

AT A CROSSROADS

HUMANITARIANISM FOR THE NEXT DECADE



Save the Children

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Save the Children is the world's leading independent children's rights organisation, with members in 29 countries and operational programmes in more than 100. We fight for children's rights and deliver lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide.



Save the Children

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Cover photo: Democratic Republic of Congo, 2008. Families flee fighting in Kibati, 5km north of Goma. (Photo: Kate Holt)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance	INGO	International non-governmental organisation
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process	IPCC	Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change
CBHA	Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies	LEAP	Livelihoods, Early Assessment, Protection project
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities project	LNGO	Local non-governmental organisation
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund	MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
CHF	Common Humanitarian Fund	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
CRSA	Child Rights Situation Analysis	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
DFID	UK Department for International Development	NNGO	National non-governmental organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
DRR	disaster risk reduction	ODI	Overseas Development Institute
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building project	OECD DAC	OECD's Development Assistance Committee
ERC	United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator	PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
ERF	Emergency Response Fund	RC	Resident Coordinator
FEWSNET	Famine Early Warning System	SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship	UAE	United Arab Emirates
GHP	Global Humanitarian Platform	UN	United Nations
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership	UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee	WFP	World Food Programme
IDP	Internally displaced person		
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Humanitarianism stands at a crossroads. This year sees the appointment of a new United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator, bringing new leadership at the very highest level of the humanitarian system. It is also five years on from the start of the Humanitarian Reform Process, an initiative designed to improve how the humanitarian system functions. Yet the humanitarian system is facing a number of significant challenges – both environmental and political. The confluence of these challenges threatens the ability of humanitarian agencies to help those affected by emergencies. At the same time, critics of the system are raising doubts about the integrity and effectiveness of humanitarianism.

This report examines some of the most pressing issues facing the humanitarian system and identifies how they are affecting the nature of humanitarian emergencies. It recommends actions that should be taken by senior humanitarian leaders to respond to these challenges.

Challenges faced by the humanitarian system:

1. Environmental and demographic trends – including climate change, population growth and urbanisation – are increasing the number of vulnerable people in the world and changing the nature of emergencies faced by children and their communities. Large-scale disasters, such as cyclones, are increasing in intensity while a proliferation of small, localised emergencies, such as floods, is affecting greater numbers of people. Slow-onset and cyclical crises – droughts, for example – are becoming more frequent and intense in some places. There will be more disasters in urban areas and greater unpredictability.

2. Political and societal trends are threatening the ability of humanitarian agencies to work on the basis of core principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. The international security agenda stemming from the ‘War on Terror’, with the associated drive for increased coherence of international policy, is blurring the lines between humanitarian activity and other political or military activity. Non-humanitarian actors, including the military and the private sector, are being used to deliver aid, while in many places both governments and non-state warring parties are attempting to exercise greater political control over humanitarian work. These developments threaten the humanitarian imperative to deliver relief purely on the basis of assessed need. They also reduce the effectiveness of aid.

3. Humanitarian agencies are being criticised for the choices they make in complex political environments, and for their ability to deliver aid in a way that is effective, coordinated and accountable. The humanitarian system has been criticised for a perceived lack of coordination in recent emergencies, particularly in Haiti. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also been criticised for the choices they have made in war zones such as Afghanistan. Their motives have been questioned, with suggestions that humanitarian agencies attempt to expand their operations at the expense of humanitarian principles. Although critiques of humanitarian agencies have been made for many years, recent events have drawn particularly sharp criticism.

To address these challenges humanitarian leaders should take the following actions:

1. **Invest further in disaster risk reduction (DRR), disaster preparedness and resilience. This is the most effective way to mitigate the increased threat posed by environmental and demographic changes.** It is widely recognised that helping communities prepare in advance is the most effective way to mitigate disasters, but the humanitarian system is not yet designed fully to incorporate this in the face of the dramatic changes happening to the environment.
2. **Focus on improving humanitarian independence and leadership, to protect humanitarian response from being distorted by short-term political interests and security objectives.** Leadership within the UN and NGOs should be strengthened. This should include ensuring that humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence are emphasised throughout the humanitarian community, as set out in the Code of Conduct for the Red Cross/Red Crescent and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

3. **Strengthen the professionalism and accountability of the humanitarian system to disaster-affected populations. This is the best way to deal with criticism of the humanitarian system and improve the ability of agencies to deliver effective, transparent humanitarian aid.** This should include ensuring that the needs of children, who represent the majority of those affected by emergencies, are fully addressed in the implementation of humanitarian response. It should also include improving the engagement of national and local NGOs in the humanitarian system. The establishment of an international professional humanitarian body should be considered.

By taking steps to implement recommendations in these three areas, humanitarian leaders would significantly address the three areas outlined as challenges in this report. The UN has a central role to play, building on the innovations and progress of the Humanitarian Reform Process. NGOs should also be leaders and innovators, as their strong role in the humanitarian system requires.

SAVE THE CHILDREN: A MULTI-MANDATED CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATION

Save the Children works for a world that respects, protects and fulfils children's rights.

The foundation for our work is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC), which encompasses the fundamental freedoms and the inherent rights of all human beings below the age of 18. Children have many of the same rights afforded to adults. In addition, children have rights in the UNCRC that reflect their particular needs as children.

Nearly all governments have signed and ratified the UNCRC, with the notable exception of the USA. The Convention is in essence an agreement to obey the same groundrules deemed necessary for a child to survive and develop to his or her full potential. Insistence that all children have exactly the same rights is particularly important in a world of growing inequality and discrimination.

In working to enhance children's rights, Save the Children adopts a multi-mandated approach. This means we conduct humanitarian response, assisting children and their communities in emergencies, alongside development programming designed to reduce poverty

and improve children's wellbeing in the longer term. In addition, we work to build an environment where children's rights will be protected and respected, advocating, campaigning and working with local and national partners to achieve these aims. How these different approaches are used in different circumstances requires a clear analysis of the particular humanitarian, developmental and political context.

In every country where we work, Save the Children carries out a Child Rights Situation Analysis (CRSA) which establishes the context of children's rights in that country. The CRSA looks at four key factors: which children's rights are not realised; why those rights are not realised; who has a duty for ensuring children's rights in the country; and what solutions exist for realising those rights.

In a fast-onset humanitarian crisis we also carry out a humanitarian assessment based on agreed methodologies. These often take place in a joint assessment with other agencies and include an integrated approach involving relevant specialists, for example, in health, nutrition, education and child protection.

I INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM AND HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Humanitarian aid is delivered to people suffering because of natural disasters or conflicts. Humanitarian agencies aim to save and improve the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable people, attempting to reach those most in need in a crisis. In 2009, 119 million people were affected by natural disasters alone.¹ Humanitarian agencies reach millions of crisis-affected people each year with emergency relief; global resources for humanitarian response totalled more than \$15 billion in 2009.²

Humanitarian response has historically been conducted by a patchwork of different actors. Governmental bodies, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, and private-sector agencies deliver aid on the local, national and international level. They make up what has been recognised as forming the 'humanitarian system'.³

This report is concerned with how the humanitarian system operates and what current trends will affect the ability of humanitarian agencies to help people in need in the future. It is particularly concerned with how the humanitarian system can improve its ability to reach children affected by emergencies. This report does not address development aid, which is designed to achieve longer-term poverty alleviation.

In this report, a broad definition of a humanitarian crisis is used, to include 'any situation in which there is an exceptional and widespread threat to human life, health or subsistence'.⁴ In responding to humanitarian crises, it is essential to keep in mind that humanitarianism is founded on core principles. These principles distinguish humanitarian response from other forms of international intervention. For NGOs, the principles of humanitarian response have been laid out in recent years in collective statements of practice. These include the NGO and Red Cross Code of Conduct⁵ (see box overleaf) and the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards.⁶ They define, in theory, the core identity of humanitarian agencies. This identity and its principles, developed over time, form the very basis of why humanitarian organisations came into being and how they seek to serve the communities they work with.

At the heart of these principles is the 'humanitarian imperative': that the right to receive assistance is fundamental and should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries. Aid must be given on the basis of need alone, regardless of race, creed or nationality, and aid must not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint nor be used purely as an instrument of government foreign policy.⁷ This particularly applies in situations of conflict, civil unrest, government oppression or other insecurity, when those who are powerful and well connected will often attempt to coerce humanitarians into taking sides or providing financial gain.

As well as stating overarching principles, the Code of Conduct and Sphere guidelines outline

in practical terms the way in which humanitarian response should be conducted. This includes an emphasis on involving affected people in the management of relief, and building disaster response on local capacities.⁸ The Sphere Minimum Standards effectively define the benchmark for the quality of projects delivered by humanitarian agencies.

Collectively, these principles and standards are central to the understanding of humanitarian response within the humanitarian community. It is their existence that sets humanitarian organisations apart from other potential deliverers of aid. Humanitarian organisations should seek to deliver aid purely on the basis of need. They should not be

motivated by financial gain or by wider political motives. This does not mean that humanitarian organisations cannot coordinate with or contract others to help deliver aid if appropriate, but the humanitarian imperative should remain central to their actions. This is crucial when discussing, for example, the interaction of humanitarian agencies with the military.

Conducting principled humanitarian response in complex political and environmental contexts is complicated. It is with this in mind that the following discussion of current and future challenges to the humanitarian system should be viewed.

HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND THE CODE OF CONDUCT

The most practical explanatory and training tool for humanitarian principles is the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief first articulated in 1994. Now officially translated into more than 20 languages, it is part of international training, workshops and debates. The Code of Conduct is voluntary, and more than 400 organisations have signed up to its principles, with many also adding aspects of it into legally binding documents for their staff. It has arguably the widest reach of any code for the humanitarian sector. Some aspects of the code are debated, but more than 15 years since its inception, Save the Children and seven other of the largest NGO networks, representing approximately 80% of humanitarian relief⁹ worldwide, have recently reaffirmed its importance.

This code is for the Red Cross/Crescent and other NGOs. Governments and other warring parties have their own obligations for humanitarian principles under international law, such as the Geneva Conventions.

The Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct contains the following principles, which remain relevant:¹⁰

- 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 humans, not hopeless objects.

1.2 CRITICISM OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

The humanitarian system has been criticised over many years for many reasons. Critics have questioned the ability of humanitarian agencies to coordinate themselves effectively and to maintain humanitarian principles in conflict zones. The delivery of humanitarian aid has at different times been perceived as wasteful, creating dependency, damaging local economies and being unsustainable.¹¹

Recently, the humanitarian response to the devastating Haitian earthquake of January 2010 was criticised as uncoordinated¹² and the behaviour of NGOs in conflict zones has also received significant public criticism.¹³ These are not new developments. The 1990s, in particular, saw significant growth in the scale of humanitarian response, and major reviews of aid sparked by crises such as the Rwandan genocide.

Many criticisms of humanitarian response have been valid. Some terrible mistakes have been made, notably in Goma following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and dating back to the Biafran War in Nigeria in the 1960s. Humanitarian agencies have sometimes failed to provide an effective response, sometimes undermined their own principles, and sometimes they have made a situation worse. There have also been cases in which humanitarian workers have abused their positions of responsibility. These issues will be dealt with in greater detail in Section 2.3, below.

Although some criticisms of humanitarian response come from those outside the system, many come from those within the system itself. Humanitarian workers recognise the need to learn from past mistakes and to develop better ways to make ethical decisions based on humanitarian principles and past experience. Humanitarians must continue to address these concerns as a priority.

While attempting to tackle the deficiencies in the humanitarian system, however, it is important to remember the fundamental causes of human suffering – namely, those responsible for wars, genocides and rights violations; governments that

are unwilling or unable to protect or assist their own citizens; and poverty that prevents communities from protecting themselves from disasters. Humanitarian organisations have a duty to improve their assistance to crisis-affected communities, but they are not themselves responsible for humanitarian crises.¹⁴

Humanitarian agencies are attempting to work in some of the most highly challenging environments in the world. Endemic poverty, corruption and pervasive inequality in many countries make any sort of intervention difficult. The humanitarian system, though by no means perfect, has helped to save and improve the lives of millions of people. Despite problems with the aid system, the scale of international need is great, and growing.¹⁵ Crisis-affected communities need an effective, functioning humanitarian system.

1.3 THE HUMANITARIAN REFORM PROCESS

In the face of challenging circumstances, humanitarians have attempted over a number of years to improve how the system functions. Most notably, in 2005 the then Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), Jan Egeland, the UN's most senior humanitarian, began an initiative called the 'Humanitarian Reform Process'. This process has attempted to improve humanitarian leadership, coordination, financing and partnerships between different agencies, with the overall aim of achieving better delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need.

A full discussion of the Humanitarian Reform Process is beyond the scope of this report, but a summary is necessary for understanding how best to respond to future challenges.¹⁶

On **leadership**, the focus of humanitarian reform has been on Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) and Resident Coordinators (RCs).¹⁷ RCs are the UN's main representative in a country, managing the UN's relationship with the host government, while HCs are responsible for managing and coordinating humanitarian response in countries where crises are common. Most often, the UN gives both these

jobs to a single person, a so-called ‘double-hatted’ RC/HC.¹⁸ NGOs, however, have argued for ‘stand-alone’ HCs with demonstrable humanitarian experience who can concentrate solely on coordinating humanitarian response based on need, even if this leads to disagreement with the host government.¹⁹ Producing a larger number of outstanding HCs has been described as “perhaps the key to making all of the other components of humanitarian reform work effectively”.^{20,21}

Reforms in **coordination** have created the most visible product of the Humanitarian Reform Process so far: the establishment of clusters. Clusters are coordination mechanisms that are based on a sectoral approach (ie, one for health, one for education and so on). They have been set up at global and country levels. The global clusters are designed to improve humanitarian assistance by pre-positioning stocks and providing training, surge capacity and rosters for their sectors. Country-level clusters are established in countries with a significant humanitarian need, to assess needs, identify priority projects and ensure that gaps are filled. Each cluster has a designated lead agency, most often a UN agency. Save the Children is the only NGO to have committed itself to the co-leadership of a global cluster – the Education Cluster, in partnership with UNICEF. We have also been actively involved in cluster leadership at a country level, in particular co-leading the Child Protection ‘sub-cluster’ in countries including Myanmar (Burma).

Financing reforms have tried to make the disbursement of humanitarian funds faster, more equitable and more predictable. The primary means of tackling this has been an emphasis on ‘pooled funds’. These mechanisms enable donors to contribute lump-sums to a fund that is centrally managed to address humanitarian needs, instead of the donor making large numbers of different grants to individual agencies. Pooled funds include the international Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) as well as country-based funds such as Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) and Emergency Response Funds (ERFs). Although pooled funds do not contain the majority of funding, they have significantly changed humanitarian response, especially in the early days of fast-onset emergencies and in chronic emergencies.

Partnership was added to the Humanitarian Reform Process in 2007, when a series of field-based workshops led to donors, UN agencies and NGOs signing a declaration called the ‘Principles of Partnership’.²² The intention of these principles is to improve cooperation between UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, to promote equality, transparency, tangible results, responsibility and complementarity. The principles also represent an attempt to increase the engagement of local and national NGOs in humanitarian mechanisms.

Together, these reforms have attempted to improve the humanitarian system and the delivery of aid to crisis-affected communities.

2 CHALLENGES FACED BY THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

2.1 ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

Climate change is already upon us. Global average temperature is 0.76°C higher than it was before the Industrial Revolution, driven up principally by human-made greenhouse gases. This increase is almost certain to exceed 2°C unless urgent action is taken to cut greenhouse emissions.²³ The Earth's weather patterns are already being affected, with more frequent and intense floods, storms and droughts, changing ecosystems and rising sea levels.²⁴ The effects of climate change on children are particularly severe, with children most vulnerable to the increase in disease, undernutrition and natural disasters caused by climate change. Save the Children has identified climate change as one of the biggest global health threats to children in the 21st century.²⁵ Simultaneously, the world's population is increasing at an unprecedented rate. The Earth's population is fast approaching 7 billion people and almost all of this population increase is taking place in developing countries – an extra 82 million people each year.²⁶

Where vulnerable people live is also changing, with more than half the world's people now living in cities. The pace of urbanisation is such that urban development cannot keep up with population growth and migration. This is exacerbating a trend that has been described as two separate urban populations existing within a single city – the wealthier people in the city benefiting from urban living, while others live in slums and marginal areas, enduring worse conditions than their rural counterparts.²⁷ These risks are made worse by governments that may be unable or unwilling to provide adequate security, water supply, drainage,

protection from floods or effective health systems. Deforestation and mismanagement of natural resources are also highly significant.

Displaced people and slum-dwellers are often pushed to live in disaster-prone places such as landfill sites, floodplains or hillsides prone to landslides.²⁸ In low-income countries the mortality rates of children under five are 5 to 20 times higher than they would be if urban populations had adequate access to healthcare and nutrition.²⁹

It is predicted that, by 2030, 60% of all urban dwellers will be under the age of 18.³⁰ There is, therefore, a significant and growing number of children in developing cities vulnerable to natural disasters and without the infrastructure to protect them.³¹

Large numbers of people are also on move. It has been estimated that as many as half of the world's internally displaced persons (IDPs), more than 30 million people, migrate to urban areas, where they mix with existing migrant populations and urban poor.³² Following the Haiti earthquake of January 2010, for example, there was an IDP population of approximately 1.3 million, most of them from the capital city, Port-au-Prince.³³ The requirements of these people are great and have raised significant issues concerning the long-term future of this urban population, with the government of Haiti stating its intention to move people permanently to less crowded, less disaster-prone locations.³⁴

Finally, in addition to their effects on 'natural' disasters, climate and demographic change have the potential to exacerbate existing social tensions,

thereby becoming a driver of conflict. Although conflicts have complex causes, research suggests that over the past 60 years 40% of all civil conflicts have been linked to natural resources.³⁵ As resources come under increased pressure from climate and demographic change, there is considerable risk that conflicts will intensify. There will also be a growing need for better negotiation of land rights and water treaties in order to prevent conflict.

By 2015, the number of people affected by climate-related disasters each year is likely to rise by an estimated 50%, from 250 million per year today to 375 million.³⁶ The environmental and demographic trends outlined here are having, and will continue to have, a significant effect on the *type* of emergencies encountered across the world:

- **An increase in the size of large-scale natural disasters** because of climate change, combined with larger and more concentrated populations. Weather-related natural disasters such as cyclones are likely to become more severe.³⁷ Consequently, extreme events such

as Cyclone Nargis, which devastated the Irrawaddy Delta of Myanmar in 2008, killing more than 100,000 people, are likely to become more common.

- **An increase in the frequency of small and medium-sized disasters.** This is a less obvious but even more significant effect of climate change and demographic shifts, with smaller-scale floods and droughts happening more often and affecting more people. The number of small disasters grew threefold between 1987 and 2006.³⁸ Flooding of the Zambezi River in southern Africa, for example, has increased in frequency from being ‘semi-regular’ – every few years – to become almost annual in countries including Zambia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique.³⁹ Disasters of this sort, on a small to medium scale, may go largely unnoticed by the international media and public. Yet small and medium-sized disasters like these affect millions of people each year and are increasing in number, with significant effects for children’s health and wellbeing.⁴⁰

HAITI: AN URBAN DISASTER FOR CHILDREN

The catastrophic earthquake of January 2010 that struck Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti, killed more than 200,000 people and presented a stark picture of the devastation that an urban emergency can bring. Children were particularly affected. Poor water and sanitation conditions threatened children with potentially fatal illnesses such as diarrhoea, especially in makeshift displacement camps. Hundreds of thousands of children were also estimated to be separated from their families, or to have lost one or both parents. Children in this situation are highly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, making this one of the biggest child protection emergencies in the world. Haiti’s education and health systems were also critically damaged in the earthquake, resulting in a longer-term impact on the wellbeing and development of children.

Even before the earthquake Port-au-Prince had significant risk factors for children. Many people live on steep hillsides on the city periphery, prone to landslides, while the annual hurricane season routinely places people at risk. Prior to the earthquake several hundred thousand children worked in Port-au-Prince as ‘restaveks’ or unpaid domestic workers; the city also has a history of insecurity, with UN peacekeeping forces present before the earthquake. This complex urban environment has proved to be an enormous challenge to humanitarian work, especially for the protection of children in the post-disaster phase.

Opposite The earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010 caused an urban disaster with huge challenges for humanitarian response.





- **More slow-onset and cyclical humanitarian emergencies.** This will result from more gradual environmental changes, degradation, soil erosion, water stress and industrial pollution.⁴¹ These trends, combined with impacts such as changing weather patterns, will have long-term, insidious effects on infrastructure in the poorest countries, putting pressure on livelihoods and health systems on which the poorest children rely. Simultaneously, climate change is likely to increase malnutrition and the spread of diseases, conditions to which children in poor communities are most vulnerable.⁴² However, owing to their often gradual nature, emergencies of this kind do not trigger media and donor attention in the same way as, for example, a tsunami. Countries across the Sahel, for example, have historically suffered from cyclical droughts and food insecurity (see box on Niger, below). In Ethiopia, droughts that used to occur every 6 to 10 years are now occurring every 1 to 2 years.⁴³
- **More urban disasters.** Historically, international humanitarian response has predominantly focused on rural areas, on the assumption, at least partially justified, that urban areas have greater economic resilience and receive more help from governments. Now, with 60 megacities predicted by 2015, each with a population greater than 10 million people, the prospect of major crises such as food insecurity or epidemics in urban environments is one that humanitarians must prepare for as well as the potential effects of earthquakes and other such disasters. This is a profound change with far-reaching implications. A recent joint UN–NGO task force on urbanisation has indicated that urban disaster risk reduction and preparedness, mitigation, response and reconstruction will dominate humanitarian policies in the future.⁴⁴
- **Increased uncertainty.** Although it is possible to identify particular trends that will challenge humanitarian response in the coming years, perhaps the only sure fact for future planning is increased uncertainty.⁴⁵ Climate science is highly complex and does not lend itself easily to clear predictions. Climate scientists are able to provide humanitarians with information, of increasing quality, on the incidence of hazards such as storms and droughts. However, in the face of these significant climatic and demographic changes it is impossible to say with complete accuracy when, where and what type of humanitarian response will be required in the coming decades.

NIGER 2010: A PREDICTED EMERGENCY

In Niger in 2010, 7.1 million people – half the population – are in need of humanitarian assistance, while almost 400,000 children are at risk of severe acute malnutrition. The humanitarian community has been aware of this coming crisis since late 2009, yet has still had difficulty raising the profile of this emergency internationally. Dealing with a predictable cycle such as this requires donor resources to be committed early and up front, as well as effective early warning systems and assessment analysis, and interventions that are appropriate for the situation.⁴⁶

The international media play a significant role in determining responses to such slow-onset disasters. In many countries the focus of international donors and governments frequently follows media interest, which in turn often draws on historical or cultural ties with the affected country. However, it is not always possible to raise the profile of an emerging disaster, such as that in Niger, to the level at which media interest is generated ahead of time in order to save lives. The system must, therefore, be sufficiently well equipped to act before the wave of public attention.

Opposite Cyclical food insecurity in Niger poses a particular threat to newborn and child survival.

2.2 POLITICAL AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

In addition to the environmental and demographic factors outlined above, a number of political trends are also challenging humanitarian response. They relate to changing perceptions of humanitarian response, newly emerging actors in the humanitarian sphere, ongoing questions of sovereignty and the perceived manipulation of the humanitarian agenda for political purposes. These trends threaten the ability of humanitarian agencies to deliver aid based on the humanitarian imperative and assessed need.

2.2.1 Terrorism, counter-terrorism, and the coherence agenda

Over the past decades there have been times when warring parties have attempted to hijack humanitarian relief for their own profit or political gain. Despite this, humanitarian aid based on need remains an important principle to be pursued and promoted in all conflicts and emergencies.

In recent years, and particularly since '9/11' in 2001, governments and the UN have sought to increase the coherence of their international policies, unifying their political, military and humanitarian objectives. Though improving coherence may be a legitimate and desirable goal, it can have significant negative implications for humanitarian activity unless applied carefully.

Particular concerns exist around the decisions of donors who have been engaging in military combat, either through NATO or as individual governments – for example, in Afghanistan. Here, an emphasis on stabilisation and state-building has diverted attention from a growing humanitarian crisis and the goal of assistance based on assessed need.⁴⁷ Afghan provinces that are politically and militarily important to NATO have received a concentration of aid funding⁴⁸ and aid is often used as a means to protect NATO forces.⁴⁹ The military tactic of using aid to gain acceptance from a population, described by some as 'winning hearts and minds'⁵⁰, is opposed to fundamental humanitarian principles, as outlined in the Code of Conduct, that aid should be based on assessed need alone. Any organisation that

agrees to be part of these operations contributes to the confusion. In such circumstances, aid risks being instrumentalised within wider political strategies.

Governments are also choosing to use the military to deliver aid. In Afghanistan, this has included the use of 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams' (PRTs), which are made up of military and civilian personnel who deliver aid as part of a military and political strategy. Evidence suggests, however, that projects implemented through military structures in conflict zones are often poorly executed,⁵¹ being designed for a fast impact but lacking the community involvement required to make them sustainable.⁵²

Military involvement in aid can also draw aid projects into a conflict, with projects that are directly associated with one warring party placing aid workers and beneficiaries at risk, and reducing aid effectiveness. PRT-constructed schools, for example, have been shown to be more vulnerable to attack than other schools.⁵³ NGOs running health clinics have also documented the fact that health facilities – for example, in Mianposhta, Helmand – have been used by both sides in the conflict for military purposes.⁵⁴ These facilities are, therefore, no longer used. This has significant implications for those concerned with the safety of beneficiaries and the effectiveness of aid.

Non-state warring parties, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan, must also bear significant responsibility for these developments and the closing of 'humanitarian space' in conflict zones (see box on Humanitarian Space in Section 2.2.3). All sides in conflicts must abide by international humanitarian law and allow humanitarian access.

The drive for coherence from donor governments has been accompanied by a comparable increase in 'Integrated Missions' by the UN. In some contexts there have been positive benefits, for example, in Liberia and Burundi. In these cases, there has been little difference between the objectives of the political, military and development sectors, and so the situation has been improved by greater integration and improved overall coherence.⁵⁵ In other contexts, though, humanitarian goals are at odds with the UN's broader political

and security goals. The UN's peacekeeping mission's support for counter-insurgency operations by the government army in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for example, risks undermining the perception of UN agencies as neutral,⁵⁶ particularly as components of the DRC army have themselves committed human rights abuses.

Partly as a consequence of these trends, the 2009 UN Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict argues that the capacity of humanitarian actors to operate according to humanitarian principles is becoming more constrained.⁵⁷

MULTI-MANDATED NGOs

Implementing a mixed-NGO mandate in complex contexts such as Afghanistan involves making some difficult judgements about what is appropriate. In Save the Children we do not limit our activity to the provision of humanitarian relief, nor do most other agencies conducting humanitarian response. In fulfilling our child rights agenda, we also engage in longer-term development and poverty alleviation, as well as advocating for human rights, equality and fairness. It is important to use different methods – humanitarian, development and advocacy – to deliver children's rights and provide assistance for children. The ability to do this is a central strength of a mixed-mandate agency.

However, there is concern in some quarters that, recently, the judgement of mixed-mandate agencies has put principled humanitarianism at risk. By accepting funding from warring parties – principally NATO countries – NGOs are in a position in which it is difficult to argue they are fully impartial, neutral or independent.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), for example, argues that the humanitarian community in Afghanistan has lost the acceptance of the population that is necessary for the provision of humanitarian aid. MSF attributes a large part of the blame for this to the instrumentalisation of aid for counter-insurgency purposes. It states that many in the aid community have been

responsible, directly or indirectly, for supporting such co-option by conducting activities that go beyond the humanitarian imperative to include broader development and state-building objectives. MSF's position is that, in the context of a war such as that in Afghanistan, the provision of humanitarian aid is incompatible with the simultaneous provision of development.⁵⁸ Academics from Tufts University and others have come to broadly the same conclusion.⁵⁹

In Afghanistan and other difficult contexts, Save the Children believes there is a role for mixed mandate agencies to support the existing government to build capacity to deliver for children. However, in doing so, NGOs must make sure they do not sleepwalk into practices that disregard the importance of humanitarian principles. In some circumstances, development projects may compromise humanitarian principles, and the ability of agencies to undertake impartial humanitarian response based on assessed need. In such cases, NGOs must make hard choices that require delicate judgement about what actions are in the best interests of beneficiaries. Agencies will not always get it right and decisions will be made under difficult circumstances. To make these choices, multi-mandated NGOs need clear mechanisms for applying their own particular mandates to complex contexts.

2.2.2 Private-sector aid delivery

In addition to the use of the military for aid delivery, the private sector is increasingly involved with the delivery of humanitarian relief. Although corporations vary greatly, they differ profoundly from humanitarian agencies in that they seek to earn a profit.⁶⁰ This opens up a number of questions alongside opportunities.

Prospective benefits of involving the private sector in humanitarian response include the potential to access new sources of funding and to provide additional delivery capacity. The private sector is also well placed to help strengthen local economies for the benefit of local people. Some private-sector investment can foster long-term relationships with communities, recruit and train local staff and support local businesses, as humanitarian agencies do.⁶¹ In particular aspects of humanitarian response, private companies have been involved for some time; for example, TNT in logistics. As private-sector interest in humanitarian response grows, it brings the possibility of innovations that could improve the humanitarian system.

However, for the involvement of the private sector to be beneficial for humanitarian response, it is important that companies operate in ways that are consistent with humanitarian principles. If they do not, many of the issues related to the use of military actors for delivery of aid will also apply to the private sector, especially when private-sector companies are providing armed security. In recognition of this, the World Economic Forum and the UN have produced guiding principles for public–private collaboration designed to ensure that private-sector engagement takes place in line with humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality and independence.⁶²

This guidance includes the recommendation that private companies should enter into partnerships with established humanitarian organisations. This would facilitate better assessment of need, use of technology and links with communities. If this is done, greater private-sector involvement in the humanitarian system can be viewed as potentially very positive, and risks can be minimised.

2.2.3 Host governments and sovereignty

The relationship between humanitarian agencies and host governments is also constantly changing and developing, with recent events in some countries placing the existence of independent, principled humanitarianism at risk.

States are recognised as having the primary role in delivering humanitarian assistance within their territory, as set out in the UN Charter and more recently in UN Resolution 46/182 in 1991. This entails a responsibility on behalf of governments, on whom affected populations rely for the management and leadership of a humanitarian response. Humanitarian agencies are also reliant on governments for access and coordination, working with the UN where present and where this is appropriate. In turn, it is incumbent upon humanitarian agencies to recognise the legitimacy of state sovereignty and to take action to engage effectively with host governments, within the boundaries of humanitarian principles.⁶³

Some governments are sufficiently wealthy that they can refuse international aid, as India did following the 2004 tsunami.⁶⁴ Others lack the capacity to respond on their own and request stronger international support, as was the case in the 2010 Haiti earthquake. There are also cases where it is inappropriate for the government to take a central role. The crisis of IDPs in Pakistan's Swat Valley in 2009, for example, was precipitated by an upsurge in conflict between the government and insurgents.⁶⁵ The government's involvement in the conflict made 'humanitarian' activity by the Pakistani military inappropriate. Despite this, the government proceeded to use military resources to deliver aid, and was criticised for risking the politicisation of aid delivery.

Most worrying, however, is an increase in governments taking an actively obstructive or antagonistic stance towards humanitarian response. Recent research indicates that host government respect for humanitarian principles has declined.⁶⁶ In some cases, governments attempt to exercise greater control over humanitarian activity in their countries, and may have political incentives to

HUMANITARIAN SPACE

'Humanitarian space' refers to the ability of humanitarian actors to operate and deliver humanitarian aid according to assessed need and without undue restrictions or threats. Humanitarian space may be reduced by any groups with an interest in controlling or redirecting aid. This is of particular relevance with regard to armed actors or host governments. In February 2010 at a meeting of the heads of many of the major UN and NGO humanitarian agencies it was concluded that "...the notion of humanitarian space is intimately linked with the policies and practices of national governments towards civil society and fundamental freedoms".⁶⁷

As a result, the profile, behaviour and perception of NGOs are important at both the international and national level. Effective engagement with host governments relies on the ability of the humanitarian community to demonstrate its efficiency and effectiveness in delivering assistance, its neutrality in relation to armed actors, and its ability to work with national partners without compromising the independence of aid. However, if governments deliberately obstruct the delivery of aid, humanitarian relief will only be able to achieve so much without additional support from the international community to press national governments into improving humanitarian space.

restrict aid to certain troublesome regions, erect blockades or establish restrictions on people's movement. Sudan's decision to expel aid agencies in 2009, despite millions of people dependent on aid, is an illustration of how power over humanitarian agencies can be used in internal political struggles within countries. The government of Myanmar also had a complex relationship with the humanitarian response following Cyclone Nargis in 2008.

2.2.4 Changes in funding for humanitarian relief

Significant changes are also taking place in funding for humanitarian work. Governments that contribute to humanitarian response are increasing in number and diversifying in nature, and there are also growing sources of non-governmental funding.

Traditionally, international debate about humanitarian financing has been dominated by Western countries that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC).

In 2003 these countries signed up to an initiative called Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD). The GHD encourages members to provide aid that is timely, accountable and made on the basis of assessed need⁶⁸ (although members may vary in their adherence to these principles).

However, whereas in the 1990s the average number of governments financing humanitarian responses was as few as 12, it is now common for 50 to 60 governments to support a response,⁶⁹ with 112 countries giving humanitarian assistance in 2009.⁷⁰ In 2008, 12% of humanitarian financing was provided by non-DAC donors, including Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Kuwait. These countries provided a much larger percentage in some cases⁷¹, while often also wielding considerable political influence. However, non-DAC contributions have varied greatly from year to year – for example, falling from a total of \$1.1 billion in 2008 to \$224 million in 2009. The scale of this fall was largely the result of an exceptionally big contribution of \$500 million from Saudi Arabia to the World Food Programme in 2008.⁷²

Newer donors tend not to be part of the OECD DAC, nor of the GHD group. Although non-DAC donors pursue a variety of approaches, broadly speaking they have chosen to channel humanitarian funding through the host state, rather than through humanitarian institutions or multilateral mechanisms. In 2007, for example, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and UAE gave 85% of their aid bilaterally to other governments.⁷³ In the case of conflicts where the authorities are a warring party, this raises concerns that aid will be politically targeted. This also means that non-DAC donors are less likely to be engaged with formal coordination mechanisms like the clusters, or with pooled funds, posing challenges for coherence and coordination.

On the positive side, non-DAC donors are clearly a significant source of funding. They can also help to address the perception that the international humanitarian system is dominated by Western countries – something the DAC and UN would like to do.⁷⁴ Arab donors also have a history of partnership and dialogue with recipient countries, enabling better recipient ownership of projects.⁷⁵ In improving the humanitarian system it is necessary to engage these important donors.

It should also be noted that NGOs are, in some cases, major donors themselves. In 2007 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) spent more than all but two donors – the USA and the European Commission.⁷⁶ More recently, US NGOs raised \$917 million from the American public in the two months following the Haiti earthquake,⁷⁷ compared with the UN ‘Flash Appeal’ request for a total of \$1.5 billion. This level of independent financing and strategic involvement affirms that NGOs are significant players in the humanitarian system.

2.3 CRITICISM OF THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

In addition to environmental and political issues that are affecting the humanitarian system, there are challenges relating to the system itself, how it operates and the choices humanitarians make. Criticisms of the humanitarian aid system have been made for many years and for many reasons. They include arguments about the unintended consequences of aid; the political economy of conflict; the creation of dependency; inappropriate or unsustainable projects; and under-cutting the responsibility of the state.⁷⁸

Some of these criticisms are made by those outside the humanitarian community, while humanitarians themselves have also undertaken critical analysis of the system and the behaviour of humanitarian agencies. Critiques of this kind must be addressed if the system is to be improved for the future. Although it is not possible here to identify and deal with every criticism of humanitarian response, some particular areas can be highlighted.

2.3.1 Poorly run humanitarian response

The humanitarian system has been criticised with regard to its ability to run a coordinated, effective and sustainable response. This criticism has most recently been expressed in relation to the Haiti earthquake response. Eleven days after the earthquake hit, reports stated that “...aid agencies and the international community are struggling to coordinate a quick, effective response to meet the needs of Haitians affected...”⁷⁹ One month into the earthquake response, coordination was still not considered good enough. In a leaked email Sir John Holmes, the then Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that insufficient progress had been made on strengthening coordination structures, concluding: “This is beginning to show and is leading others to doubt our ability to deliver.” He called for “all major organisations... to deploy their most experienced disaster response staff”.⁸⁰

Despite the enormous logistical difficulties faced by humanitarians in Haiti (see box in Section 2.1 above) this perceived lack of coordination in the earliest phase of the Haiti response led to renewed questions about the motivations of large humanitarian agencies. NGOs were accused of ‘jostling for position’, pursuing their own interests ahead of those of the affected population, and with little collaboration with smaller, grassroots organisations with potentially better access to communities.⁸¹ The impression given was of a sector that could not organise itself effectively, in part owing to internal competition.

Such criticisms are not unique to Haiti. Following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, a comprehensive evaluation reported that “many agencies competed for ‘client’ populations which resulted in some duplication... Some geographical areas were better served than others, and there was a perceived need among agencies to have ‘visible’ projects, such as new houses and boats.”⁸² The evaluation concluded that the international community should assist host governments to exert greater coordinating authority over visiting organisations.

It was owing to perceived weaknesses in the system that Jan Egeland commissioned a study in 2004 called the ‘Humanitarian Response Review’. This study began the Humanitarian Reform Process. The review identified gaps in the humanitarian system, notably in the preparedness of humanitarian organisations. It also stated that there was limited collaboration between the UN, Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs, and concluded that the time had come for an inclusive, system-wide coordination mechanism.⁸³ This conclusion led directly to the establishment of the cluster system.

Five years on, the most recent evaluation of the cluster system has concluded that coverage has improved in some areas, gaps are better identified and duplications are reduced, leading to greater efficiency.⁸⁴ However, it also identified poor cluster management as a problem, as well as ineffective inter-cluster coordination. Clusters have also failed to build on local capacity, and in several cases

have weakened national and local ownership and participation. Problems of this kind are being experienced in Haiti.

Despite such challenges, recent research has indicated that there have been improvements in areas including needs assessments, prioritisation and timeliness of humanitarian response.⁸⁵ The cluster evaluation has concluded that the benefits of the cluster approach already outweigh its costs.⁸⁶ But in the pursuit of coordinated and effective humanitarian response, much more remains to be done. This is dealt with further in Section 3, below.

2.3.2 Making conflicts worse

Humanitarian agencies are also criticised for their behaviour in conflict zones and for the unintended consequences of their actions. The response to refugee camps of Rwandan Hutus in Goma, eastern Zaire, following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, is a well-known example in which humanitarian aid had terrible undesired consequences. Tutsi survivors of the genocide in Rwanda received little aid, while the Goma camps, under the control of *génocidaires*, were provided with an array of humanitarian assistance.⁸⁷ It should be emphasised that the vast majority of people in the Goma camps were civilians, including hundreds of thousands of children who had no responsibility whatsoever for the genocide. These people were not *génocidaires* and had a right to humanitarian assistance. The Goma camps presented deep moral dilemmas that are not uncommon in humanitarian relief. Clearly, blaming humanitarian agencies for the actions of armed *génocidaires* in those camps does not tell the complete story.

Other examples of the unintended consequences of aid include the Biafran war of the late 1960s, in which a massive relief operation is thought to have contributed to extending the conflict for two-and-a-half years, with the deaths of more than a million people. It is argued that Igbo nationalists, who wished to secede from Nigeria, were only able to continue the war because of the aid, which they effectively taxed while bringing in weapons under the cover of relief flights.⁸⁸

In this context, deciding how to respond to humanitarian needs in Afghanistan is posing significant challenges for humanitarian agencies. The humanitarian system has drawn strong criticism for allowing large sums of aid money to be passed through multiple agencies, causing corruption and waste. According to journalist Linda Polman: “Unsupervised aid invites theft and corruption, which strengthens and multiplies Taliban support, leading to greater insecurity, which brings more security companies, prompting even more hostility towards foreigners, with greater insecurity, because more Taliban, as a result. So, even more aid remains unsupervised.”⁸⁹

Polman mistakenly asserts that the humanitarian principle of neutrality means NGOs stand aside and allow corruption and wastage to take place. This is a basic misunderstanding of humanitarian principles that are designed to enable aid to be delivered on the basis of need while minimising risk to aid workers and beneficiaries. It is also inaccurate to suggest that NGOs, motivated by self-interest, do not care about problems in the aid system. Experience in Rwanda and Zaire led directly to the establishment of the Code of Conduct and other frameworks of humanitarian standards. The Humanitarian Reform Process itself originated within the humanitarian system with the intention of improving it. Initiatives like these have made significant progress in improving the choices NGOs make. International NGOs have also developed their own accountability procedures in an effort to improve their delivery of aid. This is discussed further in Section 3, below. Military structures such as PRTs, in contrast, do not generally have such accountability mechanisms. Their activities are therefore more likely to drive conflicts.

It is true that the system is often found wanting, especially in complex emergencies like Afghanistan. (See also the discussion of multi-mandated agencies in the box in Section 2.2.1 above.) Problems should be highlighted and criticism must be acknowledged. This should not lead to an abandonment of the victims of conflicts and crises, but to a renewed desire to make the system work better.

2.3.3 Abuse of power by humanitarian workers

Another area where humanitarians rightly receive criticism is where humanitarian workers abuse their power by behaving inappropriately or criminally. Of particular concern have been cases in which aid workers have sexually exploited or abused children. Save the Children has been a leader in exposing cases of this kind, working with other major NGOs and UN agencies to try to bring these abuses to a full stop. In 2004 it was reported that many girls and women in DRC had traded sex for food from UN peacekeepers.⁹⁰ In Liberia in 2006, we reported high levels of abuse of girls, some as young as eight.⁹¹ And in 2008 we found that nearly 90% of people in crisis-affected communities who were interviewed in 38 focus groups in Côte d’Ivoire, Sudan and Haiti, recalled incidents of children being sexually exploited by aid workers and peacekeepers.⁹²

Responding to these issues, aid agencies have taken steps including the formation of the ‘Keeping Children Safe’ coalition, adopting a set of standards for child protection around the world. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has also set up a Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises, composed of several UN agencies and NGOs. A number of standards, tools and commitments have been developed on this issue. It is vital that these initiatives are translated into action on the ground.

The issue of abuse of children by aid workers also highlights the necessity for the humanitarian system to be accountable to its intended beneficiaries, both children and adults. This is discussed in Section 3.3, below.

3 HOW THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM SHOULD RESPOND TO THESE CHALLENGES

The humanitarian system is being challenged to respond better to emergencies at a time when those emergencies are becoming more complex and more numerous. The system must therefore improve if it is to cope and provide effective humanitarian aid to children and their communities now and in the future. It is impossible for this report to highlight everything that could be done to improve the workings of the humanitarian system. However, there are three particular areas that should be emphasised as vital to how the humanitarian community prepares itself for the future:

- 1. Improving disaster risk reduction, preparedness and resilience of communities** – primarily to mitigate environmental and demographic changes.
- 2. Strengthening humanitarian independence and leadership** – to help prevent humanitarian response becoming co-opted into wider political and security objectives.
- 3. Improving accountability to beneficiaries and engagement with communities** – to ensure that humanitarian response performs the task for which it is intended by delivering appropriate aid to those in need, thereby addressing criticisms of the humanitarian system.

3.1 IMPROVING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND RESILIENCE

With the increased unpredictability of disasters and a proliferation of small emergencies, it is simply unrealistic for the humanitarian system to rely on traditional, large-scale, international response in all cases. Of urgent concern, therefore, is the need to support and enhance the abilities of local communities, and national organisations, to prepare for emergencies *before* they happen. In doing so, children must be part of the solution and be active participants. While they are among the worst-affected by disasters, when given the chance to do so children can also be powerful actors in protecting and educating themselves, their peers and communities.

3.1.1 Disaster risk reduction

Supporting communities requires a greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction (DRR). DRR involves all actors working on activities that help people prepare for and reduce the impact of natural disasters. This can include mapping the risks in a village, building evacuation routes, providing early warning systems, or simply teaching children their addresses in case they are separated from their families.⁹³ There is an increasing acknowledgement that DRR is a major requirement for coping with emergencies and enhancing community resilience.⁹⁴ It makes more sense to protect communities from disasters ahead of time than to wait for them to

happen before responding. Indeed, it is estimated that for every \$1 spent on risk management before a disaster, \$7 of losses can be prevented.⁹⁵ Although recognised as important by the humanitarian community, however, insufficient attention has so far been paid to ensuring that risk reduction in advance of disasters is built into the humanitarian system. This manifests itself particularly in the way in which DRR work is funded.

At the moment, DRR receives funding from a patchwork of sources. It receives some humanitarian funding and some longer-term development funding. It also receives funding as part of climate change adaptation. In addition, agencies including Save the Children devote some of their own resources directly to DRR, while national governments are expected to conduct DRR as part of their commitments under an agreement called the Hyogo Framework.⁹⁶ In short, funding for DRR has been piecemeal, despite its being recognised as a major part of the answer to increased humanitarian need in the face of climate and demographic change.⁹⁷ This will have to change if people in vulnerable communities are to be properly prepared for the future.

Children must be central in these efforts. Save the Children's experience in more than 30 countries around the world shows that when children are involved in the design and implementation of DRR activities, they can have a substantial impact. For example, in Vietnam children have been involved in developing emergency preparedness plans for their schools so they know where to go and what to do when an emergency strikes. In Mozambique, children have led community outreach activities in flood-prone areas, where they develop and share important messages on disaster preparedness.

To protect vulnerable populations from slow-onset and cyclical disasters, it will also be necessary to focus particularly on supporting livelihoods, and the use of cash transfers and social protection to help communities cope with emergencies. There is strong evidence that well-designed cash transfer programmes can help tackle child mortality,

particularly by reducing malnutrition and increasing access to healthcare.⁹⁸ Also needed are effective measures to ensure that vulnerable populations do not experience a gap between short-term humanitarian assistance and longer-term development assistance.

DRR is vital to coping with the more numerous and more unpredictable disasters that will occur with climate change and demographic shifts. Greater use of DRR would go some way to providing the humanitarian system with the flexibility it will need to deal with the uncertainty presented by these trends. Also important will be the building of local capacity and the engagement of local and national NGOs in funding and coordination mechanisms, discussed in Section 3.3.1 below.

3.1.2 Early warning linked to pre-arranged funding

Responding to slow-onset and cyclical emergencies, as well as to more frequent rapid-onset emergencies, will require greater investment in early warning systems and linked funding.

Significant strides have already been made in establishing early warning systems for slow-onset emergencies – for example, the Famine Early Warning System (FEWSNET) and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). However, this does not always translate into effective and timely action if information does not trigger needs-based decision-making by donors or agencies.⁹⁹ For the system to function better, donors and humanitarian agencies must be willing and able to react before a situation – for example, food insecurity in the Sahel – reaches crisis point.

Some innovations have already been trialled. The World Food Programme has already established a project in Ethiopia called LEAP,¹⁰⁰ which triggers the release of resources from a central fund based on a forecast of the weather. This temporary scale-up in funding is designed to allow a response to take place in the initial stages of floods and droughts. NGO initiatives can also offer solutions here. Many

NGOs already generate their own emergency funds, such as Save the Children's 'Children's Emergency Fund', to enable us to jump-start a response without having to wait for donors to make up their minds. This approach is now being scaled up. Recently, UK-based NGOs have taken the step of forming a consortium to manage an emergency fund, provided by the Department for International Development (DFID), called the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA). This initiative is designed to enable rapid and effective NGO response across 15 major agencies (see box).

Humanitarians will also need to work more closely with climate scientists to identify the effects climatic hazards will have on vulnerable populations. They will need to work with a range of actors and partners – urban planners, engineers, health ministries, teachers, parents, street dwellers and so on. Planning should meaningfully involve children and should be undertaken with a view to the next few decades as well as getting through the next few months.

3.2 STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN INDEPENDENCE AND LEADERSHIP

The humanitarian system must respond to challenges to its neutrality, impartiality and independence. In doing this it must maintain a strong emphasis on humanitarian principles. If not based on principles, it is hard to describe aid delivery as humanitarian; instead it becomes simply an extension of the wider political or military agenda.

Consequently, the system needs strong and principled humanitarian leaders, especially in UN agencies and NGOs, who can effectively coordinate a humanitarian response while championing adherence to fundamental humanitarian principles. This is necessary not only to meet challenges to humanitarian independence; it is vital for improving the effectiveness and coordination of humanitarian response.¹⁰¹

CONSORTIUM OF BRITISH HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

A current example of NGOs innovating, co-operating and taking responsibility is the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies (CBHA). This project, hosted by Save the Children, comprises 15 leading UK-based NGOs and is funded by an £8 million grant from DFID.

The programme includes an emergency response fund mechanism that will provide predictable financing in the first 48 hours of an emergency. The mechanism is designed to allow agencies to respond immediately, before other sources of

funding become available. The programme also aims to build leadership capacity, by increasing the numbers and skills of both national and international humanitarian leaders. It will increase surge capacity, improve supply chain logistics and enable the sharing of learning and examples of good practice.

The CBHA represents a collaboration between NGOs and DFID to strengthen the capacity and coordination of NGOs, thereby improving their ability to respond to the needs of disaster-affected populations.

3.2.1 UN leadership

Leadership within the UN is crucial. The Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) is the single most influential humanitarian in the world. The Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs), who report directly to the ERC, have been described as “perhaps the key to making all of the other components of humanitarian reform work effectively”.¹⁰² UN agencies also have crucial roles to play as cluster lead agencies, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is a key component for coordinating the humanitarian system. UN leadership is therefore central to ensuring the humanitarian system receives the principled leadership it needs to prevent the independence of humanitarian response being subordinated to wider political and security objectives.

However, despite its central importance, leadership has been repeatedly identified as a weak link in the humanitarian system. Research by the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project for example (a coalition of NGOs working together to increase NGO engagement with humanitarian reform in four countries) concluded that in four out of five study countries, HC performance was considered poor. This can have a severe knock-on effect on every other component of the system, including cluster coordination, leading to poor humanitarian response overall.¹⁰³

A major factor here is the continued preference within the UN for the ‘double-hatted’ RC/HC model.¹⁰⁴ RCs are the UN’s main representative in a country, managing the UN’s relationship with the host government. HCs, meanwhile, are responsible for managing and coordinating humanitarian response, for chairing the Humanitarian Country Team, overseeing inter-cluster coordination and advocating for independent, principled humanitarianism. UN agencies contend that giving both the HC and RC roles to one person provides the HC position with greater political weight, especially in dealing with the host government, as well as maintaining coherence within the UN itself.¹⁰⁵

However, the RC is obliged to maintain good relations with a host government, while the HC must press for an effective humanitarian response based on need, even in the face of government disapproval, particularly around humanitarian access or food security. This presents an RC/HC with a potential conflict of interest. In contexts where host governments are attempting to exercise greater control over humanitarian response, as discussed above, this split mandate impairs the ability of an HC (the most senior humanitarian in a country) to stand up for humanitarian independence. Perhaps more significantly, the practice of favouring double-hatted RC/HCs has also resulted in inexperienced or unqualified candidates being appointed as HCs, as candidates for the RC position often do not have any experience of coordinating a humanitarian response.

The double-hatted model has led to examples where humanitarian principles have not been adequately emphasised by UN leadership. Research in Afghanistan, for example, suggested the RC/HC/DSRSG spent little time on the humanitarian elements of his job, leaving leadership “incoherent” or “disjointed”.¹⁰⁶ According to the research, lack of humanitarian leadership also exacerbated the blurring of lines between humanitarian and other objectives. While the RC role is concerned with state-building, implicitly supportive of the government, this should not be the case for the HC role and humanitarian response. In Ethiopia, too, research has suggested the RC/HC did not effectively challenge the government about upholding humanitarian principles in the Somali region, with the UN too reliant on the government for maintaining its operations.¹⁰⁷

As discussed above, around the world independent humanitarian response is at risk from increasing government interference. At such a time it is alarming that in many countries the HC, the most senior humanitarian, is unable to defend humanitarian principles.

To deal with this situation, the UN should continue to give serious consideration to the appointment of

stand-alone HCs, especially in politically complex countries. To help improve the quality of humanitarian leadership, the new ERC should make sure she consults fully with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) on HC appointments, and that she facilitates a transparent and inclusive process. There have been some positive innovations in UN leadership in recent years. This includes the establishment of the HC Pool, designed to identify highly qualified HC candidates. OCHA has also made efforts to improve HC recruitment through more systematic training and development.¹⁰⁸ So far, the HC Pool has had limited effect, but it is to be hoped it will produce high-quality HC candidates in the future. The UN should continue to build on this progress, particularly to enable agencies to utilise the significant leadership resources and experience within NGOs.

Consideration should also be given to the creation of further Deputy HC roles. Deputy HCs could be tasked with ensuring more effective engagement and management with cluster leads and/or the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), while also ensuring better humanitarian access based on assessed need. In cases where a double-hatted RC/HC exists, this would leave the RC/HC free to conduct the double-hatted role, provided the Deputy HC was able to take up serious humanitarian concerns with the RC/HC and government counterparts. This would be particularly valuable in cases where the RC/HC was not an experienced humanitarian, and if candidates for Deputy HC posts could be provided by NGOs with experience to offer. The existence of a Deputy HC, however, should not be used as a substitute for an unqualified HC.

To date, humanitarian leadership has been based on a UN model that has an old-fashioned sense of what an appropriate leader is required to achieve. In a changing humanitarian landscape it should be acknowledged that leaders need a strong appreciation of humanitarian principles as well as extensive, field-based humanitarian experience. Some host governments may resist such moves, in their own country or at the UN General Assembly. However, if independent and principled humanitarian

response is to be maintained, future leaders should be appointed according to their ability to lead an effective response based on needs on the ground. Governments within the UN General Assembly, OECD DAC and GHD should support this.

In turn, NGOs should be prepared to make some of their most experienced humanitarian leaders available for deployment in UN roles, such as that of Deputy HC. This should be supported by donors.

Finally, there is an acute need for independent, effective cluster coordinators. Too often, cluster coordinators are asked to run the cluster while simultaneously representing their parent UN agency. This not only leads to a conflict of interest, it reduces the effectiveness of the cluster, as the demands of cluster coordination are too great to be a part-time job.¹⁰⁹ Global clusters should ensure that cluster coordinators are full-time, independent and properly trained in coordination and meeting facilitation. This should also be supported by donors.

3.2.2 NGO leadership

The role of RC/HC/DSRSG is crucial. Action is needed to improve UN leadership in countries where there are humanitarian crises. However, the debate around this role and whether it should be 'double-hatted' or not has perhaps become over-dominant in the discussion about humanitarian leadership. Principled leadership is required in other places as well, including at the level of cluster coordination, inter-cluster coordination and the HCT. Principled leadership is also needed at the head of humanitarian agencies, multi-mandated agencies and inter-agency initiatives. Making the right decisions in a difficult, politicised landscape will require better training and recruitment of staff. It will also require a reaffirmation of the Code of Conduct and training in humanitarian principles for a new generation of humanitarians from all over the world.

NGOs cannot rely on the UN to reassert humanitarian principles and fix the system by itself. NGOs employ more than half the staff in the international humanitarian system, with UN staff

making up less than a quarter.¹¹⁰ NGOs also deliver the majority of aid and are responsible for most projects in Consolidated Appeals Processes (CAPs).¹¹¹ Consequently NGOs have significant responsibility for recruiting, training and deploying the humanitarian leaders of the future. In doing so, they should continue to emphasise the important moral compass of the Code of Conduct as the only internationally accepted, relevant description of humanitarian principles. NGOs must also continue to make sure they train their staff in accordance with the Sphere Minimum Standards for the implementation of humanitarian programmes.¹¹² By doing this, NGOs will ensure the development of future humanitarian leaders with an understanding and appreciation of these fundamental principles and standards, as well as the ability to navigate the dilemmas inherent in these complex situations.

Improving leadership will also help to address criticisms of the humanitarian system, described in Section 2.3, above. In particular, strong leadership is important for making judgement calls on, for example, the nature of humanitarian engagement in conflict zones. In dealing with this issue, agencies may choose to use decision-making tools to aid them in the practical application of humanitarian principles in complicated contexts. One such tool is 'HISS CAM'. This system, designed by World Vision, provides humanitarian workers with a framework within which to weigh up ethical considerations based on principles against pragmatic choices about how, if at all, they should engage.¹¹³ Systematic processes like this are useful for enabling humanitarian staff to take principles into account when making complicated judgements regarding the delivery of aid. Whatever mechanism is used, all agencies should have established procedures for making difficult decisions involving humanitarian principles.¹¹⁴

NGOs should also exert their influence on the strategies deployed by others, especially governments facilitating or blocking humanitarian relief. Humanitarian principles exist to protect people caught up in conflicts and disasters and they should not be disregarded in the face of changing political circumstances, such as the so-called War on Terror. Governments, warring parties

and others have laws and rules to which they are answerable. In ensuring principled and effective humanitarian response, there is a need for a renewed push to make certain that international humanitarian law is respected, particularly with regard to the rights to assistance and protection.

NGO leadership can also have a direct, positive and practical impact on the effectiveness of humanitarian response. In particular, NGOs are already offering leadership, globally and nationally, as cluster co-leads and co-coordinators. The benefits of NGO cluster co-leadership have been found to include the ability to 'fill the gap' where the UN is constrained, as well as improving cluster management and procedures.¹¹⁵ Overall, the most recent cluster evaluation has concluded that co-lead arrangements with NGOs have positive effects and should be reinforced.¹¹⁶ Save the Children is the only NGO to have committed itself to the co-leadership of a global cluster – the Education Cluster in partnership with UNICEF. We are proud of this engagement and we believe that this kind of more representative leadership, based on expertise and coming from the NGO sector, is a necessary piece of the puzzle for humanitarianism to deal with future challenges. It is important for NGOs to be supported to engage in this way, to avoid their limited resources being drawn away from direct response to emergencies.

For the humanitarian system to be prepared for future emergencies, strong leadership will be essential, both for ensuring that key decisions are made with respect to humanitarian principles, and for making the system work effectively. Because of the unpredictable nature of future disasters, this means leaders will have to feel comfortable with uncertainty. They will also need strategically to scan the horizon for the challenges of the next decades, and not just focus on the managerial problems of the next few months.¹¹⁷

The significant leadership resources within NGOs should be acknowledged by UN leaders, who should draw on NGO expertise where possible. Donors should also look for innovative ways to reward expertise that comes from the NGO sector and contributes to leadership in the system.

EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

The Global Education Cluster has helped to establish education as a core part of emergency response. As the Global Cluster co-lead, Save the Children is at the forefront of helping children affected by emergencies to get back into education as quickly as possible. It is increasingly recognised that education is a vital component of a humanitarian response. In the immediate aftermath of an emergency, getting children back into school can help protect them from death, exploitation or trafficking. It makes it possible to provide lifesaving information on issues including unexploded ordnance, nutrition, health

and hygiene, while alleviating the psychological impact on children by offering a routine and a sense of stability.

In the longer term, education can contribute to the recovery and reconstruction of post-conflict societies, and promote conflict resolution, tolerance and respect for human rights. It can increase children's own knowledge, skills, understanding and capacity to stay safe and healthy. Education is also crucial in helping implement DRR strategies, including through national curricula.

3.3 IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO DISASTER-AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Engagement with communities and beneficiaries is fundamental to improving the humanitarian system. Amid discussions of coordination, leadership and funding mechanisms, the most important people must always remain those who are in need of aid – children and their communities. Unless humanitarians continue to listen to beneficiaries and respond to their needs the system will not sufficiently improve. Accountability to populations is also an area that is central to distinguishing humanitarian agencies from other actors. With humanitarians being increasingly challenged, by host governments and the wider international public, the need for humanitarian agencies to demonstrate that their aid is appropriate, effective and wanted is more acute than ever.

Lack of efficiency and coordination, poor decision-making and abuse of power can all, to some extent, be addressed through greater engagement with communities and beneficiaries.

3.3.1 Engagement with local and national NGOs to improve coordination and effectiveness

As discussed in Section 3.1, above, the changing nature of emergencies has implications in terms of who should respond to them, with an increasing need for humanitarian response to take place at a national and local, rather than international, level. There is also a demand, as described in relation to Haiti and after the tsunami for example, for humanitarian response to improve coordination and effectiveness.

To enable this to happen, the system must allow for better capacity-building and involvement of local and national NGOs. These agencies, although far from being uniform, often have the knowledge and ability to ensure that projects are carried out effectively and sustainably. So far, however, including local and national NGOs in coordination mechanisms has been problematic, as an increase in coordination brings with it a proliferation of meetings – cluster meetings, inter-cluster meetings or other coordination meetings.¹¹⁸ This is a burden even for relatively large organisations such as Save the Children. For local and national NGOs it often



results in their being unable to engage with clusters as they do not have the staff capacity.¹¹⁹ Cluster meetings are often also held in national capitals, away from field locations where national NGOs have their staff. Meetings may not be held in a language that makes them accessible to local organisations. The need to devolve decision-making away from the capital was identified in Pakistan in 2009,¹²⁰ for example, while exclusion of national NGOs because of language barriers has been seen in Afghanistan and Sudan.¹²¹

To maximise the effectiveness of the humanitarian system, more work is needed to engage with local and national NGOs that are capable of responding, while ensuring that the quality of response is maintained. Coordination and funding mechanisms must be more accessible for these front-line responders and make it easier to plan ahead at the community level. That will require more effectively managed, in-country pooled funds that allow for small allocations to local actors without overly bureaucratic procedures. It also means a greater need for coordination mechanisms with effective, dedicated coordinators who are able to engage with local and national agencies. This is particularly important with the predicted proliferation of small emergencies and increased vulnerability identified above, where it will most often fall to local and national organisations to respond.

3.3.2 Accountability to beneficiaries

As outlined in Section 1.1, above, accountability to (and involvement of) beneficiaries is a core part of the Code of Conduct and the Sphere Minimum Standards. It has also been the subject of a peer review by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response, which comprises the eight largest NGO families in the world.¹²² It is, therefore, recognised at the highest levels as central to humanitarian response. There is also some evidence of recent improvement, including better evaluations of projects and greater transparency.¹²³ Overarching accountability initiatives have had a positive impact, including the Humanitarian Accountability

Partnership (HAP) and the development of a 'good enough' guide for participation and accountability by the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) project.¹²⁴

Nevertheless, much improvement is still needed. Concerns have been expressed that tensions arise from the delivery of aid being a top-down, externally driven and relatively rigid process that does not allow for significant local participation.¹²⁵ Such concerns chime with criticisms such as those made in Afghanistan, that aid is subject to waste and corruption that alienates the population and damages acceptance of humanitarian agencies. The question of the exclusion of local communities has also been raised in Haiti, as discussed above. These concerns must be addressed.

Accountability, however, is subtle and complex. It does not have a single definition and nor is there just one way in which to implement it. It is not simply the requirement for feedback or complaints mechanisms. It is also, for example, the need to change power dynamics and relationships with affected groups.¹²⁶ Despite this, it is possible to identify some particular points that humanitarian leaders should emphasise for the future.

First, clusters should prioritise finding ways to ensure accountability to populations. This is related to the need, discussed above, for clusters to be devolved to local level, to engage effectively with local organisations and to employ effective cluster coordinators.

There is also increasing recognition that communicating with aid recipients is a basic requirement during humanitarian response. This is illustrated by the establishment of the Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC) project. This multi-agency initiative, chaired by Save the Children, aims to embed effective communication with communities into humanitarian response, as well as enabling both complaints mechanisms and positive feedback.¹²⁷ Initiatives such as this should be supported and applied more widely within the humanitarian system.

Opposite Children in Myanmar back in school after 2008's devastating cyclone.

Better communication with communities is particularly necessary, and is becoming more possible, given the growing availability of technology, with crisis-affected populations having increasing access to mobile phones and other forms of communication. Humanitarian agencies should be harnessing the potential of this technology. If used effectively, communications technology could allow NGOs to act as conduits for the wishes of the population. This would help improve the quality of humanitarian response while increasing the acceptance of humanitarian agencies and the effectiveness and sustainability of their projects. In light of growing pressures on humanitarian principles and the identities of humanitarian agencies, this would be welcome. Effective communication, complaints procedures and accountability are also essential for humanitarian agencies to tackle cases in which power is being abused, especially cases of child abuse.

NGOs can be effective, principled deliverers of aid that are central to the functioning of the humanitarian system. To maintain this position they must be able to demonstrate that they are responsive to the needs of beneficiaries. Their legitimacy depends on their ability to deliver aid that the affected population needs, wants, and has rights to. Every agency should have documented procedures for accountability to beneficiaries, and donors should hold them to those procedures.

3.3.3 Improving financial transparency

The need to improve accountability and transparency extends far beyond just NGOs. To improve the performance of humanitarian response overall, greater transparency throughout the system is needed. This particularly applies to UN agencies.

Donors do not require UN agencies to account in detail for the onward disbursement of funds, despite very large amounts of money being channelled through the UN system.¹²⁸ In most cases, it is therefore impossible to know exactly where and

how funds given directly to UN agencies are spent. This also applies to funds received by UN agencies from the CERF, which is only able to provide money to UN agencies.

Despite overall improvement in financing, the speed and transparency of funding, especially to NGOs, remain an obstacle. Transparency and needs-based decision-making in the allocation of pooled funds will, it is hoped, improve with greater NGO involvement in cluster leadership and coordination.¹²⁹ In addition, NGOs have taken actions to improve their ability to respond rapidly to an emergency without relying on reformed funding mechanisms.¹³⁰ For financing to be channelled through a UN agency first, as has so often been the case in the past, is an old-fashioned and inefficient mechanism, creating obstacles to the fast and transparent delivery of aid.¹³¹ NGOs should be (and are) increasingly at the table, engaging with decision-making and strategy formulation where financing of humanitarian relief is being decided.

Until UN transparency improves, the ability of the humanitarian system to account effectively for its activities will remain poor. In turn, this is likely to contribute to poorer acceptance from communities and less effective humanitarian response. It also makes it harder for donors to reassure their taxpayers that funding is being spent wisely and achieving value for money. The UN and NGOs should make improving transparency and accountability to beneficiaries a priority. UN agencies should be required to publish details of how their funds are spent, or of the onward disbursement of funds to partners. Donors should also insist on greater accountability, in line with the aims of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.¹³²

It should also be noted that national governments must be accountable to their own populations as well. As NGOs and the UN move towards greater accountability this may shed increasing light on governments that fail to deliver for their people, or those that block aid for their own ends.

Opposite Catastrophic flooding in Pakistan in August 2010 has challenged the ability of the humanitarian system to respond quickly and effectively.



3.3.4 Focusing on children

For Save the Children, child participation is central to our accountability. We aim to act as a conduit for the voices of children. However, with children representing more than half the people affected by crises, taking account of the needs of children is an approach that should be a core part of the whole humanitarian system.¹³³ At the same time, it is necessary to recognise that different groups of children have different needs, and children should not be viewed as one homogeneous group.

Central to meeting children’s needs in emergencies is ensuring that humanitarian agencies are not ‘child blind’, in the same way that they should not be ‘gender blind’. Organisations can make decisions that are detrimental to children unless the needs of those children are properly assessed, the right policies and procedures are put in place, and accurate evaluation of those policies is undertaken. Therefore, humanitarian agencies should evaluate and report on a number of actions regarding how their activities affect children.

The questions to ask should include:

- whether the agency has a policy about children and how such a policy is applied
- whether child protection issues are considered in programme design and whether specific measures are in place to prevent child abuse and exploitation
- how children’s needs are assessed within broader practices of assessment
- whether data to evaluate response is effectively disaggregated to take account of different children – for example, by age group, social class or caste, and gender
- whether methods exist to ensure child participation in humanitarian projects
- whether children have access to accountability and complaint systems.

In many ways, effective humanitarian response for children is linked with effective response for the rest of the community. However, if humanitarian assistance fails to assess and meet the needs of children, then humanitarian agencies cannot claim to have succeeded.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children has made accountability to children an institutional priority, recognising that this should be a central pillar of what we do.

Our understanding of accountability requires:

- 1) delivering humanitarian and development aid based on children’s needs and rights;
- 2) recruiting and training appropriate staff for the job;
- 3) consultation with communities, including meaningful ways of involving children; and
- 4) providing useful mechanisms for feedback, complaints and reports of abuse.

We already have established ways for children to participate in shaping and reviewing our work at

local, and sometimes national, level. We have a ‘Global Children’s Panel’ that engages children from around the world to review and direct our work, with access to the most senior decision-makers at global and national levels. We have mechanisms designed to ensure the appropriate behaviour of all Save the Children staff, and reports on sexual exploitation and abuse are made to the Board of Directors. Save the Children’s work is also subject to review by HAP, the Disasters Emergency Committee accountability initiative, and peer review by other agencies.

3.3.5 Professionalising the humanitarian system

One option for improving the performance of the humanitarian system overall, especially with regard to improving accountability, is to establish a process for professionalising the humanitarian system. This is an idea that is receiving considerable attention and is currently being explored by practitioners and academics.¹³⁴

There are, as discussed above, a number of existing standards, codes and practices for humanitarians, including the Code of Conduct. Although they provide frameworks of standards and principles, they do not represent a single, coherent structure within which humanitarians can be trained, work and be held to account.

According to recent research, professionalising the humanitarian sector could involve the creation of an international professional body, plus the development of a certification system for humanitarians. Such a move could arguably improve accountability, quality and consistency within the humanitarian system, strengthen recruitment and training, and raise the status of the humanitarian workers to that of other professions. A key factor is that, in a professional system, a humanitarian worker would be personally responsible for adherence to professional standards, as is the case with a doctor or lawyer, for example. This would mark a change from most existing sets of standards, such as Sphere, that measure commitments from institutions but not individuals.

Although humanitarian workers broadly already have a strong sense of personal responsibility, professionalising the sector could significantly improve the quality of humanitarian response by making it easier to hold individuals and agencies to account.

The most significant area of debate concerns ways of ensuring that those in developing countries would not be excluded from a professional system. If certified qualifications were too expensive, or only available in developed countries, this would clearly have a negative effect on building the capacity of local and national NGOs – something that is vital for future humanitarian response. This issue is widely acknowledged and as the professionalisation debate moves on, attention should be paid to how to make certain that appropriate and affordable training and qualifications are available in developing countries. If this is achieved, it would make a major contribution to preparing for the likely increase in emergencies to which large sections of civil society in many countries will be required to respond.¹³⁵

It should also be noted that professionalisation has the potential to help deal with other issues raised in this report. In particular, a unified system providing core training, based on humanitarian principles and standards, could help to produce future humanitarian leaders capable of dealing with a complex political landscape and increasingly unpredictable emergencies.

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Humanitarianism stands at a crossroads. Although humanitarians have always been faced with new and changing circumstances, the environmental, demographic and political trends currently under way are particularly profound. They have the potential to change the very nature of humanitarian response. Faced with these challenges, humanitarian agencies must take action to improve their ability to respond to disasters while upholding humanitarian principles and standards.

This report has outlined actions that humanitarian leaders should take to help prepare the humanitarian system for an uncertain future. They should focus on DRR and preparedness in order to meet the challenges presented by environmental and demographic trends. They should respond to political and societal pressures by improving humanitarian independence and leadership. They should address criticisms of the aid system through better accountability to beneficiaries and community engagement.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of actions humanitarian leaders should take. However, improvements in these areas would dramatically improve the ability of the humanitarian system to provide life-saving relief to children and communities caught up in crises.

In making these improvements, the humanitarian community will also clarify its own future. The

identity of humanitarian agencies is currently at risk. Other actors in the private sector or military are delivering aid, and humanitarian responses are receiving criticism. Some critics are questioning the entire purpose of the humanitarian system. By taking actions outlined in this report, humanitarian agencies will go some way to dealing with these issues, increasing the legitimacy of their actions and maintaining their unique identity.

The UN, under the leadership of the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, should build on the innovations and successes of the Humanitarian Reform Process. NGOs also have a role to play. They must be leaders and innovators, as their strong position in the humanitarian system requires. NGOs should fulfil their mandates by making certain that beneficiaries' wants and needs are fully understood and taken into account in any humanitarian response.

Independent, principled humanitarian organisations are needed in the world. They provide something that no one else provides. Their focus on the most marginalised in conflicts and disasters will, unfortunately, still be needed for decades to come. By improving their ability to help those people, humanitarian agencies can approach an uncertain future with confidence.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve disaster risk reduction and preparedness:

- **Donors should improve their mechanisms to link funding to early warning systems.** Funds must be released in good time when a slow-onset disaster is predicted, to prevent the worst of the crisis from developing. In many contexts, national and international systems such as FEWS and IPC provide evidence to support early funding. This evidence should directly link to donor decision-making or pre-positioned funds – for example, by building on initiatives such as the World Food Programme’s LEAP project.
- **Donors should move beyond rhetorical support for disaster risk reduction by increasing funding for DRR projects.** National governments should mainstream disaster risk reduction into programmes for protecting their citizens and ensure that child-focused DRR is a strong component. NGOs and UN agencies should continue their own commitment to DRR as an essential measure for the protection of communities from disasters. Donors and agencies should more consistently implement integrated livelihoods approaches to deal with chronic emergencies and slow-onset or cyclical disasters.

To improve humanitarian leadership and independence:

- **The Emergency Relief Coordinator should ensure that UN leadership, especially Humanitarian Coordinators, prioritise humanitarian independence and humanitarian principles.** UN country teams and leadership should consider the more frequent appointment of Deputy HCs when complicated humanitarian responses need an experienced leader. The person should be recruited from a wide pool of applicants with

relevant qualifications, including individuals from an NGO background. This should be supported by donors.

- **NGOs must take active steps to reaffirm the importance of the NGO and Red Cross Code of Conduct.** They also must press others, including governments, warring parties and the UN Security Council, on their responsibilities under international humanitarian law.
- NGOs should continually assess the manner in which they operate in conflict zones and complex emergencies. **Every agency should have established mechanisms to identify potential threats to humanitarian principles and enable decision-making based on humanitarian principles.** An introduction to humanitarian principles should form part of core training for staff members in humanitarian and mixed-mandate agencies.
- **Donors should ensure respect for humanitarian principles, and should not attempt to co-opt humanitarian agencies into wider political agendas, which reduces the effectiveness of aid.** Donors should wherever possible avoid mingling their international aid objectives with their wider political and military objectives, and should reduce their use of military units for the delivery of aid where there is civilian capacity. Donors should make certain their staff are fully informed of humanitarian principles.
- **The OECD countries should reaffirm their commitment to Good Humanitarian Donorship,** and publicly re-emphasise the importance of humanitarian assistance based on need. Efforts should be made to engage non-OECD donors on the importance of these principles of engagement and persuade them to subscribe to Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) and peer review.

continued overleaf

To improve accountability to beneficiaries and engagement of communities:

- **NGO, UN and donor efforts to improve accountability to beneficiaries and their communities should be prioritised.** This should include support for initiatives that implement communication with beneficiaries, using new technologies and locally appropriate methods.
- **All humanitarian agencies should have in place policies to account for the specific needs of children.** Since children represent the majority of people affected by crises, humanitarian agencies must ensure their operations are not ‘child blind’, in the same way that they should not be ‘gender blind’.
- **UN agencies, international NGOs and donors should urgently improve the accessibility of the humanitarian system for local and national NGOs.** This should include renewed efforts to decentralise cluster

coordination to sub-national and local levels and the establishment of further flexible country-based pooled funds such as Emergency Response Funds. Greater efforts are required to share information and build capacity to enable local and national NGOs to engage with humanitarian mechanisms.

- **UN agencies should improve their transparency by publishing details of how funding received from donors is spent, including onward disbursement to partners.** Donors should subject UN agencies to greater scrutiny for this transparency.
- **NGOs, UN agencies and donors should consider the establishment of an international professional body to oversee certification of workers in the humanitarian sector.** Such professionalisation could contribute to improved humanitarian standards, further extension of humanitarian principles and a stronger humanitarian identity.

NOTES

I Introduction

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2 Challenges faced by the humanitarian system

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3 How the humanitarian system should respond to these challenges

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AT A CROSSROADS

HUMANITARIANISM FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Humanitarianism faces a critical moment. The appointment of a new United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator brings new leadership at the very highest level of the humanitarian system. It is also five years since the Humanitarian Reform Process began, with the aim of improving how the humanitarian system functions.

Yet, at the same time, a number of environmental and political challenges are threatening humanitarian agencies' ability to help people affected by emergencies. Meanwhile, critics of the system are raising doubts about the integrity and effectiveness of humanitarianism.

With humanitarianism standing *At a Crossroads*, this report examines the pressing issues the sector faces and puts forward concrete recommendations for action by senior humanitarian leaders.