



## **International Humanitarian Aid 2007–2010** – An Evaluation Synthesis



National Audit Office of Finland  
Component of the Performance Audit on Humanitarian Aid



**International Humanitarian Aid**  
**2007–2010**  
– An Evaluation Synthesis

ISSN 1797-0598 (Bound)  
ISSN 1797-0601 (PDF)  
ISBN 978-952-499-171-1 (Bound)  
ISBN 978-952-499-172-8 (PDF)

Edita Prima Ltd  
Helsinki 2011

# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2 An Overview of the International Humanitarian System</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 The International Humanitarian System	13
2.2 Measuring Humanitarian Needs	15
2.3 Humanitarian Financing and Implementation	17
2.3.1 Overview of Financing Trends	17
2.3.2 Humanitarian Aid Donorship	21
2.3.3 Implementing Agencies and Pooled Funding	25
<b>3 Effectiveness and Impact of Humanitarian Aid</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1 Policy and Planning	29
3.1.1 Policy Coordination	29
3.1.2 Response Planning	33
3.2 Implementation	39
3.2.1 Resource Use	39
3.2.2 Operational Delivery	41
3.3 Results and Impacts	49
3.3.1 Results	50
3.3.2 Impacts	55
3.4 Review of Findings	63
3.4.1 Performance Assessment Summary	63
3.4.2 Cross-cutting issues	67
<b>4 Discussion</b>	<b>70</b>
4.1 Current Themes	70
4.2 Conclusions	77
References	82



### International Humanitarian Aid 2007-2010 – An Evaluation Synthesis

This evaluation synthesis report was commissioned by the National Audit Office of Finland, Finland's Supreme Audit Institution. This report forms one part of a performance audit on the effectiveness of Finnish-funded humanitarian aid. The report presents findings from 35 evaluations, reviews and analytical reports on humanitarian aid. Its objective is to provide an overview of recent assessments and analysis on humanitarian assistance, to inform current policy discussion on humanitarian aid effectiveness and impact. The question which this evaluation synthesis has set out to answer centres on *what is currently known about the state of international humanitarian aid, as presented through evaluation reports*.

The introductory section (1) of this report outlines the context and method used in compiling the synthesis report. The next section (2) presents an overview of the funding and organisation of international humanitarian assistance. It is followed by a section (3) which presents findings from the evaluation reports under the themes of policy and planning, implementation and results and impacts. The final section (4) contains discussion on current themes in humanitarian aid and concluding remarks.

The main findings of the report are both system-level and operational-level observations in the three main areas of policy and planning, implementation, and results and impacts. Within the policy and planning process the findings are presented under policy coordination and strategic response planning. The section on implementation is divided into resource use and operational delivery. The results and impacts section presents findings on both the humanitarian results which have been reported and on accounting for the longer-term impacts of humanitarian assistance operations.

Policy coordination issues have been reported with reference to the performance assessment criteria of coherence, relevance and appropriateness. The reports noted evidence of the growing lack of respect for international humanitarian law, core humanitarian principles and refugee law in humanitarian aid. Rising concern with protection issues was highlighted, and policy coordination gaps in it were pointed out. With regard to specific findings at operation- and agency-level, policy coordination and coherence issues were found to be central factors influencing the operational success of humanitarian assistance operations.

For strategic planning, it was found that lack of adequate data, disparate methodological approaches and insufficient coordination were the biggest problems affecting the quality of needs assessments. A central finding was the lack and inadequacy of beneficiary consultation and involvement in needs assessments and in the design of programmes. Discrepancies and biases in donor funding according to need and amongst different crises was noted, as were inequities in funding which disadvantage particularly small, local NGOs.

Implementation issues related to the criteria of efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness and coordination. The main efficiency concerns related to fund disbursement and transaction speeds, which were reported as not being fast and direct enough, although the predictability of funding was reported to have improved. A further finding calls attention to the administrative overheads charged by UN agencies. Results in terms of improvements and gaps in operational implementation processes focused largely on the humanitarian reforms, which were reported to be improving in effectiveness. Some aspects of the reformed system were found to be performing better than others, such as the financial mechanisms which were overall assessed to have improved the timeliness and flexibility of humanitarian funding. However, significant weaknesses were reported to remain in the management and accountability processes of the joint funds, particularly in leadership and monitoring. A central finding at the operational level was the need to increase the involvement of – and accountability to – beneficiaries and crisis-affected populations at all stages of programme implementation, in order to perform better.

Results and impacts have been looked at in terms of coverage, connectedness and sustainability. Global humanitarian coverage was found to have increased in size and volume, with a general upward trend in humanitarian financing reported to continue. Yet it was highlighted that the humanitarian needs of crisis-affected populations have also increased, which has resulted in perceived insufficiency at the global level. The joint financing mechanisms are reported to have had positive results in improving humanitarian funding in terms of sufficiency and sustainability through strategic coordination. System-level coordination through clusters was found to have made assistance gaps easier to identify and reduced duplications, thus improving coverage. On the other hand coverage is also affected by increasingly shrinking humanitarian space, in terms of declines in access to affected populations due to insecurity and security-related restrictions. The reports found a significant and real lack of appropriate engagement with and of crisis-affected peoples in all stages of humanitarian operations. This has been treated as a sign of a systemic deficiency in accountability, particularly accountability to disaster-



affected populations and the direct beneficiaries of international aid operations. The lack of adequate investments in recipient-country capacities at all levels has been highlighted as a central sustainability and connectedness issue, which impacts on both the short and long-term impacts of aid. It has been found that the international humanitarian system at times undermines local emergency preparedness and response capacities. The evaluations have found that current coordination mechanisms do not consult and include national actors enough.

It was found out that most assessments and evaluations of humanitarian aid neglect cross-cutting issues, which then also suffer from lack of integration into future response planning. Attention to gender issues in operations is identified as a particularly weak point for humanitarian action. Although gender equity in humanitarian programming is a principle that is widely subscribed to, there are varying degrees of follow-up in practical steps taken to act on the commitments.

The discussion on central themes for contemporary humanitarian aid focuses on five topical issues. These interlinked themes relate to engaging local capacities better and addressing the increased security risks and the rising frequency and intensity of natural hazards and accompanying increases in vulnerability to disaster risk, through improvements in linking relief, rehabilitation and development.

In the last section of the report, there is a discussion on the potential of impact evaluations to act as accurate performance assessments. The increasingly recognised value of evidence-based policy and both public and political interest in the real consequences of aid – both positive and negative – on disaster-affected people and states have focused attention on the methodologies and processes of impact assessment.

In conclusion, three main areas in which donor recommendations have been made are presented. The first is increasing investments for disaster prevention, preparedness and disaster risk reduction and the need to link relief, rehabilitation and development, in order to build resilience and reduce vulnerabilities. The second is advocating for reclaiming humanitarian space. On the one hand donors are recommended to advocate for increased humanitarian access on the basis of adherence to the core humanitarian principles, without distortion from political interests and security objectives. On the other hand, donors are also recommended to increase their engagement in conflict prevention and peace-building processes. The third area in which improved donor policy and action has been recommended in is the need to increase both the professionalism and accountability of the international humanitarian system, through active engagement with and improvements in quality standards such as the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship.



# 1 Introduction

This evaluation synthesis report was commissioned by the National Audit Office of Finland which is Finland's Supreme Audit Institution. This synthesis report forms one part of a performance audit on the effectiveness of Finnish-funded humanitarian aid. The report presents findings from 35 evaluations, reviews and analytical reports on humanitarian aid. Its objective is to provide an overview of recent assessments and analysis on humanitarian assistance, to inform current policy discussion on humanitarian aid effectiveness and impact.

The performance audit evaluates the overall performance of Finnish humanitarian aid funding and implementation practices. The synthesis report aims to provide relevant information on the state of the international humanitarian system, of which Finland forms a part, as a donor government. The findings of this report will be used to support the other components of the performance audit, which is to be completed in the autumn of 2011.<sup>1</sup> A summary of the completed audit will be available in English.<sup>2</sup>

The central framing question which the performance audit addresses is the extent to which Finnish humanitarian assistance is effective and sufficiently coordinated with other development assistance. This central question is divided into three sections, which answer to particular aspects of the audit. The first audit component is focused on the quantity and targeting of the financial resources of Finnish humanitarian aid. The second component examines the management and administrative procedures in humanitarian aid. A third component of the audit is concerned with the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian assistance. This evaluation synthesis forms a part of the third component of the audit. It presents specific findings on the state of knowledge on international humanitarian aid. The question which this evaluation synthesis has set out to answer centres on *what is currently known about the state of international humanitarian aid, as presented through evaluation reports.*

The main criteria which were used in selecting the relevant evaluation reports for inclusion in the synthesis focused on temporal, thematic and quality issues. Only evaluations and evaluative reports which have been published since 2007 and are available through public domain databases

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vtv.fi/julkaisut/tuloksellisuustarkastus-kertomukset>.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.vtv.fi/en/publications/performance\\_audit\\_reports](http://www.vtv.fi/en/publications/performance_audit_reports).

were used. This was to ensure that the synthesis presents only current data which can be used for effective evidence-based policy-making. It was also a relevant criterion with regard to capturing results which have been observed in relation to the organisational changes that have been implemented in the humanitarian assistance sector in recent years.

The thematic criterion in the selection of information sources was the relative relevance of the evaluations for Finnish-funded humanitarian aid. As a member of the international humanitarian system, Finland allocates aid resources to particular national and international coordinating and implementing agencies, which combine various sources of funding to enable comprehensive humanitarian programming. The effectiveness of Finland's humanitarian assistance can therefore be evaluated in relation to the overall effectiveness of the international humanitarian system. The criterion which was used was selecting those evaluations that may have the most relevance for establishing findings pertaining to Finnish-funded aid. Through an analysis of Finnish humanitarian financing between 2006 and 2010 the main recipient organizations and sectors of Finnish aid were identified and prioritised in the selection of the evaluation sources.

The third source selection criterion was quality. Only evaluations and reports which stated adherence to evaluation quality requirements and standards were included.

The initial method that was used in selecting the evaluations and evaluative reports was database research. Collective humanitarian databases and individual agency databases were used to select the resources, through date and content searches.<sup>3</sup> Databases were accessed between September and December 2010. The next step in locating evaluations for inclusion into the synthesis was through extensive cross-checking of references across the evaluations, to establish key resources and to fill in missing sources. Finally relevant specialists were also consulted in order to locate sources for particular themes and areas.

The aim of the source selection process was to gather and include all of the evaluation reports which matched the criteria and requirements of this synthesis exercise. However omissions and exclusions are possible. The information and findings in this synthesis are based on the data which was available in the evaluations and evaluative reports which have been studied. As such, the extent to which it is able to answer the questions that it has set out to answer is limited by the available amount and type of

---

<sup>3</sup> *ALNAP ERD, OCHA evaluations database, DAC evaluation resource centre, ReliefWeb database search, UNEG, UNHCR, WFP, FAO, UNICEF and WHO evaluation databases.*

information which was contained in the selected sources. Similarly, the findings are only as current as the resources from which they have been extracted. The evaluation synthesis is a way of presenting a collection of secondary data in a comparable way, which offers valuable information on the state of knowledge on international humanitarian aid.

The process of synthesising and analysing the evaluations and evaluative reports was based on two methods of data ordering. The first was to identify and elaborate on the stages and processes which take place in the humanitarian sector, from planning through to implementation and to the results and impacts of aid. The other approach which was simultaneously applied was to identify which criteria have been used in the evaluations to assess the performance of international humanitarian assistance initiatives.

The international humanitarian system is complex and diverse and composed of many overlapping processes. This is reflected in the findings presented by the evaluations, which are inter-related and interdependent. There are however clear stages through which humanitarian aid is processed. For data analysis purposes, these have been divided into three main sections which can be seen to progress in a linear model – from policy and planning through to the implementation of aid and to the results and impacts of aid. The evaluation findings on the effectiveness and impact of aid are presented in the report in sections which are ordered according to these processes. Within the policy and planning process the findings are presented under policy coordination and strategic response planning. The section on implementation is divided into resource use and operational delivery. Finally the results and impacts section presents findings on both the humanitarian results which have been reported and on accounting for the longer-term impacts of humanitarian assistance operations.

The findings from the evaluations and evaluative reports are also presented in relation to standard performance assessment criteria. The majority of the evaluation reports based their performance assessment criteria on the OECD-DAC development assessment criteria which have been widely used. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) has elaborated on the use of the OECD-DAC criteria particularly for humanitarian assistance evaluations to create the current best practice model (ALNAP 2006, Harvey et al 2010). Many organizations have in the past used variously derived versions of these criteria. The evaluation reports tended to use parts or all of the OECD-DAC performance assessment criteria. The OECD-DAC criteria – appropriateness, relevance, effectiveness, timeliness, efficiency, coverage, connectedness, coherence, sustainability, impact – are cited as the

standard by the EU consensus on Humanitarian Aid.<sup>4</sup> Many of the evaluative reports have based their findings on these criteria, which support the presentation of the data in the linearly progressive structure followed in this report.

The next section (2) of this report presents an overview of the funding and organisation of international humanitarian assistance. It is followed by a section (3) which presents findings from the evaluation reports under the themes of policy and planning, implementation and results and impacts. The final section (4) contains discussion on current themes in humanitarian aid and concluding remarks.

This report was written by Auditor Pilvi Aro-Marques and overseen by Principal Performance Auditor Berndt Lindman and Director of Performance Audit Lassi Perkinen.

---

<sup>4</sup> *EU 2008.*

## 2 An Overview of the International Humanitarian System

### 2.1 The International Humanitarian System

Humanitarian aid is often described as the aid and actions which aim to 'save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies'.<sup>5</sup> Humanitarian assistance is carried out in accordance with the core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Humanitarian aid includes a wide range of processes such as disaster prevention and preparedness, reconstruction and relief, relief coordination, and protection and support services. Humanitarian aid is a fast-growing enterprise, with constantly increasing funding and staffing levels. Immediate humanitarian aid employed over 210,800 humanitarian workers in 2008, and global staffing levels of humanitarian workers have been increasing at an annual average rate of 6% between 1998–2008. Both humanitarian funding requirements and real humanitarian expenditure are increasing at significant rates. These trends reflect not only the increasingly devastating effects of natural and human disasters at a global level, but also the increased ability of the humanitarian system to identify and respond to humanitarian needs.

As the humanitarian system continues to grow, its complexity and the diversity of actors and processes linked to it has received increasing attention as well. There is increased diversity in the sources and uses of funding, in policy and practice, and in understandings of the fundamental values and concepts of what constitutes humanitarian aid and how it can and should be delivered. It has been doubted whether these multiple networks and interactions can be called a cohesive 'system' as such, and some have called it a 'fiction' that there is a unified sense of a humanitarian aid enterprise. However, others state that in a very real sense the global and national humanitarian actors do constitute an international system as they are interdependent in field operations, where they work towards shared humanitarian goals. The defining concepts, structures and

---

<sup>5</sup> *OECD DAC, Development Initiatives 2010:132.*

processes of international aid architecture have been continuously called into question in the last few decades, and since 2005 several central reforms have been instituted in order to standardise and streamline international humanitarian aid systems<sup>6</sup>.

The aim of these reforms has been to improve the overall effectiveness of humanitarian responses by providing greater predictability, accountability and partnership. The key elements of the reforms are:

1. Improved coordination through the cluster approach.
2. Improved leadership by a strengthened humanitarian coordinator system.
3. Adequate, flexible and predictable humanitarian funding through new financing mechanisms.
4. Better partnerships between UN and non-UN actors.

The cluster approach is a system of coordination in which a lead organization, designated for priority areas of response, is responsible for organizing coordination and strengthening preparedness at global and country level.

Good humanitarian leadership is the key to making all of the other components of the humanitarian reform work effectively and the part of reform often sited as being the most difficult, yet strategically significant element.

The financial reforms have focused on the creation of faster and more effective funding mechanisms, which reduce earmarking to achieve more strategic, coordinated funding allocation based on the identification of priority needs at field-level. The new financing mechanisms are designed to reduce donor earmarking of funds in order to reduce the inequities and competition which have led to previously uncoordinated responses. Current multilateral funding mechanisms consist of the expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the country-level pooled funding mechanisms Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) and Emergency Response Funds (ERFs). The CERF allows donors to contribute to a global pool of money which can be allocated to sudden onset emergencies and to underfunded, chronic crises. The CHF and ERF apply the same model at the country level. CHF have been set up to ensure timely and predictable funding of core activities in protracted humanitarian emergencies. ERFs are small, flexible funds established to provide NGOs and UN agencies with rapid funds to meet short-term needs in sudden onset emergencies.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Harvey et al. 2010, Development Initiatives 2010.*



Partnerships became a key issue for humanitarian reform when the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) was set up in 2006 as a reaction against the UN-centrism of reforms to date. The GHP is composed of NGOs, UN members and other humanitarian actors. In 2007 the platform adopted the Principles of Partnership – equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity – to foster more genuine partnerships among humanitarian actors, based on the understanding that no single organisation can meet all humanitarian needs. Partnership is now the fourth pillar of humanitarian reform<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.2 Measuring Humanitarian Needs

A core question for the whole enterprise of humanitarian aid is whether humanitarian needs are being met by the existing system, and whether funding is being allocated and received according to need. There is evidence of large increases in humanitarian aid volumes and activities, but these are outweighed by faster rises in humanitarian need. In many ways this reflects the fact that needs are becoming better recognised and new kinds of needs are being articulated, such as early recovery needs which have been made into their own category recently. The ability to articulate a wider variety and depth of humanitarian needs is reflected in improvements in the comprehensiveness of the UN common humanitarian appeals. UN CAP appeals have increased by five times from 2000 to 2010, which reflects both the deterioration of humanitarian situations but also the increased capacity of aid providers to meet a wider range of needs. However, 30% of needs still remain unmet on a yearly basis within the common appeal process. These unmet needs add to the requirements for future funding and may increase the vulnerability of populations at risk of disasters and lead to ever increasing humanitarian needs in future crises.

The principle of delivering assistance on an impartial and needs-driven basis assumes that it is possible to assess and measure needs in a comprehensive and comparable way. Currently, needs are measured in a variety of contrasting and competing ways, and there is a significant lack of a holistic, global scale of needs based on accepted standards. As adequate methodological tools and processes to assess and record needs

---

<sup>7</sup> *Steets et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009.*

are scarce, there is consensus on the fact that at the moment it is not possible to estimate actual humanitarian need, nor the ability of the humanitarian system to respond to it. Many initiatives do however have databases which measure certain kinds of needs, such as the CRED EM-DAT database on the human impact and cost of natural disasters, and the ECHO Global Needs Assessment (GNA) index which ranks countries in terms of both vulnerability and crisis, identifying the most vulnerable countries and assessing the extent to which they are affected by crises and to which their humanitarian needs are unmet. There are also sectoral needs assessment initiatives, which seek to collect and disseminate data and also to harmonise needs assessments within sectors by improving standardisation.

The UN consolidated appeals process (CAP) is a country or region-level process used in the planning, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian aid activities for particular crises. It was reported that 63% of total humanitarian funding in 2009 was committed inside the common appeal process. The UN CAP consists of two different kinds of appeal, consolidated appeals and flash appeals. Consolidated appeals include projected activities for the coming year, often for the predictable needs of conflict and post-conflict situations. Country and regional-level consolidated appeals are merged into a common Humanitarian Appeal launched yearly in November for the following year. Consolidated appeals made up 88.7% of UN CAP requirements between 2003–2009, and were on average funded at 70.4%.

Flash appeals are speedy, strategic fundraising tools used for immediately identified needs in the wake of rapid onset disasters. Flash appeals made up on average 11.5% of CAP requirements between 2003–2009, but with great variation between years, due to the unpredictability of natural disasters. Flash appeals were funded at an average of 71.7%, which compares with the 70.4% average for consolidated appeals. A given country or region may have both consolidated and flash appeals active at the same time, if long-term crisis situations are aggravated by sudden disasters and increased humanitarian needs. The UN CAP process is a way of producing combined estimates of funding requirements and beneficiary numbers for specific crises. As such, CAP provides listings of priority projects for funding, rather than estimates of the actual scale of humanitarian need across sectors for all of the crisis-affected people. In this sense it is not a real estimate of need, but is used as a proxy measurement for need. CAP is primarily a coordination and planning tool

for agencies, and can be used to measure donor funding levels against the requirements which are presented in the appeals<sup>8</sup>.

## 2.3 Humanitarian Financing and Implementation

### 2.3.1 Overview of Financing Trends

What does the picture look like in terms of overall humanitarian funding? Multiple reports declare that it is not possible to precisely know or even to accurately estimate levels of global humanitarian funding. Government reporting of humanitarian spending to the OCHA Financial Tracking Service and other databases is voluntary, ad-hoc and incomplete, which makes it difficult to keep track of global public spending on aid. Private funding is even more challenging, as transfers remain unreported at national and global levels.

Estimates for global expenditure in humanitarian aid for 2008 varied between USD 6.6 billion and USD 18 billion, depending on the types of measurements, but both estimates show significant raises from their 2007 equivalents of USD 4.4 billion and USD 15 billion.<sup>9</sup>

Reports confirm that humanitarian funding increased rapidly between 2000 and 2006, with the upward trend still continuing, despite recent slow-downs. Between 2000 and 2008 there has been an ongoing upward trend, with humanitarian financing increasing at an average of 6.9% per year.<sup>10</sup>

The share of humanitarian aid of overseas development aid (ODA) expenditure globally is rising faster than overall ODA levels, and this upward trend is also reported to be likely to continue. Between 2000 and 2008, humanitarian aid accounted for an average 8.3% of ODA, with ODA levels increasing. However, there are signs that the global economic crisis has caused some significant shortfalls in funding for humanitarian assistance since 2008–2009. This has been particularly reflected in sharp declines in funding from private sources – which have a trend of increasingly accounting for a larger share in humanitarian assistance – as a result of the financial crisis. Those hardest hit by this fall have been

---

<sup>8</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010.*

<sup>9</sup> *Harvey et al. 2010.*

<sup>10</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010.*

NGOs and national Red Cross societies which rely heavily on private funding. Whilst causing some assistance flows to ebb, the recession has also had an impact in creating additional humanitarian needs, particularly in protracted crises. For example remittances, which can constitute important coping mechanisms for crisis-affected populations, have decreased as a result of the effects of the financial crisis.

Although general trends in humanitarian funding can be detected and analysed, the complicated and multilayered nature of the international humanitarian system means that it is not possible to say how much money is being spent where, by whom and for which ends. Part of the challenge is the structure and architecture of aid, in which many agencies overlap in complicated patterns that do not follow a linear progression. The aid dollar, pound or euro does not flow directly from donors through an aid implementer to beneficiaries. Instead, many humanitarian agencies have multiple roles as both donors and beneficiaries of aid funds, whilst acting simultaneously as implementing agencies. Often these various roles overlap and take place at the same time in the same contexts. Due to this it has been said that the same aid dollar is spent many times, but there is no measure of whether this recycling through the system is resulting in increased value, and whether that money is being spent appropriately. It has been argued that although reforms have taken place inside donor, UN and NGO components of the aid system, the overall aid architecture still remains inefficient. Due to the numerous interlinked actors and processes, it is challenging to pinpoint what are the precise causes of systemic ineffectiveness and inefficiencies. The complexity of the humanitarian system obscures accountability.

#### *Global targeting of humanitarian aid*

Trends indicate the geographical concentration of humanitarian aid resources on a very limited number of countries for prolonged periods of time. Most humanitarian funding is spent in the same countries from year to year. In 2007–2008, Sudan was the single top recipient country, receiving over USD 1 billion, followed by DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia and Uganda, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The report further states that in the last decade, the top 8 recipient countries – Sudan, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo – have received 50% of all government humanitarian spending. The majority of these countries are conflict-affected and suffer from situations of protracted crisis. Complex emergencies show a trend of making up the largest proportion of

humanitarian needs, requirements and spending. Since 2000, it is reported that both the funding requirements and the amount of resources spent in conflict-affected countries has grown considerably. Relative spending has however also been increasing to countries which have not traditionally been humanitarian priority countries, but which have been experiencing long-term chronic poverty situations – such as Haiti, Niger, Chad and Bangladesh.

Humanitarian aid is programmed for relatively short cycles of activity, yet the trends show that the majority of humanitarian aid is being spent in the same countries year after year, on much more substantial and long-term programming than some definitions of humanitarian action might advocate for. People living in complex, protracted crisis and post-crisis situations depend on humanitarian aid for medium and even long-term provision of basic sustenance and services. In many countries, humanitarian aid is the norm for a number of years as interlinked, compounded vulnerabilities drive crisis-affected communities to the brink of survival. This contradiction in the expectations and the reality of humanitarian spending has drawn attention to discrepancies in the way in which current aid architecture distinguishes firmly between humanitarian and development funding and activities. Many humanitarian actors have come to increasingly advocate for stronger policy coherence between humanitarian aid and longer-term development, particularly at the field level.

In response to the facts of the situation on the ground, there is a growing realization that the artificial distinctions between humanitarian, recovery and development funding, policies and priorities are being blurred. Chronic vulnerability is increasingly seen as a root cause and consequence of humanitarian need. Strengthened interaction and coordination between humanitarian assistance and longer term development is acknowledged to reduce vulnerability and build the resilience of crisis-affected communities. Similarly humanitarian aid actors have also had to address coherence challenges in terms of links between humanitarian work and security and protection issues. In response to the growing realization that the largest share of humanitarian requirements and resources are in contexts of complex emergencies, several reconstruction, recovery and peacebuilding funds have been set up to provide specific financing for countries emerging from conflict, in order to address their humanitarian and human security needs.

### *Primary aid sectors*

In terms of sectoral focus, food has been reported as the overwhelmingly largest sector, particularly tied food aid. The food sector is also reported to be growing in size, reflected by it having more than quadrupled from 2000 to 2009. Between 2007–2009, the food sector constituted 36.6% of all humanitarian aid. This was followed by the 24.7% of which went to multisector requirements – ie. needs which are not dominated by one sector, such as nutrition and IDP and refugee needs. These are priority funding areas for the great majority of donor governments. Non-DAC donors have reportedly tended to support sectors which rely on commodities, such as food, shelter and other non-food items, rather than service-providing sectors such as education and coordination.

From 2007 to 2009, the remaining roughly 40% of aid had been split between health, – the third largest sector at 8.9% - agriculture, shelter and non-food items, water and sanitation, coordination and support services, economic recovery and infrastructure, education, mine action, protection and IHL and security<sup>11</sup>. The least funding has been reported to go to mine action, coordination and support services, and protection/ human rights/ rule of law activities. Funding for the early recovery sector is reported to be increasing incrementally. It has become apparent through analysis of UN common appeals (CAP) that humanitarian funding to aid sectors that address chronic issues – such as health, water and sanitation – has tended to be neglected in favour of emergency food aid.

Overall CAP appeal requirements are funded at approximately 70% each year, although spending varies greatly between crises, with great differences apparent in the funding profiles of particular countries and regions. Spending per person also varies greatly between crises, and most countries experiences sharp shifts in the volume of humanitarian aid they receive.

It is reported that although there are general trends, most humanitarian funding is still very reactive, and driven by many national and international pressures. Immediate, visible food and other basic relief in response to sudden large-scale disasters is reported as tending to receive the most focus from the global media and – to an extent – from the humanitarian system itself. Political and public pressures have been said to influence humanitarian aid programming more than evidence-based humanitarian needs, and the system overall is very reactive rather than proactive. This can be seen in the lack of adequate funding to prevention

---

<sup>11</sup> *GHA 2010:38.*

and preparedness activities and to other less visible sectors. One of the most flexible forms of donor funding is un-earmarked allocations to agencies, which can be directed to address such needs.<sup>12</sup>

### 2.3.2 Humanitarian Aid Donorship

#### *DAC donorship*

Government funding is reported as the single largest source of humanitarian funds, as opposed to funding provided by private or other public sources. The majority of global humanitarian aid is donated by a small group of governments who are members of the OECD DAC - Development Assistance Committee. Government and European Commission funding made up 76% of total humanitarian aid in 2008 and 73% of the aid total in 2009. DAC funding is reported to have made up over 95% of all government funded aid from 2000-2008. Inside the DAC, a small group of governments donate the majority of global humanitarian funding. In 2008, the top ten DAC donors accounted for 91% of all government aid, with the USA sited as the largest single DAC donor.

The largest increases in donor funding for humanitarian aid between 2005 and 2009 were made by the UK, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Canada, who are also the largest funders of the CERF. These increases in the years since the launch of the humanitarian financial reforms are explained by the long-term trend of increasing finance for humanitarian aid.

The global total of government humanitarian contributions more than doubled from 2005 to 2007, driven by these same donors. Most of the funding from DAC donors – 60% in 2008 - was channelled through United Nations agencies and multilateral organisations. The top UN agency recipients of DAC funding in 2008 were reported to be WFP at 24.4 % of the total, UNHCR at 10.6% and UNRWA at 5.2%.

In 2008, approximately 25% of DAC aid was provided directly to NGOs, with the majority going to the ICRC, IFRC and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. As with the providers of aid, the group of top aid recipients is small and concentrated on a small number of countries. In 2008, Sudan received the most funding from DAC donors, being the top recipient at 13.7% of all DAC funding allocated to specific countries. Sudan was followed by Afghanistan and Ethiopia as the next largest

---

<sup>12</sup> *Development Initiatives 2009, Development Initiatives 2010, Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Walker & Pepper 2007.*

recipients. The top ten recipients of humanitarian aid from DAC donors received 62.5% of all DAC humanitarian allocations in 2008. The 37.5% remaining resources were divided between 138 countries.<sup>13</sup>

### *Emerging donorship*

Although the largest share of humanitarian aid is being provided and received by a very limited number of countries, the increasing complexity of the humanitarian system is partly due to an increasingly varied and diverse donor community. Recent reports on humanitarian aid trends have noted the significant contributions being made by emerging non-DAC donors. The number of donors contributing to international humanitarian aid is reported to have increased by 40% from 2005 to 2008, with 104 governments reporting humanitarian assistance in 2008. The exact contributions of non-DAC donors cannot be counted for the same reasons that overall humanitarian funding is unaccounted for – the voluntary nature of financial reporting to instruments such as the FTS.

The growing number of non-DAC donor contributions has been in part attributed to the accessibility of the new financial instruments, most notably the CERF, which allow donors to engage in humanitarian aid without it being necessary to have national administrative and technical capacity for it. This has been reported to blur the lines between which countries are donors and which are recipients, with traditional recipient countries increasingly making humanitarian donations. There is a reported long-term trend of the majority of non-DAC aid being given in bilateral grants to neighbouring countries – although non-DAC donors are increasingly supporting UN agencies and the joint financing mechanisms. It is reported that non-DAC donorship has a tendency to vary greatly between years, and is characterised by large single donations. Most of the humanitarian aid contributed by non-DAC donors is reported to be regionally prioritised, with donors choosing to support their neighbouring countries during humanitarian emergencies. This high concentration of non-DAC aid to particular regions has been shown to increase the impact and strategic importance of the aid contributions at the level of individual countries, whilst it is not representative of total aid at the global level.

This regional prioritisation is reflected in the top three non-DAC donors' – Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait – support to the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), which has been the largest recipient of non-DAC aid since 2001. From 2000 to 2009, the OPT have received 30% of all the

---

<sup>13</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Harvey et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008.*



non-DAC aid which has been allocated to specific countries, rising to 45% for 2009. In 2009, 76% of non-DAC aid was allocated to the OPT, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The reported trend is that the Middle East receives the largest share of non-DAC humanitarian aid, followed by southern Central Asian countries – such as Afghanistan and Pakistan – and sub-Saharan Africa.

In comparison to DAC countries which provide overall the most funding to African countries, non-DAC donors focus on the Arab countries of the Middle East. It has been noted that both DAC and non-DAC donors prioritise certain aid recipients based on a wide variety of factors including access and logistics, strategy, politics and diplomacy, public and media opinion and shared historical, geographic and language and cultural ties. Some reports observe the apparent discrepancy that exists between the reality of funding decisions being influenced by politics and strategic interests, and the aspiration to base humanitarian financing on the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality – on the part of all donors. It has also been reported that emerging donors are increasingly concerned by good donor practice, and are committing to the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) principles.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Private donorship*

An increasing share of humanitarian aid funds are perceived to consist of private contributions. The total sum of private contributions to humanitarian agencies is reported to have increased by 50% from 2006 to 2008. Some of the largest humanitarian operators are financed nearly exclusively from private donations from foundations, corporations and private voluntary sources. Medecins Sans Frontieres was the world's third largest single humanitarian funder in 2006, after the United States and the United Kingdom. The main advantages of private funds consist of the speed and flexibility with which they can be used by organisations, as they often do not come with the heavy administrative regulations and reporting conditions that accompany government funding. Private sector funding for humanitarian assistance is difficult to estimate overall, as it is not well recorded and tracked.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Harvey et al. 2010, Walker & Pepper 2007.*

<sup>15</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Harvey et al. 2010.*

## *Donorship trends*

Overall assessments of donor trends report that donor practice for humanitarian aid is improving, as donor funding has increased and donors are committing to good donor practice. Donor financing trends indicate that funding is being committed earlier and donors are seeking to develop appropriate policy frameworks for humanitarian action, to promote humanitarian operational reforms and to enhance humanitarian learning and accountability.

Although there is no consensus on definitions of humanitarian accountability, increasing numbers of donor organisations are reported to engage with quality and accountability initiatives and adhering to quality standards for humanitarian donorship. The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative is a donor platform for the advancement of good donorship practice and adherence to GHD principles of good donorship practice, which has a growing number of committed donor members. There are reported positive trends that the institutional reforms in humanitarian aid have changed humanitarian financing architecture in ways which better enable good donorship practices. Although commitments to the GHD initiative are increasing in numbers, it has been noted that there are significant gaps in the practical implementation of good donorship practice. Individual donors have widely disparate funding policies and practices, which is reflected in different understandings and uneven applications of GHD standards.

The GHD principles are criticised for not having clear, shared indicators for measuring donor progress against GHD principles, even though various initiatives have been set up to measure donor performance against them. Although measurements against GHD principles have been variable, it has been reported that they provide very useful indications of donors' yearly performance against GHD commitments. Donors have overall made progress, but significant areas of weakness remain in the actual implementation of GHD commitments in practice. A DAC peer review synthesis of DAC donors' performance in humanitarian aid notes that very few of the humanitarian policies are underpinned by action plans or specific targets which could be applied to demonstrate the actual impacts of policies. Some core challenges for donors are reported to be sustaining political interest in humanitarian reform and making actual commitments to it – as many donors are decreasing their capacity and resources for humanitarian assistance, – improving engagement with

humanitarian actors beyond the UN-system, and achieving more effective coordination.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3.3 Implementing Agencies and Pooled Funding

#### *Implementing Agencies*

The great majority of humanitarian assistance is implemented by local, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other community-based organisations and United Nations specialized agencies. It is reported that approximately half of all global humanitarian funding goes through the UN, the volume of which was estimated at USD 16.9 billion for 2008. It has also been pointed out that including the CERF and CHF, over 85% of all humanitarian funding allocated by governments for specific emergencies currently goes through UN agencies. The importance of UN agencies is reflected in figures for GHD donors, whose reported distribution of funding in 2007 was 51.4% of total humanitarian aid allocation going to the UN, of which 10.1% was in un-earmarked contributions. NGOs received 17.8%, and the Red Cross a total of 7.4%.

It has been observed that donors are decreasing the share of their funding allocated directly to NGOs and Red Cross societies. NGOs are, however, responsible for the delivery of over half of all humanitarian assistance. In 2007–2008, the percentage of government funding of total NGO funding was approximately 97.7%, whilst the proportion of funding from the UN to NGOs was 19%. There are signs that these figures are set to change, as NGOs are increasingly relying on UN agencies for access to the joint country-level financial resources. Since 2006, the share of NGO funding from pooled funding sub-grants from UN agencies has been increasing. There are some INGOs, such as MSF which are less dependent on UN funding, as they rely nearly exclusively on private funding support.

The global International NGO (INGO) community is estimated at around 250 organisations and federations, employing the majority of humanitarian field staff worldwide. Of this staff, it is reported that approximately 95% are nationals of the host countries. UN agencies have higher rates of international expat staff, at an average 11% as opposed to the 5% for NGOs. This reflects the centralised coordination structures of UN agencies. The majority of INGOs are also based in North America and Europe. As a general trend, most INGOs are reportedly secular, and

---

<sup>16</sup> *Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, OECD-DAC 2009, Development Initiatives 2009.*

their humanitarian activities range across a variety of sectors. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies is estimated as the world's largest emergency relief operator, with an unsurpassed global presence at 186 national societies. National and local NGOs and community-based organisations are small in size and the most numerous in quantity. They are often the final end-implementers of humanitarian assistance operations.<sup>17</sup>

### *Joint financing instruments*

The common UN- coordinated financial instruments CERF, CHFs and ERFs are funded mainly by governments. In 2008 and 2009, the joint financial mechanisms accounted for 7% of the total government- allocated humanitarian aid. In 2009, the top 10 OECD-DAC donors to the funds contributed 94% of the total funding to the new financial instruments. Of these 10, the top 3 provided 60% of the funding – the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands, and overall fund volumes to the CERF are rapidly increasing. It has been observed that supporting the joint funding mechanisms has been seen as a way for these donors to support the efficiency and coordination of the humanitarian system, and to reach different types of beneficiaries than would be possible through bilateral funding. The significant incentives of reduced administrative costs and focusing decision-making processes to the field level have also been highlighted as influencing decisions to finance the joint mechanisms.

The instruments are attractive to non-DAC governments for these reasons as well, as funding them does not require humanitarian infrastructure or field presence. Non-DAC donors prefer to fund the CERF and some top emerging donors include India, China, Korea and Saudi Arabia. The joint funds are also funded by private donors, as doing so enables them to contribute to relief operations without having to develop detailed internal policies on humanitarian aid. Whilst enabling non-traditional donors to fund humanitarian aid, doubts have been raised that the joint mechanisms will re-create the additional layer of bureaucracy that they have sought to reduce, by operating on a two-level funding process whereby global and country-level allocations are made through separate processes. This requires strong capacity at both levels, which has been criticised for increasing the internal transaction costs of the funds.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Harvey et al 2010.*

Another reported central problem with the funds is that NGOs do not have direct access to the joint funds, which directly prioritise and benefit UN agencies. Concerns are also raised with regard to the high programme overhead costs extracted by UN agencies as they pass funds from the joint instruments to implementing NGOs. Whilst making more funds available to pass through UN agencies via the new funds, their establishment has not decreased core UN agencies' direct bilateral funding from governments.<sup>18</sup>

### *Pooled funding recipients*

The top recipient countries of pooled funding mechanisms – 9 out of 10 – are reported to be countries classified as fragile states, reflecting the way in which pooled funds provide flexible and prioritised funding for complex contexts. The majority of country-level pooled funds are in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Sudan and the DRC. Both of these countries have Common Humanitarian Action Plans (CHAPs) to support coordination and prioritised fund dispersal.

A reported feature of the common pooled funds is their use in supporting humanitarian financing in countries which are transitioning from conflict situations, including for early recovery activities – which it has been argued is not what they were designed for. The CERF aims to meet those resourcing gaps which are not addressed by other humanitarian funding mechanisms, to ensure the continued financing of ongoing humanitarian needs and to provide more equitable, speedy and flexible humanitarian funding. It consists of a rapid response grant mechanism to meet the needs of sudden onset emergencies, which have made up 65% of all CERF funding up through 2008 since it became active in 2006. The rest of the funding, 35% up to 2008 was in grants to emergencies which OCHA has classified as underfunded.

Most of CERF funding is outside the CAP appeal, as it aims to address crucial financing gaps. The top CERF recipient from 2006 to 2008 was the DRC and Somalia in 2009. Since 2006, the top group of 5 countries – DRC, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire – have received a third of all funding disbursed by the CERF. In terms of sectors, 50% of all CERF funding to date in 2008 was allocated to the food and health sectors – 29% to food and 21% to health – reflecting global funding patterns. The least funded sectors inside CERF allocations were education, mine action,

---

<sup>18</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Stoddard 2008, Barber et al. 2008, Walker & Pepper 2007.*

economic recovery and infrastructure, which together accounted for only 2% of total funding. Other less funded sectors from 2006 to 2008 included protection / human rights / rule of law at 4% and agriculture and shelter, non-food items and water and sanitation, each accounting for 8%. Coordination and support services made up 9% of all CERF allocations, and multi-sector requirements were funded with 10% of the total.

Most of CERF funding from 2006 to 2008 was channelled through the UN agencies WFP (37%) and UNICEF (24%). Nearly a third of all the remaining funding was split between UNHCR, WHO and FAO, with the remaining 11% being shared by all other recipient agencies.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Stoddard 2008, Barber et al. 2008, Walker & Pepper 2007.*

# 3 Effectiveness and Impact of Humanitarian Aid

## 3.1 Policy and Planning

Under the heading of policy and planning, findings were recorded for policy coordination (3.1.1) and strategic response planning (3.1.2). Policy coordination processes include donor policy formulation and policy coherence with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law. Strategic response planning findings relate to processes of situation analysis, needs assessment and resource allocation.

### 3.1.1 Policy Coordination

The evaluations and reports raised a number of current issues in relation to policy coherence. Coherence pertains to adherence to the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action, as well as to respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and refugee law. Protection issues are another area where policy coordination gaps have been identified.

Donor trend indicators show that some donors have made deliberate and consistent efforts to align their national humanitarian policies more closely with international quality standards and principles, and that these changes in policy alignment have made real improvements to the overall performance of those donors. On the other hand, those donors which have not made efforts to better align and improve their policies and practices have not performed as well. There are wide differences between the best- and worst-performing donors in relation to respect for IHL, human rights and refugee law. Similarly there are wide disparities between different crises at the field level.

Donors which have made commitments to adhere to the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship still have room for improvement in terms of overall awareness of GHD principles, as well as specifically in formulating national policies on humanitarian aid which are in line with core humanitarian principles. In 2009, 17 GHD members had in place national policies which recognise the leading role of civilian and non-state humanitarian organisations in carrying out the implementation of humanitarian action.

The EU Humanitarian Consensus from 2008 sets out principles on civilian protection and on the use of military assets and capacities, which are applicable to all EU members.<sup>20</sup> There has been evidence of a growing lack of respect for international humanitarian law, core humanitarian principles and refugee law in an increasing number of recent conflicts. Beyond host country actors, particular challenges also arise from various degrees of integration of humanitarian action with other goals of donor governments' foreign policy. The increasing engagement of foreign militaries in humanitarian aid can be seen to compromise humanitarian independence, and in some cases has been attributed as a factor in causing increased insecurity to humanitarian personnel in the field and the shrinking of humanitarian space. Although the deployment of United Nations integrated missions is largely seen as a problem for the delivery of humanitarian aid, they have been seen to present advantages as well, particularly in terms of support and coordination assistance with politically, military and development actors.

Protection is an issue which is under increased focus from humanitarian aid actors, both agencies and donor governments. Protection relates to "activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, regardless of their age, gender or social, ethnic, national, religious or other background"<sup>21</sup>. In recent years protection guidelines have been developed, and organisations are beginning to be more active on protection. However, protection is still viewed as a complex issue, one which is difficult for donors and agencies to come to grasp with and despite recent efforts, there has not been enough progress on it. Donors have not been funding protection to the same extent as other activities, due to the low visibility of protection activities, and their indirect, compounded results and impacts. Protection issues are, like disaster prevention issues, long-term activities that are not reactive in nature, and therefore less attractive to donors. Aid agencies for their part have not been doing enough to advocate on principled protection and IHL issues toward their donors.

There is reported confusion over what protection activities are, and which aid actors have the responsibility for it. There have also been criticisms of the quality of protection work, in relation to the quality of staff, relations with accountability to affected populations, and inconsistencies in the knowledge and application of relevant laws.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Development Initiatives 2009, EU 2008.*

<sup>21</sup> *OCHA 2010.*



Protection is a particularly central issue to UNHCR, which is the global lead agency of the UN protection cluster. There have not been clear policies on the nature and extent of UNHCR's and other UN agencies' involvement with and coordination of protection issues, but UNHCR has recently made policy clarifications on its role as protection lead in both conflict-related internal displacements and disasters caused by natural hazards. There has been considerable discussion on different UN agency-specific definitions of protection and activities that constitute protection, which have caused coordination and coherence issues. This has become apparent for example in Flash Appeals, where a wide range of protection-related activities converge, reflecting the range of actors working on protection-related activities under the Protection Cluster. Different understandings of protection issues contributes to a 'humanitarian dilemma' of differing attitudes within one cluster towards working together with UN peacekeeping operations and integrated missions.<sup>22</sup>

The view of NGO platforms is to engage more actively and thoroughly with humanitarian principles and values, rather than focusing on technocratic discussions on aspects of the aid reform process. NGO perspectives stress the paramount importance of core humanitarian principles, particularly NGO independence in situations of conflict, and advocate for context-based balances in cooperation with local governments, based on established Principles of Partnership. The Principles of Partnership were endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007, by UN and non-UN humanitarian organizations. The principles of partnership are equality, transparency, a result-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.<sup>23</sup>

The second cluster evaluation states that the creation of clusters has led to greater coherence in a number of operational issues, as important efforts are being made in adapting global standards to local contexts, and in creating locally relevant standards. However there has not been evidence that clusters have been able to develop mechanisms for monitoring the adherence and compliance to these standards, as this has not been their perceived role. The cluster approach has been found also at times to threaten humanitarian principles. This occurs when cluster member agencies are financially dependent on clusters and cluster leads for their programme and activity funds. Coherence issues are also raised in situations where cluster lead agencies have direct links with peacekeeping forces, integrated missions or parties to active conflicts.

---

<sup>22</sup> *Harvey et al. 2010, Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Deschamp et al. 2010.*

<sup>23</sup> *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009.*

This same issue leads to conflicts and concerns that political and other considerations will trump humanitarian issues in the administration of pooled funding mechanisms. In these cases partnerships between UN agencies and other international humanitarian actors have been undermined, which in other cases have been made stronger by the cluster system. Although clusters strengthen the humanitarian values of those actors involved in relief operations, they can also consequently reinforce the split between humanitarian and development actors and activities.<sup>24</sup>

### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

In terms of specific findings at operation- and agency-level, policy coordination and coherence issues have been very central to the effectiveness or otherwise of certain aid programmes. Protection was identified as a weak point in an evaluation of UNHCR's work on returnee integration in Southern Sudan<sup>25</sup>. The evaluators noted that protection was insufficiently built into the reintegration operation, and became deprioritized when it should have been emphasized. National protection capacity should have been built, in order to link returnees with national authorities and building protection into national policy structures. As this was not done, the success of the returnee operation became too reliant on UNHCR support. Similarly the evaluation of Cyclone Nargis<sup>26</sup> highlighted a significant gap in the response in terms of protection. Protection activities could not be included in the response as its link to human rights issues was too sensitive for the government of Myanmar.

In the Pakistan 2009 displacement crisis<sup>27</sup>, humanitarian access was highlighted as a key issue, as security and government controls were reported to completely shape and constrain the humanitarian response. The Pakistani military was mobilised to reassert control of national territory. It was noted that pragmatic needs overcame qualms about adhering to fundamental humanitarian principles, as the more aid organisations compromised on their humanitarian principles, the better access they were able to have to the affected populations. Aid organizations found it was easier for them to work in areas controlled by the military than by civil administration. This limitation to humanitarian space was reportedly unchallenged in Pakistan, setting a poor precedent

---

<sup>24</sup> Steets et al. 2010, Willits-King et al. 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Duffield et al. 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Turner et al. 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Cosgrave et al. 2010.

for a context which is expecting more complex emergencies, as humanitarian agencies were not doing enough to push for donor advocacy for humanitarian space. Donor reluctance to engage with the displacement crisis in Pakistan was already strongly influenced by geopolitical interests, and as UN agencies strongly supported the government, it was noted that it became difficult to adhere to humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality.

Similarly in the Haiti earthquake disaster, coherence issues were raised with regards to the strong involvement of foreign military forces, particularly the US army, in addition to the UN integrated mission in Haiti MINUSTAH.<sup>28</sup> The establishment of parallel decision-making structures by these military actors, which included the government of Haiti and OCHA, reportedly made it difficult for the humanitarian community to regulate the response. It was noted that there had been limited coordination with military forces before the earthquake, which resulted in a magnified gap in effective policy coordination and coherence during the organization of the emergency response. There was a reported lack of IASC guidance on how to deal with integrated missions and the presence of foreign military forces, which reinforced the powerlessness of humanitarian actors in the face of the politically mandated and heavily equipped military stakeholders.

### 3.1.2 Response Planning

The biggest gap in strategic response planning issues seems to be the quality and use of needs assessments. Needs assessments are central to identifying the humanitarian needs of disaster-affected populations. Although there are indications that the quality and quantity of needs assessments has improved and that inter-agency needs assessments are increasingly taking place, it is still identified as a fundamental flaw of the humanitarian system. There is a lack of hard data, particularly at the early stages of rapid onset disasters, which is needed to support dynamic and ongoing needs assessment. Agencies have become accustomed to making rough assessments from preliminary observations in rapidly changing environments.

A core weakness is that there is no one accepted method of assessment, and although there have been recent methodological innovations and new tools, multiple initiatives and mechanisms overlap and create parallel

---

<sup>28</sup> *Grunewald & Binder 2010.*

processes. There is not enough sharing of needs assessments and information, as it is widely considered to be institutionally legitimate to keep needs assessments private, to decrease competition for funding based on identified needs. This lack of collective institutional learning contributes to the further proliferation of overlapping mechanisms and initiatives, and causes persistent information gaps to remain.

The OCHA Assessment and Classification of Emergencies (ACE) project has undertaken a mapping of key emergency needs assessment initiatives, and found that there is a lot of potential for improved consultation and coordination on needs assessments. Improvements are needed in pre-crisis baseline information, which needs to be collected in the initial stages of emergencies, in order to coordinate effectively with contingency planning. Many of the assessment tools have also not adequately considered the varying information requirements that arise at different times throughout an emergency.

The OCHA ACE review revealed a strong opportunity for the standardization of a core set of indicators and definitions of key terms, to improve comparability in measuring needs and severity across sectors which can ultimately improve response prioritization. This could be done for example by using multi-sectoral needs assessment tools. The overall assessment by the project is that many agencies and clusters are seriously engaged in efforts to standardize and improve their own assessment practices and build partnerships for joint assessments and information consolidation.

All of the currently active needs assessment initiatives aim to address the need for better information for sectoral programming, as well as the need for more timely information at the onset of an emergency. Different agencies do however have varying capacities, and some need to strengthen their substantive and technical capacity building. Clusters and agencies should conduct a review of their existing capacities for needs assessment tool design and implementation and begin capacity-building in identified gap areas. The ACE project recommends a classification system for emergencies in which they are sequenced in a linear emergency timeline, where each phase of the emergency from onset to recovery has its own set of assessment tools and methods to collect data for a particular information set. Standardised sequencing would create a comprehensive evidence base for humanitarian action, from decision-making to programming.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> OCHA 2009.

Needs assessments always take place in complex, political environments, and their validity and relevance depends on many different factors. Needs assessments are often used as programming tools which enable access to funding for those sectors which are the specialization of the agency in question. Agencies may thus support the prioritization of those needs which they have been able to identify, as their data assessments will focus on creating programmes to which the capacity to respond already exists. It can be said that only that which is measured can be known, which reflects the lack of effective methods to currently determine real humanitarian need. Agencies can however measure the needs to which they have the capacity to respond. This is reflected in the UN Common Appeals, which are used as the basis for aid allocations but may not always reflect actual need. Out of necessity, the addressed 'needs' become that which UN agencies are able to strategically programme and provide for. By focusing on rapid response and the reliability and predictability of the humanitarian response some level of technical accuracy may be compromised in needs assessment methods. Although needs assessments can be used as instruments to legitimize certain types of response or disregarded for political reasons, they can also be valuable means of holding authorities and aid agencies accountable for responding to stated needs.

A repeatedly mentioned core issue with needs assessments is the lack and inadequacy of beneficiary consultation and involvement in assessments and in the design of programmes. The aid response is meant to respond to the needs of the beneficiaries, but local knowledge, beneficiary consultation and cultural sensitivity are crucial in order to be successful in this. Gender issues are also often neglected in needs assessments, although their importance as a cross-cutting issue is continuously raised in evaluation recommendations. Incorporating gender-sensitive analysis remains a constant weak aspect of assessments. Overall however the strategic prioritisation of needs and allocation based on needs has improved, due to the new assessment tools and methodologies. Humanitarian aid reforms of clusters, sectoral coordination and pooled funding mechanisms such as CERF have contributed to the improvements in coordinated needs assessments, in the planning and quality of proposals for major funding appeals such as common appeals and flash appeals and in the development of innovative indicators to measure relative needs.

There is some indication that developing measurements of vulnerability are seen to be more relevant and useable than measures of need. Growing importance is accorded to vulnerability analyses, however the humanitarian system is only just beginning to define vulnerability as a concept, and to develop methods to measure and respond to it. More

nanced and comprehensive notions such as human security have also been raised as better measures than needs-based assessments. The central questions in these types of analyses are about what kinds of risks are people exposed to and the time frames in which certain risks can become actualized. At the moment new types of programming which have been developed based on vulnerability and livelihood measures are seen to be improving the relevance and appropriateness of humanitarian aid. Further discussion on livelihood and vulnerability approaches is contained in the section on current themes in humanitarian aid.<sup>30</sup>

### *Resource allocation*

Donors are lagging behind in their commitments to allocate resources equitably among crises and in accordance to needs. Donor funding is reported to remain overwhelmingly biased towards international actors, which is undermining local and national-level NGOs and civil society organisations in crisis-affected countries. Similarly there is reportedly increasing concern over the UN-centrism of the joint funding mechanisms, which is changing the way humanitarian assistance is financed.

As larger shares of funding flows are channelled through UN agencies, NGOs are receiving proportionately less direct funding and are increasingly dependent on contracts with UN agencies in order to access funds. There are concerns that this may be detracting from the flexibility and independence of humanitarian providers, with consequences for the relevance and appropriateness of aid. The concentrated fund allocation processes are reported to benefit large NGOs with the resources to comply with complicated administrative requirements. An example of poor practice in the resource allocation process of pooled funds at cluster level to competing projects describes how the allocation process has been described as "horse-trading, a souk, a bazaar".<sup>31</sup> This type of competition highlights the increased need for appropriateness in UN – NGO contracting relations, as greater levels of funding are channelled through the UN.

There are reports of improvements in appropriateness that have been brought about through the implementation of the various aspects of the humanitarian reforms. Clusters are noted to have improved financial

---

<sup>30</sup> *Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Steets et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009.*

<sup>31</sup> *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009.*

planning processes, as well as the quality of proposals for the common funding appeals. However, the introduction of the cluster system has not improved needs assessment coordination to the extent that it should have, which is apparent in continuing duplications. The cluster system evaluation notes that there are not enough improvements in organisational learning within the system. The CERF is reported to have contributed to an increased volume of humanitarian resources, and to have improved overall relevance and appropriateness of interventions. This is due to the decentralized nature of the decision-making process. Particularly the rapid response aspect of CERF funding is reported as highly relevant and appropriate. In contrast, the relevance of many grants accorded through the underfunded emergencies part of the instrument is called into question. There are debates on the appropriateness of funding 'non life-saving' interventions, such as certain early recovery needs. However, along with the other pooled funding mechanisms and together with improved cluster and sectoral coordination, CERF has contributed to improved joint needs assessment initiatives. Yet in terms of resource allocation, donors have failed to invest enough in needs assessment which has hindered agency-level capacity development in needs assessment.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

The Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluations all reported on relevance and appropriateness results. The evaluations reported gaps in the quality of needs assessments and contextual analysis of the crisis situations, and insufficient beneficiary consultation. These lacks in appropriate needs assessments and beneficiary consultation led to examples of inappropriate aid assistance being provided.

The evaluation of the responses to the Haiti earthquake<sup>33</sup> noted that although needs analyses were carried out, they had serious lacks and contextual analysis of the disaster situation was missing. The needs assessments were reportedly using poor methodologies, were too reliant on quantitative data and were not identifying the correct needs. Existing needs assessments and censuses carried out by local Haitian actors were not taken into account, which made the overall response less effective and less relevant to the affected communities. The initial international response to the Haiti earthquake was reported to have undermined local

---

<sup>32</sup> *Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Steets et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009.*

<sup>33</sup> *Grunewald & Binder 2010.*

actors, and led to a response which was designed not to support but to replace local capacities. The crisis-affected population was largely excluded from the design and implementation of the response.

In contrast, the evaluation of the response to cyclone Nargis in Myanmar<sup>34</sup> states that significant efforts were made to include beneficiaries and local communities on their needs and priorities. However, this communication was not used in an interactive way throughout the planning process, but was more extractive, with no feedback mechanism back to crisis-affected communities. There was also a reported lack of attention to gender issues in the needs assessment process, and not enough consideration of vulnerability issues. Strategic planning was noted to be a weakness in the operation.

The evaluation of the response to the Pakistan displacement crisis<sup>35</sup> also reported the lack of beneficiary consultation, particularly of women beneficiaries, at the programme planning stage. There were not enough needs assessments done and joint assessments were rare and not shared well enough, which led to relevance problems. The lacks in appropriate needs assessments and beneficiary consultation led to the provision of some inappropriate aid assistance. Sited examples include focusing on shelter kits, when the affected people needed help with repairing existing houses. Agencies are provided in-kind goods and services, when cash assistance would have been more effective at meeting the needs of the beneficiaries.

Similarly gaps in the strategic planning process led to inappropriate aid in Myanmar, where the aid response focused on donations of goods, services and cash. The affected communities would have benefited more from livelihood recovery assistance. In Haiti, the lack of contextual analysis was reported to lead to inequitable allocation of resources between different sectors, with the agriculture, early recovery and education sectors being underfunded and experiencing delays in funding. Overall high levels of appropriateness were reported for the WFP Kenya emergency operation<sup>36</sup>, yet it was also stated that the needs of the programme beneficiaries should have been addressed more at different stages of programme implementation.

---

<sup>34</sup> *Turner et al. 2008.*

<sup>35</sup> *Cosgrave et al. 2010.*

<sup>36</sup> *Simkin 2008.*



## 3.2 Implementation

Under the heading of implementation, findings are presented on resource use (3.2.1) and operational delivery (3.2.2). Resource use refers to cost-efficiency issues, with regard to processing resources and measuring the operational efficiency of fund disbursement processes in humanitarian aid. Operational delivery processes contain the organization, coordination and delivery of aid, including issues of timeliness, effectiveness and the quality of humanitarian aid implementation processes, with particular reference to the joint financing mechanisms.

### 3.2.1 Resource Use

Cost-efficiency issues have been overall under-reported and unaddressed in the assessed humanitarian evaluations. However, even though cost-efficiency concerns have not been analysed in detail, many efficiency shortfalls in organisational processes have been noted. The most often raised issue is a concern with those significant, remaining inefficiencies in the humanitarian system that have not been adequately addressed in the implementation of the reforms. Despite some improvements in the predictability of funding, major inefficiencies remain in the transaction speed from fund allocation to its end use in the field. There is also widespread concern over UN agency overheads and programme support costs, particularly with regard to the new financial mechanisms.

The main inefficiencies of the new funding mechanisms (CERF, country-level pooled funds) are reported to be caused by the multiple hindrances of high transaction costs and ineffective and inflexible financial reporting procedures. Similarly there are administrative inefficiencies at both ends of funding allocation processes of the new funding mechanisms, from delays with proposal and procurement processes to incompatible reporting systems and procedures. Efficiency is also hindered by the complicated partnership agreements between UN agencies and the NGOs which act as implementing agencies for programme activities. Even where fund disbursements to particular UN agencies are speedy, the agency-to-NGO disbursement is a bottleneck. These inefficiencies which are due to time lags between fund commitment and disbursement are causing delays to some projects.

There are also reported concerns from both NGOs and donors about the administrative overheads extracted by UN agencies, which may average at 10%. Concerns have been raised about the extent to which UN agencies are adding value to transactions, as well as about the sustainability of the

practice of UN agencies extracting operational overheads yet making it difficult for contracting NGOs to do the same. There is a call for conducting financial analyses of transaction costs against the value added of operating through UN agencies, to bring to light possible inefficiencies in certain contracting systems between UN organisations and NGOs.

A main concern for NGOs in terms is their lack of direct access to the new funding mechanisms. NGOs find accessing pooled and CERF funding difficult and this is reported to be particularly challenging for local and national NGOs, who may be unable to meet the administrative requirements of the funds. As the UN-centrism of new funding mechanisms is being heavily criticised by the NGO community, there is a call for donors to play a larger role in ensuring the effective financing of NGOs in the aid sector. Particularly at field level, evaluators find that donors can play a central role in ensuring coordination between various funding mechanisms, as well as in facilitating access to country-level pooled funds for local and national NGOs. This is in line with the GHD principle of supporting local capacities.

Donors which have been regarded previously as flexible and responsive are being criticised for making their funding more rigid by channelling it through un-earmarked allocations to UN agencies and joint financing mechanisms, due to their internal bureaucratic pressure to cut down on administrative costs. Donors are seeking to improve their own efficiencies by concentrating funds in the new mechanisms, but this may be resulting in both higher transaction costs and also in increasingly inflexible funding arrangements which are at odds with donors' GHD commitments. In order to retain flexibility, donors are recommended to continue funding bilaterally, particularly to NGOs during rapid-onset disasters so that activities can begin whilst NGOs wait for pooled funding disbursements. There is a drive to increase efficiency by cutting down on administrative costs across the system, but this may be proving to be a handicap as it can lead to underinvestment in those key capacities which could be used to improve performance.

Although the perceived transaction costs of the new aid reform processes can be considerable in terms of time and resources for agencies, the benefits of coordination overall for the system are argued to exceed the costs. However, there remain concerns particularly for small NGOs about the costs of reform outweighing its benefits – due to increases in transaction and administrative costs. There is also the risk that intra-

sectoral coordination may be weakening the efficiency of inter-sectoral coordination.<sup>37</sup>

### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

There were few specific results for efficiency in the operational evaluations, although general assessments were made. At times there were issues with the availability and use of funds, as in the case of the Haiti earthquake where substantial funds were readily available through UN pooled funding mechanisms, but in fact the resources flows were so considerable that the absorption capacity of the humanitarian system quickly became saturated.<sup>38</sup> The opposite problem was apparent for the UNHCR Southern Sudan returnee programme, where funding was unpredictable and constrained, which undermined much of the operational and strategic planning. For this programme, limited funding and the requirement for quick visible achievements put pressure on all aspects of planning and delivery, which resulted in below-par needs assessments and gaps in coverage.<sup>39</sup>

In the Pakistan displacement crisis operational costs were higher than anticipated due to security needs, and high levels of insecurity affected the overall programme quality negatively. Good efficiency results were reported for the WFP Kenya emergency operation, which was able to meet most of its funding requirements and increased efficiency by purchasing grain locally within Kenya.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2.2 Operational Delivery

Results in terms of improvements and gaps in operational implementation processes focused largely on the relative effectiveness of the various aspects of humanitarian reforms. Although there have not been definitive assessments on the overall improvements which have resulted from the introduction of UN-centred humanitarian reforms, there are many specific findings particularly in terms of the effectiveness of the financial reforms. Beyond results for the new financial mechanisms, there are overall results in timeliness, coordination in terms of clusters and leadership, and

---

<sup>37</sup> Harvey et al. 2010, *NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009*, Stoddard 2008, Willitts-King et al. 2007, Barber et al. 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Grunewald & Binder 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Duffield et al. 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Simkin 2008.

monitoring and learning processes. In terms of overarching results, it is reported that the organisational structures and processes of the humanitarian system are improving overall and concentrated efforts are being made to keep improving the system. There are however particular areas of humanitarian aid processes which are weaker than others and affect the effectiveness of all other aspects of the system. General recommendations for improving system effectiveness include involving weak aspects such as leadership and monitoring, and involving national partners better whilst increasing accountability to crisis-affected communities, as well as increasing beneficiary involvement at all levels of humanitarian responses.

There have been improvements noted in timeliness brought on by the reforms, namely the cluster system and the new financial mechanisms, as they have been implemented with speed since their establishment in 2006. The 2009 GHD indicator report shows that there had been slight increases in timeliness between 2007 and 2008, with a higher percentage of commitments being made in the first quarter of the year. However, disparities remain wide between crises, with some being funded only at 16.5% in the first quarter compared to the highest funded at 54.4%.

Similarly disparate funding proportions were in evidence for different rapid-onset disaster flash appeals where funds committed - as a share of the whole year's GHD total commitments - within the first six weeks of the appeal ranged from 6.7% to 100% in 2008. Overall contribution to flash appeals within the first six weeks - as a share of revised requirements- rose from 19.7% in 2007 to 24.4% in 2008. In terms of flexibility, in 2007, 13% of GHD donor committed funds were flexible (9.2% were un-earmarked, 3.8% were CERF allocations).<sup>41</sup> In terms of future improvements in timeliness, they are to be expected from current investments in disasters risk reduction (DRR), in the way of improved preparedness and more timely, efficient and locally-grounded responses.

### *Joint financing mechanisms*

Some evaluation results state that the greatest progress made by the humanitarian reforms is in the creation of the new financial mechanisms of CERF and country-level funds – Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF), Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) and Humanitarian Response Funds (HRFs). They have also been the reforms which have been instituted most speedily. However, one of the main problems with the

---

<sup>41</sup> *Development Initiatives 2009.*

financial reforms is their inability to get funds to NGOs in a timely manner. This is a particularly important issue as NGOs implement the bulk of humanitarian aid and deliver the funds to the end recipients, to local organisations and crisis-affected communities and populations.

Another often reported area in which the funds have not performed as effectively as they could have is in coordination. The various financial instruments serve different purposes and can be applied in complementary ways in specific contexts. Coordination is crucial for the various mechanisms to be complementary rather than competing. There are issues with the coordination of the new financial instruments, as they are not used enough together in complementary and strategic ways. This lack of coordination poses risks of inefficiencies and funding gaps. As the pooled funds together have accounted for only approximately 7% of global humanitarian financing, issues of coordination with other financing and programming instruments are central to ensuring their effectiveness.

Beyond coordination amongst the funds, a core added value of the joint financing instruments is achieved through their coordinated use with the other elements of humanitarian reform. The performance of the humanitarian reforms increases when the funds and other coordination mechanisms interact together effectively.

The Central Emergency Response Fund is reported to have overall increased flexible and timely funding to UN agencies for rapid onset humanitarian crises, and in addressing inequities in humanitarian funding to 'forgotten' or 'neglected', underfunded crises. The CERF is also credited with improving joint strategic planning and improving overall system-level preparedness. However, many challenges and opportunities remain for improving CERF effectiveness. The rapid response allocations through CERF are deemed to be effective in enabling initial response to emergencies by funding priority sectors and activities in a timely way. There are however more complicated results for the under-funded emergencies CERF allocations, as questions remain about the definition of 'under-fundedness' and some criticise the inappropriate use of CERF funds for activities which may not be considered immediately 'life-saving' and as such not in the core mandate of humanitarian funding.

Other aspects of the CERF which have come under criticism are the lack of rapid access to funding for NGOs, particularly local and national NGOs. CERF effectiveness is also hampered by heavy administrative issues which have caused inefficiencies in fund dispersal, with effects for the actual timeliness in enabling the implementation of CERF-funded activities. Inadequate monitoring and reporting systems are also noted to be a weakness of the CERF, as their lack hinders institutional learning and capacity building. CERF is however overall reported to be a valuable tool

for promoting decentralised decision-making and the evidence-based prioritisation of funding.<sup>42</sup>

The country-level pooled funds CHFs and ERFs are overall evaluated to have performed well in improving country-level funding prioritisation, coordination and strategic planning. The Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) are reported to provide advanced funding for country-wide emergency responses, enabling at times a more timely response than through bilateral funding and providing incentives for country-level coordination. The common humanitarian funds in DRC and Sudan are reported to have successfully addressed sectoral, geographical and time-gaps in financing. However, some of the main failings of the funds relate to fund management issues such as decision-making structures and administration, and efficiency and accountability issues. There are accountability questions with the CHFs, with reported doubts particularly from NGOs on whether allocation decisions are made on an impartial basis. The CHFs have also been criticised much like the CERF for the provision of assistance to long-term recovery needs, which may have reduced the availability of funding for acute emergency needs. The CHFs have reportedly not improved enough in terms of monitoring, evaluation and institutional learning.

The Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) have been found to be effective in responding to unforeseen needs and small-scale programming gaps. They are well placed to address the initial needs of sudden-onset natural disasters on a small scale. ERFs have been noted to be flexible and effective in meeting ongoing emergency needs, although their flexibility has also been hampered at times by inflexible rules and regulations. Similarly to the CHFs, ERFs have provided increased incentives for country-level coordination, but have weaknesses in monitoring capacity.<sup>43</sup>

### *Cluster coordination*

There are some contradictory results for the effectiveness of the cluster system in improving humanitarian coordination. Some state that sectoral coordination has overall been seen to improve with the introduction of the cluster approach, whilst other reports claim that that it has merely been a surface reordering which has not changed on-the-ground coordination practices. The second cluster evaluation states that investments are now beginning to pay off, as the benefits generated by the cluster approach are

---

<sup>42</sup> Barber *et al.* 2008, Stoddard 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Stoddard 2008, Mowjee & Randel 2007, Willits-King *et al.* 2007.

outweighing its costs and shortcomings. There is a perceived decrease in resistance and criticism towards the cluster approach, both from UN agencies and NGOs, since its introduction. At local levels, the implementation of the cluster approach has varied significantly in many ways, in relation to: types of emergencies, geographic coverage of operations, coverage of thematic cluster areas, level of integration with existing mechanisms, country-specific challenges (for example political or security-related access) and even terminology (sectors vs. clusters). As such, it is difficult to assess the overall effectiveness of the cluster approach, as it is being contextually applied in different ways.

The significant potential of the cluster approach for further improving humanitarian response is called on to justify further efforts and investments to improve and strengthen the implementation of the approach. However, all of the evaluation findings relating to cluster effectiveness state the need for further improvements. Specific areas for improvement include cluster leadership and management, inter-cluster coordination, the level of NGO involvement in clusters and accountability issues.

Cluster leadership is cited as a central issue particularly due to its role in improving overall leadership mechanisms in the humanitarian reforms. However there are leadership issues, from problems in mainstreaming leadership roles within organizations to poor cluster management in the field, resulting in ineffective planning and facilitation of country operations. Inter-cluster coordination is seen to be ineffective particularly at the strategic level, both at country level and globally, as strategic inter-cluster coordination mechanisms do not exist at the global level. The effects of poor coordination are apparent in cross-cutting, multi-sectoral issues not being addressed and in overlaps persisting between clusters. This reflects on the currently insufficient coordination between the cluster approach and other mechanisms of humanitarian reform.

Clusters are criticised for not enabling NGOs to fully engage at global and local levels in cluster coordination, as very few NGOs act as cluster co-chairs and other leadership positions. There is a sense that NGOs are not treated as genuine partners, as NGO involvement in the reform processes has been inconsistent, and undermined at times by UN agencies' uncooperativeness and perceived inequalities. Local and national NGOs in particular continue to have difficulties in accessing funds or meaningfully participating in coordination mechanisms. This reflects on the issue of cluster accountability at the local level, which has not been manifested enough as clusters are called on to improve local capacity building and invest in real partnerships at the local level. Coordination is of particular relevance to local humanitarian actors and the affected populations, as

they will bear the costs of ineffective coordination. There are also recommendations to link the cluster approach with and support existing in-country preparedness, response and coordination mechanisms and capacities.

### *Leadership and administration*

Overall leadership was noted as a core weakness for humanitarian coordination, as strong and experienced humanitarian leadership is widely lacking. Unqualified Humanitarian Coordinators and conflicts between Resident Coordinators (RCs) and HCs are cited as common issues. Lacks in effective leadership have immediate adverse effects on the other elements of the reform process; coordination, funding and partnership. Adequate leadership from Humanitarian Coordinators remains crucial to the system and is a necessary condition to the performance of the reforms, with initiatives underway that are looking to improve the HC system, such as the common pool of standard-qualified HCs.

Monitoring has likewise been identified as a weakness in the system, although the quality of monitoring has been improving as there are positive trends of various monitoring and reporting initiatives converging. The real methodological failure is of not having clearly defined indicators and benchmarks for overall system performance, and the failure to apply them systematically when they do exist. Innovations such as inter-agency real time evaluations have been introduced to improve both accountability and learning, but there remain concerns over both. For accountability, the non-inclusion of accountability issues in the design of programming and monitoring processes – and particularly the accountability to crisis-affected communities – is a significant gap. Donors and humanitarian agencies are not applying enough energy and resources to addressing the challenge of improving 'downward' donor accountability towards their local partners and the crisis-affected people they are looking to support, which leads to insufficient follow-up to evaluations for beneficiaries.

Another central issue which determines the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation tools is the extent to which they are used for programming and learning purposes. Important learning gaps remain, as evaluations are not being effectively used by the agencies as a learning tool. As a consequence, the benefits of evaluations, both agency-specific and joint, have not been absorbed within humanitarian sector. Peer review mechanisms have however been cited as increasing the ability of humanitarian actors to learn. There are calls for significant improvements



in the use of evaluations, in information management and in organisational and system-level learning.

Overall there have not been many findings in terms of human resources, or institutional capacity building beyond learning. Human resources improvements in the humanitarian sectors include efforts in increased investment in the operational capacity and quality of human resources, apparent in improvements in the professionalism of humanitarian staff. There are problems with the constantly high turnover of humanitarian staff, and underinvestment in human resources management. Further investments are particularly needed in national staff capacity development, and local response capacity of the governments of crisis-affected countries.<sup>44</sup>

### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

The operational evaluations provided mixed results in terms of timeliness, coordination and effectiveness. The WFP food and livelihoods programme in Ethiopia<sup>45</sup> reported problems in the timeliness and effectiveness of food distribution. The problems consisted of multiple problems in delays and late, irregular arrival of food rations, inadequate storage facilities and insecure, impractical distribution sites, inadequate food rations in terms of both quantity and size, food misappropriation and lacks of information and feedback mechanisms. These timeliness gaps were due in part to access problems due to transport problems, road conditions and high levels of insecurity. These constraints also affected the monitoring quality of the programme, which was a noted weakness. The WFP Ethiopia programme was also reported not to have been effective enough in building local capacity.

Positive results in terms of effectiveness were reported for both the WFP Kenya emergency operation<sup>46</sup> and the emergency school feeding component of the same programme<sup>47</sup>. The emergency operation established an efficient, equitable and transparent aid distribution system. However, a core problem of the programme was a lack of sufficient and effective coordination with other actors in the UN system. Although the programme did to some extent coordinate with the government of Kenya,

---

<sup>44</sup> Harvey et al. 2010, Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009, Stoddard 2008, Steets et al. 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Shoham 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Simkin 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Finan et al. 2010.

coordination gaps were evaluated to have reduced programme effectiveness. All aspects of the programme also suffered from needs assessment, targeting and monitoring lacks. The school feeding component of WFP Kenya emergency operations was evaluated as having been overall efficient and effective, timely and well coordinated particularly with government partners at the local and national levels. However it also had gaps in terms of timely and systematic monitoring and evaluation.

The response to cyclone Nargis<sup>48</sup> was reportedly not as efficient, organized or coordinated as it may have been, particularly at the early stages of the response. Coordination and logistics problems were caused in the beginning due to the large presence of organizations without previous emergency relief experience. It was noted that the most effective life-saving operations were conducted by national actors, prior to the arrival of international agencies. It is therefore difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the international humanitarian in early response to the cyclone disaster. However the report notes that the international response was timely in mobilizing funding and activating clusters and other coordination and leadership mechanisms. However, there were field-level delays, as government restrictions which were placed on international organizations significantly limited the international response to the crisis. The lack of humanitarian access to the crisis was reportedly a major factor which constrained the effectiveness of the response. The operation suffered from communication, information management and strategic coherence problems. However the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) was highlighted as a good monitoring practice example of an interagency assessment, which engaged in community consultation at an early phase of the emergency.

The humanitarian response to the Pakistan displacement crisis<sup>49</sup> reported an overall effective response, with some innovation in IDP crisis management processes. The evaluation notes that the local response to the crisis was very timely, which compensated for delays in the arrival of international humanitarian assistance. Coordination was noted to have been variably successful, with a slow roll-out to the field which resulted in the relief operation being initially managed the military rather than humanitarian actors. The government restrictions on the humanitarian operation have constrained the delivery of assistance and insecurity issues were reported to impact negatively on monitoring and evaluation

---

<sup>48</sup> *Turner et al. 2008.*

<sup>49</sup> *Cosgrave et al. 2010.*

activities. UN coordination for this response reportedly suffered from a lack of adequate leadership.

The Haiti earthquake response<sup>50</sup> also reported weak humanitarian leadership and a lack of a coordinated joint response strategy. Leadership issues were noted as a core problem and constraint for the effectiveness of the response. The response was however evaluated to have been timely and successful in rapidly mobilizing aid, setting up cluster coordination. This was enabled by an established UN in-country presence and strong levels of preparedness in terms of relief supplies. However, it was noted that this capacity was not translated into timely and effective humanitarian results. A main cause of these lacks was weak contextual assessment and appropriate needs assessment. The urban context of the crisis led to important inefficiencies and gaps in the response, which was not able to address the real immediate needs of the affected populations. The response provided inappropriate aid in terms of inadequate shelters and sanitation facilities. The evaluation also highlighted human resources mismanagement issues in the Haiti response, which resulted in unusually high levels of staff evacuations. A high level of staff turnover also compromised context-specific institutional learning, even though it increased response capacity.

### 3.3 Results and Impacts

Under the theme of results are grouped findings that have reported on results (3.3.1) and impacts (3.3.2) of aid. Results refer to the humanitarian results that have been achieved through relief programmes, in terms of meeting the appropriate needs of disaster-affected populations and reaching the right beneficiaries in terms of coverage. Impacts relate to findings on the longer-term consequences, both positive and negative, of humanitarian interventions. The sustainability of relief operations and the degree to which they contribute to local capacity building and participation are central elements in accounting for the impacts of humanitarian aid.

---

<sup>50</sup> *Grunewald & Binder 2010.*

### 3.3.1 Results

The evaluation findings for results focus on the extent to which operational coverage of aid programmes has been achieved. At the system level, overall results for coverage indicate that although there have been increases in humanitarian funding and the global aid worker population, the needs of disaster-affected populations have simultaneously increased at such a rate that there is a clear sense of ‘universal insufficiency’. Although there has been progress in terms of coverage, the resources still do not match all the stated needs. Coverage is also limited by shrinking humanitarian space, in terms of declines in access to affected populations, due to insecurity and host government restrictions. Beyond generalised statements, there were few system-wide results on coverage, with findings reported mainly for the new financial mechanisms.

In terms of sufficiency, the overall upward trend of increased humanitarian funding for emergencies is reported to continue. Although the new financing mechanisms have not directly caused it, it is reported that they have been part of the enabling framework which is able to process increased flows of humanitarian funds, and as such have contributed to overall increased sufficiency and coverage of humanitarian aid. CERF funds are reported to have significantly contributed to increases in CAP funding, along with the other pillars of humanitarian reform. CERF has strengthened the humanitarian response to underfunded and neglected crises, enabling both assistance and protection support, whilst channelling increasing donor attention to these forgotten crises. CERF has succeeded in reinforcing needs-based response in global humanitarian funding, and increased attention to the principle of impartiality in aid allocations. CERF is reported to work well as a funding channel for large-scale rapid onset disasters through its rapid response window, but not as well for smaller scale disasters.

As individual CERF-funded projects are so diverse and involve multiple agencies, general results on the outcomes of CERF-supported projects have not been reported. However, there is an overall assessment that these projects are likely to have increased in relevance, as a result of CERF’s decentralized decision-making processes which have increasing the potential coverage of real needs on the ground. There are results which indicate that ERFs have improved overall humanitarian response by covering needs that would not have otherwise been met, and ERF projects have recorded results for overall achieving their objectives. It is stated that it has not been possible to determine whether country-level pooled CHFs have had a positive impact on humanitarian outcomes, either by sector or overall.

In general terms, the new humanitarian financing mechanisms have led to positive results in humanitarian funding and strategic coordination. Funding coverage against stated needs across a range of sectors has improved since the introduction of the financial mechanisms. The largest increases in funding coverage have taken place in the early recovery, shelter and protection sectors. The early recovery sector is particularly noteworthy, as it has been stated that the reason humanitarian aid is increasingly funding early recovery activities is due to the fact that there are no other operational funding systems in place for it. Institutional reform in the development sector has not sufficiently accounted for early recovery gaps, which have become the domain of humanitarian actors. The fact that the new financial mechanisms, particularly the CHF, are being used to fund transitional and early recovery needs has fuelled the discussion on whether it is appropriate for ‘humanitarian aid’ to fill gaps in needs which may not be described as ‘life-saving’ and as such a part of core humanitarian activities. Defining early recovery needs and their place are a central theme in discussions on divisions between emergency aid and development activities, and may be in part resulting in a broadening definition of what constitutes humanitarian assistance.

Clusters are evaluated to have had a limited effect on overall humanitarian coverage, with improvements in some areas being difficult to attribute to the introduction of the cluster approach. However, improvements in overall coordination through clusters has made assistance gaps easier to identify, and reduced duplications, thus improving coverage. Improved inter-sector and inter-agency coordination and collaboration has enabled the identification of previously uncharted needs and enabled humanitarian responses to them, increasing coverage. Clusters have also to a certain extent enabled the improved targeting and efficient use of humanitarian funds and activities.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

A variety of results were reported in the operational evaluations of specific humanitarian assistance programmes, in both agency-specific and inter-agency evaluations.

The WFP Kenya emergency operation<sup>52</sup> was evaluated as having successfully targeted and provided relief to those target groups most in

---

<sup>51</sup> Harvey et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008, Steets et al. 2010, Mowjee & Randel 2007, Willits-King et al 2007, Barber et al. 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Simkin 2008.

need of assistance. Coverage was assessed to have been a success, as regionally 95% of the most vulnerable districts were included in the relief operation. There were problems caused by the lack of nutritional data, which would have improved targeting. Overall the operation was reported as successful in terms of delivering the available food aid on time to avoid large-scale hunger and loss of life of the 3 million people who were affected by the successive droughts of 2004 and 2005 and the floods of 2006.

The WFP Kenya school feeding component of the Kenya emergency operation<sup>53</sup> was considered very successful in terms of having targeted the most vulnerable populations. Overall the programme was found to have made a significant and positive contribution to the operational target of reducing hunger and improving nutritional intake through school meals. The health of the participating children improved and the incidence of illness reduced. Although overall coverage was adequate, there was variation amongst different schools, which may have reduced the overall effectiveness of the operation. The programme was found to be overall effective and efficient, and developed appropriate partnerships with the Government at both the national and local levels, which improved the success rate for targeting to the communities most in need.

Less successful results were evident in the WFP Ethiopia food and livelihoods assistance operation<sup>54</sup>, which revealed significant gaps in coverage in terms of insufficient quantities of food rations. This was due to failings in assessing and targeting the food needs of the affected communities, which caused inadequate quotas for ration allocation. Other contributing factors to these lacks were the misappropriated food as well as the unintended consequences of local food sharing practices. Improved monitoring and assessment processes for determining emergency food security and appropriate, context-specific targeting systems for pastoralist communities were called for, alongside improvements in communications, local partnerships and government capacity building.

Although the UNHCR operation in Southern Sudan<sup>55</sup> was reported to have overall success in refugee repatriation – assisting the return of more than 130,000 refugees, – significant insufficiencies were reported in operational coverage. Resources were allocated unevenly across regions in relation to need, and there was not enough programming and activity emphasis on the returnee reintegration process. The operation was not

---

<sup>53</sup> *Finan et al. 2010.*

<sup>54</sup> *Shoham 2007.*

<sup>55</sup> *Duffield et al. 2008.*

able to meet its goals in terms of coverage due to funding base insecurities and inconsistencies, which led to weak operational planning and ad-hoc prioritisation decisions. Operational outputs were hindered by lacks in planning, strategic analysis and ineffective partnership practices. However, the support provided in the basic services sectors was reported as timely and appropriate.

The humanitarian response to cyclone Nargis<sup>56</sup> was estimated to have been overall successful, yet with significant gaps in coverage. Some of the worst-affected areas were left without aid, due to access and targeting issues. Coverage was decreased as a result of government restrictions placed on international agencies, as limitations were made on humanitarian access. Government restrictions on the humanitarian response also led to the small number of agencies which were granted access having to take on a wide variety of sectoral activities that went beyond their technical expertise. This had consequences for the effectiveness of the response. Yet even with these logistic, material and access constraints, the response was evaluated as having been adequate. Although the funding response to the disaster had only been met by between 50-70%, the majority of immediate short term humanitarian needs were met by considerable contributions in local resources. The domestic response to the cyclone was highlighted as having played the more significant part in ensuring the relatively good overall humanitarian response to Nargis. Due to this, it was reported as difficult to evaluate the extent to which the international humanitarian community can take credit for the relative success of the response.

Although immediate needs had good coverage, the evaluation noted uncertainty with regard to adequate funding for longer-term recovery and reconstruction needs, as well as for ongoing post-crisis humanitarian needs. Funding to certain sectors which build longer-term livelihood recovery such as agriculture was considered critical to successful recovery, along with funding to disaster risk reduction. A central gap in the international response to Nargis was limited consultation with the affected communities and lack of sufficient coordination amongst and between national and international humanitarian counterparts, which would have contributed to a more effective response and improved coverage.

Coverage was also a failing cited in the evaluation of the response to the Pakistan displacement crisis<sup>57</sup>. Although the response overall was deemed

---

<sup>56</sup> *Turner et al. 2008.*

<sup>57</sup> *Cosgrave et al. 2010.*

effective in preventing large-scale death and suffering, the very worst affected people did not receive adequate humanitarian assistance. The operation was successful in providing immediate relief to those internally displaced people who were able to access IDP camps, where assistance was available. However, the evaluation sites that the poorest of the poor were the worst affected as they were not able to afford the costs of displacement, and due to insecurity and constraints to humanitarian space, the relief operations could not access those beneficiaries. Overall security concerns were reported to have caused large operational costs and had a negative effect on programme quality. These constraints to humanitarian access were a central feature of the response.

Funding gaps were also a significant determinant of the extent to which humanitarian operations could meet the needs of crisis-affected populations in Pakistan. Donor funding for relief in 2009 was much more adequate than funding for ongoing humanitarian and recovery needs in 2010. This was reported to lead to significant coverage gaps in terms of inadequate assistance for recovery needs, which are not being met. The focus of the response was on relief rather than recovery, rehabilitation or development, although the direct damage suffered to infrastructure and livelihood assets is a major humanitarian problem in the areas of return. Results were also reported in terms of lacks in the degree to which the affected populations were consulted and to inadequate needs assessments. This led to the overall assistance not being proportionate to the needs of the crisis-affected populations, which were highly focused on recovery and livelihood support – sectors that did not receive adequate funding from donors.

The 3-month evaluation of the response to the Haiti earthquake<sup>58</sup> reported inadequate coverage of needs, despite there being significant overall resources. These coverage gaps were due to insufficient contextual analysis and relevant and appropriate prioritization of projects according to humanitarian needs and available resources. A main factor in the joint operational programmes' inability to meet the needs of the disaster-affected populations adequately was the sheer scale of needs which outweighed the capacity of the aid system in Haiti. Issues caused by the magnitude of the disaster were compounded by the lack of coordination among various aid operators arriving in Haiti, particularly the influx of numerous small, often inexperienced NGOs, and a lack of leadership at the country level. The evaluation reports the lack of appropriate contextual assessment and needs analysis as one of the main failings of

---

<sup>58</sup> *Grunewald & Binder 2010.*



the response, as many planned aid activities were inappropriate to the particular urban features of the disaster. There was not enough collaboration between international actors and national institutions at both national and decentralized levels, which would have assisted in data collection and use for decision-making, and the coordination of implementation activities. Overall it was reported that in the Haiti response there was not enough analysis of local response capacities, and an inadequate understanding of the urban context and needs of the disaster-affected population. The evaluation answers the question 'did the aid system save lives?' with 'Yes, but not that many', and deems that overall not enough was done to alleviate humanitarian suffering. The evaluators note that although the response to the Haiti earthquake has been a significant learning experience for the international humanitarian system in terms of coping with an acute large-scale disaster that was not enough.

*"The response to the earthquake between January and April 2010 was a missed opportunity to translate the quick setting up of cluster coordination and the availability of substantial resources in the form of money, military assets and staff into timely results."<sup>59</sup>*

### 3.3.2 Impacts

Impact is used to describe both the positive and negative, intended and unintended long-term changes which can take place as a result of humanitarian action. At the system level, there were nearly no reported results on actual impacts. Impact issues were generally not mentioned in the system evaluations, but the challenges of assessing real impacts of humanitarian assistance operations were highlighted. In part this is due to the fact that there aren't adequate processes and methodologies in place to assess the impacts of humanitarian interventions, and in part to the fact that humanitarian evaluations often take place relatively soon after relief operations have taken place in order to assess immediate programme outputs. There is a lack of resources and attention being paid to assessing longer-term consequences.

Beyond time constraints, the problem of attribution is central to explaining why humanitarian aid evaluations rarely have reports on impact. In the complex operating environments of humanitarian aid operations, it is very difficult to determine the chain of attribution between

---

<sup>59</sup> Grunewald & Binder 2010:8.

an agency's relief activities and their long-term impacts on the disaster-affected communities. At the system level, many findings were however reported on issues of local capacity building and sustainability in terms of accountability issues. The reports unanimously state a significant and real lack of appropriate engagement with and of crisis-affected people in all stages of humanitarian operations. This is a sign of accountability deficiencies at the systemic level, particularly in relation to 'downward' or 'onward' accountability to those people who are the beneficiaries of aid interventions.

The international humanitarian system is criticised for not investing enough in local and national capacities inside the countries which are at risk of being, or already affected by disasters. This results in a top-heavy hierarchical aid system, which is constantly undermining local capacities. However, some improvements are reported to have taken place in these areas in the very last few years, with increased momentum around local capacity and accountability issues. These link to emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction issues, as the role of local and domestic response in the immediate wake of disasters is increasingly noted and reported on. Critical service delivery following sudden onset disasters depends solely on existing local preparedness and capacity. At the moment however, it is reported that the international humanitarian system is 'stacked against' preparedness and local capacity building and participation, even though these are the crucial aspects which overwhelmingly determine the successes and failures of future humanitarian disaster responses. A part of the responsibility for building improved local emergency preparedness capacity lies in the hands of donors, particularly GHD donors who are being criticized for not taking enough steps towards mitigating disaster consequences by investing in local preparedness and disasters risk reduction capacities.

A particularly heavy criticism on the system is the lack of adequate partnerships between national and local NGOs and other actors in the international humanitarian aid system. Evaluation results state that local NGO participation and capacity building have not benefited from the humanitarian reforms, particularly from the new financial mechanisms. CERF in particular is criticized for being too UN-centric, with adverse consequences for local and national NGOs in terms of capacity building as they cannot access funds and fail to meet the complicated administrative requirements for implementing CERF funded-projects. The CHF's are reported to be somewhat better than CERF at providing access to funds for local NGOs, although it is stated that local NGOs need considerably more support than is provided at the moment in order to access CHF funds efficiently and effectively. ERFs however also do not

provide funds adequately to local NGOs, as they can rarely access the funds directly. Local NGOs tend not to be represented in country-level boards of common pooled funds, which directly limits the extent to which these funds are able to take into account and address the priorities and needs of the local communities. Findings state that clusters may in some cases weaken national and local capacities, as the cluster system excludes national and local actors. As such, it is criticized for failing to communicate with, link with, build on and support existing local coordination mechanisms. There is not enough consultation with and inclusion of national actors in the cluster coordination mechanisms, which has led to significant gaps in the potential impacts of the cluster system.

The often stated need for increased downward accountability to and greater participation of disaster-affected people in humanitarian aid stems from the need to increase both the effectiveness and transparency of the aid sector. It is reported that not enough is known about accountability lacks, as it has not been a central issues in humanitarian aid programmes or evaluations.

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) acts as a self-regulatory accountability body for the humanitarian sector, which provides the HAP Standard against which agencies can assess and improve their accountability practices. The 2009 Humanitarian Accountability Report<sup>60</sup> reviewed the state of accountability in the humanitarian sector, and came to the overall conclusion that there is a significant 'accountability deficit' in the humanitarian system. There are indications of continued progress on improving the quality and accountability of the humanitarian system by increasing engagement with accountability issues, and better accountability to beneficiaries and affected communities. However, the HAP study revealed that in 2009, very few evaluations of humanitarian aid considered accountability issues, and even fewer mentioned direct accountability to beneficiaries and the affected communities. Accountability issues were 5% more present in HAP evaluations in 2010 than in 2009, which represents the rise of 'good practice' in including beneficiary interviewing and participatory methods in evaluation practice.

However, there are issues with conceptualizations and definitions of what 'accountability' means. Current definitions and conceptual understandings of 'accountability' in humanitarian evaluations remain slanted in favour of 'upwards' accountability, towards donors and international stakeholders, rather than to the programme beneficiaries or

---

<sup>60</sup> *HAP International 2010.*

national host governments. This highlights the deficit of accountability to the principal stakeholder group of humanitarian assistance – crisis-affected people, communities and governments- in favour of upwards accountability to international donors. This accountability deficit remains significant despite indications of improved awareness of accountability issues. The report argues that the remaining awareness gap is compounded by the lack of an OECD-DAC evaluation criteria on accountability issues, which tend to get sidelined under 'appropriateness', 'effectiveness' and 'impact'.

Due to the lack of explicit evaluation focus on accountability issues, evaluation practice has not been up to the required standard on this topic. Whilst beneficiary 'involvement' and 'participation' may often be mentioned in evaluations, the report argues that they are not systematically assessed as central accountability issues. The 2009 HAP report advocates for the introduction of a particular evaluation criteria for humanitarian aid on accountability, with clear definitions of accountability. The HAP report sites that for example WFP and UNICEF definitions of accountability to beneficiaries is poorly articulated, whilst UNHCR has paid particular attention to this issue and had developed explicit accountability frameworks and commitments. The report states that the adoption of definitions which explicitly acknowledge the accountability to beneficiaries and affected communities by all the main UN agencies is required. In this way humanitarian accountability could become better integrated into the strategic priorities and objectives of UN agencies.

The UN-led humanitarian reform process has not been shown to have great improvements on accountability issues, as accountability continues to be viewed as an issue of clarification of the roles and responsibilities amongst the various actors and agencies involved. It is reported that the cluster system overall has a poorly developed approach to accountability, with focus remaining on internal accountabilities to the system, and upwards to donors.

The common financing mechanisms are reportedly more focused on meeting project delivery requirements than in beneficiary consultations, which reflects the lack of accountability standards as basic requirements for funding access. The incentive structure of the humanitarian system prioritizes focus on cost-efficiency and immediate outputs, to the detriment of improving beneficiary involvement and accounting for the long-term impacts on crisis-affected people. Despite or perhaps because of these accountability lacks in the reformed humanitarian system, accountability and standards initiatives have been growing in the NGO sphere. They include the HAP Standard; the Sphere project; the Disaster

Emergency Committee's (DEC) accountability framework; the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB); the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) and the Collaborative for Development Action's Listening Project among others.<sup>61</sup>

In an accountability case study from Southern Sudan, the HAP report highlights some of the central concerns which crisis-affected communities in Southern Sudan have with the accountability of humanitarian aid. Many of the respondents feared voicing criticism for fear of jeopardizing their aid supply, which illustrates the heavy top-down nature of the aid system and its fundamental power balance. Many of the interviewed communities were not clear about what constituted aid assistance, where it came from, who was entitled to it and what were the beneficiary criteria, with people living in remote areas having the least knowledge of humanitarian agencies and assistance. Overall there was a lack of information provision, with poorly communicated information having led to distrust of aid agencies by communities who had had false expectations raised.

The case study reported on the limited consultation of crisis-affected communities is programme planning, delivery and monitoring, and on insufficient information being provided on complaints mechanisms. Respondents complained of uneven aid distribution, nepotism and corruption. Overall, however, most of the beneficiaries reported high appreciation for assistance, and highlighted the positive changes that had resulted from international humanitarian aid. Projects providing basic services of water, food, health and education, and those which focused on improving livelihoods were the most appreciated. Whilst reporting on certain positive long-term consequences of aid projects, respondents also noted that some projects remained short-term with limited benefits. The biggest challenge in terms of engagement with crisis-affected communities is their lack of ownership of and meaningful engagement with relief projects, both of which are a challenge to achieving sustainable humanitarian results.

#### *Findings from operation-level evaluations*

The operational evaluations had limited results in terms of impacts, but they did discuss some of the potential longer-term consequences of the humanitarian operations. In the WFP Kenya emergency operation<sup>62</sup> it was

---

<sup>61</sup> HAP I 2010, NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project 2009, Harvey et al. 2010, Stoddard 2008, Steets et al. 2010, Mowjee & Randel 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Simkin 2008.

noted that the real impact of food aid is difficult to estimate due to the complex and multi-faceted causes of food shortages and hunger. In order to increase the long-term impacts of food aid, the real underlying causes of food insecurity should be addressed, and the activities of other supporting non-food sectors strengthened. The coverage of the relief operation was limited by the lack of donor support and funding for non-food assistance items, which consequently impacted on the short-term results and long-term impacts of the operation.

*“Emergency food aid cannot be expected to solve the causes of drought nor the social impact of collapsing nomadic and agro-pastoral livelihoods. But it can help to stave off widespread famine, save human lives, prevent migration and assist disaster-affected communities to survive without having to dispose of their remaining assets. The evaluation team considered that these objectives were achieved by the [emergency operation].”*<sup>63</sup>

Similar long-term causes of structural vulnerability and humanitarian needs were identified in the evaluation of the response to Pakistan's displacement crisis<sup>64</sup>. The evaluation recognised that many of the gaps which the humanitarian operation was unable to fill had predated the crisis, and related to chronic underlying problems in the provision of basic services in Pakistan, which created a complex pattern of compounded needs. Structural poverty was found to have limited the extent to which the operation could achieve sustainability and connectedness aims. Multi-dimensional poverty, governance issues and social inequalities, including the marginalisation of women, were sited as fundamentally affecting any longer-term impacts that the operations could have.

The existing complicated operating environment highlighted the inability of the operation to have adequate address women's needs, as humanitarian actors were unwilling to address underlying gender equality issues. Whilst noting the relatively minor effect that the humanitarian operation could have in addressing the longer-term needs of the crisis-affected populations, the evaluation did highlight that humanitarian actors in Pakistan were aware of this, and focused on linking and connecting the humanitarian aid operations with their existing development work in the affected areas. The primary importance of the local community in the response was also highlighted, as approximately 85–90% of the displaced were housed by local communities. The international community did

---

<sup>63</sup> *Simkin 2008:80.*

<sup>64</sup> *Cosgrave et al. 2010.*

however provide necessary resources and specialist skills. All of these factors will have influenced the various impacts of the relief operation.

The UNHCR Southern Sudan returnee programme<sup>65</sup> estimated that it had enabled the return of nearly two million people to South Sudan without the recurrence of an immediate crisis. At times this type of evaluation result of 'simply' preventing the further escalation of humanitarian crises may have very significant impacts, but they are very challenging to assess. In terms of the sustainability of UNHCR operations in the region the evaluation raised some issues. The programme did not have an adequate exit strategy, which was reflected in concerns over the continued provision of the basic services managed by the UNHCR such as schools and health care facilities. This was due to the low level of connectedness with local communities and government, and insufficient investment in the capacity building of local partners. The lack of appropriate local partnerships is seen to negatively influence the potential impact of the operation. At the same time, the evaluation notes that sustainability is very difficult to measure, and argues that it is less relevant to assess the sustainability of UNHCR's programmes and more relevant to assess impacts from longer-term returnee sustainability. However it should be noted that once the agency with the funds and capacity to conduct monitoring and evaluation functions leaves, impact may become untraceable.

The evaluation of the humanitarian response to cyclone Nargis in Myanmar<sup>66</sup> highlights that as the response was initially predominantly local and national, it is difficult to evaluate the impacts that can be attributed to interventions by the international humanitarian system. Robust community-level coping mechanisms were already in place when the international support arrived. The evaluation notes that there were however missed opportunities in terms of building and strengthening local capacities, which may have had a significant impact on the long-term sustainability of relief and recovery programs in Myanmar. The main concern was with gaps in communication which resulted in the undermining of local staff. The operation was criticized for not having coordinated well enough with local partners, and not giving enough priority to disaster risk reduction activities, particularly for community-based preparedness, planning and risk-reduction activities. These findings on connectedness and sustainability lacks have implications for what impact the humanitarian operations have and could have had.

---

<sup>65</sup> *Duffield et al. 2008.*

<sup>66</sup> *Turner et al. 2008.*

The evaluation of WFP's emergency operation's school feeding programme in Kenya<sup>67</sup> notes that school meals can have a significant positive effect on human poverty indicators, such as improved educational rates, beyond the immediate results of improving the nutritional intake of children. The evaluation notes that although school meals provide immediate, at times life-saving relief, the actual long-term positive impacts of such operations can only be achieved together with other factors. The availability of food can act as a 'magnet' to attract families to send their children to school, but sustainably increased attendance rates can only be achieved when the adequate infrastructure and enabling environment are also in place (for example cooking and sanitation facilities and community support for the project).

The evaluation reported a possible negative outcome of the programme, which is that families may reduce the home feeding of children who receive school meals, thus jeopardizing the overall nutritional impact of school food aid. The availability of school feeding also cannot overcome gender disparities in educational outcomes, with girls particularly in rural areas having limited access to school. It can however provide multiple safety nets to crisis-affected families and communities. The direct benefit to households is economic, in terms of cash savings through reduced food purchase, with school feeding representing between four percent and nine percent of annual household income.

School feeding can also be shown to increase overall livelihood generation capacities of households, as the increased employment prospects of graduates contribute to household incomes in the future. There were however significant concerns over the lack of an appropriate exit strategy for the programme, and the future sustainability of its impacts. This evaluation was particularly thorough in considering the longer-term impacts of the intervention, both negative and positive. It raises the attribution challenge of determining which factors influence particular outcomes, as aid programmes take place in already complex environments.

The joint evaluation of responses to the Haiti earthquake<sup>68</sup> briefly highlighted some immediate, unintended negative effects which were caused by the response. Large amounts of inappropriate and unusable aid items were sent to Haiti, mainly in the form of expired medicine. These took significant time and resources to destroy, which impacted negatively on the other effects of the operations and limited positive impacts. A more

---

<sup>67</sup> *Finan et al. 2010.*

<sup>68</sup> *Grunewald & Binder 2010.*



long-term and locally damaging consequence was the undermining of the local market economy as aid agencies provided basic services free of charge, thus causing many locally-owned private service providers to go bankrupt. Local hospitals and schools were unable to compete with free services and their closing down may have further increased humanitarian need. Although the evaluation does not highlight the positive, life-saving consequences of the operation, it may be presumed that these negative impacts do not outweigh the immediate humanitarian achievements of the operation.

## 3.4 Review of Findings

### 3.4.1 Performance Assessment Summary

#### *Policy and Planning*

Results for policy coordination focused on policy coherence and protection issues. The most widely reported strategic planning issues on relevance and appropriateness were needs assessment and resource allocation. In terms of policy coordination, the reports noted evidence of the growing lack of respect for international humanitarian law, core humanitarian principles and refugee law in humanitarian aid. This is also on the part of donor governments' military engagements in aid recipient countries, which has raised serious issues of coherence between humanitarian and other actors at field level. Rising concern with protection issues was highlighted, and policy coordination gaps in it were pointed out. With regard to specific findings at operation- and agency-level, policy coordination and coherence issues were found to be central factors influencing the operational success of humanitarian assistance operations.

Strategic planning findings focused on the quality and use of needs assessments, with mention of resource allocation issues. It was found that lack of adequate data, disparate methodological approaches and insufficient strategic coordination were the biggest problems affecting the quality of needs assessments. The political use of needs assessments to secure funding at various levels was noted in the results. A central finding was the lack and inadequacy of beneficiary consultation and involvement in needs assessments and in the design of programmes. The operational findings demonstrated how these lacks in appropriate needs assessments and beneficiary consultation at times led to the provision of inappropriate

aid. Discrepancies and biases in donor funding according to need and amongst different crises was noted. The funding inequities which disadvantage NGOs, particularly local and national NGOs were underlined, in the context of the UN-centrism of current humanitarian finance mechanisms.

### *Implementation*

Implementation findings were presented with regard to efficiency issues in resource use and in terms of the effectiveness of operational aid implementation processes. Cost-efficiency results were not widely reported in the evaluations, although concerns were raised in regard to process inefficiencies particularly in the financing architecture of international humanitarian aid. The results emphasise that there remain significant systemic inefficiencies in the reformed aid system, which need addressing. The main efficiency concerns related to fund disbursement and transaction speeds, which are not fast and direct enough, although the predictability of funding was reported to have improved. A further finding calls attention to the administrative overheads charged by UN agencies for processing resource flows from pooled funds to the implementing NGOs. Inefficiencies in the joint financial mechanisms which result from inflexible financial reporting procedures were highlighted. Overall the findings indicated that the benefits of coordination in the form of the joint financial mechanisms outweigh their costs.

Results in terms of improvements and gaps in operational implementation processes focused largely on the humanitarian reforms, which were reported to be improving in effectiveness. Some aspects of the reformed system were found to be performing better than others, such as the financial mechanisms which were overall assessed to have improved the timeliness and flexibility of humanitarian funding. However, significant weaknesses were reported to remain in the management and accountability processes of the joint funds. Leadership and monitoring were found to be some of the significantly weak parts of the international humanitarian system, with particular efforts called for in improving their effectiveness, in order to improve overarching systemic performance. A central finding at the operational level was the need to increase the involvement of – and accountability to – beneficiaries and crisis-affected populations at all stages of programme implementation, in order to perform better.

## *Results and Impacts*

Findings on the achievements of aid programmes in attaining their humanitarian objectives were presented under results and impacts. Most of the results findings were presented in terms of the extent to which international humanitarian assistance has achieved operational coverage. Impact findings focused on the sustainability of aid at the systemic level, with reference to the extent of connectedness and local capacity building in international humanitarian assistance. Global humanitarian coverage was found to have increased in size and volume, with a general upward trend in humanitarian financing reported to continue. Yet it was highlighted that the humanitarian needs of crisis-affected populations have also increased, which has resulted perceived insufficiency at the global level. Despite progress in terms of coverage, the resources still do not match the stated needs, which in themselves constitute only a part of actual global humanitarian needs.

The joint financing mechanisms are reported to have had positive results in improving humanitarian funding and strategic coordination. The Central Emergency Response Fund was found to have reinforced needs-based response in global humanitarian funding, and increased attention to the principle of impartiality in aid allocations. Funding coverage against stated needs across a range of sectors was also found to have improved since the introduction of the financial mechanisms. There has been discussion on the appropriateness of funding early recovery activities through the pooled funds, as there they have at times be considered to be longer-term needs rather than core humanitarian needs. On the other hand the necessity to better link humanitarian and development actors at the field level is underlined. System-level coordination through clusters was found to have made assistance gaps easier to identify and reduced duplications, thus improving coverage. Improved inter-sector and inter-agency coordination and collaboration has also increased coverage as it has enabled the system to identify and responds to previously uncharted needs. On the other hand coverage is also affected by increasingly shrinking humanitarian space, in terms of declines in access to affected populations due to insecurity and security-related restrictions.

Impact results were not very thoroughly reported on at the system level, perhaps due to the inherent practical and methodological challenges faced by impact assessment. The majority of findings in relation to system-wide impact issues were concerned with sustainability and local capacity building. The reports found a significant and real lack of appropriate engagement with and of crisis-affected peoples in all stages of humanitarian operations. This has been treated as a sign of a systemic

deficiency in accountability, particularly accountability to disaster-affected populations and the direct beneficiaries of international aid operations.

The lack of adequate investments in recipient-country capacities at all levels has been highlighted as a central sustainability and connectedness issue, which impacts on both the short and long-term impacts of aid. It has been found that the international humanitarian system undermines local emergency preparedness and response capacities, which is mirrored in the deeply hierarchical, top-heavy structure of the aid system.

The findings focused especially on the lack of adequate partnerships between national and local NGOs and international aid agencies and donors. Evaluation results call attention to the fact that local NGO participation and capacity building have not benefited from the humanitarian reforms, particularly from the new financial mechanisms. Findings state that the current way of organising cluster coordination is also in some cases weakening national and local capacities, as the cluster system excludes national and local actors, and fails to communicate with, link with, build on and support existing local coordination mechanisms.

The evaluations have found that current coordination mechanisms do not consult and include national actors enough. These types of accountability gaps have been given prominence in the evaluation findings on aid impacts. Accountability to crisis-affected people and governments is repeatedly raised as a core issue which the international humanitarian system has up to date failed to adequately engage with. The impact findings call attention to the need to improve accountability policies and practices, starting with basic understandings of the concept of accountability as 'forwards' accountability – beyond upwards accountability to donors and amongst international programme stakeholders – to real action towards transparency and responsibility for addressing the fundamental power issues in humanitarian aid.

*"Because humanitarianism is founded upon the fundamental principle of human dignity and solidarity, the idea of humanitarian accountability should by definition be intrinsic and inseparable from all 'humanitarian' work. It should be obvious that to undertake relief work without first consulting the intended beneficiaries is to deny disaster survivors a voice."*<sup>69</sup>

Accountability is sited as being the 'Achilles heel' of humanitarian aid at the moment. GHD donors are failing to demonstrate their commitments to accountability in practice, with regard to explicit commitments to ensure

---

<sup>69</sup> HAP-I 2010.

beneficiary involvement in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating humanitarian responses. DAC peer reviews highlight that this is a commitment which has been particularly challenging for donors to act on, and is one of the weakest elements of the GHD initiative to date. This is despite the crucial role of beneficiary participation and local capacity building in achieving the broader, long-term disaster risk reduction goals of the GHD Initiative. The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership defines accountability in terms of the responsible use of power in all humanitarian engagements.

*"It involves taking account of the needs, concerns, capacities and disposition of affected parties, and explaining the meaning of, and reasons for, actions and decisions. Accountability is therefore also about the right to be heard and the duty to respond."*<sup>70</sup>

The Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response is an alliance of humanitarian actors which aims to support increased quality, accountability and learning in the humanitarian sector. The SCHR peer review on accountability states that a core lesson which has been learned for humanitarian accountability is that it is more an ongoing process than an end-state, and as such it needs to be managed as a continuing process. Because of this, real organisational accountability requires changes in the ways organisations work and engage with disaster-affected people and communities, in order to change the types of relationships that institutions have with their primary stakeholders. This entails paying attention to the imbalances of power which exist between organisations and disaster-affected persons and seeking to reduce them, as well as involving the affected people in the central aid decisions and processes. Accountable relationships are characterised by dignity, respect and trust.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.4.2 Cross-cutting issues

Overall there were disparate practices in reporting on the cross-cutting issues of gender, age, illness, disability and environmental issues. Some evaluations had a particular and exclusive focus on the cross-cutting issue of climate change impacts, and one looked specifically at the effects of a humanitarian aid programme on children. In general however, the most commonly reported results were a lack of focus on gender issues, and a general lack of integration of cross-cutting issues in the implementation of the humanitarian aid reform instruments. A tendency to 'sudden bursts of

---

<sup>70</sup> HAP-I 2010.

<sup>71</sup> SCHR 2010, HAP-I 2010, OECD-DAC 2009.

attention to particular issues' was noted as a general trend, with weak follow-up and difficulties in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues into organisational systems. It has been reported that most assessments and evaluations of humanitarian aid neglect cross-cutting issues, which then also suffer from lack of integration into future response planning. Attention to gender issues in operations is identified as a particularly weak point for humanitarian action. Although gender equity in humanitarian programming is a principle that is widely subscribed to, there are varying degrees of follow-up in practical steps taken to act on the commitments. There were reports of particular failings in addressing gender equity issues for the cluster system and the CERF. The failing of CERF projects to address gender issues was found out to be due to the lack of reporting demands on gender equity.<sup>72</sup>

The operation-level evaluations revealed similar results for cross-cutting issues, with gender being the most reported one. Invariably, however, the evaluations reported on the negative effects of not paying enough attention to gender issues at all stages of humanitarian operations, from needs assessment to programming through to monitoring and reporting practices.

For example results from all of the WFP evaluations from Kenya and Ethiopia reported on the need to significantly improve programme effectiveness by implementing commitments to gender issues in practice. Although WFP programmes overall comply with their internal 'Enhanced Commitments to Women' requirements, there remain serious gaps in the field-level implementation of these commitments, which have impacts on operational effectiveness. Similarly the UNHCR Southern Sudan returnee assistance programme reported that the lack of acknowledgement of some central gender issues affected programme quality.

The need for more age-disaggregated data requirements was also mentioned in this evaluation as well as in the evaluation of the response to the Pakistan displacement crisis, as rare examples of attention being paid to cross-cutting age issues. The Pakistan response evaluation also looked in detail at particular gender concerns of the operation.

The response the Haiti earthquake highlighted the real challenges that were experienced with all cross-cutting issues, as the slow start of inter-cluster coordination and lacks in leadership prevented the effective mainstreaming of cross-cutting issues into the response from the start. As crucial considerations of cross-cutting issues were not integrated into programme planning from the beginning, there were doubts reported

---

<sup>72</sup> *Harvey et al. 2010, Steets et al. 2010, Barber et al. 2008.*

about whether it would be possible to add them in later on. The evaluation considered that although lip service was now being paid to mainstreaming cross-cutting issues, it may have been too late to effectively integrate them. Particular mention was made of inappropriate assessment tools being used for needs assessment, and the lack of comprehensive analysis on the different needs and capacities of women, girls, boys and men prevented the design of an equal access response. The Haiti evaluation noted that many agency assessments in Haiti still continue to use data which is not disaggregated by gender.<sup>73</sup>

The cross-cutting issue which has received the most attention and funding is the environment, and numerous reports and evaluations have focused on looking at the impacts and effects of climate change on humanitarian aid. However, although there are particular climate-change focused initiatives, the environmental and climate-related effects of particular humanitarian relief operations were not often considered in operational evaluations. The UNHCR evaluation of the assisted return operation in Southern Sudan mentioned the need to address the increasing protection gaps in relation to current and future 'climate refugees' or 'environmental refugees', as this relates to their core area of work. UNHCR was called on to take a leadership position in responding to the new challenges which are emerging in relation to the effects of climate change on vulnerable populations. At the system level, it was reported that the humanitarian reforms are currently not addressing the challenges of increased small-to medium scale natural disasters brought about by climate change, to the extent that they should be.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> *Finan et al. 2010, Simkin 2008, Shoham 2007, Duffield et al. 2008, Grunewald & Binder 2010, Cosgrave et al. 2010.*

<sup>74</sup> *Duffield et al. 2008, Stoddard 2008.*

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Current Themes

#### *Engaging local capacities*

One of the central concerns and recommendations which has been brought up across the evaluations and evaluative reports on the state of international humanitarian aid has focused on the need to improve the system's involvement with local actors in crisis-affected countries. It has been perceived that there are two main channels through which aid is delivered and received. One is the centrally coordinated response of international humanitarian assistance. The other is the immediate domestic response to natural hazards and crisis situations, which mainly involves local actors. This divide is reflected in the evaluations, which on the one hand focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of international coordination and delivery systems, and on the other emphasize the need to reinforce local capacity, participation and longer-term vulnerability reduction.

The lack of recognition of and involvement with domestic responses to humanitarian needs has been highlighted in both the system- and operational-level evaluations of aid. The Global Humanitarian Assistance report 2010 states that there is a significant lack of information on the scale and impact of local relief responses, which take place outside the international relief system. However locally this is the response to disasters which is perceived as the most visible, immediate and vitally lifesaving, even if it has far fewer resources than international aid operations. Local relief support is sited as being culturally appropriate and continuous, as it provides on-going assistance not only before but also throughout and after international aid operations take place. Local assistance can also reach areas which may not be accessible to international aid agencies.

It has been noted that adequate contextual analysis of crisis situations is an aspect of strategic aid planning which needs to be improved across the system. International agencies often do not have accurate information on a disaster-affected state's institutional or financial capacities to respond to crisis situations, which can lead to inappropriate international responses that may undermine rather than strengthen local capacities. In order to improve on this, the recommendation is that international aid should seek



to complement and support local responses. It is argued that increasing small-scale disasters caused by the impacts of climate change will require increasing prominence on the part of domestic response. This is a fact which international aid actors are encouraged to acknowledge and respond to, by supporting local capacity to prevent and respond to disasters and to reduce long-term vulnerability through joint efforts. It is argued that currently the international humanitarian system's hierarchical, top-down nature has improved the predictability and standardization of international aid in a positive way. However, at times this centralized approach can be seen to compromise its flexibility, accuracy and impartiality, as it can marginalize other humanitarian aid actors in the field. This has led some reports to advocate for a degree of re-democratization in the international aid sector.<sup>75</sup>

### *Increasing insecurity*

The numbers of politically-motivated, violent attacks on humanitarian aid workers are reported to be increasing. The growing insecurity for aid workers in complex environments is said to be due to the ongoing politicization of humanitarian aid as a whole. Some report that striving for coherence in donor government and international security agendas can be seen as a threat to the core humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence. International security concerns, such as those related to terrorism and counter-terrorism, are argued to have made humanitarian action more dangerous due to its political links. Increased coherence with political and military aims can at times lead to the instrumental use of humanitarian aid in advancing non-humanitarian policies, and reduce its ability to address humanitarian needs impartially. This is said to be due to the decreasing humanitarian space and limiting access for humanitarian workers, as more institutional controls and security measures are put in place.

*"In sum, our case studies highlight the fact that coherence / integration agendas increase the risk that humanitarians will be seen as "guilty by association" with political and securitization agendas and, more broadly, with the failings of internationally supported peace and reconstruction processes. The security of humanitarian personnel may be compromised by donor-driven pressure for coherence, by their linkage to agendas that*

---

<sup>75</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Harmer & Ray 2009, Donini et al. 2008, Stokke 2007.*

*are not strictly humanitarian, and by the use of humanitarian action as a tool to achieve political objectives."*<sup>76</sup>

On the other hand, some reports state that as most humanitarian aid takes place in complex crisis situations which are partly due to political and security reasons, it is overall effective to engage in conflict-reduction and peacebuilding activities. Because of complex insecurity concerns, a central issue for the international humanitarian enterprise has been engagement in the protection of crisis-affected populations. As local and global security issues become more complicated, local communities are facing increased risks.

Personal security is sited as the highest priority need for people in complex and protracted emergency situations. Protection activities are however recorded as underfunded and lacking in adequate donor support. Although protection is a core GHD commitment, it is reported that actual donor commitments to it remain neglected, which may be due to its political sensitivity. It is sited as one of the most under-funded sectors in UN CAP and Flash Appeals, with just 35% of the requirements having been met in the protection / human rights / rule of law sector in 2007<sup>77</sup>.

It is reported that the humanitarian system is not able to effectively meet the protection needs of crisis-affected people, particularly in relation to internally displaced peoples (IDPs). As growing aid volumes continue to be channelled into protracted crisis contexts, it is reported that security and protection issues will become increasingly central questions for the international humanitarian system. It is predicted that humanitarian action will be delivered in increasingly closer proximity to other political, military and peacekeeping actors and agendas. As humanitarian aid is inevitably embedded in global power and security discourses, the role of the core humanitarian principles and respect for them is set to be a central issue for the sector.<sup>78</sup>

### *Increasing natural hazards*

The frequency of occurrence and the intensity of the impacts of natural hazards are reported to be increasing. Although there are no reliable and accurate records on the number and severity of global disaster occurrences, it is estimated increasing numbers of disasters are currently

---

<sup>76</sup> Donini et al 2008:24.

<sup>77</sup> OECD-DAC 2009:13.

<sup>78</sup> Dempsey & Kyazze 2010, Donini et al 2008, Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, HAP-I 2010, OECD-DAC 2009, Brauman 2007.

caused by the consequences of climate change and global warming. Climate change alone is predicted to lead to natural hazard frequency increases of approximately 20% in the next twenty years.

The impacts of disasters are also increasing, both in terms of financial costs and human impacts. It is reported that in the costs of natural disaster events have increased significantly, despite improvements in early warning and disaster management systems. Climate change and its environmental, social and political consequences are expected to increase humanitarian costs in the future. There have been projections that the near-future increases to humanitarian expenditure which are related to climate change impacts may range from a 32% increase – accounting only for increased disaster frequency – to upwards of a 1600% increase – when accounting for increased intensity of impacts as well<sup>79</sup>.

It is noted that although estimates can be made, the true costs of disasters are not researched and reported enough. Reports indicate that there will be a severe and predictable growth in the cost of disasters, as disaster intensity and moderate climate events as well as multi-hazard events increase and more and more people are affected by them. This will be a serious challenge to the international humanitarian system, as humanitarian needs will increase, yet the time and place of natural hazards occurrence remain unpredictable. This has led reports to emphasize the need to improve global disaster data collection and increase cooperation between humanitarian actors and those working on climate change related issues in other sectors. Investment in disaster risk reduction and preparedness are reported as being the most effective and cost-efficient way to mitigate the humanitarian impacts of climate change.

At the global level, one of the steps taken in this direction is the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which was endorsed by UN member states at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Kobe, Japan, in 2005. It commits all signatory countries to make major efforts to reduce their disaster risk at national and community levels by 2015, seeking to consolidate both political and economic support and commitments to disaster risk reduction. In 2009, it was reported that although there are growing commitments to disaster risk reduction issues, actual progress was uneven. It was found that high-income countries are performing better than middle- and low- income countries overall, but many countries have made progress particularly in terms of policy, legislative and institutional improvements for disaster risk reduction. Overall it was noted that although progress has been made in strengthening the institutional

---

<sup>79</sup> *Webster et al. 2008:4.*

capacities for disaster preparedness, response and early warning systems, there are still significant gaps in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into social and economic planning and development. The need to address the underlying risk factors which translate disaster risks into actual humanitarian disaster impacts and costs is underlined.<sup>80</sup>

### *Increasing vulnerabilities and disaster risks*

The realization that accelerating climate change leads to increased levels of humanitarian vulnerability, has led to the high visibility of climate-related issues across both development and humanitarian aid sectors. There is however reported concern that not enough attention is being given to reducing vulnerability – which is a measure of the factors which expose persons and communities to increased disaster risks – through collective efforts in humanitarian, development and climate change sectors.

*"At both the international and national levels, the policy and strategy frameworks for disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation are not effectively integrated, are not focused on addressing the underlying risk drivers and are insufficiently articulated to and supportive of effective local and sectoral actions. This is the missing link that is holding back progress in addressing the disaster risk–poverty nexus in the context of climate change."*<sup>81</sup>

When natural hazard events combine with economic and political crisis situations, complex emergency environments are created which intensify the humanitarian impact of natural occurrences. More and more attention is being given to the notion of vulnerability, which can be described as "the conditions determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards".<sup>82</sup>

Although climate factors produce natural hazards, peoples' vulnerability to them and resilience against their impacts are products of their geographic, social and economic situations. Vulnerabilities can change and vary depending on resilience and the range of coping factors which are available to people who are affected by crisis. The increasing occurrence of cyclical hazards and moderate climate events can wear down and decrease resilience accumulatively. The impacts of weather

---

<sup>80</sup> ISDR 2009, Webster et al. 2008, OECD-DAC 2009, ISDR 2009.

<sup>81</sup> ISDR 2009.

<sup>82</sup> UN/ISDR 2004.

events interconnect with other conditions and risk factors such as precarious political and security situations, economic crises and health concerns, which are all interdependent. The interactions of these processes create changing human vulnerabilities.

It is reported that currently the total numbers of people who are vulnerable to disaster risks is increasing and that these people are globally unevenly distributed. The highest levels of vulnerability are reported to be concentrated in the poorest countries, which also lack strong governments – such as small-island developing states and land-locked developing countries. The highest-intensity global disaster risk is concentrated in these areas which have the lowest resilience and greatest economic vulnerability to natural hazards. At the same time, a great number of countries experience frequent low-intensity disaster risk, which in the long term causes significant damage and loss of livelihoods. Both types of disaster risk are reportedly disproportionately concentrated on the poorest countries and within those, on the poorest communities, households and individuals. However reports note that because vulnerability is constructed through human processes, it can be addressed and reinforced.

*"This Report shows that by addressing the underlying risk drivers that translate poverty into disaster risk, such as poor urban governance, vulnerable rural livelihoods and ecosystem decline, - and by addressing the underlying risk drivers that translate disaster impacts into poverty outcomes, such as the lack of access to social protection and risk transfer – it is possible to develop in a way that does not lead to increased risk whilst contributing to poverty reduction. If disaster risk can be reduced, then the magnifying effect of climate change on risk will also diminish."*<sup>83</sup>

#### *Disaster risk reduction (DRR) and linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD)*

Effective disaster risk reduction is reported to be based on the premise that disaster impacts are intensified by interlinked global processes and the varying vulnerability and resilience of disaster-affected people. Successful disaster risk reduction will therefore depend on acknowledging and addressing risk factors which span across the continuum from humanitarian aid to recovery and longer-term development.

*"Disaster risk reduction and recovery/ reconstruction are currently "grey transition" areas that more often than not fall between the cracks of development and humanitarian responsibilities, but will become ever*

---

<sup>83</sup> ISDR 2009, 1:13.

*more important for both. Existing policy and program divides between the two will become increasingly problematic and artificial. Current and future efforts to bridge this divide are essential and should be expanded.*"<sup>84</sup>

Reports highlight the need to mainstream vulnerability reduction across relief, rehabilitation and development programming. It has been stated that disaster-affected communities often receive humanitarian assistance which does not reduce their vulnerability to ongoing or future disasters. This has been referred to as 'saving lives' at the expense of the rather more comprehensive 'saving livelihoods'.

By linking relief efforts with early and longer term recovery and development objectives, livelihood vulnerability issues can be addressed in order to reduce aid dependency and to strengthen resilience and preparedness against future disasters. This is highlighted as the most efficient way for donors to maximise the value of their humanitarian assistance and increase its effectiveness and long-term positive impacts. There has however been reported reluctance in donor support and funding to disaster risk reduction, preparedness and early recovery activities, and in integrating these with longer term development programmes. It is a central GHD commitment which donors are reported to be performing poorly. The divide between humanitarian disaster response and development cooperation continues to prevail, despite increased policy statements emphasizing the need to link relief, rehabilitation and development.

*"Better synchronisation of these global commitments should serve to identify common ground for simultaneous achievement of the Accra Action Agenda objective of an appropriate blend of humanitarian, recovery and longer-term development assistance in fragile contexts as well as the GHD objective 'to provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development.'"*<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Webster et al. 2008:24.

<sup>85</sup> OECD-DAC 2009:12.

## 4.2 Conclusions

### *Measuring performance*

The ambition to build an international humanitarian assistance system which can act on behalf of global welfare to protect human rights and dignity is a high aim. It has been reported that due to the discrepancy between this aim and the political and practical constraints which hinder its realisation, evaluations of humanitarian aid have a tendency to be heavily critical and to focus on the failings of the humanitarian system and its components. This does not however mean that there has not been constant progress and improvement, just that it is difficult to measure it in relation to increasing global humanitarian needs and ambitions. Impact assessment is often reported as being difficult and at times impossible. Impact is understood to be the assessment and analysis of the long-term positive and negative, intended and unintended changes which have occurred in people's lives as a direct or indirect result of certain actions. In the case of humanitarian aid, these actions would be the activities which have been carried out in the context of humanitarian assistance operations.

Overall it is reported that evaluation practice in the humanitarian sector has improved and is set to improve further through institutional capacity building in monitoring and evaluation, as this has been identified as an area in need of strengthening. The use of the OECD-DAC criteria is reported to have increased and it is said that the humanitarian aid sector, unlike the development sector which already has established performance assessment and quality assurance processes, is experiencing a stage of steep learning in terms of assessment and evaluation practice. This is in line with the increased importance of accountability in the sector, to all different stakeholders.

It is noted that evaluations have been used primarily for two ends, either to improve upward accountability in the sense of monitoring whether targets have been achieved, or for learning, in order to improve practice and methodologies. It has been reported that often humanitarian evaluations serve narrow aims, in order to fulfil donor accountability requirements and validate institutional mandate by 'proving impact'. This is said to deter from 'improving the real impacts' and to hinder institutional learning. Due to the focus on proving immediate results, evaluation practice has been criticised for being heavy at the front-end of analysis and focused on immediate activities and outputs, as these have been easier to measure than outcomes and impacts. Due to this, evaluations of humanitarian assistance have not always fulfilled their

potential and have been criticised as inadequate measures of real performance in the humanitarian sector.

The increasingly recognised value of evidence-based policy and both public and political interest in the real consequences of aid – both positive and negative – on disaster-affected people and states have focused attention on the methodologies and processes of impact assessment. Many have highlighted the methodological problems in establishing accurate causality and in attributing particular effects to the actions of specific agencies and interventions. It has been stated that in reality, causal links from outputs to outcomes and ultimately impacts may be tenuous and influenced by numerous factors which are external to international humanitarian aid activities. A key feature of complicated emergency situations is constant change, which can be unpredictable and chaotic, therefore also non-linear, defying the internal linear 'change theories' of humanitarian programming.

The challenge of data collection in insecure environments and in shrinking humanitarian space has also been underlined as a key limiting factor for evaluations of humanitarian action. The recognition of these factors has led to institutional refocusing on the value and methods of impact assessment. It has been noted that comprehensive monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems - which interlink and provide different kinds of data during different stages of a humanitarian operation- are required. Performance assessment methods need to be overall improved and better coordinated, with evaluations forming one aspect of more comprehensive systems. It has been reported that improvements are being made in these areas – such as through joint evaluations and real-time evaluations – and a key factor for further learning will be centred on accountability.

Partnership models have been proposed as more useful than extractive data collection models, as the beneficiaries of humanitarian operations are sited as feeling 'over-assessed' and 'under-consulted'. Longer-term learning partnerships and participation are seen as crucial factors for the success of future monitoring and evaluation strategies, which are called on to move away from proving impact through attribution, towards making some impacts in the form of 'positive contributions'. Reports stress that although there are challenges in the impact assessment of humanitarian aid – methodological, time, access, security and contextual challenges – it is an area which needs serious investments in order to increase



accountability in the sector and to ensure the constant improvement of international humanitarian assistance.<sup>86</sup>

### *Interlinked challenges*

The global context in which humanitarian aid is planned, programmed and implemented is reported to be facing numerous interlinked challenges which will have consequences for the effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid. Weather-related disaster risk is increasing, as are the humanitarian costs and impacts of natural hazards. Disasters frequency and intensity are predicted to increase, as are the multiplier effects which compound human vulnerability to the consequences of natural hazards. It has been reported that currently there is not enough information on disaster risk and occurrence, which has led to insufficient levels of systemic preparedness to these challenges.

At the same time, humanitarian space is reported to be shrinking due to access and security limitations. The core humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence are reported to be threatened by global security agendas and the fading of distinctions between humanitarian and non-humanitarian military and political actors. Increasing coherence may be seen as a threat to the ability of the international humanitarian system to deliver aid impartially, in relation to needs. These climate and security risks interact with other challenges such as the impacts of economic crises and shifts, international commodities markets, social and economic trends such as increasing urbanisation and population growth, as well as health risks such as HIV/AIDS and epidemics. Humanitarian aid is being delivered in increasingly complex environments, which demands improvements in the internal effectiveness of the international aid system.

The current organisation of international humanitarian aid is overall reported to have improved in terms of performance, yet to be still struggling with significant internal challenges. Measuring the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of humanitarian aid is still inexact and incomplete. There are lacks in leadership and coordination capacities and in the quality of internal management and administrative processes. Humanitarian aid operations are not always relevant, appropriate and sustainable enough. Improvements are needed in all areas of policy and planning, implementation and accounting for the results and impacts of

---

<sup>86</sup> Proudlock & Ramalingam 2009, Ramalingam et al. 2009, Watson 2008, Beck & Buchanan-Smith 2008, Beck 2009, Telford 2009.

aid. Investments in the areas of disaster risk reduction and in linking relief, recovery and development are reported to be insufficient, despite the central importance of these areas for improved preparedness against natural hazards and for ensuring sustainability of the livelihoods of vulnerable and disaster-affected people.<sup>87</sup>

### *Recommendations to donors*

Numerous recent evaluations and evaluative reports have made recommendations to donors on primary areas for improvement with regard to how international humanitarian aid is currently funded and managed. Three main areas have been emphasised for which future donor improvements are reported to be of significant importance and impact.

The first is increasing investments for disaster prevention, preparedness and disaster risk reduction. Investments in local capacities to plan for and respond to the risks presented by natural hazards and crises are highlighted as the most effective way of managing the threat of increased disaster risks and costs. The need to link relief, rehabilitation and development, as well as coordinating these together with other approaches to build resilience and reduce vulnerabilities is emphasized.

The second central area in which recommendations have been made for improved donor action is in increasing efforts to reclaim humanitarian space. Security threats and the challenge of gaining humanitarian access have focused debates on the immutability of the core humanitarian principles. On the one hand donors are recommended to advocate for increased humanitarian access on the basis of adherence to the core humanitarian principles, without distortion from political interests and security objectives. On the other hand, donors are also recommended to increase their engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes in a similar way as in disaster risk reduction and LRRD. Increased involvement in protection activities is advocated for. These are core issues which donors will be increasingly challenged with in current and future humanitarian aid.

The third area in which improved donor policy and action has been recommended in is the need to increase both the professionalism and accountability of the international humanitarian system. By actively engaging with and improving agreed quality standards, such as commitments to Good Humanitarian Donorship, donors will be able to

---

<sup>87</sup> *Hidalgo & Tamminga 2010, Development Initiatives 2010, Dempsey & Kyazze 2010.*

promote better and more principled approaches to international humanitarian aid.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>88</sup> *Development Initiatives 2010, Dempsey & Kyazze 2010.*

## References

---

ALNAP (2006) Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria- An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies. London: Overseas Development Institute.

Barber, M., B Abhijit, R. Lossio, L. Sida (2008) Central Emergency Response Fund – Two Year Evaluation CERF

Beck, T and M. Buchanan- Smith (2008) 'Joint evaluations coming of age? The quality and future scope of joint evaluations' in ALNAP 7th Review of Humanitarian Action. London: ODI.

Beck, T. (2009) Joint humanitarian impact evaluation: options paper. OCHA.

Cosgrave, J., Polastro R. and Zafar, F. (2010) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation (IA RTE) of the Humanitarian Response to Pakistan's 2009 Displacement Crisis.

Dempsey, B and A. Kyazze (2010) At A Crossroads – Humanitarianism for the Next Decade. London: Save the Children UK.

Deschamp, B., M. Azorbo, S. Lohse (2010) Earth, wind and fire – A review of UNHCR's role in recent natural disasters. Geneva: UNHCR.

Development Initiatives (2009) GHD Indicator Report 2009. Wells, UK: Development Initiatives.

Development Initiatives (2010) GHA Report 2010. Wells, UK: Development Initiatives.

Donini, A., L Fast, G Hansen, S Harris, L Minear, T Mowjee and A Wilder (2008) Humanitarian Agenda 2015 Final Report: The State of the Humanitarian Enterprise. MA, USA: Feinstein International Center.

Duffield M., Diagne K., Tennant V. (2008) Evaluation of UNHCR's returnee reintegration programme in Southern Sudan UNHCR.

EU (2008) EU Humanitarian Consensus 2008  
[<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:025:0001:0012:EN:PDF>].

Finan, T., A. Rashid, B. Woel, D. Arunga, S. Ochola (2010) Summary Evaluation Report of the Impact Evaluation of WFP School Feeding Programmes in Kenya (1999-2008). Rome: WFP.

Grunewald F. and A. Binder (2010) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation in Haiti: 3 months after the earthquake. Groupe U.R.D./ GPPI.

HAP-I -Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (2010) The 2009 Humanitarian Accountability Report. Geneva: HAP-I.

Harmer A and D. Ray (2009) Study on the relevance and applicability of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in Humanitarian Assistance. London: HPG / ODI.

Harvey, P., A. Stoddard, A. Harmer, G. Taylor (2010) The state of the humanitarian system: assessing performance and progress – A pilot study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Hidalgo, S. and P. Tamminga (2010) The Humanitarian Response Index 2009 – Donor Accountability in Humanitarian Action. Madrid: DARA (Development Assistance Research Associates)

ISDR (2009) Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. Geneva: United Nations.

Mowjee, T., and J. Randel (2007) Review of OCHA Emergency Response Funds (ERFs) Development Initiatives, OCHA.

NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (2009) Synthesis Report-Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process (Humanitarian Reform Project/ DfID 2009).

OCHA (2009) Assessment and Classification of Emergencies (ACE) Project – Mapping of Key Emergency Needs Assessment and Analysis Initiatives- Final Report. OCHA.

OECD- DAC (2009) Humanitarian Aid in DAC Peer Reviews- A Synthesis of Findings and Experiences (2006-2007) DCD/DAC(2008)43/Rev1. OECD.

Proudlock, K. and B. Ramalingam (2009) 'Improving humanitarian impact assessment: bridging theory and practice' in Ch.2 ALNAP 8<sup>th</sup> Review of Humanitarian Action London: ODI.

Ramalingam, B. and J. Mitchell (2009) 'Counting what counts: performance and effectiveness in the humanitarian sector' in Ch. 1 ALNAP 8<sup>th</sup> Review of Humanitarian Action London: ODI.

SCHR- Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (2010) SCHR Peer Review on Accountability to Disaster-Affected Populations – An Overview of Lessons Learned. Geneva: SCHR.

Shoham J. (2007) Evaluation of the Mid-Term PRRO10362.0: Enabling Livelihood Protection and Promotion in Ethiopia. Rome: WFP.

Simkin, P. (2008) Evaluation of Kenya Emergency Operation 10374.0 and Country Programme 10264.0 (2004-2008) Rome: WFP.

Steets J., F. Grunewald, A. Binder, V. de Geoffrey, D. Kauffman , S. Kruger, C. Meier and B. Sokpoh (2010) Cluster Approach Evaluation 2 Synthesis Report. OCHA.

Stoddard, A. (2008) International Humanitarian Financing: Review and comparative assessment of instruments – A study for the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative commissioned by the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance. Humanitarian Outcomes.

Stokke K. (2007) Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters: A Synthesis of Evaluation Findings. Oslo: Norad.

Telford J. (2009) Review of Joint Evaluations and the Future of Inter Agency Evaluations. OCHA.

Turner, R., J. Baker, M.Z. Oo, N.S. Aye (2008) Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Response to Cyclone Nargis. OCHA.

Walker, P and K. Pepper (2007) Follow the Money: A Review and Analysis of the State of Humanitarian Funding. MA, USA: Feinstein International Center.

Watson C. (2008) Impact Assessment of Humanitarian Response: A Review of the Literature. Addis Ababa & MA, USA: Feinstein International Center.

Webster M, J Ginnetti, P Walker, D Coppard and R Kent (2008) *The Humanitarian Costs of Climate Change*. MA, USA: Feinstein International Centre.

Willitts-King, B., T. Mowjee, J. Barham (2007) *Evaluation of Common/Pooled Humanitarian Funds in DRC and Sudan*. OCHA.



NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE OF FINLAND  
Antinkatu 1, P.O. Box 1119, FI-00101 HELSINKI  
Telephone +358 9 4321, fax +358 9432 5820, [www.vtv.fi](http://www.vtv.fi)

ISBN 978-952-499-171-1 (Bound)