coordination of humanitarian actors and projects, and (5) disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction.

The findings of this report can be summarised in five points:
- Firstly, it is consistently found that the divide between humanitarian disaster response and development cooperation continues to prevail despite increased emphasis on the need to link relief, recovery and development.
- Secondly, there is strong focus on needs assessment as a prerequisite for effective, equitable humanitarian response, but it is also commonly observed that actual assessment practice shows substantial deviations from this norm.
- Thirdly, it is a common experience that international humanitarian response undermines rather than bolsters local capacity, despite growing emphasis on the importance of local capacity in humanitarian response and long-term vulnerability reduction.
- Fourthly, it is a recurrent theme in evaluation reports that there is a great and persistent need to find effective mechanisms for coordinating the multitude of actors in the humanitarian system.
- Fifthly, the evaluation reports show that there is growing awareness of the need for disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction, but there are relatively few examples of good practices.

These evaluation findings show a clear need to reform the international humanitarian system to promote both synergies between international actors as coordinating facilitators and local vulnerability reduction and response capacity. The challenge for Norway as a donor lies not only in contributing to increased response capacity through improved funding and coordination, but also in helping to put in place strategies that focus on long-term vulnerability reduction and local response capacity. This indicates a need for selective choices of channels on the basis of three overarching objectives: (1) effective humanitarian relief, (2) rehabilitation, livelihood development and vulnerability reduction, and (3) coordination of relief, rehabilitation and livelihood development.

# Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters

Natural hazards are naturally occurring physical phenomena caused either by rapid or slow onset events having atmospheric, geologic and hydrologic origins on global, regional, national and local scales. They include earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, floods, droughts and epidemics. Natural disasters are the consequences or effects of natural hazards. They may represent a serious breakdown in sustainability and disruption of economic and social progress. (Sørensen, Vedeld & Haug 2006)

**Natural Disasters and Humanitarian Response**

*Natural disasters* are a result of a combination of a natural hazard and human vulnerability. Natural hazards can be generated by hydrometeorological, geophysical or biological processes, or a combination thereof, and include floods, drought, landslides, storms, hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and epidemics (Sørensen, Vedeld & Haug 2006). While it was formerly common to differentiate between natural and "man-made" disasters, this distinction is now widely perceived to be problematic. Natural disasters are also socially produced in the sense that the consequences of a natural hazard (e.g. loss of human life, infrastructure and livelihoods) are contingent on the vulnerability of individuals and societies and their capacity for adaptation and resilience to natural hazards. This means that natural disasters are determined by processes in both society and the natural environment (Bankoff, Frerks & Hilhorst 2004, Pelling 2003, Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis 2004).

*Humanitarian action* or *response* consists of providing material and logistical assistance in order to save lives, alleviate suffering and protect human dignity in an emergency caused by a natural disaster, armed conflict, economic or political crisis or, in complex emergencies, by a combination of several such factors. Humanitarian response encompasses a broad range of actors and practices and is generally based on the humanitarian principle of the right to receive help and the obligation to provide assistance in an emergency, based on impartiality and neutrality (Sphere 2004). Humanitarian response differs from development assistance in the sense that development cooperation seeks to promote a more long-term, structural transformation of the conditions that have given rise to various emergencies. In practice, however, this distinction is problematic and a key issue in humanitarian response concerns precisely the need to link humanitarian relief and rehabilitation to development and vulnerability reduction.

A number of major natural disasters in recent years have triggered large-scale humanitarian action and critical attention has been focused on this response. The floods in Mozambique (2000), earthquakes in India (2001), El Salvador (2001) and Pakistan (2005), the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean (2004), Hurricane Mitch in Central America (1998) and the drought in Ethiopia in 2002/2003 are examples of major natural disasters that have been followed by extensive, humanitarian actions by local and national authorities, multilateral organisations and local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) (2002, 2006a) points out that the scale of Western humanitarian response has expanded since the end of the Cold War. This growth has been accompanied by discussions on policy and practice in the humanitarian field. This debate is primarily expressed through various types of evaluations and general summaries and meta-evaluations of these reports.

Such evaluations[1] are themselves a relatively new phenomenon in the humanitarian system, compared with the international development sector, but have become more widespread in the context of a general increase in humanitarian action (ALNAP 2002).

A number of humanitarian agencies and operations have been made the object of evaluations that highlight important lessons related to the implementation, results and broader social consequences of humanitarian action. While many of these evaluations focus on individual agencies, there are also some holistic evaluations of the overall response to a natural disaster or of the international humanitarian system (Adinolfi, Bassiouni, Lauritzen & Williams 2005, Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton 2006, Wiles, Selvester & Fidalgo 2005, Beck 2005, Simkin et al. 2004). Nevertheless, there is a tendency for experience and evaluations to remain fragmented and case-specific despite there being numerous similarities in terms of the topics emphasised and the weaknesses that are revealed. Summarising and generalising context-specific experience in order to improve the humanitarian response to future natural disasters is therefore a challenge. The establishment in 1997 of ALNAP as a cross-cutting forum for humanitarian organisations and the efforts to develop standards for humanitarian performance are important responses to this challenge. This report is also intended to make a small contribution to this learning process in Norway.

The report was commissioned by Norad's Evaluation Department, which requested a synthesis report on the lessons learned in the field of humanitarian response to natural disasters, including the "slow onset emergencies" resulting from protracted or repeated periods of drought. The report is intended to provide input for ongoing processes, such as the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' preventive efforts, and to provide basic information for interested actors in the humanitarian sector. It is hoped that this report will provide a useful status report on current knowledge for both the public administration and other actors in the humanitarian system.

**Evaluations and Main Findings**

The purpose of this short report is to synthesise some general lessons learned from humanitarian response to natural disasters in the last five years. The summary is largely based on evaluation reports on humanitarian operations classified as natural disasters in ALNAP's evaluative reports database, and on ALNAP's annual *Review of Humanitarian Action.*[2]
As of 1 May 2007, the ALNAP database contained a total of 108 evaluative reports on humanitarian operations in response to natural disasters. Limiting the time-frame to the past five years reduces this figure to 45 reports. However, several of these reports are not available in their entirety, some of them have a relatively narrow focus on logistical issues relating to humanitarian operations, while others deal mainly with emergencies other than natural disasters. A few of the reports have also been omitted because their professional and technical grounding appears to be weak, although I have not had an opportunity to undertake a thorough assessment of the methods used.[3] This means that the synthesis report is based on some twenty reports that are deemed to be particularly relevant for this assignment. Apart from that, the report has also drawn on a few research reports on natural disasters, humanitarian operations and human vulnerability.

OECD/DAC (1999) and ALNAP (2006b) differentiate between single-agency/project[4] evaluations and multi-agency/sector evaluations. While studies of single agencies and projects usually focus on organisational specifics and measurable results of relief, rehabilitation and recovery programmes, holistic studies of humanitarian response focus more on goals, strategies, roles and relations within the humanitarian system. While the first approach produces information on *efficiency* and results at agency and project level, the latter is more suitable for

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1 ALNAP (2001, p. 10) defines evaluation of humanitarian action as "a systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability".
2 http://www.alnap.org
3 A quality assurance check list for evaluations of humanitarian action may be found at ALNAP (2001).
4 See, for instance, Kruke, Olsen, Mathiesen & Scharffscher (2005), Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2002).

analysing the social *effectiveness* of a humanitarian response. All the evaluations focus on the results of humanitarian action, but the kind of result that is highlighted varies according to the different types of study. Since this report is intended to be a synthesising review of humanitarian action, it will place more emphasis on analyses of strategies and effectiveness than on more specific agency and project evaluations.

Available evaluation reports offer a wealth of empirical insights and context-specific reflections, and any attempt at synthesisation will necessarily have to simplify this complexity. However, the evaluations clearly have numerous common characteristics. This applies primarily to the themes that are emphasised, but also to the lessons that have been learned in these thematic areas. In this report, I will accentuate five general themes in the available evaluation reports. These can be briefly summarised as the need for and lessons learned from:

1. Linking relief, recovery and development
2. Mapping and monitoring needs and target groups
3. Synergy between local, national and international capacities
4. Coordination of humanitarian actors and projects
5. Disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction

A feature common to all the evaluation reports is that the degree of success of humanitarian response to natural disasters is assessed and explained in reference to these five themes. Another issue related to humanitarian operations concerns the mobilisation and administration of financial resources (Flint & Goyder 2006). This is a pivotal issue in connection with the UN reform process, but is not a prominent topic in most of the evaluation reports and will therefore not be discussed here.

An important question is to what extent and in what way evaluation findings are translated into improved practice in subsequent humanitarian action (ALNAP 2003, 2005). The further discussion will begin with a brief account of three initiatives to promote learning and improve standards of humanitarian performance. These are:

(1) the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP),
(2) efforts to develop standards for humanitarian response (particularly the principles for Good Humanitarian Donorship and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement), and
(3) the United Nation's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

I will then synthesise some main points and lessons learned in each of the five thematic areas, at the same time pointing to examples of good humanitarian practice. This will form the basis for a brief discussion of some of the implications of the UN reform process and choice of channels for Norway's humanitarian response to future natural disasters.

**Learning Networks and Standards for Humanitarian Action**
ALNAP was established in 1997 as a forum for the promotion of learning, standard-raising and accountability in humanitarian action, following the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (Danida 1996). This was the most comprehensive, systematic evaluation of an international response to a humanitarian emergency at that time and led to demands for the professionalisation and quality assurance of international humanitarian action. This situation also spurred the establishment of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Code of Conduct, the Sphere Project and other parallel measures implemented during the same period of time (ALNAP 2002).

ALNAP has close to 60 full members consisting of donors, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, UN agencies, non-governmental organisations and research institutions, in

addition to individuals with observer status. ALNAP's main purpose is to promote learning through information-sharing. Two key tools in this connection are its Evaluative Reports Database (ERD), which provides Internet access to evaluative reports, and its annual report, the Review of Humanitarian Action. The annual report analyses humanitarian action in relation to key evaluation criteria and communicates key findings from new evaluative reports to a broader audience in the humanitarian sector. ALNAP has also developed training modules and guidelines for evaluating humanitarian action, and served as the base for the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition in 2005/2006.

ALNAP's most recent annual report, the Review of Humanitarian Action 2005, goes beyond synthesising evaluation findings to discuss the use of such evaluations (see also ALNAP 2003, 2004b). It emphasises that although evaluations are the most visible expression of the learning and accountability agenda in humanitarian action, it is uncertain to what degree and in what way evaluations are actually used and bring about improvements in humanitarian practice. In so far as evaluation reports address this issue, they point to limited application rather than examples of good application. However, the annual report underscores that learning can be difficult to measure and takes a variety of forms. Evaluations can, for instance, be followed by the direct implementation of evaluation findings and recommendations, the development and diffusion of new ideas and concepts in a humanitarian organisation, and enhanced understanding and communication within an organisation, or they can be used to legitimise existing interpretations and practices. Although the picture is complex, one of the main findings was that the use of evaluations is largely determined by the *quality* of the evaluation process and the result (design, planning, participation, timing, dissemination, substantiation), but also by *organisational* factors (learning and decision-making processes, political structures and institutional pressure), *relational* factors (personal and institutional links between evaluators, users and decision-makers) and *external* influence (from the general public, mass media, authorities and donors). ALNAP clearly recommends focusing more strongly on the links between evaluation-based learning and good humanitarian practice. This poses a challenge for the planning and implementation of evaluations, but also for the subsequent use of evaluation results.

Other initiatives to promote learning and accountability are efforts to develop standards for humanitarian action, including the establishment of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Code of Conduct in 1994[5], the initiation of the Sphere Project[6] by a group of non-governmental humanitarian organisations in Europe and the USA in 1996 and the establishment of the principles for Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) in 2003 (ALNAP 2004a).[7]

Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) is a set of objectives, definitions and general principles for humanitarian action that was endorsed at a meeting of donors held in Stockholm on 17 June 2003. The GHD principles serve as a framework for governmental humanitarian assistance and a basis for evaluating donors' allocation of resources and the use of these resources. The objectives and general GHD principles may be found in Appendix 1. GHD also comprises 13 more specific principles for good practice with regard to donor financing, management and accountability in humanitarian assistance, but these are not included in the appendix.

GHD defines the objectives of humanitarian action as saving lives and alleviating suffering in the aftermath of man-made and natural disasters, but also preventing and strengthening preparedness for the occurrence of future disasters. GHD states that humanitarian action should be informed by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The general principles emphasise (1) implementation of international humanitarian law, (2)

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5  http://www.ifrc.org
6  http://www.sphereproject.org
7  http://www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org

flexible and timely funding, (3) allocation of resources on the basis of needs assessments, (4) the adequate involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian response, (5) strengthening the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, (6) recovery and long-term development, and (7) United Nations leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action. The GHD principles correspond closely to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (Appendix 2). The first four points of the Code of Conduct affirm fundamental humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and cultural sensitivity. Point 6 underscores the importance of local capacity, point 7 emphasises local involvement, point 8 focuses on reducing future vulnerabilities to disaster, and point 9 stresses the need for accountability in humanitarian operations.

The GHD principles and the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct have established a general framework for good humanitarian practice. There is a striking correspondence between the topics that are emphasised in the evaluation reports and these humanitarian standards. This is logical, both because the standards are based on lessons learned from previous disasters and because donors have considerable power to define the criteria for evaluating humanitarian action and allocating resources in the event of future natural disasters. However, implementing this framework has proved to be more problematic (Graves & Wheeler 2006). ALNAP (2006a) points out that humanitarian practice often deviates from the principles: humanitarian operations commonly focus on life-saving relief with weak linkages to rehabilitation and livelihood recovery, humanitarian assistance is often provided on the basis of appeals, media focus and interests rather than needs assessments and vulnerability analyses, and local capacity is often overlooked by international agencies. It is particularly serious that donors' political interests undermine principle 4 of the Code of Conduct regarding the provision of assistance based on humanitarian needs without regard to foreign policy interests (ALNAP 2004b, 2005, 2006a). ALNAP observes that "Principle Four enjoins agencies not to act as instruments of government foreign policy. But since foreign policy is a fundamental element of the global allocation of aid, and NGOs depend heavily on institutional funding, humanitarian action follows politics" (2006a, p. 76). This has created a situation where there is broad consensus on the principles for good humanitarian practice, but where concrete humanitarian action can reflect strong deviation from this norm.

Disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction are another field where efforts are being made to translate key lessons from humanitarian operations into improved practice. The United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) constitutes an important organisational framework for local and international initiatives to reduce natural disaster risk.[8] The ISDR's objective is to promote greater understanding of and action to reduce vulnerability. Efforts are being made to achieve this objective by disseminating information on risk, vulnerability and vulnerability reduction, prompting donors to commit to supporting disaster reduction strategies, and developing scientific knowledge of vulnerability reduction. The Hyogo Framework, which is the final report adopted by the ISDR's World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005, outlines an action plan for risk reduction for the period 2005-2015, consisting of five main priorities (UN/ISDR 2005, p. 6):

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

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8 http://unisdr.org

So far there are very few references to vulnerability reduction and the Hyogo Framework in evaluations of humanitarian response to natural disasters.

As the international humanitarian system has grown in scale and complexity, a greater need has arisen to coordinate and assure the quality of humanitarian operations. The aforementioned initiatives are key efforts to establish a common understanding of and institutionalised frameworks for assessing international humanitarian operations. The necessity of and challenges posed by such a framework are underscored by the evaluation reports, which often document significant deviations from the principles for good practice. Some of the main findings as regards these challenges will be summarised in the next chapter.

# Synthesis of Evaluation Findings

### Linking of Relief, Recovery and Development

> Natural disasters occur throughout the world, but their economic and social impacts have been increasing and are generally much greater in developing countries than in developed ones. Disasters can wipe out development gains and eclipse years of development investment. (World Bank 2006, p. ix)

The World Bank report, "Hazards of Nature, Risks to Development", emphasises the close links between natural disasters and development. On the one hand, the impacts of a natural disaster are compounded by poverty, exclusion and vulnerability, often coupled with limited government capacity to prevent, mitigate and relieve the humanitarian consequences. On the other hand, the report points out that natural disasters cause extensive damage in terms of loss of lives and health, livelihoods and infrastructure, and thereby constitute a significant risk to development. There is also growing focus on the linkages between natural disasters and other humanitarian crises (such as civil war) in developing countries, but also on the fact that humanitarian operations offer opportunities for conflict transformation and development (Pelling 2003). One example of a complex crisis that is often mentioned is Mozambique, a post-conflict country with comprehensive and socially differentiated vulnerability to frequent, devastating natural disasters. Despite this complex crisis, it is commonly argued that national planning and coordination, combined with international humanitarian response and development cooperation, has made possible a forward-looking recovery that lays the foundation for long-term development (Wiles, Selvester & Fidalgo 2005). This contrasts with Sudan and Somalia where the World Food Programme (2004, 2006) reports a complex drought/civil war situation that has necessitated a narrow focus on humanitarian food distribution with little linkage to development and conflict transformation.

The general point here is that there are close links between natural disasters and development, but also that growing importance is being attached to these links by humanitarian organisations and development agencies. Nevertheless, it is a fact that humanitarian response and development cooperation have often been organised and perceived as separate spheres. This divide has been institutionalised in the division of labour between humanitarian agencies and development organisations within the international system of humanitarian activity and development cooperation (Suhrke & Ofstad 2005).

This distinction between humanitarian response and development cooperation is problematised in most evaluation reports, albeit less prominently in evaluations of food aid in response to slow onset disasters (World Food Program 2004, 2006). The issue is addressed most comprehensively in the analysis carried out by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC)[9] of the tsunami disaster in 2004. Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton (2006) conclude that a successful transition was made from relief to rehabilitation/recovery, not least as a consequence of the fact that it was a sudden disaster where the immediate life-saving work was carried out by the local community. This rapid transition put many humanitarian organisations in an unaccustomed situation, where their focus had to be on development rather than relief. However, several of the organisations had limited resources to handle complex development processes and treated them as technocratic questions of replacing lost production assets (particularly houses and fishing boats) and rebuilding infrastructure (such as schools, hospitals and roads).

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9  http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org

Partly as a result of this technocratic approach to development, the recovery process was relatively insensitive to gender relations, social inequality and poverty and to the conflicts in Aceh (Indonesia) and Sri Lanka.

The lessons learned from the tsunami disaster are echoed in several other evaluation reports. For instance, it is consistently seen in the response to drought and famine disasters that these are perceived and dealt with as a question of food shortage rather than livelihood crises. This results in focus on the life-saving distribution of food and medicine, but limited focus on rehabilitation and the development of livelihoods to reduce the population's vulnerability to new disasters (Steering Committee 2004). The ALNAP reports are sceptical to this type of "food aid" because it can create dependency rather than promote vulnerability-reducing livelihood development (ALNAP 2003).

Many evaluation reports on natural disasters point out that rehabilitation and recovery are usually treated as an extension of relief, which also establishes parameters for further development processes and therefore should be linked to more long-term, participatory development planning. While relief work requires a swift, effective response from humanitarian actors with the necessary resources and capacities, development is a far more complex process of change, where power and participation play a very pivotal role. Christoplos (2006) therefore concludes that recovery should not be implemented as the top-down technocratic supply of services, but that lessons learned and strategies from development cooperation must also be incorporated into humanitarian action. This applies in particular to emphasis on gender, conflict sensitivity, poverty reduction, participation and accountability, which are key principles for good practice in development cooperation. This understanding of the nature, objectives and tools of recovery also has implications for the choice of partner organisations and channels for recovery assistance, with some precedence being given to organisations with a mixture of humanitarian and development expertise, context-specific experience and a strong basis in the local community.

However, the evaluation reports also contain examples of good practice with regard to the linking of relief, recovery and development. After both the tsunami disaster in 2004 and the flood disaster in Mozambique in 2000, there was a swift transition from relief to rehabilitation, which is considered to be crucial to avoid creating dependency. In Mozambique, the authorities made strategic use of the recovery process as an opportunity to implement existing development plans. Extensive reconstruction of infrastructure was carried out on the basis of already existing plans, thereby helping to ensure relatively good progress in the recovery efforts (Wiles, Selvester & Fidalgo 2005). As regards the linkage with livelihood development, the picture is more complicated. It is emphasised that while livelihoods based on agricultural production requiring little capital have been re-established at pre-flood level, the authorities and humanitarian actors have been reluctant to finance more capital-intensive means of production such as cattle and fishing gear. Despite a general focus on "building back better" to a standard higher than that existing prior to a natural disaster, humanitarian response is often limited to, at best, replacing physical infrastructure and resources. This is the case in the fishery sector in Sri Lanka, where many humanitarian organisations have contributed towards replacing the fishing boats and gear lost in the tsunami disaster, but where little of the massive inflow of assistance has been used to further develop the sector. It is pointed out that in Mozambique recovery has helped to change the position of women, as humanitarian actors have promoted women's participation in local forums and insisted that houses and land be registered in the name of women. These examples illustrate how recovery can institutionalise changes that are significant for more long-term development.

Despite the consistent emphasis on viewing recovery in conjunction with development, the evaluation reports leave a clear impression that the division between humanitarian disaster response and development cooperation continues to prevail in many humanitarian operations (ALNAP 2004a, 2004b). The need to link relief, rehabilitation/recovery and development

therefore remains a significant lesson to be learned from evaluations of humanitarian response to natural disasters, a key principle of Good Humanitarian Donorship and an important evaluation criterion for humanitarian organisations.

**Mapping and Monitoring Needs and Target Groups**

> Needs assessment remains the fundamental flaw of the humanitarian system. There is no accepted method of assessment… UN appeals are often used by donors as the basis for aid allocations but bear little relationship to need. Indeed, 'need' is often reduced to little more than a list of what the UN agencies can most easily provide. Vulnerability is a better basis for assessment than need, but the system is only just beginning to define this term and find ways to measure and respond to it. More comprehensive notions, such as human security, have yet to be developed and applied. (ALNAP 2006a, p. 77)

The evaluation reports are unanimous in their emphasis on needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation. Up-to-date, accurate and complete needs assessments are referred to as absolutely essential to efficient and equitable relief and recovery, as well as to a good transition from relief to recovery and development (ALNAP 2004a). There is also unanimous emphasis on monitoring and evaluation during the response process, particularly to assure the quality of immediate relief as quickly as possible by carrying out needs, vulnerability and risk assessments.

The validity and relevance of needs assessments are contingent on several factors. It is often pointed out that such assessments must be current and complete, that the expertise and composition of a team and the data collection method must be adapted to need and context, that the data must be stratified according to social criteria such as age and gender, and that the result is dependent on good relations with local institutions, knowledge of local communities, cultural sensitivity and consultations with target groups. Growing importance appears to be attached to vulnerability analyses, which means that needs assessments aim to answer questions of the type "who is exposed to what kind of risk in what kind of time frame?" (Houghton undated).

There is strong focus in the evaluation reports on the fact that good needs assessments identify and highlight target groups. Several evaluation reports underscore the necessity for cultural sensitivity in identifying target groups and designing strategies for humanitarian action. Houghton (undated) observes that there is a problematic tendency to base target group identification on external rather than local social categories. The evaluation reports offer no easy answer to this challenge other than to underscore the need for local knowledge, consultation and cultural sensitivity. Some report good experience with self-identification of particularly vulnerable sub-groups within a more broadly defined target group, especially in slow onset disasters (ALNAP 2004a, World Food Programme 2005).

A feature common to the reports is the depiction of gender as a key dimension that cuts across sectors and activities in humanitarian operations. Part of the reason for this is the fact that women are often over-represented among natural disaster victims, in addition to which they face special challenges in the recovery process, in both cases as a consequence of their vulnerable economic, social and cultural position. Despite this emphasis on gender in humanitarian operations and in development cooperation in general, the evaluation reports consistently find that humanitarian operations fail to meet the objectives in this field. ALNAP (2003, 2004a) identifies the gender dimension as one of the weakest points of humanitarian action. However, there are some instances of good practice, such as the aforementioned securing of land rights for women in the recovery process following the flood disaster in Mozambique in 2000.

There are many examples of poor practice in needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation. The TEC study of the tsunami disaster points, for instance, to a number of problems in connection with poor, fragmented, incomplete and overlapping needs assessments carried out by individual actors that failed to ensure the necessary coordination and communication with other relevant actors (de Goyet & Mornière 2006). While the humanitarian response in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster reflected inadequate needs assessments and problems arising from both the uneven distribution and duplication of assistance, there are also examples of good practice. Gonzáles (2001) notes that after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, most of the international NGOs carried out needs assessments and identified target groups in close collaboration with national and local authorities. The World Food Programme (2005) cites positive experience with the use of multi-agency targeting structures and community-based targeting in connection with the provision of food aid in response to slow onset disasters.

The tsunami evaluation points out that the influx of a large number of humanitarian actors with substantial financial resources and the need to achieve concrete results in a relatively short time frame created a situation in which humanitarian assistance was provided on the basis of the agencies' interests and resource situation rather than actual needs. In Sri Lanka, moreover, assistance for rehabilitation and recovery can be said to have been politicised at both the local and national levels. This situation prompts de Goyet & Mornière (2006) to question the purpose of needs assessment when the actual humanitarian response is largely determined by political priorities rather than based on fact. Needs assessments and humanitarian response in general take place in a political context, a fact to which relatively little attention is paid in evaluation reports. Needs assessments can thus be disregarded for political reasons or used as an instrument to legitimise certain types of response, but they can also be used to hold authorities and humanitarian agencies accountable. A prerequisite for the latter is that the assessments not only are carried out in accordance with the quality criteria described earlier, but also that they are made available to the target groups and their representatives. This type of information-sharing appears to be the exception rather than the norm in humanitarian response to natural disasters.

The evaluation reports consistently stress the importance of needs assessments as a prerequisite for effective, equitable humanitarian response, but practice with regard to needs assessment shows some significant deviations from the norm. There is also growing emphasis on vulnerability and risk analysis, but this has been put in practice to a minor degree in the humanitarian sector.

**Synergy between Local, National and International Capacities**

> The international, humanitarian welfare regime has a dominant Northern imprint. … Most of the operations, by contrast, take place in the South as conventionally defined… This structure raises some critical questions regarding the role that local or "Southern" actors can and should play in the international humanitarian regime. The dominant rhetoric on all sides has long emphasised the need to build more "local capacity", yet this is generally followed by non-action. Even long-term, semi-permanent emergencies have not generated significant local capacity to assist. In some cases, whatever local capacity did exist in this arena has been overwhelmed by the international aid presence and eroded. (Juma & Suhrke 2002, p. 7)

A third consistent theme in the evaluation reports is the relationship between local, national and international actors, where it is emphasised that effective humanitarian response is contingent on positive synergies between different capacities and that local and national capacity-building is essential to long-term disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction. The reports consistently conclude that local capacity must play a key role in humanitarian response and that this capacity must be strengthened rather than weakened if the goal of long-term vulnerability reduction is to be realised. As suggested in the quote from Juma & Suhrke (2002), the realities of humanitarian action are often not in keeping with these goals.

Local capacity is an ambiguous term that can be used in different ways. The term is usually operationalised as the ability of local NGOs to identify needs and provide humanitarian assistance in disaster-stricken areas. Evaluation reports often stress the context-specific expertise of local organisations and that it enhances the effectiveness and positive ripple effects of humanitarian operations. However, local capacity is also used in a broader sense to refer to individuals, groups and organisations other than NGOs, and their ability to deal with the consequences of a natural disaster (ALNAP 2005). The question that is often asked is how and to what extent international humanitarian organisations can draw on local capacity without the latter being undermined by the relation to external actors with more resources at their disposal.

Lessons learned from "sudden" natural disasters (such as earthquakes and tsunami disasters) highlight the key role played by local capacity and the often problematic relationship of local actors to non-local actors. Such disasters create an acute need for life-saving relief, followed by a rapid transition to rehabilitation. This means that the immediate humanitarian response must as a rule be handled by local and to a certain extent national actors, while rehabilitation and recovery usually require additional external resources.

The evaluations of the earthquakes in Pakistan (2005) and Gujarat (2001) and of the tsunami disaster (2004) show that the local population and local organisations took charge of much of the immediate rescue work, based on the resources that could be mobilised locally (Scheper, Parakrama & Patel 2006, Strand & Borchgrevink 2006, Disasters Emergency Committee 2001). As the humanitarian response gradually progressed from life-saving relief to rehabilitation and recovery, local community capacity was replaced by national civilian and military authorities, and particularly by international NGOs. A large number of overlapping and, to some extent, competing actors were involved in the tsunami disaster response, where there was a clear tendency for local capacity to be subordinated and instrumentalised by international actors. For instance, local structures were marginalised in decision-making processes and implementation or key personnel in local organisations were recruited by international organisations. This kind of relations between local and international agencies undermined rather than developed the capacity of local organisations to carry out relief, rehabilitation and recovery.

The relationship between national and local capacities is also depicted as problematic in several of the evaluation reports, since centralised public administration obstruct efficient local administration and local democratic participation and control (Disasters Emergency Committee 2001). The lessons learned from the earthquake in Pakistan and the flood disaster in Mozambique (2000) illustrate this point: while centralised and bureaucratic-authoritarian institutions (including the Pakistan military forces) displayed a significant capacity to organise efficient relief and facilitate the transition from relief to rehabilitation, this centralised authority led to a democratic deficit that became problematic in relation to the linking of rehabilitation and recovery and long-term development (Strand & Borchgrevink 2006, Wiles, Selvester & Fidalgo 2005). It is consistently found in many evaluation studies that disaster victims receive little information on recovery plans and have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making and implementation processes that affect themselves. Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton (2006) note that the general lack of transparency and accountability as regards the resources and plans of international NGOs has given rise to considerable frustration and a feeling of powerlessness at the local level, but has also undermined the civilian population's capacity to take charge of its own rehabilitation and recovery after the tsunami disaster.

However, there are also examples of positive synergies, especially between international and national capacities. The tsunami evaluation stresses that the international response has contributed to improved disaster preparedness at the national level, in the form of preparedness plans, early warning systems and national institutions for disaster management (Scheper, Parakrama & Patel 2006). Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton (2006) and Adams (2007) further

maintain that the use of cash compensation[10] for households affected by the tsunami created positive synergies between the financial resources of international agencies and the skills of the local population. Alemu & Yoseph (2004) note a corresponding synergy in the "cash for seed" programme in the aftermath of the drought disaster in Ethiopia in 2002/2003. It is also pointed out that the international humanitarian organisations involved in the tsunami disaster were most effective when they teamed up with local organisations. Strand & Borchgrevink (2006) noted the same result in connection with the earthquake disaster in Pakistan. Several of the Norwegian NGOs that were involved in the humanitarian response took positive initiatives to strengthen local partner organisations and the capacity of government institutions to respond to future disasters. González (2000) emphasises that most of the international NGOs that participated in the humanitarian response to Hurricane Mitch made use of local actors with relevant skills (such as local health workers and masons). However, this did not apply to the target groups in general, who often became passive beneficiaries rather than active participants in the recovery process.

The study carried out by the Disasters Emergency Committee (2001) of the earthquake in Gujarat, India (2001) is one of the few reports that found that local organisations both headed the humanitarian response (including coordination) and played an important political role in putting pressure on the authorities in the recovery and development process. Popular movements combined the role of service-providing NGOs with political representation. The Disasters Emergency Committee underscores this link between the NGO role and movement politics as an important contribution to a democratic development process, but there are few reports of similar dynamics from other natural disasters.

Despite the emphasis on local capacity as being essential for effective humanitarian response and long-term vulnerability reduction, the general lesson learned is that humanitarian assistance undermines rather than strengthens local capacity (ALNAP 2005). This paradoxical situation has significant implications for policy formulation and practice in the international humanitarian system.

### Coordination of Actors and Programmes

> The number of international agencies involved in the [tsunami] response grew unabated. Well-resourced agencies and very small ones, competent and incompetent, well-prepared and unprepared, secular and faith-based, reputable and disreputable, household names and unknown, ambitious and humble, opportunistic and committed, governmental and non-governmental, national and international, bilateral and multilateral, well-established and just-formed – they all turned up.
> (Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton 2006, p. 55)

A fourth consistent theme of the evaluation reports is the need to coordinate the humanitarian response to natural disasters. The international humanitarian system consists of a large number of actors, roles and capacities. Figure 1 illustrates some of the complexity of this system by showing the flow of financial resources within the system. The multitude of actors and the absence of a strong authoritative structure, combined with the indeterminate needs that arise in emergencies and the necessity of providing swift relief, makes coordination a major challenge in the aftermath of most natural disasters. A coordinated response promotes the effective, targeted use of humanitarian resources, by avoiding the imposition of unnecessary extra work on local and national authorities and extra burdens on disaster victims, and duplication of administrative structures, needs assessments and humanitarian assistance. The importance of coordination is also stressed as a prerequisite for sharing lessons learned between different agencies, as well as a mechanism for promoting accountability of humanitarian organisations in respect to other agencies, authorities, donors and, in particular, disaster-stricken target groups.

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10  The arguments in favour of cash payments primarily focus on the question of capacity (Adams 2007). The development-related consequences of such a strategy, i.e. the long-term development of market systems and social inequality, are discussed to a lesser degree. This should be made the object of thorough analysis before applying a strategy of cash compensation on a large scale.Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings
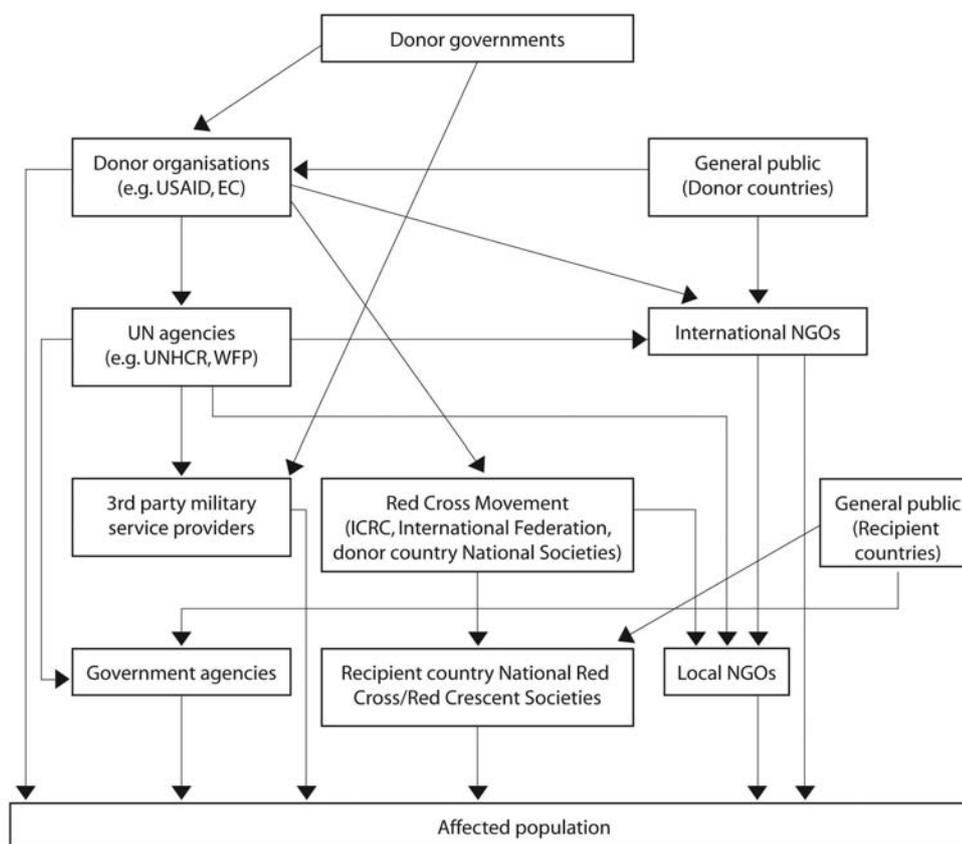
*Figure 1. Flow of resources in the international humanitarian system. (Source: OECD/DAC 1999)*

The TEC evaluation of the tsunami disaster is again illustrative. The humanitarian response to the tsunami disaster was generally very well financed and, to some extent, over-financed. This contributed to the heavy influx of humanitarian actors referred to in the above quotation, including many new organisations with limited expertise or basis in the affected communities. At the same time, many of these actors were under considerable pressure to spend funds rapidly, both on account of the humanitarian needs and because the bulk of the resources were raised to provide relief and had to be utilised within a limited time period. This situation created a greater need for coordination but a reduced willingness on the part of certain agencies to submit to official coordination. At the same time, governmental coordination is described as relatively weak in both Sri Lanka and Indonesia, while the UN lacked authority to act as an effective coordinator (Bennett, Bertrand, Harkin, Samarasinghe & Wickramatillake 2006).

However, there are also cases where experience of disaster response coordination has been more positive. The evaluation reports usually distinguish between coordination at the national and at the local level. They often point out that it is easier to achieve coordination at national level, but that this can have limited effect on concrete activities at the local level. A general lesson learned is that effective national coordination works best where a sound system of disaster preparedness has been established. In Pakistan, there was only limited national preparedness for natural disasters, but the authorities reacted quickly and effectively after the earthquake in 2005. Strand and Borchgrevink (2006) draw particular attention to the fact that the army was mobilised in the relief effort and that a Federal Relief Commission was established under military leadership shortly after the disaster to coordinate relief work. A new Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority with important functions in terms of facilitating the transition from relief to rehabilitation was also established. These institutional changes are indicative of significant governmental capacity to assume responsibility for coordination. It is pointed out, however, that these institutions have not had robust mechanisms for democratic control and participation, a deficiency that has proved to be problematic as the humanitarian response has progressed from relief to rehabilitation and development.

Strand & Borchgrevink (2006) also emphasise that the earthquake in Pakistan was a test of the UN's role as coordinator and in particular its new cluster approach. In this approach, various UN agencies are given responsibility for coordinating activities in a given field based on their specific expertise and subject to coordination by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The evaluation report concludes that this cluster approach is an important step in the right direction, but also that it had a number of flaws. It took the UN a long time to establish functioning clusters, particularly at the local level, and it proved to be difficult to achieve efficient coordination between the national and local levels. Several UN agencies were reluctant to assume responsibility for coordination and faced resource constraints, both financial and in the form of qualified personnel. Mention must also be made of the fact that although gender is supposed to be a general focus in all the clusters, this principle was not applied in practice. Strand and Borchgrevink therefore observe that the cluster approach is not sufficient to ensure a gender perspective in humanitarian operations.

Following the earthquake in Gujarat, a great deal of the relief work was coordinated locally through an NGO consortium (Abhiyan), which to some extent can be seen as a result of lack of coordination by both the Indian authorities and the UN (Disasters Emergency Committee 2001). One of the reasons for the successful effort in this case was the extensive network of local members in the organisations, but also the fact that at a critical point in the operation they chose to carry out a comprehensive needs assessment that was then used to assign responsibilities to newly arrived humanitarian organisations. This example shows that networks and member organisations operating through decentralised structures can effectively coordinate local response and participation in the aftermath of a natural disaster. One question in this connection concerns the extent to which international humanitarian agencies are willing to be coordinated by local, community-based organisations, particularly when the latter are also oppositional political actors. This does not alter the fact that there is a great need to find effective mechanisms for coordinating the multitude of diverse actors in the humanitarian system.

### Disaster Preparedness and Vulnerability Reduction

> In disasters, a geophysical or biological event is implicated in some way as a trigger event or a link in a chain of causes. Yet, even where such natural hazards appear to be directly linked to loss of life and damage to property, there are social factors involved that cause peoples' vulnerability and can be traced back sometimes to quite "remote" root and general causes. This vulnerability is generated by social, economic and political processes that influence how hazards affect people in varying ways and with differing intensities. (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davis 2004, p. 7)

Perhaps the most consistent observation in the evaluation reports is the significance of preparedness, i.e. the need to go from humanitarian response to proactive preparedness and vulnerability reduction. This argument is two-fold. On the one hand, attention is called to the need for national and local preparedness with regard to establishing early warning systems, saving lives and coordinating the relief and recovery process. On the other hand, it is also pointed out that the consequences of a natural disaster are not determined by nature, but is contingent on socially produced and stratified vulnerabilities to a natural hazard. This indicates a need for measures to reduce vulnerability. This perception is illustrated in Figure 2, where the top four boxes indicate that the natural environment creates a resource base for human activity and livelihoods, but also natural hazards. The bottom four boxes show that political, economic and social systems stratify people in terms of their access to natural resources and exposure to natural hazards. The combination of the nature-determined opportunities and hazards and the socially determined access to opportunities and exposure to hazards defines the vulnerability of different groups to natural disasters (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon & Davies 2004).
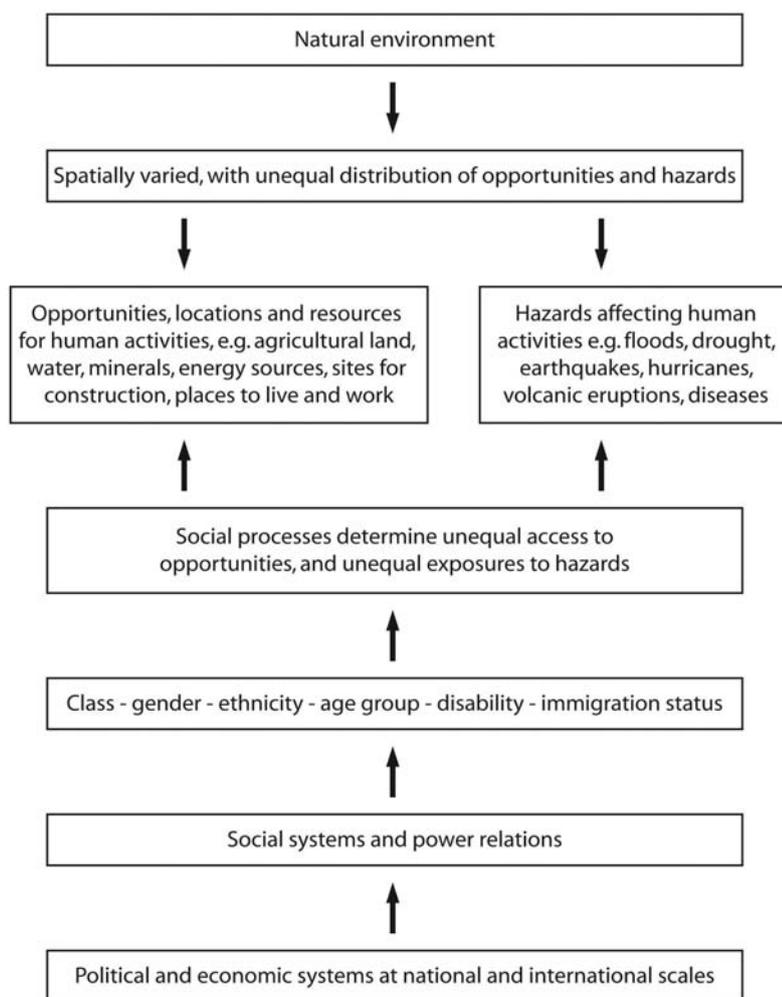
**Figure 2.** *Natural disasters as a product of natural hazards and vulnerability. (Source: Walker, Blaikie, Cannon & Davies 2004)*

Common to all the evaluation reports is the emphasis on the need for disaster preparedness, but this is increasingly accompanied by additional emphasis on the need for long-term vulnerability reduction. The first emphasis points in the direction of institutional capacity-building at both the local and national levels. The latter focus implies an integration of humanitarian response into ordinary development cooperation. The UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction has already been mentioned as a global framework for strategies aimed at making local communities less vulnerable to natural hazards. The challenge lies in translating this agenda into action to reduce vulnerability at all levels, from the local to the global. By "mainstreaming" vulnerability reduction in relation to natural disasters, key development goals such as poverty alleviation, gender equality, good governance and democratic participation will also become important considerations in preparedness efforts (Bankoff, Frerks & Hilhorst 2004).

Several of the evaluation reports point to poor or non-existent natural disaster preparedness plans and early warning systems. This is striking in connection with both the earthquake in Pakistan (2005) and the tsunami disaster (2004). Early warning that a tsunami was on its way could undoubtedly have reduced the casualties, especially in areas that were located at some distance from the earthquake's epicentre in Indonesia, and better disaster preparedness could have made the relief more effective. In hindsight, it is clear that relatively minor investments in monitoring and early warning systems would have been highly cost-effective. A strategic implication of the tsunami evaluation and other natural disasters is therefore that more international assistance should be allocated for preparedness and early warning systems in areas

that are exposed to natural hazards. The evaluation carried out by Mottet (2002) of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)'s relief operations following the earthquakes in El Salvador and India in 2001 recommends stronger links between relief and recovery/development as discussed above, but also a systematic integration of vulnerability reduction in the recovery and development phases.

However, the evaluation reports also cite examples of good practice as regards disaster preparedness and the integration of vulnerability reduction into recovery and development planning. Beck (2005) points to the fact that Bangladesh has developed institutions for disaster response, including a Disaster Management Act and a National Disaster Management Plan. He also notes that the issue of vulnerability has increasingly been integrated into national planning documents and that there has been a partial transition from emphasis on flood control to flood proofing with focus on strategies to protect local livelihoods. This means that floods are understood as an inevitable part of the continuous development process rather than as isolated natural events. Since many households in the areas most subject to flooding are in constant need of relief, reducing the vulnerability of these households and strengthening their rehabilitation capacity are priority tasks. Beck maintains that these changes in Bangladeshi flood disaster policy have come about as a result of pressure from civil society, combined with the aforementioned paradigm shift in thinking with regard to disasters.

Wiles, Selvester & Fidalgo (2005) note that Mozambique has also moved towards integrated disaster preparedness with the National Institute for Disaster Reduction playing a key role as coordinator for disaster preparedness. González (2001) points to positive experience with afforestation after Hurricane Mitch, also as a strategy to raise awareness of the connection between environmental degradation and natural disasters. This is one of very few references in the evaluation reports to environmental interventions in connection with humanitarian response to natural disasters. De Haulleville & Gander (2001) stress the positive lessons learned from emergency drills carried out among vulnerable local communities in the Andes region, but suggests that this type of local training has limited effect unless it is integrated into national programmes for disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction.

Sørensen, Vedeld & Haug (2006) mention Cuba as a model of disaster preparedness. Despite repeated cyclones, Cuba has generally avoided major natural disasters. This is usually explained by references to the country's efficient preparedness system, which includes legislation, training programmes, meteorological research, early warning systems, effective communication systems, comprehensive disaster plans and local civil defence.

The evaluation reports show that there is growing awareness of the need for disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction, but relatively few examples of good practice, especially where vulnerability reduction is concerned. Most of the reports leave the impression that disaster-stricken areas and groups receive humanitarian assistance without their vulnerability being reduced to any appreciable extent. The focus on vulnerability reduction, combined with the previously mentioned emphasis on local capacity, points in the direction of the need to reform the international humanitarian system. A reform should aim to place international actors in a new role as facilitators for vulnerability-reducing local development and the development of local capacity to respond to natural disasters. This aim raises a number of issues regarding tools and implementation, including which channels should be chosen for humanitarian response, but also regarding the relationship between local vulnerability reduction/capacity-building and, for instance, the goal of stronger international coordination of humanitarian response. The last chapter provides a brief discussion of some of these issues.

# UN Reform and Choice of Channels for Norwegian Humanitarian Response

> Although international aid inevitably involves some level of participation and consultation simply as means to the goal of service delivery, capacity building of communities through information, transparency and accountability are lacking. A fundamental re-orientation of the humanitarian sector is required to recognise that the ownership of humanitarian assistance rests with the claim-holders – i.e. that local capacities are the starting point, that long-term sustainable risk reduction is the aim, and that the role of other players is to support. Only when vulnerable people take control of their environment will they escape from vulnerability. Otherwise they will simply be dependent on fickle Western public responses and the reliability or otherwise of international aid. (Scheper, Parakrama & Patel 2006, p. 44)

OECD/DAC's (2005) Peer Review of Norway's contribution to development cooperation and humanitarian operations concludes that Norway is characterised by: *"A good performance in humanitarian donorship but a comprehensive policy document is called for and co-ordination could be ensured to better address emerging issues"* (OECD/DAC 2005, pp. 16-17, italicized in the original). The report notes, on the one hand, that Norway plays a leading role as a major, flexible donor for humanitarian action in the UN system, within the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and among NGOs. Norway has also played a leading role in efforts to link humanitarian response to conflict resolution and development. On the other hand, it points to the lack of a holistic policy document and clear priorities for work in the humanitarian field. It further notes that the administration of Norwegian humanitarian response is complex and that this makes great demands in terms of coordination. The OECD/DAC therefore recommends policy formulation and institutional reforms in order to better equip Norwegian humanitarian actors to meet new challenges, particularly as regards the genuine participation of target groups in the planning, implementation and evaluation of humanitarian operations. This emphasis on policy formulation and coordination also poses a challenge to the international humanitarian system in general.

ALNAP (2006a) observes that there has been strong growth in Western humanitarian activity after the Cold War and predicts that this trend is likely to continue for the next twenty years. It emphasises that there is now considerable optimism in the humanitarian system concerning the will and possibility to deliver impartial, effective humanitarian assistance. The expectation prevailing among key actors is that the humanitarian system will develop into a rights-based guarantee for global welfare. Because of this high level of ambition, evaluations are often very critical, since there is undeniably a significant gap between goals and actual results in key areas, as has already been shown in the previous sections.

This situation of high ambitions for global welfare combined with political and practical barriers to realising the goals has given rise to a reform process in the UN. The then Secretary-General Kofi Annan established a high-level panel in 2005 with a mandate to explore how the UN system can work more coherently and effectively across the world in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment. This work is summed up in the report "Delivering as One", which was presented in November 2006 (UN 2006). The overarching recommendation in the report is that the UN must solve its multidimensional fragmentation problems in order to be able to develop adequate response capacity and effectively fulfil its obligations in the humanitarian sector (see also UN/OCHA 2005). This entails

implementing measures to ensure internal coordination both at headquarters and at country level, but also a stronger role for the UN in coordinating other actors in the humanitarian system. The recommendations for the humanitarian sector are that the UN's role as coordinator should be further developed by focusing on six specific areas:

- Stronger coordination between the UN, national governments and NGOs, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, through a "cluster" approach to establish lead roles to deliver specific needs such as shelter, water, food, etc.
- Fully funding the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to facilitate quicker, more effective flows of funds in response to disasters.
- Clarifying UN mandates with regard to responsibility for internally displaced persons.
- More investment in risk reduction, early warning and innovative disaster assistance strategies and mechanisms.
- Stronger leadership, quicker funding and better cooperation in post-conflict and post-disaster transition, with a clear lead role for the UNDP once humanitarian coordination winds down.
- Periodic assessment and review of the performance of UN Agencies and NGOs involved in humanitarian assistance. (UN 2006, p. 5)

These recommendations concur with the evaluation reports' indication of the need for coordination, accountability and quality assurance of international humanitarian action. However, there is a possible tension between the report's strong focus on centralised coordination and humanitarian service delivery, and the evaluations' emphasis on local capacity, democratic participation and local vulnerability reduction. The latter points instead in the direction of what Scheper, Parakrama & Patel (2006) describe as a fundamental reorientation of humanitarian action in favour of local capacity and vulnerability reduction (see the above quote). This reorientation places international actors in a role of providing support for local development that reduces vulnerability and for strengthening local capacity to respond to natural disasters. The implication of this is that centralised international response capacity is not a universal solution to future natural disasters, but that humanitarian response should be seen in conjunction with and integrated into development cooperation aimed at promoting local vulnerability reduction and capacity-building.

These two strategies point towards different channels for humanitarian assistance: on the one hand, support for centralised international response capacity organised through the UN system, and on the other, use of local community-based organisations, structures for democratic participation and emphasis on a combination of humanitarian response and development. The evaluations of the tsunami disaster and the earthquake in Pakistan indicate that humanitarian organisations with a long-term basis in the local community and comprehensive context knowledge were those that were best suited to deliver efficient and effective humanitarian assistance in a situation where the life-saving relief phase was of short duration (Telford, Cosgrave & Houghton 2006). At the same time, evaluations of the humanitarian response following the earthquake in Pakistan suggest that there were mixed experiences of the UN's ability to respond quickly and establish functioning coordination clusters (Strand & Borchgrevink 2006). The challenge for Norway as a donor is not only to contribute to increasing international response capacity through improved funding and coordination, but also to promote strategies that focus on long-term vulnerability reduction and local response capacities. This calls for the selective use of channels for various objectives: (1) rapid, life-saving relief, (2) rehabilitation, livelihood development and vulnerability reduction, and (3) coordination of relief, rehabilitation and livelihood development.

# Conclusion

The evaluations of humanitarian response to natural disasters clearly have many features in common. This applies primarily to the themes that are emphasised, but also to the lessons learned in these thematic areas. The report has underscored the need for (1) linking of relief, recovery and development, (2) mapping and monitoring of needs and target groups, (3) synergy between local, national and international capacities, (4) coordination of humanitarian actors and projects, and (5) disaster preparedness and vulnerability reduction. Seen as a whole, the lessons learned indicate a need for both increased international response capacity and a reorientation of humanitarian response to focus more on local response capacity and vulnerability reduction. A key challenge for Norway as donor and for other actors in the international humanitarian system thus lies in helping to increase international response capacity through improved funding and coordination, but also in promoting strategies that focus on long-term vulnerability reduction and local response capacity.

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# Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship

Endorsed in Stockholm, 17 June 2003 by Germany, Australia, Belgium, Canada, the European Commission, Denmark, the United States, Finland, France, Ireland, Japan, Luxemburg, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland

### *Objectives and definition of humanitarian action*

1. The objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.
2. Humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles of *humanity*, meaning the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found; *impartiality*, meaning the implementation of actions solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations; *neutrality*, meaning that humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out; and *independence*, meaning the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.
3. Humanitarian action includes the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods.

### *General principles*

4. Respect and promote the implementation of international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights.
5. While reaffirming the primary responsibility of states for the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders, strive to ensure flexible and timely funding, on the basis of the collective obligation of striving to meet humanitarian needs.
6. Allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments.
7. Request implementing humanitarian organisations to ensure, to the greatest possible extent, adequate involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian response.
8. Strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and co-ordinate effectively with humanitarian partners.
9. Provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development, striving to ensure support, where appropriate, to the maintenance and return of sustainable livelihoods and transitions from humanitarian relief to recovery and development activities.
10. Support and promote the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership and co-ordination of international humanitarian action, the special role of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the vital role of the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations in implementing humanitarian action.

Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)[11]

11  http://www.reliefweb.int/ghd/a%2023%20Principles%20EN-GHD19.10.04%20RED.doc

# Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief

1. The Humanitarian imperative comes first.
2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.
3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.
4. We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.
5. We shall respect culture and custom.
6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.
7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.
8. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs.
9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.
10. In our information, publicity and advertising activities, we shall recognise disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects.

Source: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies[12]

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12  http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/index.asp