The role of national governments in international humanitarian response to disasters

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INTRODUCTION

This background paper explores the relationships between international humanitarian actors and national governments in disaster-affected countries and how these are shifting in response to changes both in national capacities and in the causes of crisis and vulnerability. This is a relevant issue for two reasons. First, because governments are increasingly asserting their sovereignty in relation to disaster relief. And second, because despite their commitments to support the host government, recent disaster responses have demonstrated the continuing failure of international systems to work effectively with national authorities.

International aid interventions depend on the consent of the government of the affected country. Whether a government is strong or weak, abusive or concerned for its citizens' welfare, it essentially determines whether humanitarian actors can be present in crises. As the case of Myanmar's response to Cyclone Nargis shows, it is almost impossible to provide relief assistance without government consent.

There is a growing focus on the role of national governments in responding to disasters. In part, this is due to the increasing wealth of some developing countries, their growing willingness and ability to respond to disasters without external assistance, and their emergence as donors in their own right. India, for instance, rejected offers of international help following the tsunami in 2004 and the South Asia earthquake in 2005, and in 2007 Mozambique responded effectively to floods and a cyclone.

In development policy, donors have re-focused attention on the role of the state, and have adopted principles emphasising the harmonisation and alignment of international cooperation, and the national ownership of development strategies. The disaster risk reduction (DRR) agenda also stresses the importance of host government involvement, domestic resilience and governance reform.

IN PRINCIPLE

States have four main roles and responsibilities regarding humanitarian aid:

- they are responsible for 'calling' a crisis and inviting international aid
- they provide assistance and protection
- they are responsible for monitoring and coordinating external assistance
- they set the regulatory and legal frameworks governing relief assistance

These functions are critical to initiating and managing a relief response and will shape its effectiveness.

The state's primary responsibility in responding to disasters is clearly recognised both in law and in statements of principle. For example UN Resolution 46/182 states:

> *The sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In this context, humanitarian assistance should be provided with the consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an appeal by the affected country.*

> *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.*

The Sphere guidelines 'acknowledge the primary role and responsibility of the state to provide assistance when people's capacity to cope has been exceeded'. The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 also notes that each state has primary responsibility for taking effective DRR measures and commits governments to ensuring, 'that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority' (ISDR, 2005).

It is the responsibility of states to ensure the safety and security of their citizens (O'Callaghan and Pantualiano 2007). The protection of civilians, whether understood primarily in physical or legal terms, remains first and foremost the duty of governments, a reflection of their sovereign authority over, and responsibility for, all those living within their territory (Pantuliano and Callaghan 2006).

National governments also set the laws and regulations governing how aid agencies may operate within their territory. Wherever they work, NGOs are obliged to register with the government and are generally required to report on their activities (IFRC, 2007). Government regulations may facilitate or impede the international relief effort. Constraints may include delays in issuing visas or customs clearances and unclear or punitive tax regimes. Since 2001, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has been engaged in a large-scale review of international response, laws, rules and principles in natural disasters (IDRL). The Federation has now produced guidelines for domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance (IFRC, 2007b; Hewitt, 2006; Picard, 2007; Costa, 2008).

The Paris Declaration on the harmonisation of international development assistance aims to ensure its effectiveness by placing responsibility for the delivery and management of aid both on donors *and* on aid-receiving governments. This approach is now being seen as applicable in emergency contexts (OECD-DAC 2005 and 2008a).

> *Ownership – partner countries exercise effective leadership over their development strategies and coordinate development actions*

> *Alignment – donors base their overall support on partner countries' national development strategies, institutions and procedures*

Donor governments have also committed themselves to OECD Principles of Good International Engagement in Fragile States, which include a 'focus on state building as the central objective'. Finally, the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative 'reaffirms the primary responsibility of states'.

At the same time international humanitarian organisations and the governments which fund them are committed to the humanitarian principle of independence. How independence is defined varies and there is a surprising lack of guidance or even discussion about how to put it into practice. The GHD initiative gives by far the broadest definition, focusing as it does on autonomy from 'political, economic, military or other objectives' (GHD, 2003). Bouchet Saulnier (2007: 156) gives a similar definition: 'Humanitarian action must be independent from any political, financial or military pressures. Its only limit, its only constraint and its only goal must be the defense of the human being'.

There has not been much exploration of how a commitment to independence (or of how donors should respect the independence of aid recipients) can be reconciled with a commitment to respect the primary responsibility of the state. Discussing the notion of independence in relation to the Red Cross principles, Jean Pictet (1979) notes the fundamental tension between humanitarian autonomy and the fact that, in practice, aid agencies must work with and alongside national authorities. As Pictet puts it, the Red Cross asserts its political, religious and economic independence and must:

> *be sovereign in its decisions, acts and words: it must be free to show the way towards humanity and justice. It is not admissible for any power whatsoever to make it deviate from the line established for it by its ideals. This independence is also the guarantee of the neutrality of the Red Cross.*

At the same time, however, the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies work as 'auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their Governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries … auxiliary status … constitutes one of the fundamental principles of the Red Cross'. By its very nature, Pictet says, the Red Cross – and other relief organisations –must cooperate with national authorities and obey the laws of the host country.

In conflict contexts, where the state is unable or unwilling to meet the population's basic needs, international humanitarian relief remains the aid instrument of last resort. In these

contexts it may neither be possible nor desirable to work with the government, either because it does not control the areas where services are needed or because donors are unwilling to engage for political reasons. Whatever the case, there is still likely to be a need for longer-term approaches that seek to align with the national government, to the extent possible.

Despite the tensions between them, it is possible to respect both humanitarian and developmental principles. The commitment to neutrality and independence is compatible with the principle of encouraging and supporting governments to protect and assist the civilian population. Humanitarian agencies should pay greater attention to respecting state sovereignty and ownership over humanitarian as well as development strategies, and to view substitution for the state as more of a last resort. Equally, development agencies should be committed to the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality.

IN PRACTICE

International relief efforts have often been criticised for ignoring, sidelining or actively undermining local capacities. Examples include flooding disaster zones with international workers, or poaching local government staff, failing to coordinate properly with host governments, showing scant respect for local government officials and eroding the social contract by making it possible for governments to evade their own responsibilities. Although policies and inter-agency guidelines contain clear commitments to building national capacities, the practice often falls short of the rhetoric.

These problems have often led to tense and even dysfunctional relations between states and international agencies. For instance government officials may regard aid agencies as being over-resourced, unaccountable, and donor-driven, with overpaid staff. At the same time, international agencies may view governments as corrupt, ineffectual and unhelpfully restrictive – a caricature perhaps, but one not too wide of the mark.

The structures and organisational cultures of aid agencies and the attitudes of their staff may also undermine their working relationship with host governments. An ability to speak local languages is clearly important, as is better knowledge of national contexts. But these skills tend to be in short supply. Rapid staff turnover inhibits the development of local knowledge and the personal relationships needed to work effectively with government counterparts.

The real-time evaluation of the 2010 Haiti earthquake response concluded:

> *Immediately after the earthquake, national and local authorities were eager to coordinate with international relief actors. However, this initial close cooperation with the national authorities was not sustained over time. Many government agencies at the national and local levels felt (and in most cases were) excluded from humanitarian coordination and decision making. As a result, the relationship between humanitarian organisations and the government has been strained and there is a risk that the humanitarian response will further weaken the government.* (Grunewald and Binder 2010: 43)

International community support for the Government of Haiti (GoH) was slow in the immediate aftermath. The UN agencies and NGOs were already moving from tents to 'offices in a box' while the country's president was still conducting coordination meetings under a mango tree (Rencoret et al 2010). Bilateral donors provided basic office resources and communication infrastructure for the GoH only three months after the earthquake (Grunewald and Binder 2010). Noting these stark discrepancies, the real-time evaluation called for 'offices in a box' to be provided to key government ministries. Another problem noted in Haiti was that restrictive security arrangements surrounding the international agencies made it difficult for the national authorities to attend meetings being held within the international compound.

The idea that an influx of humanitarian aid may undermine national capacities is not new (see, for example, Juma and Surkhe, 2002; Eade, 2007; Smillie, 2001). The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition review of the response to the 2004 Asian tsunami also found that local institutions were frequently neglected and undermined by the influx of international organisations and examples of '*brushing aside or misleading authorities*' and '*displacement of able local staff by poorly prepared internationals and dominance of English as a 'lingua franca'* (Telford, 2006). In Indonesia, government officials were shocked at the way some international agencies ignored local capacities and authority structures (Willitts-King, 2009).

Behera (2002), the head of the Orissa State Disaster Management Authority in India, looked at relations between the government and NGOs after the 1999 cyclone and 2001 floods. He highlights the need to overcome the common misconceptions whereby NGOs feel that the government wants to restrict their freedoms through exerting authoritative control, and the government views NGOs as talking rather than acting, opposed to any move to ensure transparency and accountability, donor driven, obsessed with sectoral issues and over-critical of government policies. He also notes that the NGOs' 'holier than thou' attitude gets in the way of meaningful collaboration (Behera 2002: 10).

There may even be significant resentment regarding international agencies, which are perceived to be more expensive and less effective than national actors. In Afghanistan, Ghani et al (2005) highlight a dual bureaucracy arising from the fact that the international aid agencies pay far more than senior civil servants earn. This has created a vacuum of skilled professionals in the government as they go to work for NGOs and donors. Jelinek (2006: 8) found that; 'mistrust and resentment are still very much prevalent amongst the vast majority of government personnel outside Kabul', largely as a result of being misinformed or not knowing what NGOs do.

In Sri Lanka, the government made a series of negative public comments about international humanitarian agencies and stepped up rejections of visa and programme applications, increased approval procedures and expelled some agency staff. This created a public discourse of hostility and distrust of humanitarian organisations (Human Rights Council, 2007; CPA, 2009; ECHO, 2008).

The criticism of humanitarian aid as undermining capacities needs to be balanced against recognition of genuine attempts to build and work with existing government capacities. The

comparative wealth and strength of the international humanitarian system can make it an easy target for knee-jerk criticism that fails to acknowledge both real efforts to build capacities, and real constraints to working with local institutions in some contexts.

In Mozambique, for instance, there was wide praise for the government's response to floods in 2007, and the role of the official body responsible for disasters, the INGC, was seen as particularly effective. The creation of the INGC was strongly supported by international donors, who helped to fund the employment and training of 285 staff and the equipping of a national headquarters and several regional offices. The INGC is now located in the Ministry for National Affairs and has established regional emergency-management centres. These are intended to coordinate all disaster-management activities, from the central government to the regional and local administrations, down to the population. The single largest donor was the German agency GTZ, which contributed just under €2 million to Mozambique's disaster-preparedness activities. GTZ also seconded staff to the INGC and paid for projects such as training and simulation exercises and equipping the emergency-response centres (Foley, 2007).

In Colombia UNHCR developed a participatory initiative to integrate internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and in 2002, the departmental government in Narino organised a participatory needs analysis with IDPs in ten municipalities. UNHCR was asked to hire and train a technical team to develop potential projects, and by 2004 more than 100 had been designed and received significant financial pledges from municipal and departmental authorities. By the end of 2006 the initiative (the Plan Integral Unico de Restablecimiento (PIUR)) had attracted US$4.2 million for housing and income generation, 77% from Colombian public funds and 19% from the international community (Zapater, 2007).

Luna (2001) notes that NGOs in the Philippines have worked effectively to support local government in institutionalising stronger disaster-management practice. The Listening Project in Ethiopia found people commenting positively on increased coordination between NGOs and government since a decentralisation process began in 2003 (CDA, 2006). There often seems to be a distinction between generalised resentment on the part of governments at what is seen as international agency extravagance or lack of respect for national governments and positive experiences with NGO work at local levels.

Regional organisations can also help to build national capacities. In Latin America, for instance, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) has brought disaster preparedness onto health agendas, and has helped to establish disaster-management offices in 75% of the health ministries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Fagen, 2008). In Africa, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has sought to strengthen risk assessments by supporting national-level vulnerability assessment committees (SADC, 2009).

In Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has appointed a humanitarian coordinator and formed an agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (ADMER). The response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and the critical role played by ASEAN within the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) demonstrates the importance of engaging with regional entities (Belanger and Horsey, 2008; Creach and Fan, 2008). The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC),

Pacific Island Forum (PIF), Pacific Islands Applied Geo-science Commission (SOPAC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) are also potential interlocutors for regional disaster-management coordination. Humanitarian agencies might also engage with other bodies such as the newly created Australia-Indonesia facility for disaster reduction, the Asian Disaster Prevention Centre (ADPC) and the ISDR Asian Partnership Platform.

A particular challenge is whether and how to build state capacity in situations of armed conflict. In Sri Lanka, for instance, it was difficult to promote the state's responsibility for protecting and assisting conflict-affected civilians in the midst of a war in which government institutions were central protagonists. Capacity-building in such contexts needs to focus on questions of political will as well as government capacity, and on encouraging governments to uphold their commitments under international humanitarian and human rights law.

In Sri Lanka UNHCR addressed capacity constraints at the central and district levels by placing key personnel within ministries and providing direct institutional support to the National Human Rights Commission. In Darfur, particularly following the expulsions of international aid agencies, relations between the government and international humanitarian agencies are fraught (HPG and ALNAP, 2009). DARA (2010) note that cooperation between the international community and the government's Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) has been significantly reduced. But even in difficult environments it is important not to completely bypass the government's technical institutions that have responsibility for service delivery, and there may be opportunities for strategic engagement with technical line ministries, particularly at the local level. In South Sudan, for instance, Save the Children has invested in working with and supporting local government officials, 'keeping them informed and involving them in decisions about the nature of activities to be implemented and where it planned to work'. The process has not been easy: the agency has had to invest additional staff time and resources to work with local government partners, and staff turnover means that 'collaboration and relationships of interpersonal trust have to be continually rebuilt' (Commins et al, 2007).

Box 1: Government and international aid agency interaction in Pakistan

An evaluation of the 2009 displacement crisis in Pakistan noted that the government was both a party to the conflict and a gatekeeper for humanitarian assistance. Access constraints in the form of government controls completely shaped the humanitarian response. The UN's programme in Pakistan was closely aligned with government priorities and the evaluation found that UN agencies did not work in an impartial, independent or neutral manner. The international humanitarian community did not challenge these limitations strongly enough and push issues of humanitarian space up the agenda (Cosgrave et al 2010).

Government officials saw the international fundraising efforts as competing with their own. The government regarded it as politically problematic to launch an appeal because of its association with failed states, and also resisted the launch of a second humanitarian response plan. The evaluation also notes inconsistencies between policies at the federal and provincial levels (Cosgrave et al, 2010). Similar issues were seen in the response to the 2010 floods, as h the government delayed the launch of the Flash Appeal and was extremely

sensitive about the language being used. Again, cooperation was frequently more effective at provincial and local levels.

The government led the initial search and rescue phase and the military played a leading role in establishing temporary camps. However, further government involvement in the relief phase has been limited with the government citing a lack of 'fiscal space' to respond more fully and asking the international community to lead in the relief and early recovery phase. The government has pledged a PKR 20,0000 (US$250) payment to all flood-affected families and started to distribute 'Watan' cards for this grant. However, reports suggest that that less than 5% of the affected population had been processed by October 2010 and on more than one occasion the distribution of cards has triggered rioting (IOM, 2010).

Even this, however, this is a rare mention of the government's own actions amidst the copious documentation of what international aid agencies are doing. It remains difficult simply to find out how governments are responding and the implications for international agencies in terms of substituting or complementing the government.

There is an emerging trend of greater government capacity and willingness to respond to emergencies. For example, rapid economic grown in the Asia-Pacific region means that there are more countries with substantial resources of their own to enable them to respond to disasters. Both disaster preparedness and national response capacity have been significantly strengthened. Of the 37 countries covered by the OCHA regional office 36 have established national disaster-management authorities, mandated to build capacity and coordinate domestic response activities. There is also growing military capacity for, and involvement in, disaster response throughout the region. Shushilan and Development Initiatives (2010) found that Bangladesh has a long tradition of domestic response to humanitarian crises and that this response is, 'increasing and diversifying by source and type. It is becoming more prompt, more efficient and reasonably well managed.'

The rhetoric of disaster preparedness is, however, ahead of reality in the Asia-Pacific region. International actors and national governments in the region have increasingly called attention to the importance of strengthening national capacities for disaster response, and to developing relationships with national disaster-management authorities, but there remain huge variations between what is established in principle and what happens in practice. Governments' aspirational commitments tend to exceed capacity on the ground.

ALTERNATIVE MODELS

There is growing interest in different models to deliver services in fragile states in ways which move away from short-term humanitarian financing delivered by international agencies towards longer-term, more state-focused approaches, especially in chronic crises where emergency aid has sometimes gone on for decades.

Chandran and Jones (2008: 41) argue that 'careful coordination, regulation and oversight of non-state providers are essential to ensure that they align with government priorities when appropriate and to prevent them from overriding local capacity and resources'. Collier (2007; 2010) suggests the use of 'independent service authorities' to deliver basic services,

managed jointly by the government, donors and civil society. Although the model Collier proposes has yet to be implemented in practice, there are examples of state-led processes to provide services and safety nets with strong civil society involvement, including the productive safety net in Ethiopia, the hunger safety net in Kenya and the basic package of health services in Afghanistan, where the respective governments set policies but NGOs were contracted to deliver services (Sondorp, 2004; Strong et al, 2006; Devereux et al, 2008; Hunger Safety Net, 2008). Other options include quasi-government agencies to run programmes and the creation of budgets which, while publicly administered, are managed separately from other state finances (Commins et al, 2008).

In situations where it is difficult to engage with central government departments due to lack of capacity or willingness, or because of political differences, it may still be possible to work with local governments and technical line ministries in delivering services. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the DFID-funded Protracted Relief Programme supports 12 major NGOs in a diverse range of activities aimed at boosting food production, improving access to water and providing care to the chronically ill. Government agencies at provincial, district and village levels are heavily involved, and there is some engagement with the agricultural research and extension agency within the Ministry of Agriculture. The UN agencies involved in the programme, FAO and UNICEF, liaise with the government at national level (Jones et al, 2006).

Even when it is difficult to work with a government it is important to take a long-term view, recognising that it will eventually take responsibility for delivery of basic services. It is still important to respect state sovereignty and to attempt to involve the government as much as possible even if aid is provided primarily through non-state agencies. One way to do this is 'shadow systems alignment', which aims to avoid undermining the state's capacity to deliver in the future. In the short term, shadow systems alignment would organise aid delivery to be compatible with existing or future state structures rather than duplicating or undermining them. The long-term aim is for the state to provide these services.

Shadow systems alignment is a state-avoiding approach that does not give control over resources to an authority or government, but does use structures, institutions or systems that are parallel to but compatible with existing or potential state arrangements. The key is to ensure that the systems are compatible with each other, so external interventions are designed as parallel but compatible organisational structures and operational procedures. A central element is that of providing information and developing systems such as budget classifications and budgeting cycles, administrative boundaries, accounting procedures and audit systems and staffing structures in a compatible format (e.g. budget years and classifications) (ODI 2005). To date, however, there are few, if any, examples of shadow systems alignment actually being used.

Bellour and Mahoney (2009) provide a useful outline of ways in which humanitarian agencies might seek to strengthen capacity. Noting that capacity development has tended to focus on training, they emphasise a broader range of possible inputs including on-the-job learning, action research, coaching and mentoring, peer-knowledge exchanges, participatory learning methods based on adult-learning principles, knowledge networks and fairs, knowledge sharing through collaborative projects, South–South knowledge exchange, community of practice approaches, and on-the-job training combined with long-term

supportive supervision. International agencies could second people to mentor and coach staff in national line ministries. In Afghanistan, UNDP provided experts to work within the government's Aid Coordination Unit, coaching the host government gradually to assume ownership. A good example of South to South learning is Mozambique's use of disaster officials from Guatemala to provide capacity support (Foley, 2007). Bellour and Mahoney (2009) describe UNICEF's capacity support in Uganda's child-protection sector, which served to raise awareness among central and district government authorities that a focus on child soldiers should give way to a broader approach to child protection. UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare and district departments in developing training modules for community-based child-protection committees.

It is important, however, to be realistic about the state's delivery capacity. In particular there is need to guard against moving from a situation where there is patchy but effective NGO delivery to one where the government is supposedly providing services but lacks the capacity to do so. This can restrict access to health care or education as clinics or schools stop functioning because staff are not being paid or medicines are not being delivered. The same may be true in relation to social assistance with vulnerable populations no longer receiving emergency support through food aid or cash transfers, but with no transition to longer-term social assistance.

Box 2: Post-conflict rebuilding of the health service sector in Timor-Leste

International donors supported a phased transition strategy to rebuild health services in Timor-Leste. The process lasted about two years, from early 2000 to the end of 2001).

1. Emergency re-establishment of services: NGOs restored essential services that had been disrupted by the violence. An Interim Health Authority (IHA) was established, with a team of senior Timorese health professionals in Dili and one in each district, along with a small number of international experts. IHA staff made assessment visits to all districts to prepare a sectoral planning exercise.

2. Establishing the policy framework and planning: The health authority started work on a policy framework and on medium-term planning and national preventive health programmes, including immunisation campaigns. Memoranda of understanding were signed with NGOs for each district to formalise district service standards.

3. Handover and capacity development: The Ministry of Health took over the financing of a majority of the NGOs in the districts. The first round of staff recruitment was completed and many previous NGO workers were hired. Several senior staff members were sent for training in public-health management.

4. Handover completed: At the request of the government, NGOs gradually withdrew from the districts and the Ministry of Health assumed management of all health facilities. International doctors replaced departing NGO staff while Timorese doctors received training overseas. A few NGOs remained to provide specialised services on a nationwide basis.

Source: Brinkerhoff, 2007 cited in Meagher, 2008

EMERGENCY CONTEXTS AND ASSESSMENT

A distinction is often made between different types of crisis, such as quick and slow-onset natural disasters and conflicts. It is assumed to be relatively easy to work with national authorities in natural disasters and more difficult in conflicts. There is an element of truth to such a characterisation. Where the government is an active party in a conflict, its role in protecting civilians raises more difficult issues than when a government is responding to an earthquake in an otherwise stable context. But conflict is not the only variable and it is also important to consider a government's capacity and willingness to assist the population in times of disaster. In Colombia the way that the international humanitarian system engages with the government in responding to the needs of IDPs in its long-running conflict is very different from how it engages with the government of Sudan in relation to Darfur.

Most definitions of what constitutes 'a disaster' include a clause to the effect that events are on such a scale that local capacities have been overwhelmed. For example, the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) defines a disaster as: 'A serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses which exceed the ability of society to cope using only its own resources' (UN, 1991). Similarly, Oxfam GB defines a humanitarian crisis as 'any situation in which there is an exceptional and widespread threat to life, health or basic subsistence, that is beyond the coping capacity of individuals and the community' (cited in Darcy and Hofmann, 2003). But how do aid agencies *know* when government capacity has been overwhelmed? And how can a government judge whether its capacity is sufficient in a given crisis, or whether it needs to appeal for international assistance?

This is more than a technical question. Making such an assessment is inherently political, and such considerations often weigh heavily as donor governments decide whether and how to intervene. Humanitarian aid to Zimbabwe and Darfur, for instance, is delivered through international organisations, bypassing the state because donor governments see the governments in Harare and Khartoum as actively involved in creating the humanitarian crisis. Decisions about aid donations may also be influenced by perceptions of corruption in recipient countries. The 2001/2 response in Malawi, for example, was delivered through international organisations in part because of donor perceptions about government corruption (Darcy and Hofmann, 2003). In other contexts, humanitarian aid is seen as contributing to building up the state and attempts to bolster fledgling governments, as in Timor-Leste and Afghanistan. The decision about how to deliver humanitarian aid and the degree to which donors are prepared to work with host governments often reflects how donors perceive these governments just as much as responding to assessed need and capacity.

The growing literature on fragile states provides a useful set of categories to analyse the role of the government in disaster response. Definitions of fragility emphasise a lack of capacity (capability/effectiveness) and willingness (will/legitimacy) to perform key government functions (Meagher, 2008). Although any such analysis needs to take the specific context and history into account, it is possible to identify three broad categories (adapted from Chandran and Jones (2008):

- States where there is an existing or emerging social contract with its citizens, by which the state undertakes to assist and protect them in the face of disasters.
- States that are weak and have extremely limited capacity and resources to meet their responsibilities to assist and protect their citizens in the face of disasters.
- States that lack the will to negotiate a resilient social contract, including assisting and protecting their citizens in times of disaster.

An analysis based on these broad categories could inform strategies for how to engage with the state in responding to a disaster. Where states are effectively meeting the population's needs in times of disaster, international humanitarian agencies are more likely to play supportive roles, such as building capacity, filling gaps and encouraging more effective responses. Where states are weak but have some willingness to meet needs, a combination of substitution and capacity building will probably be appropriate. States that are unwilling to assist the population or which are themselves actively involved in creating a crisis pose the greatest challenge; in these circumstances, it is likely that a combination of substitution and advocacy, to encourage states to fulfil their obligations, will be needed.

The ICRC explicitly distinguishes between different modes of action in relation to the state, and strives to ensure that the authorities fully assume their responsibilities towards those affected by armed conflict (ICRC, 2008: 10).

- *Persuasion:* confidential representations addressed to the authorities and aimed at convincing them to enhance respect for IHL (international humanitarian law) and other fundamental rules protecting people in situations of violence, and to take measures which improve the situation of people affected by such situations.
- *Support:* activities aimed at providing assistance to the authorities to carry out their functions and fulfil their responsibilities.
- *Direct services/substitution:* activities providing direct services to people in need, often in place of authorities who are not able or willing to do so.
- *Mobilisation:* activities aimed at prevailing upon third parties to influence the behaviour or actions of the authorities, to support them, or to provide direct services to people in need.
- *Denunciation (only in exceptional circumstances and with strict conditions):* public declarations regarding violations of IHL or other fundamental rules protecting people in situations of violence, committed by specific actors, for the purpose of bringing a halt to such violations or preventing their recurrence.

Aid agencies are generally weak at assessing capacities as well as needs, although there are tools for capacity analysis such as Save the Children's Child Rights Situation Analysis (CRSA), which provides a foundation for understanding the state's responsibility as a duty-bearer for children's rights. The monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian assistance also tends to focus on what international aid agencies are doing and to neglect the roles of the host government.

APPEALS

International relief can only be activated in response to a formal request for assistance from the affected government. Governments are often reluctant to appeal for help because it can

be politically difficult for them to declare a disaster for fear of appearing weak and damaging national pride; governments may mistrust the motives behind the provision of international assistance, or that their sovereignty will be undermined.

There needs to be a more sensitive way for governments to be able to request international assistance without damaging national pride. Donors also need triggers for providing assistance whether via international or national channels in the absence of a government declaring the existence of a disaster. The ICRC has suggested a more flexible model, whereby governments make a general statement welcoming international assistance but retain the right to decide which organisations should participate in the response, for example by linking legal arrangements such as visas and customs clearances to a registration system (IFRC, 2007a: 93).

Governments in the Asia-Pacific region in particular feel the need for new systems for welcoming emergency assistance. Already there has been a shift away from traditional coordinated and flash appeal processes (CAPs and FAs) to a greater reliance on the CERF and other pooled funding mechanisms, as well as bilateral funding patterns unique to the region.

An issue in the Asia-Pacific region is that many of the natural disasters create small and medium-scale emergencies for which the international system is ill equipped because of the need for the fairly cumbersome appeal process before significant resources can be mobilised. This means that there is often either a large international response to major disasters and the corresponding influx of aid agencies or very little international support. There is therefore an unmet need for more flexible mechanisms and appropriate capacities for responding to small and medium-scale as well as large-scale disasters.

COORDINATION

States have a clear role in coordinating and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of external assistance. According to the IFRC's 'Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance' (IDRL), 'affected States have the sovereign right to coordinate, regulate and monitor, disaster relief and recovery assistance provided by assisting actors on their territory, consistent with international law' (IFRC, 2007b). Line ministries are usually involved in sectoral coordination, disaster units with overall coordination, and local and regional governments with local-level coordination. There may be legislation in place to formalise these coordination roles; in Guatemala, for instance, a law passed in 1996 obliges all private and state bodies to cooperate with the country's system of disaster management (Picard, 2007). In practice, however, there is often a tense relationship between government coordination systems and those set up by international agencies, and coordination problems are common. A high proportion of respondents to an IFRC survey reported that some international agencies bypass national coordination structures and fail to inform the domestic authorities of their activities (IFRC, 2007b).

These tensions have been seen most recently in the introduction of the cluster system. Concerns about the way in which national authorities were included in cluster coordination processes led to revised guidance that stresses their role (IASC, 2007). A recent evaluation

of cluster coordination, however, found a continuing failure to engage with national authorities sufficiently:

> *In their current implementation, clusters largely exclude national and local actors and often fail to link with, build on, or support existing coordination and response mechanisms. Among other reasons, this is due to insufficient analysis of local structures and capacities before cluster implementation, as well as a lack of clear transition and exit criteria and strategies. As a result, the introduction of clusters has in several cases weakened national and local ownership and capacities.* (Steets et al 2010)

Initiatives within clusters have focused on national capacities such as working groups for building the capacity of national stakeholders within the health and education clusters and efforts to strengthen national capacities within the nutrition and protection clusters. Relatively small investments in national capacities for coordination can be important: in the Horn of Africa, for instance, UNICEF has played a significant role in building national capacity to coordinate humanitarian response in Kenya and Ethiopia (Bellour and Mahoney, 2009).

Despite these efforts, international coordination systems tend not to be sufficiently respectful of the host governments' primary role in responding to emergencies within their national territory. Government officials are not systematically invited to coordination meetings, nor is there enough effort to ensure that they can participate actively in them, for instance through the translation of key documents and the use of local languages. As Bennett et al (2006: 11**)** found in relation to the response to the Asian tsunami: 'where coordination meetings are dominated by international agencies, English becomes the medium of communication at the expense of already marginalised local participants'. Language was a real barrier to greater government engagement in responding to the West Sumatra earthquake in Indonesia and in response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Harvey et al 2010).

Box 3: Coordination between national and international actors in Indonesia

Indonesia's 2007 disaster-management law created a new high-level agency for disaster management, the BNBP. At the time of the West Java and West Sumatra earthquakes in 2009, the BNBP had been established at the national level but not completely at the provincial and district levels. The decentralisation process underway in Indonesia devolves significant power to around 30 provinces and 450 districts. Two important challenges are the different capacities of the provincial governments and ensuring consistency of new structures. The operational capacity at provincial level is generally quite limited. Although there are variations, the capacity to respond tends to be located at district levels.

OCHA recognised the importance of coordinating with the Government of Indonesia at national, provincial and district levels. In Padang (West Sumatra) OCHA made efforts to invite government officials to coordination meetings and to keep them engaged. In the first two weeks, government officials did participate in general coordination meetings, helped by the fact that the head of the office in Padang was Indonesian and spoke Bahasa. An OCHA official was also one of the few international representatives invited to attend daily government coordination meetings. At the cluster level, there were strong partnerships

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with the government in sectors such as health and education where there were clear counterpart line ministries.

Government attendance at the general coordination meetings dropped off after the first two weeks, however, and the meetings started to be held solely in English. It was also difficult for OCHA to engage district-level governments in coordination given their limited capacities and the fact that six districts were affected. The issue of language was a key constraint for government officials and national NGOs, making it hard for them to attend and play an active part in general coordination and cluster meetings. Approaches to tackling this varied. The shelter cluster had simultaneous translation facilities. Some education clusters provided translation in all meetings and just accepted that this meant extending the schedule, while others switched between Bahasa and English depending on who was attending.

OCHA is currently caught in something of a Catch 22. It recognises the need to move towards greater national ownership and leadership in coordinating and responding to disasters. But in high-profile disasters OCHA ends up being completely absorbed by the influx of hundreds of international aid agencies. The system tends to default to what it is familiar with, which is coordination largely among international agencies and in English. This excludes nationals and either marginalises them and/or leads to two responses running in parallel, and only limited understanding between them. This could be seen in Padang, where international aid, government-led assistance and the efforts of national NGOs were coordinated in parallel rather than jointly.

Source: Harvey et al 2010

If the international system is serious about meeting its commitment to promoting greater national ownership and leadership in responding to disasters, then representatives must be capable of holding meetings in the local language(s). International aid agencies must accept the need to provide translation facilities in meetings, even if this means the meetings take longer, and to make greater efforts to recruit more senior national staff, international staff with the relevant language skills and translators. It would be helpful if OCHA invested in the capacity to supply professional translators for documents and in meetings and providing simultaneous translation equipment as part of its preparedness and contingency planning.

In Haiti following the 2010 earthquake, where international aid agencies were criticised for failing to coordinate sufficiently with national actors, international NGOs that belong to the Humanitarian Country Team have developed a contract that promises their support, coherency, transparency, etc to the government - a first attempt to formulate rules of engagement. The WASH cluster in Haiti is also widely seen as an example of good practice, with good cooperation between international agencies and the relevant ministry (DINEPA). Coordination meetings were held in the ministry and with a Creole/Kreyól translator and chaired by senior ministry staff. A contract between DINEPA and NGOs setting out their respective roles and responsibilities has since been developed (pers comm.). In the response to the 2009/10 typhoons in the Philippines there were two parallel coordination systems – one for national coordination and one for the international effort (Polastro 2010).

The rapid turnover of humanitarian staff inhibits the development of local knowledge and the personal relationships needed to work effectively with government counterparts. As MacRae (2008) found in the international response to the Jogjakarta earthquake in Indonesia, 'staff turnover was astonishingly high' and 'it seemed that anybody who built up any local knowledge left before they were able to use it'. He argues that the almost total lack of local knowledge, language skills or experience among the international aid workers seriously inhibited their ability to understand anything more than the material dimensions of the local situation or to communicate with government officials or local people.

A critical problem at the global level is the lack of opportunities for Western and G77 governments and international aid agencies to come together to discuss humanitarian issues. In the United Nations any dialogue on humanitarian issues among member states is primarily either in the General Assembly (GA) or at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since 1998, ECOSOC has included a dedicated high-level humanitarian segment. This is the only official forum for donor and disaster-affected states to discuss humanitarian issues, and is therefore an important arena in which to highlight political and policy concerns at the intergovernmental level. In these forums the G77 represents 132 developing countries the largest single coalition of developing nations.

The G77 has increasingly raised concerns about the way in which humanitarian action is carried out, particularly with regard to state sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. It stresses the primary role of the affected state in the 'initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory'. Western donor governments tend to emphasise the need to respect the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence, and to ensure 'safe and unhindered access'.[1] The G77 remains cautious about the humanitarian reform agenda, primarily because most of the reforms have been developed outside the GA and ECOSOC and the G77 countries consider them to have been imposed on developing countries without sufficient consultation. In contrast, the Central Emergency Response Fund, which was approved in the GA, is a policy reform that has unprecedented support from the G77 and Western donor governments.

The G77 and Western donor governments have not had many opportunities to discuss definitional issues, policy emphasis and the reform agenda outside the UN, where political positions are deeply entrenched and seldom reveal the diversity of views among G77 member states. Existing forums outside the UN barely represent the G77 member states. The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative remains a small agenda, made up primarily of OECD-DAC donors. Few opportunities have been sought to widen the dialogue with non-DAC donors, with the exception of the accession states of eastern Europe.[2] Other forums, such as the OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG), and the Humanitarian Liaison Working Group (HLWG), also have only a narrow base. The ODSG is a donor country 'board' of primarily Western states, and although other countries take part in the HLWG it is only an ad hoc and informal body. G77 governments are represented on the executive boards of UN humanitarian agencies and take part in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent

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[1] ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, 2008
[2] In 2008, a number of donor governments launched a Geneva-based dialogue with affected states on issues of shared interest, including support to IDPs and the role of regional organisations in facilitating access and response efforts. It is unclear whether this initiative will be repeated.

Movement conference. While these provide valuable opportunities to discuss humanitarian issues, they are limited to a single organisational focus.

CIVIL–MILITARY COORDINATION

The military is increasingly engaged in humanitarian activities in the Asia-Pacific region and in many countries the armed forces are mandated to provide the first emergency response. In India, for instance, the Disaster Management Act provides for the establishment of a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) consisting of eight battalions stationed around the country. These troops are trained in disaster response and integrated with state disaster-response mechanisms. The NRDF was active in the response to floods in Bihar in 2008 (Price and Bhatt, 2009; Harvey 2009).

Existing guidelines on using the armed forces in disaster responses, such as the UN Military and Civil Defence Asset (MCDA) Register and the Oslo Guidelines, focus largely on the deployment of international forces in complex emergencies (UN, 2003; UN, 2006). But the guidelines fail to address the practical question of how humanitarian agencies should relate to the armed forces of affected states. Some countries, including India, have rejected the Oslo Guidelines because they were not developed inter-governmentally and are seen as impinging on their sovereignty. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s reference paper *Civil–Military Relationship in Complex Emergencies* covers national militaries, as do guidelines produced by the ICRC on the use of armed protection for humanitarian assistance (IASC, 2004; ICRC, 1995). However, these documents focus on how humanitarian agencies relate to the military, rather than the latters' role in providing assistance.

A study of coordination in the Asia-Pacific region found that there was a need for stronger engagement with the role of the military in disaster management and that there remains much to do in terms of preparedness. OCHA and the UN more generally feel that they lack the resources to do this effectively (Harvey et al 2010).

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

An issue in developing a better understanding of what states do in response to disasters and how they relate to international agencies is that there is virtually no monitoring and evaluation of government responses. International aid agencies are getting better at monitoring and evaluating their own work, but rarely include any analysis of host government responses. Two recent reports by Development Initiatives are exceptional in this respect (DRT and Development Initiatives,2010; Shushilan and Development Initiatives, 2010). Governments themselves seldom commission or publish internal or independent analyses or evaluations of their disaster responses. The result is there is no critical, independent analysis of the impact, effectiveness or efficiency of large-scale government responses to recent disasters such as Pakistan's response to the earthquake, China's response in Sichuan, Bangladesh's response to Cyclone Sidr or Indonesia's response in West Sumatra. Governments might be sensitive about allowing independent evaluations of their provision of emergency relief, but this critical dimension of the overall relief response needs to be better documented and understood.

In Bangladesh, for instance,, the government responded to recent emergencies by providing both cash and food through Gratuitous Relief, vulnerable group feeding and public works.

But there is little documentation and only limited details about these programmes or of the overall government response. People interviewed for a brief study on choices between cash and food assistance said that government relief is often spread very thinly so that large numbers of people receive only very small amounts of food or cash. For example, one interviewee described government's vulnerable group feeding programmes as a 'sprinkling of resources on an arbitrary basis' with little serious impact on household food security or nutrition. One concern is that the beneficiaries of even small amounts of government support risk being excluded from other assistance (Harvey 2010, forthcoming). It is likely that these issues are relevant to other government responses – there is a reluctance to target because exclusion is politically difficult, which means that government resources are often spread more widely but more thinly than international relief.

Shushilan and Development Initiatives (2010) note that the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management's budget in Bangladesh has increased from US$235 million in 2005 to US$824 million in 2010/11. This is in addition to 18 disaster-related government programmes in other ministries with total budgets of US$700 million in 2009/10. Yet these significant levels of domestic expenditure often go largely unnoticed and unrecorded by international humanitarian agencies.

FUNDING

There has been a clear shift in the way donors provide aid, from direct bilateral support to governments in the 1970s and 1980s to funding international humanitarian agencies in the 1990s and 2000s. By the early 1990s, the share of European Commission's relief budget that was channelled directly through national governments had fallen to 6% from over 90% in 1976 (Macrae, 2001).

OECD donors overwhelmingly channel their funds through international aid agencies, and increasingly through the UN via consolidated and flash appeals, the CERF and Common Humanitarian Funds. This is the case even among donors that provide direct budget support to governments for development. Thus, while the total funding for humanitarian work has increased and new mechanisms have been developed, the proportion of government-to-government relief assistance has declined.

Funding for humanitarian action is typically short-term, often unpredictable and tied to annual and (usually) under-funded appeals. Aid volatility in fragile states is twice as high as in other low-income countries, in part because of abrupt changes in donor priorities. Funding also tends to be tied to particular sectors or projects. Initiatives such as GHD and new mechanisms including the CERF have focused largely on improving the way funding is provided to international organisations. A greater focus on building national capacities to respond to disasters and on principled engagement with governments to help them meet their humanitarian responsibilities reinforces the need for longer-term, multi-year funding, particularly in protracted crises. International humanitarian agencies can provide basic relief on a short-term basis, but working with state authorities to strengthen their capacity to respond to disasters requires a longer-term approach.

In addition to changes in funding mechanisms and channels among the 'traditional' donors, the emergence of developing countries as donors as well as recipients of humanitarian aid has led to a greater emphasis on direct assistance to disaster-affected states and support for

state sovereignty. For non-DAC donors, aid is a regular component of bilateral diplomacy, and as such channelling aid directly to the affected state remains their most important approach. The ten largest non-DAC donors disbursed an average of 38% of their humanitarian assistance directly to the recipient government between 2000 and 2008, compared to just 2.5% for the top ten DAC donors. In Pakistan, the OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS) reports that 66% of non-DAC contributions were channelled to the government, primarily through the Ministry of Finance or the President's Relief Fund. This compares to 21% for all donors in the earthquake response (Harmer and Martin, 2010).

Harmer and Martin (2010) note that, 'arguably, the tendency of non-DAC donors to provide funds through the affected state, at least in natural disaster responses where the government has the capability and means to manage the response effort, has the effect of supporting and building domestic capacity, rather than circumventing it'. They found that the approach has also proved important in allowing non-DAC donors to successfully negotiate access. In the response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008, for example, ASEAN's long-standing policies of 'non interference' and 'constructive engagement' with the authorities in Myanmar made it an acceptable interlocutor, and the Association was the driving force behind the overall intervention, especially in its early phases (Creach and Fan, 2008).

KEY QUESTIONS

Harvey (2009) concluded that, 'a long-overdue reappraisal of the roles and responsibilities of states in relation to humanitarian action is finally taking place' and this ALNAP meeting provides welcome evidence that such a review is gathering pace. The governments of many developing country government's are becoming more assertive in wanting their sovereign primacy in responding to disaster to be respected and more capable in leading disaster responses. This does not mean that principled independent and neutral international humanitarian action is no longer needed, and substitution for the state will sometimes still be appropriate, particularly in situations of civil conflict. But international humanitarian agencies do need to be more consistent in fulfilling their stated commitments to encourage and support states to meet their responsibilities to assist and protect their own citizens. International agencies should more systematically assess state capacities, invest more in joint contingency planning with governments and link better with the disaster risk reduction agenda, which does recognise the primary role of governments in disaster risk management. The trend will be to move from delivering aid in ways that substitute for the state to supporting states to meet their own responsibilities and advocating for them to address gaps in responses.

The onus for change, however, is not just on international aid agencies. In order to meet their responsibilities to assist and protect their citizens in times of disaster, and fulfil the commitments made in the Hyogo Framework and embodied in international humanitarian and human rights law, many governments need to invest more in their capacity to manage disaster risk. This is both the humane thing to do and can also be politically popular and economically effective. International agencies too often shoulder the blame for the shared failures of governments and aid agencies to work effectively together. Both sides need to work at the relationship. Aid agencies and donors currently bypass and marginalise governments partly because of a lack of trust in their ability to deliver effective and accountable relief assistance. This lack of confidence can only be tackled by government's

making a stronger case to donors and aid agencies, demonstrating effectiveness and building up trust over time.

It is also important to acknowledge an alternative perspective, which could be called the 'get real' school of thought. People who hold this position regard much of the pious commitment to work more with governments as politically correct but unrealistic. They would argue that there are many contexts where governments are either parties to a conflict, flouting humanitarian and human rights law, too corrupt or simply lack the capacity for international aid agencies to work more closely with them than they do already. In these contexts this line of argument maintains, international aid agencies should keep their engagement with government to a basic minimum and preserve operational independence; keeping governments informed about what they are doing and maintaining a low profile to avoid interference or getting thrown out of the country.

A problem with this viewpoint is that keeping governments at arm's length is often unfeasible. To believe otherwise is politically naive and opens agencies to being manipulated by astute and controlling authorities. Aid agencies working in difficult environments need strong political antennae in order to work with the authorities, and be prepared to both formulate collective 'red lines' and to act on them if they are no longer able to function.

A number of critical questions to explore at the ALNAP meeting flow from these broad conclusions.

1. *What are government perspectives on interactions between themselves and international humanitarian agencies and the scope for improvement?*

The potential for international aid agencies to undermine or inappropriately substitute for the state has led to often tense relationships between them. International humanitarian agencies still do not talk enough with the governments of developing countries about how they should interact, and existing dialogues are often framed in a negative way. Current debates on humanitarian issues within the UN are too often antagonistic with governments protecting and defending agreed language rather than attempting to move forward.

There is a need for a more constructive dialogue and for more open-ended engagement with the G77 countries, and for greater encouragement to the members of the G77 to engage in humanitarian discussions both within ECOSOC and the GA, but also outside these forums. There needs to be more thought about where this dialogue could take place, and how it could be facilitated and conducted without it being seen as a Western-initiated or dominated initiative. This ALNAP meeting is an example of a possible way forward and may perhaps lead to ongoing discussions.

2. *What evidence and research exist, and how might they be strengthened?*

There is ample documentation of critical evaluations showing the tendency of international humanitarian aid to undermine national capacities but much less of efforts to work with and strengthen national actors. Such efforts are seldom publicised, which leads to a lopsided view of humanitarian action that is focused on high-profile crises where international agencies overwhelm their national counterparts. This overlooks the work to build capacities that is often going on in more neglected crises.

International humanitarian agencies remain too focused on their own role, and on how international aid is financed and delivered. Reforms in humanitarian assistance such as cluster approaches to coordination and financing initiatives, the good humanitarian donorship agenda and forthcoming milestones such as revised Sphere standards should all include a greater focus on how aid agencies relate to governments.

The existing literature seldom gets beyond relatively superficial critiques of aid agencies undermining national capacities. What is lacking is a more nuanced understanding of why this continues to takes place despite the agencies' best intentions to work with and support national actors – and what can be done about it. The emphasis on critiques also risks alienating the humanitarian practitioners who need to be influenced to do things differently, and not write off such reports as just another example of knee-jerk criticism that is not based on an understanding of the operational constraints on humanitarian organisations, particularly in high-profile crises. This points to the need for a follow-up research agenda to document attempts to build national capacities, their successes and failures and emerging good practice.

3. *What are examples of good practice? What are the lessons from these examples?*

While there are still too few well-documented examples of good practice, there are some examples that can be highlighted – for instance the partnership between international donors and the Government of Mozambique in building up the capacity of the INGC and the development by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement of the guidelines for domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance. What these examples suggest is that it takes time to build stronger and more effective working relationships between governments and international humanitarian agencies - they cannot be created overnight. The need for long-term investment in developing partnerships and investing in strengthened capacities entails greater cooperation between the development and humanitarian wings of international organisations, and a stronger focus by development actors on disaster risk management and greater investment in contingency planning and preparedness processes.

4. What lessons from the wider world about partnerships/collaborations?

International humanitarian agencies could learn more from their development counterparts in thinking about how to interact more effectively with governments. There is a need to think about how to apply the Paris principles in humanitarian crises, about what lessons can be taken from development approaches to capacity building and what donor commitments to 'focus on state-building as the central objective' in fragile states mean for humanitarian actors (OECD, 2007). Humanitarian action in conflicts and fragile states risks being ever more marginalised as donors focus on state-building, security and stabilisation. Maintaining a space for principled, independent humanitarian action should include a focus on how international actors relate to states through principled engagement.

There may also be scope for learning from situations where the private sector has to collaborate very quickly and across cultural and political boundaries, and from private-sector engagement with governments. Partnerships between the armed forces to provide assistance in times of disaster may also provide lessons. Representatives from both the

private sector and the military will present lessons from their experience at the ALNAP meeting.

5. *What do different actors need to do differently?*

Evaluations of high-profile crises such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti continue to identify problems with coordination and language, and the tendency of the international system to exclude national authorities, in part because of the tendency to rely on English as a lingua franca. There may be some immediate practical solutions to these problems. Should donors support OCHA and cluster leads to invest in simultaneous translation equipment? Is there a need to focus more on language skills when recruiting and deploying staff? Should 'offices in a box' be a standard part of what OCHA and cluster leads provide for government counterparts? And should there be a review of ways in which security restrictions can hamper engagement with national authorities?

The Haiti earthquake response also illustrated once again the problems caused in high-profile disasters when an influx of hundreds of aid agencies overwhelms the coordination structure, making it much harder to work effectively with national authorities. It is difficult to see what can be done about this within an unregulated international system but it might be possible for national governments to exert greater control. Should governments link legal facilities (such as expedited visas or customs clearance) to a system of registration, as recommended by ICRC (2007b)? Who needs to have what sort of dialogue in order to restrain the number of international organisations converging on high-profile emergencies?

The international humanitarian system also needs a new model for appealing for assistance and a process for developing it. How could governments request international assistance without damaging national pride or risking political sensitivities? Should there be a form of appeal that welcomes assistance only from international agencies that already have an in-country presence or to pre-registered organisations?

There is also a case for changes to how donors fund humanitarian interventions. Western donors still channel the vast majority of humanitarian aid via international agencies. Should donors more often fund governments bilaterally? If so, how would this work in practice?

The DRR agenda does recognise the primary role of governments in disaster risk management. This agenda, however, is seldom one of the central concerns of humanitarian actors who need to get more involved in debates on disaster risk management and the follow-up to the Hyogo Framework. Some progress is being made on financing for disaster risk reduction and this could usefully be taken forward (Harmer et al 2009).

Aid agencies continue to overlook national capacities in assessments and contingency planning. This is not due to the lack of guidelines or methodologies but because, as the Haiti response demonstrates, good practice seems to go out of the window under the pressure of a high-profile, large-scale emergency. How can existing guidance and tools to assess capacities be more systematically embedded in actual practice?

The way in which international aid agencies are structured and staffed and the attitudes and organisational cultures that aid staff bring to bear in responding to emergencies may be hard to pin down, but are critical components of what is sometimes a dysfunctional

relationship between aid agencies and governments. Do international aid workers often have underlying attitudes that are not sufficiently respectful of national authorities?

6. What are realistic shared goals for moving forward and next steps?

The agenda for action outlined above is a bold one. It will require changing the ways in which international humanitarian action is appealed for, financed, coordinated, staffed, assessed and delivered. Moving forward on this agenda can take place at multiple levels and in different forums - and some of it is already happening. There are also things that international organisations can do internally. For example donors can reflect on how they provide financing, NGOs and UN agencies can examine how they train staff, and OCHA and cluster lead agencies can look at how they facilitate the engagement of national authorities in coordination processes. Other aspects require more coordinated, international discussion and greater dialogue between donor and disaster-affected governments, such as changes to the appeal process for international assistance.

Part of the concern the G77 countries have about the humanitarian agenda, however, is that they tend to see it as driven and imposed by the West and Western-dominated aid agencies. It is vital, therefore, to avoid any dialogue on these issues being seen as a Western-led initiative or as having particular pre-determined objectives.

Possible activities to take forward might include:

- Working with the governments of developing countries and Southern researchers to document the perspectives of government officials and national civil society organisations involved in disaster management about their approaches to humanitarian policy and practice; and their perspectives on international humanitarian assistance efforts.

- Research, documentation and learning on how international humanitarian agencies and disaster-affected governments have worked with each other in recent disaster responses. This would include joint (international agency and government) evaluations of government responses to disasters.

- With Southern researchers, conducting a range of workshops in Africa, Asia and Latin America bringing together international humanitarian and G77 government and civil society actors to develop a framework for the types of principles that might reflect good humanitarian governance – from both a national and international perspective.

The framework of principles could feed into a number of important policy processes including a possible revision of the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles to better reflect the role of the affected state in humanitarian action and the shared agenda that donor and recipient states have in promoting effective humanitarian action. The framework could also feed into an elaboration of guidelines to fulfil existing commitments regarding state primacy.

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