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## Humanitarian Policy Group

# Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters

A briefing paper prepared by the Humanitarian Policy Group for the International Development Committee inquiry into Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters

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1.  This paper provides a broad and selective overview of the humanitarian system, and trends and issues relating to humanitarian responses to natural disasters.[1] Key issues covered include:

- Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are the key underlying principles of humanitarian action;

- Natural disasters aren't straightforwardly 'natural' – their natural and human dimensions are inextricably linked;

- While natural hazards often trigger disasters, disasters result from human vulnerability rather than simply from hazard events per se;

- Vulnerability to natural disaster is determined by social, economic, political and environmental variables;

- Effective development processes are critical to prevent and mitigate natural disasters therefore collaboration between humanitarian and development actors is essential; and,

- The response mechanisms used by the humanitarian community have at times been inappropriate or insufficient. There is currently significant reform of the humanitarian system underway.

2. **Section I** introduces the concept of humanitarian action and the key actors within the international humanitarian system. **Section II** focuses specifically on humanitarian responses to natural hazards and disasters highlighting key issues such as chronic vulnerability and the links between natural disasters and development. **Section III** of the paper explores a number of key challenges currently confronting the humanitarian sector. These range from global issues such as climate change and HIV/AIDS to reform initiatives aimed at improving the timeliness and appropriateness of humanitarian responses. Within this section of the paper a number of issues are introduced in brief as possible areas that the Committee may wish to pursue further throughout their inquiry. A short list of recommended reading is also provided as is a glossary of key terms (Annex 1).

## Section I – Humanitarian action and the International Humanitarian System

### Objectives and definition of 'humanitarian action'

3.  The objectives of **humanitarian action** 'are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations'.[2] Humanitarian action has two inextricably-linked dimensions: protecting people and providing assistance. Humanitarian action is rooted in **humanitarian principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence** – which are drawn from both International Humanitarian Law and the framework of principles developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).[3] Fundamentally, humanitarian action depends on the consent of local authorities to humanitarian presence and access to affected populations.  The exception to this is UN Security Council authorised interventions.

4.  A significant degree of consensus concerning definitions and principles has been achieved in recent years. While humanitarianism has a universal significance beyond specific humanitarian actors and Western aid agencies, the **Good Humanitarian Donorship** (GHD) initiative has resulted in twenty-two donor governments as well as the UN and the European Commission, agreeing on the definition of humanitarian action cited above and on the core humanitarian principles that must guide such action (see Box 1).

5.  The application of humanitarian principles has often been contested. Different actors have interpreted principles in different ways. For example, in recent years the promotion of policy coherence and integrated approaches by a number of bilateral actors and the UN has raised questions about the independence of humanitarian action. Contexts where governments that provide humanitarian funding are, simultaneously, actors in a conflict have raised difficult issues for some implementing agencies with regard to independence and neutrality. The application of impartiality at the global and country level is also a perennial challenge as reflected recently in debates over the substantial resources allocated to tsunami affected regions in contrast to other emergencies where human need was argued to be equal if not greater.

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**BOX 1: Principles of good humanitarian action agreed through the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) Initiative**

Twenty-two donors and the European Commission have agreed that humanitarian action should be guided by the following principles:
- *Humanity*, meaning the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found;
- *Impartiality*, meaning the implementation of actions solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations;
- *Neutrality*, meaning that humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out; and
- *Independence*, meaning the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

(www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org)

## The International Humanitarian System

*Affected States*

6. Sovereign states bear the primary responsibility for protecting and assisting the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders. As outlined in Resolution 46/182 of the UN General Assembly:

> *Each State has the responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. Hence, the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.*

7. **State capacity** and political will have a fundamental impact on whether a natural hazard results in a disaster requiring international assistance. The role played by the state should also inform the nature of the response by the international humanitarian system and the roles played by other actors. After the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, for example, the high level of cooperation from the Pakistani government and the role played by the Pakistani military in the relief effort have been cited as key factors in the success of the earthquake response and in preventing a feared second wave of winter deaths.[4] Conversely, political interests can influence how crises are presented by the relevant state. At times, states do not wish to have crises within their borders labelled 'humanitarian disasters' in order to prevent unwanted international attention.

*The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*

8. The **International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement** is a recognised international organisation (and seen as distinct from NGOs) which is comprised of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), and 183 national Red Cross/Red Crescent national societies. The ICRC is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of war and armed violence. It has a permanent mandate under international law to take impartial action for prisoners, the wounded and sick, and civilians affected by conflict. The ICRC has historically played a critical role in defining and promoting humanitarian principles.

9. However, it is the IFRC and particularly the **National Red Cross societies** that play a substantial role in natural disaster response and preparedness. They act as auxiliaries to public authorities and provide disaster relief assistance (as well as health and social programs) and often play a critical role in the national response. The IFRC Secretariat in Geneva coordinates and mobilizes relief assistance for international emergencies in support of the National Societies, helps strengthen capacity of the national societies and represents the Federation at the international level.

*The United Nations humanitarian system*

10. The United Nations and its agencies are central to the international humanitarian system and play a critical role in disaster response. Of particular importance is the UN **Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs** (OCHA) and the **Inter-Agency Standing Committee** (IASC).

11. The IASC has system-wide reach, and is notable for promoting an equal partnership between the UN and non-UN actors. Chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (who is also the head of OCHA), it brings together a range of humanitarian actors, including UN operational agencies, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), consortia of major international NGOs, the

Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the internally-displaced and the Red Cross movement (though the Red Cross maintains a distance from the policy statements issued by the IASC and its subsidiaries).[5]

12. OCHA has responsibility for coordinating the international humanitarian response (under GA Res 46/182) and for the coordination of the **Consolidated Appeals Process** (CAP) and the Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP). The CAP is a primary tool for resource mobilisation. In addition to the consolidated appeal, flash appeals are launched in response to specific and often sudden onset emergencies. The CHAP is an instrument for planning and prioritising humanitarian interventions. While the CAP and the CHAP have increasingly been promoted as the central mechanisms for planning and resource mobilisation in the humanitarian system there remains significant debate regarding the degree to which it reflects priority needs. Many NGOs are not active participants in the CHAP process and choose to seek funding outside the CAP. Some donors continue to channel a large percentage of their funding through other mechanisms or directly to partner agencies.

13. While OCHA plays a critical role in the coordination of humanitarian assistance over two thirds of UN humanitarian assistance is spent by three agencies: World Food Program (WFP) (35%), United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (21%) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (11%).[6] In terms of response to natural disasters the WFP's role is significant. Each year WFP provides food aid to an average of 90 million people in more than 80 countries. UNICEF and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) also play a key role in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

*Donor governments*

14. In 2003 bilateral donors contributed US$7.8billion in official humanitarian assistance. This represented over 11% of total official development assistance (ODA) in 2003. The **large majority of humanitarian aid** is provided by a relatively small number of donors. In recent years the US has been the largest contributor of humanitarian assistance, exceeding the contributions of the next six largest donors combined – the UK, France, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands and Germany.[7] In 2003 the UK contributed US$666 million.[8] The European Commission (EC) is a multilateral organisation that is also a donor and has been a significant contributor of humanitarian assistance (through ECHO, the EC's Humanitarian aid department). In 2005 a number of donors made significant pledges with regard to increases in total ODA. It is yet to be seen how these pledges will impact on official humanitarian assistance but a real increase in contributions is likely (however, this may not translate into an increase in humanitarian aid as a percentage of ODA).

15. While OECD-DAC countries provide the large majority of official humanitarian assistance it is important to recognise that the donor group is far more diverse than this with many non-OECD countries having a long history of international humanitarian engagement[9] - for instance Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Eastern European states.

16. While donor governments primarily channel humanitarian funds through NGOs, UN agencies or the Red Cross movement, they also often deploy their own **military** to assist in providing relief in response to natural disasters. The military are assumed to have comparative advantage in a number of areas, including logistics, transportation and security. The UK, for instance, has responded in this fashion to 11 international crises over the past ten years – either bilaterally or coordinated through NATO.

17. Relevant policy and guidelines include the Oslo guidelines[10] and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, both of which emphasise the **primacy of civilian lead** in crisis response and that military assets should be used only *in extremis*. While the use of military assets in natural disaster response is assumed to be less problematic for independent humanitarian actors than in conflict related emergencies, in contexts where a natural hazard coincides with an ongoing conflict (for example Sri Lanka and Aceh following the Indian Ocean tsunami) the role played by the military must be carefully managed to ensure humanitarian principles are not undermined. The preparedness of international military forces to be coordinated by local authorities must also be ensured. Issues of cost-effectiveness also arise for governments — particularly when marginal costs are often recovered from aid budgets for this assistance. Comprehensive costs remain difficult to determine and analyse (see paragraph 22 for details relating to the UK Ministry of Defence).

*Non-Government Organisations*

18. The humanitarian system and efforts towards disaster risk reduction are also reliant on a huge and growing number of NGOs. NGOs operate at local, national and international levels and are often the implementing partners for donors and UN agencies.[11] In the UK, many of the larger NGOs that respond to natural disasters are represented by the umbrella organisation, the Disasters Emergency Committee.[12] Besides large international NGOs, the significant actual and potential contribution of local NGOs in disaster-affected countries is also receiving growing recognition.

19. Reliable estimates of total NGO funding are not readily available but a significant proportion of overall official humanitarian funding is channelled through NGOs. A Development Initiatives study of a sample of 18 NGOs in 2001 demonstrated that the annual income of these NGOs was US$2.8 billion of which approximately half was for humanitarian purposes. In the same year reports from 12 bilateral donors and the EC show that over US$1 billion of humanitarian aid was spent through NGOs (both grants and direct contracts). The total official humanitarian assistance channelled through NGOs in 2001 was likely over $1.5b once UN agencies funding of NGOs is also included.[13]

*Private Sector*

20. In recent years the private sector has become increasingly involved in humanitarian assistance in a range of ways. Firstly, the private sector provides funding for humanitarian action primarily through NGOs. The private sector contribution to the Indian Ocean tsunami was significant and, combined with the response from the public, resulted in many operational agencies stretched but also much less dependent on funding from official donors. Secondly, the private sector is at times contracted by donor governments to deliver assistance (for example the use of logistics and transport companies for delivery of food aid). Thirdly, motivated in part through the rise in corporate social responsibility (CSR) a number of companies have initiated public-private partnerships of relevance to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in a natural disaster context. At times this involves the pro bono provision of services by the private company. For example, the WFP has a partnership with the logistics company TNT which involves TNT providing direct (pro-bono) logistical support for emergency operations including in response to floods, earthquakes and drought.

### The UK Government and Humanitarian Response

*Whole-of-Government Initiatives*

21. In recent years a number of Western governments have sought to ensure greater coherence in policy making and operations across government. The UK has strongly pursued coherence which has led to organisational changes and the adoption of **'joined-up' initiatives**. These trends have been particularly apparent in relation to development and humanitarian assistance in conflict and post-conflict contexts however the promotion of whole-of-government approaches has also been a feature of responses to natural disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami.

22. While the Department for International Development (DFID) still has primary responsibility for development and humanitarian assistance (see below) it is important to recognise the active involvement of other parts of the bureaucracy in policy-making and operations relating to natural disaster response. For example:

- The **Ministry of Defence** (MoD) has been actively involved in the UK Government's response to the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake. In response to the tsunami the MoD mobilised 'Operation Garron' and provided air mobility, communication, transportation, water supply and electrical capacity support. In Pakistan it provided airlift capacity to distribute food and clothing in remote areas. As outlined above these operations are often funded from the aid budget. The MoD, for example, recovered approximately £3m for assistance to Tsunami affected countries in 2004, and £2m for Mozambique flood assistance in 2000, from DFID.[14]

- The **Prime Minister's Strategy Unit** leads a cross-Whitehall program team focused on countries at risk of instability which has produced a manual on Risk Assessment and Strategic Analysis. While primarily focusing on the risk of conflict the manual cites HIV/AIDS and climate change as long-term risks and recognises the link between poverty and conflict. The UK has also agreed to pilot application of the OECD-DAC Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States[15] in Somalia. This pilot will take place in the context of a natural hazard and ongoing humanitarian response as four years of consecutive drought in Somalia has contributed (along with conflict) to the internal displacement of 370,000 to 400,000 Somalians.[16]

*Department for International Development*

23. The 2002 **International Development Act** authorises DFID to provide humanitarian assistance to alleviate the effects of natural or man-made disasters or other emergencies. DFID leads the UK's response to humanitarian disasters partly through bilateral funding to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and funding to multilateral organisations such as United Nations agencies. DFID can also provide direct operational, technical and logistical support. In addition, DFID is active in debates of reforming the international humanitarian system. Within DFID, issues concerning conflict and humanitarian affairs, including emergencies and disasters, are handled by the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Department (CHAS).

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**BOX 2: Major recent UK policy initiatives that relate to natural disasters**

Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Paper: DFID's DDR paper was launched in March 2006. As DFID puts it, 'the policy provides a framework for DFID to integrate disaster risk reduction measures more effectively into its own work, as well as strengthen the international system's capacity to manage disaster risks, helping to reduce the threat that disasters pose to sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals'.
http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/disaster-risk-reduction-policy.pdf

Humanitarian Policy Paper: DFID is shortly to release the UK government's new humanitarian policy paper. The paper acknowledges that: 'Humanitarian operations remain characterised by a weak evidence base, poor coordination, and limited capacity. The financing of humanitarian action by official donors and others has evolved in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner.  The linkages between humanitarian, developmental and political action remain weak and poorly understood, limiting efforts to address the root causes of vulnerability and prevent future crises.'

The policy paper commits the government to delivering 'adequate, predictable and flexible finance' for humanitarian crises and to addressing the problem of 'forgotten emergencies'. Rather than relying on emergency relief, the need to 'reduce risk and extreme vulnerability' is one of the paper's key messages.

The launch is scheduled for early June. A draft is available at: www.dfid.gov.uk/consultations/humanitarian-policy.pdf

2006 White Paper: The Department for International Development has just finished consulting on a new White Paper on Eliminating Global Poverty. The Paper will be published in the summer and will set out the government's development overview for the next decade.

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24. DFID's key objectives are set out in its **Public Service Agreement** (PSA). The overall aim is 'the elimination of poverty in particular through the achievement by 2015 of the Millenium Development Goals' (MDGs).[17] The PSA is the primary accountability tool for DFID. The Secretary of State is ultimately accountable for achievement of the PSA but the PSA guides the objectives and aims of all parts of DFID. In June 2006 DFID is scheduled to launch a humanitarian policy that clearly outlines its humanitarian aims and objectives. The primary aim is to 'save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity'.[18] The draft policy also emphasises DFID's commitment to preventing conflict, to reducing the impact of natural disasters, and to civilian lead in disaster response even when involving military actors.

25. The UK Government's approach to humanitarian assistance is also detailed in its **GHD Domestic Implementation Action Plan**. This plan outlines a number of commitments and actions undertaken of relevance to natural disaster response. These include:
- Commissioning of a study into the links between disaster risk reduction and progress towards the MDGs, to use as an advocacy tool to make the case for greater investment in disaster risk reduction.
- Commitment to provide 10% of funding in response to each new natural disaster towards financing mitigation, preparedness and risk reduction measures.
- Undertaking to increase funding for the multilateral disaster risk reduction agencies
- Provision of multi-year flexible funding to the IFRC and Red Crescent Societies at £5.5m pa for 4 years.
- Commissioning of a report by a panel led by the UK's Chief Scientific Adviser, in the aftermath of the tsunami, to look at the potential for making better use of science to promote disaster reduction.

The UK's role in broader humanitarian debate

26. An objective of DFID's PSA is 'to increase the impact of the international system in reducing poverty, preventing conflict and responding effectively to conflict and humanitarian crises'.[19] The UK has played an active role in **discussions on UN reform** including proposals to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian system. It is also currently chair of the GHD Initiative, an important inter-governmental platform for dialogue around improved donor coordination and response.

27. On 15 December 2004 Hilary Benn, UK Secretary of State for International Development, launched a humanitarian reform initiative which included a number of proposals: a new humanitarian fund to help address the problem of forgotten crises, a strengthened role for UN Humanitarian Coordinators, the use of agreed benchmarks to monitor delivery of humanitarian assistance, and a greater emphasis on disaster risk reduction. These proposals played an important role in building and maintaining momentum for reform of the humanitarian system.

28. While a more detailed discussion of humanitarian reforms can be found in Section III it is important to note that the UK continues to play a very active role in these discussions. Consensus amongst donors and other UN member states will however be critical to the success of the reforms. This will require a sound understanding of the diversity of donors and the differing capacities of donors to contribute to reform discussions and to operationalise agreed reforms. While leadership within the donor group is important, the collective of donors must coalesce behind reform proposals if their positive potential is to be realised.

29. The UK also has a useful role to play in promoting change within the **European Union** (EU). Collectively the EU Member States plus the European Commission (EC) represent close to 50% of official humanitarian assistance. In 2003 their contributions represented US$2.991billion, a record level of assistance (although just US$200million more than the US).[20] This means together, the EU Member States and EC have a powerful means through which to positively influence and impact on humanitarian response globally. Bringing EC policies and procedures into full alignment with the broader reforms being promoted by the UK, and supporting accession states in developing sound and appropriate humanitarian response capacity in line with the principles and practices of GHD could also contribute significantly to improved humanitarian action.

30. Currently, DFID's objectives and approach to working with the European Union are set out in a strategy paper '*Working in partnership with the European Union: Strategy for Eradicating Poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals*'[21] This paper covers the period to the end of 2006 and briefly mentions objectives with regard to humanitarian assistance. The strategy will be revised later this year (once the outcomes of the internal EU reforms are clear) and will provide a valuable opportunity for articulation of clear and well-grounded objectives in relation to timeliness and appropriateness of EC responses to humanitarian crises; and the collective goals of the EU Member States.

**BOX 3: Significant reviews of DFID**

The UK was peer reviewed by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee in early 2006, and the results of the review are due to be published on May 31$^{st}$. Reviews monitor individual DAC members' policies and efforts in the area of development co-operation, and on this occasion the UK review focused in particular on the UK's provision of humanitarian assistance. The last DAC Peer Review of the UK was in 2001 - a time when the DAC peer review group did not identify humanitarian action as an area of distinct policy analysis. Through the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, the humanitarian responsibilities of donor governments have been formally reviewed since 2005.

In 2003 the UK National Audit Office conducted an audit of DFID's response to humanitarian emergencies – *DFID: Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor-General,* HC 1227, Session 2002-2003, 5 November 2003. An audit of the financial assistance provided in response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami was also conducted in 2006. A number of recommendations have already been addressed but the Committee may wish to consider progress against the NAO recommendations in its inquiry.

## Section II – Natural Hazards, Disasters and Vulnerability

### Natural disaster trends

31. Natural disasters cause suffering, death and damage of devastating proportions. The scale of contemporary disasters is unprecedented – both the number and severity of disasters are increasing.[22] The increasing magnitude of natural disaster impact falls most heavily on poor people in developing countries (see Box 4).

| Box 4: The human and economic cost of natural disasters |
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| Over the past 30 years, natural disasters have killed over 2 million people, affected over 5 billion and caused estimated damages of US$1.38 trillion[23] |
| Between 1994 and 2003, natural disasters claimed an annual average of 58,000 lives[24] and affected an annual average of 258 m people[25] |
| While the number of people killed by natural disasters is falling, the number of people vulnerable to, and affected by, natural disasters is increasing. From 2000-2004 a third more people were affected than during 1995-99[26] |
| The increasing magnitude of disaster impact is being felt most acutely in the developing world. Africa and Asia are hardest hit by disasters. Over the last 30 years, people in these regions made up approximately 88% of the total people reported killed and 96% of the people reported affected by natural disasters[27] |
| Natural disasters often inflict serious long as well as short term economic damage. Negative impacts have been registered for economic growth, development and poverty reduction efforts although the wider, more diffuse ramifications of disasters often go unmeasured and therefore underappreciated[28] |
| In the last decade it is estimated that disaster damage amounted to an average cost of US$67 billion per year.[29]The economic cost associated with natural disasters has increased 14-fold since the 1950s[30] |
| Humanitarian responses to disasters cost Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors an annual US$6 billion or seven percent of total official development assistance[31] |

*Key terms and concepts*

32. A **natural disaster** can be defined as 'a serious disruption triggered by a natural hazard causing human, material, economic or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of those affected to cope'.[32] Natural hazards are categorised as being:
   - weather-related (storms, drought, flooding, heat and cold shocks).
   - geophysical (earthquake, volcano and landslide).

33. The term 'natural disaster' conjures up images of **rapid-onset** natural hazards such as the Indian Ocean tsunami and the Pakistani earthquake. However, **slow-onset** hazards such as drought that build up and play out over protracted periods of time – sometimes years – are a major contributor to humanitarian need.

34. In recent years the complexity of 'natural disasters' has been better understood and a number of key points have been increasingly emphasised:

   - Natural disasters aren't straightforwardly 'natural' – their natural and human dimensions are inextricably linked;

   - **Natural hazards** should be distinguished from natural disasters. While natural hazards often trigger disasters, disasters result from human vulnerability rather than simply from hazard events *per se*;

- Human-induced processes such as climate change and environmental degradation are shaping the frequency and intensity of ostensibly natural hazards such as floods; and,

- Disasters often result not from a single hazard event but rather from the complex interaction of a range of multiple hazards over different time periods and spaces.

*Hazards plus Vulnerability*

35. It is human **vulnerability** that determines whether hazards become disasters. Vulnerability can be defined as 'the extent to which a person or group is likely to be affected by adverse circumstances'.[33] The key variables in determining vulnerability are exposure to harm – through, for example, where one lives and works - as well as susceptibility to harm arising from social, economic, political, psychological and environmental variables that produce different impacts in disasters despite potentially similar exposure.[34] Recognition that vulnerability is often entrenched, constant and enduring has increased attention to 'chronic vulnerability'.[35] Chronic poverty and vulnerability can mean that small, incremental shifts can change daily deprivation into a more profound crisis[36].

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**Box 5 - Vulnerability in Niger**

The humanitarian crisis in Niger in 2005 was the subject of much debate due to differing views regarding whether chronic vulnerability should be defined as 'famine'. The causes of the crisis in Niger were varied and included both long-term and acute components. It is clear though that the natural hazards of drought and locust infestation were not the primary contributors to the crisis. Social and economic aspects of vulnerability clearly contributed to the severity of need including through 'the widespread sale of household assets, debt and the mortgaging of future harvests' which left households with few resources with which to counter food shortages or purchase food at raised prices.[37]

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36. Just as people are vulnerable, so they also have capacities to anticipate, cope with and recover from disasters. Somewhat similarly, **'resilience'** refers to 'the ability to absorb and recover from hazard impacts'. 'Resilience' takes into account the institutional environment that enables individuals and households to draw on their capacities.[38]

*Disasters and development*

37. The growing emphasis on vulnerability has challenged notions of disasters as exceptional and temporary events that are disturbing of, and discontinuous from, everyday life. Rather than being unavoidable aberrations, disasters are increasingly perceived as cause and consequence of inadequate development. Human interventions and development processes are being recognised as fundamental in causing and exacerbating disasters as well as preventing or mitigating them. The emphasis on development puts disasters in the context of familiar processes, pressures and patterns of life and shows disaster risk to be amenable to human interventions rather something beyond our control (see Box 6 on the Hyogo Framework for Action and the need to mainstream disasters into development considerations).

38. Recent studies have underlined that:

- Disasters are a cause and a consequence of development failings;

- Development can increase or decrease disaster risk depending on how it is managed;

- Disasters can reduce the chances of achieving the MDGs; and,

- Disaster risk reduction can have positive developmental dividends, including for the MDGs.

39. **'Disaster risk reduction'** is the widely favoured term to express policies and practices that aim to minimise vulnerabilities and hazards whilst enhancing people's capacity to cope and adapt. Disaster risk reduction is partly about overcoming segregation between development planning and disaster management. UNDP writes that 'while humanitarian action to mitigate the impact of disasters will always be vitally important, the global community is facing a critical challenge: How to better anticipate — and then manage and reduce — disaster risk by integrating the potential threat into its planning and policies.[39]

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**Box 6: The Kobe disaster conference and the Hyogo Framework**

The most significant disaster conference in recent years took place in January 2005 in Kobe, Japan. The UN-convened World Conference on Disaster Reduction sought to reflect on progress in disaster risk reduction since the mid-1990s and to plan for the next decade.

The conference saw struggles to ensure that 'climate change' was referred to explicitly in the outcome document. Efforts by some negotiators to establish specific targets for disaster reduction were unsuccessful (although a mechanism to draw up targets was agreed). Northern and southern NGOs pressed on questions of timeframes, financial commitments and accountability on the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction.

After intense negotiation, the Conference produced the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (hereafter 'the Framework').

On the positive side, the Framework was greeted for making important headway by framing disasters as a core development issue and by bringing together states with civil society.

The Framework stresses disaster risk reduction through good governance and the importance of integrating disaster concerns throughout development and poverty reduction initiatives. The Framework also emphasises the importance of international cooperation and multilateral action, building national and community resilience, and action informed by an understanding of hazards, vulnerabilities and capacities.

## Section III – Emerging challenges and initiatives

### Global issues impacting on vulnerability

40. Humanitarians are faced with disasters of changing scale, nature and complexity. Global change processes are creating new kinds and degrees of vulnerability that look set to produce disasters that are more frequent, extreme and multi-dimensional. Amongst a host of factors contributing to the changing profile of human vulnerability, several are especially pronounced.

*Environmental/Climate change*

41. Recent decades have yielded growing evidence that human behaviour is having an increasing impact on the world's climate and on the environment overall. Whether, and by how much, **global climate change** is already influencing natural disasters is disputed but many observers maintain that climate change will increase the frequency and intensity of natural hazards and thereby increase disasters associated with extreme weather events such as floods and windstorms.[40] The impacts of climate change are potentially severe and wide-ranging:

> Climate change is a multi-faceted...hazard that has short, medium and long-term aspects and unknown outcomes. What we know is that climate change is intensifying the hazards that affect human livelihoods, settlements and infrastructure. Climate change is also weakening the resilience of livelihood systems in the face of increasing uncertainty and frequent disasters. [41]

*Urbanisation*

42. The speed and character of **urbanisation** raises the prospect of new kinds and degrees of urban natural disasters. Almost all of the world's rapid population growth in the coming decades is likely to be absorbed by urban areas of less developed regions. Between 2005 and 2030, the urban population of these regions is expected to increase by 1.7 billion persons.[42] By 2017, the number of urban-dwellers in the less developed regions will equal the number of rural-dwellers.[43] Of particular concern for humanitarians is the fact that much of the increase in urban numbers is expected to be concentrated in informal slum encampments and other areas such as exposed coasts that are especially vulnerable to an array of hazards.

*HIV/AIDS*

43. **HIV/AIDS** increases the likelihood of a natural disaster and also the damage that such disasters cause. Besides the fact that HIV/AIDS is a disaster in itself, it is also clear that HIV/AIDS is becoming an increasingly active ingredient in contributing to other humanitarian crises. By, for example, heightening food insecurity, the burden of HIV/AIDS renders vulnerable people and communities less able to withstand other stresses and shocks. In this way, HIV/AIDS both precipitates crises and exacerbates them once they occur. The disease also creates distinct kinds of vulnerability by, for example, hitting prime-age adults hardest and because of its gender-specific dimensions. In addition to HIV/AIDS contributing to natural disasters, humanitarians must also consider the ways in which natural disasters can contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS.[44]

*Conflict*

44. Alongside the growing concerns outlined above, **conflict** and complex political emergencies continue to exacerbate natural disasters. In the last five years, at least 140 natural disasters have

occurred in countries where complex political emergencies have also been present.[45] Examples of how disasters and violent conflict are entwined include[46]:

- Violent conflict causes and exacerbates social vulnerability;
- Conflict-related displacement can lead to relocation to hazard-prone areas;
- Violent conflict can hamper the provision of humanitarian relief and recovery assistance following a natural disaster;
- The application of coping strategies in the face of natural disasters is undermined when conflict is also present;
- Conflict can divert funds that might otherwise be used to respond to prevent or mitigate natural disasters; and,
- Violent conflict can damage infrastructure such as dams that are crucial to preventing or mitigating natural disasters.

## Humanitarian and Development Assistance – a combination of approaches?

*Understanding chronic vulnerability*

45. **Chronic vulnerability** challenges the humanitarian system in a number of critical ways:

- Understanding chronic vulnerability and preventing slow-onset emergencies requires humanitarian and development actors to work together more collaboratively. Donors may therefore need to ensure flexibility in their long-term development policies and funding arrangements;

- Crises may have both acute and chronic dimensions. Traditional emergency response mechanisms may therefore prove inappropriate. Building resilience requires a more predictable response mechanism;

- Chronic vulnerability and slow-onset emergencies often struggle for visibility and profile – a problem that can negatively impact on the flow of both public and private funds; and,

- When vulnerability is chronic (for example constant food insecurity) the question of when to intervene and when to withdraw is especially vexed.[47]

*Choice of Response Mechanisms*

46. The multi-faceted nature of vulnerability means that humanitarian need must be addressed by a range of different types of assistance – often concurrently. The policy and programming choices confronting actors are therefore not straight-forward. This is particularly true in contexts of both acute and chronic need. 'A long-term crisis by definition erodes the traditional boundaries that separate emergency and development programming'.[48]

47. With greater emphasis on disasters as a development issue and not simply a humanitarian one has come renewed focus on the interface between development and humanitarian responses and on ways that humanitarian responses can contribute to reducing the risk of future disasters. How to bridge the conceptual, cultural and operational divide between humanitarian and developmental approaches whilst retaining important differences and distinctions between them has become a renewed concern.

48. A study commissioned by DFID identified a number of constraints on disaster risk reduction and on a more effective relationship between humanitarian and development sectors.[49] These included:

- The contrast between the visible and media-friendly nature of humanitarian responses in contrast to more gradual nature of risk reduction;

- Humanitarians' focus on complex political emergencies at the expense of attention to vulnerability to natural hazards;

- The 'institutional gulf' between donors' humanitarian and development sections;

- Flawed assumptions that if development endeavours to reduce poverty then reduced vulnerability will necessarily follow;

- Development professionals' lack of exposure to disaster risk reduction issues; and,

- Difficult questions over timing, criteria and mechanisms for transitions from relief to development modes.

49. The development sector has been criticised for neglecting its responsibilities with regard to natural disasters. UNDP, for example, has argued that the development community 'generally continues to view disasters as exceptional natural events that interrupt normal development and that can be managed through humanitarian actions'.[50]

50. Humanitarian actors have themselves, however, often treated natural disasters as atypical interruptions and have struggled with crises related to chronic vulnerability in particular. The case of the Niger crisis in 2005 demonstrated that there is still much to learn for both humanitarian and development actors, as well as donors.[51]  A disconnect between longer-term programming and emergency responses was particularly apparent in the 2006 drought in the Greater Horn of Africa. The large-scale emergency livelihoods programming that the situation demanded was one that that neither humanitarian nor development actors were able to supply.[52]

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**Box 7: Case study: Drought in East Africa**

The drought that is currently affecting an estimated 11 million people across the Greater Horn of Africa - Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia raises major issues in relation to prevention and response to slow onset emergencies.  The impact of the drought has been most severe in pastoral areas on the Ethiopia–Kenya–Somalia border, with reports of malnutrition levels far beyond emergency thresholds, livestock losses of up to 70% and the mass migration of pastoralists in search of water, food, jobs and relief aid.

Pastoralists, those who rear livestock as their main source of income, have developed sophisticated methods to optimise the use of water and land and to deal with the scant, erratic rainfall as well as cyclical drought by moving, sharing, exchanging and selling animals.  Despite the recurrent nature of the drought in the region, there is insufficient attention by national and international actors to enhancing the resilience of these communities to prevent or mitigate drought-related disaster. These groups have become increasingly vulnerable as a result of political and economic marginalisation, as well as adverse policies which have restricted their access to key natural resources such as land and water.

Widely available research shows that if urgent action is taken early in a crisis to protect livelihoods (for example with animal health and water interventions), the effects of drought on pastoralists can be mitigated and the need for a massive emergency response to save lives can be reduced. Yet agencies, donors and national governments proved unable to address the crisis effectively in its early stages and the emergency response has been characterised by delays, lack of funding and inappropriate interventions. This was due to the fact that a 'livelihoods crisis' does not fit neatly into development or humanitarian capabilities and as a result, there was insufficient disaster preparedness plans, contingency funding and technical capacity to mount a timely and large-scale livelihoods response. Livelihoods interventions have been limited, and the response has focused overwhelmingly on food aid. While lives have been saved, the effect of the drought on the livelihoods of these communities has been disastrous.[53]

Food Aid

51. **Food aid** has long been the response of choice for major international donors, a fact related in part to the existence of large grain surpluses and the interests of producers and shippers in the developed world (and particularly in the US). WFP has the largest budget of the UN agencies and is the fastest growing: its operational budget has roughly doubled in the past five years. The food aid 'industry' has often been criticised as representing domestic interests of the donors more than the interests of the recipient states. In particular the tying of food aid to exports has been criticised as being both inappropriate and inefficient where local or regional purchase options exist. The merits of food aid itself as a form of relief assistance has been questioned on various grounds, from quality and appropriateness to adverse effects on local production and local or regional markets. Many now argue the case for greater support to alternative forms of intervention to help ensure food security (access to adequate food) for those threatened with disaster. Prominent among these are arguments for various forms of livelihood support, particularly in the early stages of a crisis and in its aftermath; and the greater use of cash transfers, argued to be potentially both more efficient and a more flexible resource for the recipient than food aid.

52. For all the criticisms, however, food aid continues to play a vital part in ensuring the survival, health and recovery of disaster-affected populations. While it can be a blunt instrument, it is often an essential lifeline for those whose ability to access food has been severely eroded, either because they lack the purchasing power or because of a shortage of available food. While the primary responsibility for ensuring people's access to food lies with the government of the affected country, WFP and the international food aid system have a vital role to play in supplementing the capacity of the state or (where necessary) substituting for a lack of state capacity.

Cash and vouchers

53. Partly in reaction to the perceived problems associated with the dominant approach to food aid, there has recently been renewed interest in alternatives to commodity-based assistance and to the potential of cash and vouchers in particular. Research suggests that providing individuals or households with cash or vouchers rather than, or in addition to, food aid, shelter or agricultural inputs can be cost effective and timely as well as permit recipients greater autonomy and benefit local economic activity.  Cash and vouchers approaches are not without difficulties of their own but these approaches remain under-utilised and under-explored despite evidence that they can be beneficial in a wide range of emergency situations.[54]

Needs/forgotten emergencies

54. In addition to complex decisions at the country level there is also need for better informed and impartial decisions regarding allocations at the global level. Responses to recent disasters continue to raise issues around the impartiality of humanitarian assistance. Observing the humanitarian principle of impartiality means that assistance should be given according to, and be in proportion to, need alone. International humanitarian financing is currently far from realising the principle of impartiality. The National Audit Office showed in 2003 that DFID had calculated that, since 1997, the per capita level of humanitarian assistance it had provided in European emergencies had been five times higher than for emergencies in Africa. The report concluded that it was possible that the discrepancy in resource allocation was partly attributable to wider strategic considerations.[55] There is presently no system-wide framework for judging the relative

severity of situations and for aligning decisions about responses accordingly. Though there have been improvements, needs assessment is often inadequate in providing the information upon which to base genuinely impartial responses. 'Too little priority is given to the process of assessment throughout the course of a crisis and it is closely aligned to the 'front-end' fundraising process.'[56]

**Improving the system to address complex challenges – Humanitarian Reform[57]**

55. The nature of crises confronting communities, states and the humanitarian sector is diverse and complex and poses significant challenges. Yet the response mechanisms available to and adopted by the humanitarian community have often proved inappropriate or inadequate. This has led to a number of efforts to reform the international humanitarian system. 2005 was a year of significant debate on reform of the international peace, security and aid architecture. Many of these initiatives are of relevance to the humanitarian community with a number of proposals aimed at improving the timeliness, appropriateness and equity of crisis response.[58]

56. Reform discussions at the technical and managerial level have focused on addressing three main areas of concern:

- <u>Financing mechanisms</u>: Response to the contention that the level and modalities of financing available are inadequate to address the level and urgency of humanitarian need and are being allocated inequitably. This has led to the establishment of an expanded Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and trialled common (or 'pooled') funding at the country level.

- <u>Leadership and response capacity</u>: Response to the perception of major inconsistencies in the quality, speed and effectiveness of international response capacities. Proposals to address this include establishment of 'cluster leads' for each sector, and improved leadership development for UN Humanitarian Coordinators.[59]

- <u>Measuring needs and collective performance</u>: The lack of a common basis for measuring and comparing levels of need presents a major obstacle to prioritisation, impartial decision-making and accountability. A benchmarking initiative has been proposed to develop a core set of common indicators (malnutrition and mortality) to inform resource allocation. [60]

57. The degree to which the proposed technical and managerial reforms will result in positive impacts for populations in crisis is uncertain. There are a number of factors that will need careful attention and which should be closely monitored as reforms are implemented.

- It remains to be seen whether contributions to the CERF will represent new money or will merely be a redistribution of existing humanitarian resources. With a number of donors announcing significant aid budget increases in recent years the opportunity exists for an overall increase in humanitarian allocations and multi-year commitments to ensure the fund is replenished.

- Addressing concerns about the impartiality of humanitarian funding allocations will not be solely reliant on levels of funding. It will also require progress in establishing clear criteria for the allocation of resources. This is a complex problem. As a starting point the 'diagnostic' aspect of humanitarian response needs to be better resourced to allow for improvements in needs assessment and evaluation of impact.

- Many of the reform initiatives are heavily reliant on the UN multilateral system and call for donors to channel large resources through mechanisms <u>managed</u> by UN multilateral agencies. However the majority of the implementation is undertaken by the NGO and Red Cross movement. This threatens to result in a middle level of bureaucracy, the value of which will need to be closely monitored, as well as whether this ensures a more impartial response. The speed at which the multilateral system can find and engage suitable implementing partners will be critical in determining impact on the ground.

- Finally, as reforms are operationalised it is essential that there is opportunity for dialogue, consultation and review. To date, the opportunities for input by recipient states and populations have been marginal which ultimately can only hamper the success of reform efforts.[61]

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## Annex 1: Definition of key terms

**Natural disaster:** A serious disruption triggered by a natural hazard causing human, material, economic or environmental losses, which exceed the ability of those affected to cope.[62]

**Disaster:** A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected community to cope using its own resources.[63]

**Natural disaster, slow onset**: A disaster event that unfolds alongside and within development processes. The hazard can be felt as an ongoing stress for many days, months or even years.[64]

**Natural disaster, rapid onset**: A disaster that is triggered by an instantaneous shock. The impact of this disaster may unfold over the medium- or long-term.[65]

**Natural hazards:** Natural processes or phenomena occurring in the biosphere that may constitute a damaging event.[66]

'an extreme natural event or process'[67]

**Capacity:** A combination of all the strengths and resources available within a community, society or organization that can reduce the level of risk, or the effects of a disaster.[68]

The ability to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from hazard impacts.[69]

**Disaster risk management**: The systematic management of administrative decisions, organisation, operational skills and abilities to implement policies, strategies and coping capacities of the society or individuals to lessen the impacts of natural and related environmental and technological hazards.[70]

**Disaster risk reduction**: The systematic development and application of policies, strategies and practices to minimise vulnerabilities, hazards and the unfolding of disaster impacts throughout a society, in the broad context of sustainable development.[71]

Measures to curb disaster losses, through minimising the hazard, reducing exposure and susceptibility and enhancing coping and adaptive capacity. Good disaster risk reduction also continues after a disaster, building resilience to future hazards.[72]

The underlying drive of disaster management is to reduce risk both to human life and to systems important to livelihoods.[73]

**Resilience:** The capacity of a system, community or society potentially exposed to hazards to adapt, by resisting or changing in order to reach and maintain an acceptable level of functioning and structure. This is determined by the degree to which the social system is capable of organizing itself to increase its capacity for learning from past disasters for better future protection and to improve risk reduction measures.[74]

**Risk:** The probability of harmful consequences, or expected loss of lives, people injured, property, livelihoods, economic activity disrupted (or environment damaged) resulting from interactions between natural or human induced hazards and vulnerable conditions. Risk is conventionally expressed by the equation: Risk = Hazard x Vulnerability.[75]

**Vulnerability**[76]**:** The characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard.[77]

Human vulnerability: A human condition or process resulting from physical, social, economic and environmental factors, which determine the likelihood and scale of damage from the impact of a given hazard.[78]

Vulnerability is sometimes seen as combining *exposure* and *susceptibility* to harm. 'Exposure is determined by where and how people live and work relative to a hazard. Susceptibility takes into account those social, economic, political, psychological and environmental variables that intervene in producing different impacts amongst people with similar levels of exposure.'[79]

For expanded glossaries, see:

http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about_isdr/basic_docs/LwR2004/Annex%201%20Terminology.pdf

http://www.irinnews.org/webspecials/DR/Definitions.asp#gs

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[1] Material draws heavily on HPG research and a select number of further sources.

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