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Links between Natural Disasters, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Risk Reduction: A Critical Perspective

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1 Introduction

Development aid has always been subject to a protracted debate concerning its effectiveness with arguments given on both sides. A major part of this debate, especially for the period covering the cold war has been to what extent aid to developing countries is enmeshed with political and strategic considerations on the part of donor countries. Humanitarian aid, referring to aid following disastrous events, has mostly stayed on the sidelines of this discourse, primarily due to the supposedly moral and humanitarian components that are imbedded in it.

On the face of it, the principles that underpin the humanitarian and relief sectors, namely proportionality, neutrality, impartiality and independence should make it less prone to controversy. However, the increased frequency and destructiveness of natural and man-made hazards of the last few years have come to question that received wisdom. In addition, the institutional separation model that characterizes the relief and development sectors has largely failed in the past, bringing to the forefront the twin concepts of risk and vulnerability, and the inextricable links between natural disasters[1,2] and human development.

As a result, risk reduction[3] has gained prominence and is increasingly seen, at least in rhetoric, as a critical component of sustainable development. This is due to the increased recognition that hazards can be considered an act of nature but disasters are essentially

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[1] *A disaster* is defined as a function of the risk process. It results from the combination of hazards, conditions of vulnerability and insufficient capacity or measures to reduce the potential negative consequences of risk. http://www.unisdr.org/eng/library/lib-terminology-eng.htm

[2] *Natural hazards* become *disasters* if they induce 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 or society to cope using its own resources. This study will concentrate on climate related events—hurricanes, cyclones, floods and droughts—but the same conclusions should be reached regarding other types of hazards such as earthquakes as the inherent vulnerabilities are similar when viewed from a holistic perspective. Most of the aggregates presented in the aid section also include data on natural disasters that are not weather related.

[3] A critical distinction will also be made between *rapid onset*—wind related events and floods—and *slow onset events*—droughts as the timing and time frame is key to the impact of these events and the type of response provided.
Disaster risk reduction: Natural Disaster Risk Reduction activities will describe ex-ante policy and actions taken to prevent natural hazards from being natural disasters:
Risk prevention: actions that are taken ex-ante to reduce the potential impacts of natural hazards whether they occur or not.
Risk mitigation: Actions taken to reduce the impact of hazards should they occur while Risk coping actions taken after the fact.
Adaptive capacity will represent the combination of ex-ante vulnerability to damages and ex-post resilience or ability to cope (Dayton-Johnson 2004).

man-made and are often exacerbated by the development process. Drawing on recent examples in Ethiopia and Niger, recent floods in Mozambique and India and the aftermath of hurricane Mitch in Latin America, this paper will make the point that the set of barriers that impede on risk reduction financing are mostly related to the perverse incentives—both political and strategic—that drive donors and aid recipients after the onset of a natural disaster, and how these impact the perceptions and financing of risk reduction strategies.

These perverse incentives are usually exposed and aggravated by events that receive extensive media coverage. Politicians in donor and recipient countries are often more willing to provide and receive relief aid than to invest in disaster reduction activities. These aligned incentives on the part of donors and recipients give rise to a tragic case of moral hazard, and in some instances to a perception of opportunistic behavior on the part of relief agencies. As a result, disaster relief will have a propensity to be overzealously funded while disaster risk reduction will remain the poor cousin in development cooperation.

There is also an increasingly fact based recognition by the international community that disasters generally affects the most vulnerable members of society, namely the poor. As this paper will discuss, the fact that humanitarian assistance is rooted in a shared belief that there is a moral imperative to assist people in times of stress makes it a highly reactive field. However, as a survey of World Bank task managers indicate, the best way to address the needs of the poor in natural disaster projects is to ensure that prevention and mitigation programmes are developed to guarantee that their homes did not fall down in the first place (World Bank 2006a). Drawing on these case studies, it will be argued that the same standards of entitlement to assistance due to a shared humanity that form the critical building block of humanitarian assistance in times of dire need should be applied to disaster risk reduction efforts.

Finally, this paper will touch a bit on the efforts that are under way to mainstream disaster risk reduction and preparedness into development projects. I will also outline the recommendations made by Tearfund after an extensive survey of the different development agencies on the issues pertaining to a better coordination of risk reduction and development projects, and also the minimum standards that will be required for better execution (La Trobe and Venton 2003).

2 Risk, vulnerability and Natural hazards

2.1 Risk and vulnerability to natural disasters: a development issue

The last three decades have seen an increase in both the frequency and destructiveness of natural hazards (Guha-Sapir et al. 2004). From a cumulative US$75.5 billion in the 1960s, economic losses from natural disasters have skyrocketed in recent decades: they stood at roughly US$660 billion in the 1990s (UNDP, 2004). As high as this global figure is, it disguises the pertinent fact that developing countries suffer considerably more from natural disasters. Whereas people in developed countries suffer mostly economic damages that are often insured, those in developing countries do suffer proportionally

greater losses when measured as a percentage of GDP (World Bank, 2004). More often than not, they also end up paying the ultimate price in terms of lives and lost livelihoods.

A regional breakdown of the impacts of natural disasters also reveals an extremely skewed picture. UNDP (2004) estimates that over the last two decades low human development countries accounted for more than half of all reported casualties, even though they represented only a tenth of those exposed to natural hazards. Furthermore, the same study estimates that nearly 85% of the people exposed to natural disasters live in medium and low human development countries. As is apparent from these figures, there is a high degree of correlation between the level of development and exposure to natural disasters. This is illustrated by the fact that between 1980 and 2000, droughts have claimed an estimated 796.77 lives per million inhabitants in Africa, while the comparative figure for Europe was about 0.04 people per million, a ratio of almost 20,000 to 1.

Although the risk of destructive events is closely associated with geography, what turns a natural hazard into a major calamitous event is clearly its interaction with society. In that respect, different societies can be subjected to the same events with radically different outcomes. Risk therefore determines the extent to which a society is potentially exposed to a natural hazard and vulnerability will determine its susceptibility to extensive damage. For instance, between 1980 and 2000, Bangladesh and the United States were respectively affected by a tropical cyclone 3.4 times and 12.1 times every year. These resulted in respective death tools of 7,468 and 223 people on average per year in the two countries (ibid.).

A comparison of developing countries also yields some insights into the reasons why hazards turn into disasters. When hurricane Mitch made landfall in Honduras and Nicaragua in 1998, it killed an astounding 14,600 people in Honduras and 3,332 people in Nicaragua, and affected about 3 million others, provoking a frenzy of international relief. Three years later, hurricane Michelle of similar magnitude battered nearly half of the Cuban territory, affected almost 6 million people but barely made the local news as only five people were killed (DFID 2005, Dayton Johnson 2004).

Granted, factors affecting levels of vulnerability are often socio-cultural and context specific. Nevertheless, they do not readily explain the wide disparities in impacts observed in different communities. Rather, vulnerabilities arise as a result of political systems and unsustainable development practices that tend to put people at risk. In the cases of Cuba, Honduras, and Nicaragua, the former had much more stringent regulations regarding lodging practices and standing structures to deal with the aftermath of such an event. Early warnings were provided to the population and the evacuation process was well executed, resulting in minimal casualties. In contrast, the development process in Honduras and Nicaragua has led to a high level of environmental degradation conducive to floods, flash floods and landslides. Combined with the poor preparedness by these countries, these factors have resulted in the disastrous events observed (Dayton-Johnson 2004).

Natural disasters also tend to reverse development gains. Besides their immediate impacts on infrastructure, unusually destructive events have the potential to change a country's growth path, or at the very least can destroy much of what took years to build. Following Hurricane Mitch, the Honduran President declared: "we lost in 72 hours what we have taken more than 50 years to build" (Tearfund, 2005). Similarly, the World Bank estimates that between 1980 and 2003, it has financed a total of 147 post-catastrophe reconstruction projects worth a total of US$12.5 billion[4].

Headline figures associated with natural disasters tend to underestimate their full social costs. Three types of costs are generally identified by these exercises: direct, indirect and secondary losses. Direct losses are those associated with the loss of capital assets such as infrastructure, indirect losses measure the immediate disruption in goods and services, and secondary losses are concerned with the short and long term macroeconomic impacts (Freeman et al. 2002). Consequently, a critical issue that is missed in these studies is the human cost. For every recorded fatality in a disaster, numerous others are affected by injury, disease, loss of critical assets and psychological factors. For these people full recovery is seldom possible.

As these examples indicate, natural disasters and development are intimately connected. The development process through its effect on rapid urbanization, demography, market mechanisms and environmental damage create the right conditions for a proliferation of vulnerable societies. In other words, development that is blind to risk increases vulnerability and vulnerability increases the likelihood of destructive events that tend to reverse development gains. This vicious circle linking disasters and development creates a dual world where shocks and the capacity to absorb them are inversely related. The countries that are most susceptible to the hazards of nature have the least technical and institutional capacity to prevent and mitigate the impacts of these events. As a result, the poor ultimately pay the highest price for nature's wrath, often in terms of lives lost but also in shattered livelihoods that lead to lifelong destitution.

2.2 Natural disasters and climate change

It is now virtually certain that due to past human activity, some amount of climate change is now inevitable. The fourth assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms as much. According to the 2007 IPCC report, there is increased confidence that the increase in anthropogenic concentrations of greenhouse houses gases in the atmosphere is the leading cause of observed increases in global air temperatures. When estimated on a linear trend, over the past 100 years, global mean surface temperatures have risen by 0.7˚C. The rate of warming of the last 50 years is almost double that of the previous 100 years, with 11 of the past 12 years (1995-2006) ranking amongst the warmest ever recorded[5] (Trenberth et al. 2007). Among the panel's findings:

- Consistent with a warming climate, there has been a substantial increase in heavy precipitation events within many land regions, with an observed increase in rare precipitation events—1 in 50 year event (Bindoff et Al. 2007).

[4] See footnote 4.
[5] Since 1850.

- Since the 1970s, droughts have become more common and more intense, especially in the tropical and sub-tropical regions. In Australia and Europe, recent droughts were accompanied by extreme temperatures and heat waves that claimed many lives (ibid.).
- Intense tropical cyclone activity is on the rise since the 1970s. Variations and the intensity of tropical cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons are influenced by global sea surface temperatures which have been on an upward trend. As a result, there has been an increase in the number and intensity of storms. Consistent with this pattern, the 2005 Atlantic hurricane season was the most active on record, with a record 28 named tropical and sub-tropical storms, of which a record 15 became hurricanes, 5 became at least category 4, and 4 reached category 5 strength—the highest possible categorization of a hurricane.

All IPCC scenarios point to a warmer future. Because of the inertia built into climate systems, we are already committed to some amount of warming during the course of the 21st century. How much will depend on different mitigation scenarios, with a best estimate likely to fall within the range of 2.0˚C to 4.5˚C, and a most likely value estimated at 3.0˚C (Meehl et al. 2007). Consequently, the 21st century is projected to bring more of the same:

- As a result of intensification in hydrological cycles, average precipitations will increase at high latitudes and in tropical regions affected by monsoons, and will generally decrease in subtropical and mid-latitude regions. In the latter, there will be longer periods between rainfall events resulting in increased drought risk.
- Due to higher thermal expansion, IPCC scenarios point to sea level rise between 0.18 and 0.59m by the end of the century. An acceleration of the melting of Greenland and West Antarctic glaciers could add another 0.1 to 0.2m, putting millions at risk of flooding. In Bangladesh, flooded area discharge is projected to increase by at least 25% with a global temperature increase of 2.0˚C—the lowest point of the IPCC best estimate range.
- Peak wind intensities and increased near storm precipitations are likely to characterize future tropical storm activity, increasing the risk of disastrous events.
- The hydrological impact will result in a higher variability of seasonal river water flows, with runoff projected to decrease in the Mediterranean, southern Africa, and western USA/northern Mexico. In some parts of Latin America, groundwater discharge is projected to decrease by 70%. By 2050, depending on different IPCC emissions scenarios, the number of people facing water-stress could reach between 2.8 billion and 6.9 billion people.
- Higher water temperature will also result in a deterioration of water quality, with significant negative impacts on human health and the ecosystems. In parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, it is projected that heavy precipitation in areas without good water supply and sanitation infrastructure will increase the

pathogen load and increase the risk of water-born diseases (Kundzewicz et al. 2007).

2.3 Disaster risk reduction: concepts and misconceptions

Disaster risk reduction refers to ex-ante measures aimed at preventing and mitigating the impacts of natural hazards[6]. These combine aspects of hazard minimization—where possible—reduction of exposure and susceptibility to high impact events and the enhancement of coping and adaptive capacity (DFID 2004). The first two sets of measures aim to reduce the depth and breadth of destructive events, while enhancing adaptive and coping capacity ensure a degree of resilience on the part of the populations that are affected.

The range of measures that can be taken vary from place to place and are primarily a function of the risks that are inherent to that society, with consideration given to situation specific cultural and local factors. For example, ex-ante risk management measures to prevent quick onset events such as floods and windstorms from becoming all out disasters include elements of strict land use planning accompanied by adequate building codes, building and maintaining adequate emergency shelters, forecasting and warning systems, and other structural measures such as building sea dykes and dams. Droughts on the other hand are slow onset events and do not necessarily kill people. Their cumulative tool on the populations affected generally results in situations of acute food insecurity which turn out to be the ultimate killer. In this case, the maintenance of adequate food stocks, adequate monitoring of the populations affected through early warning systems—routinely implemented in most drought prone areas—and more importantly early action—national and international—to relieve the plight of those affected will help save lives.

Judging from the list above, measuring the benefits of mitigation and risk reduction will be an inherently difficult exercise. In essence, one can only observe the impact of a disaster after it has occurred, making it virtually impossible to accurately determine the would-be impact of an event once measures to reduce its impact have been implemented. The magnitude, location and various other indicators interact with socio-economic systems to determine the impact and destructiveness of a natural hazard, making history a poor forecasting guide.

Another added difficulty in the field of risk reduction that compounds the lack of counterfactual, is that delimiting and quantifying which activities, as opposed to others, contribute to reducing risks and vulnerabilities is essentially impossible. As mentioned in a report by Tearfund[7], disaster risk reduction spans various different areas and can be

[6] See footnote 3.

[7] In 2003, Tearfund, a Christian Charity based in the UK conducted a study to determine why donors spent so little in DRR activities. The overall consensus among development professionals interviewed for the study was that DRR is not very well understood but should be prioritized. Some of the conclusions of this paper are based on that report. It can be downloaded at http://www.tearfund.org/webdocs/Website/Campaigning/Policy%20and%20research/Natural%20Disaster%20Risk%20Reduction%20research.pdf

multidimensional in focus, requiring different types of expertise. These include scientific, engineering, environmental and development sectors, with many different players including governments, NGOs, academics, civil society and the private sector. This wide scope makes it difficult to define, let alone quantify what measures should be billed as a risk reduction activities. As a result, most of the development professionals interviewed for the report believed that their organization was spending much more on disaster risk reduction than the official figures seemed to imply (La Trobe and Venton 2003).

A more serious problem mentioned in the report is that disaster risk reduction (DRR) is generally an area reserved for the humanitarian sector, simply because the word disaster is attached to the concept. This misrepresentation of risk reduction transforms its focus into disaster preparedness or "preparing to respond", leaving all aspects of evaluation and cost effectiveness as a side note for technocrats. This is an indication that the issues involved in DRR are still not well understood within the development community, especially among key development professionals working for major institutional donors.

The report also indicated that there is a vast institutional divide between the humanitarian and development sectors of these agencies, with neither sector specifically claiming ownership of risk reduction initiatives. As the authors highlight, people within the development sectors of these agencies maintain the perception that their focus on poverty reduction addresses vulnerability accordingly while those in the relief sectors assign this task to their development counterparts. This is mostly the result of a cultural divide whereas development professionals are trained in the social sciences and humanitarian workers are generally from the military. This situation, sometimes result in a lack of professional respect between the two groups.

Relief by its very nature means assisting people in need, and requires the provision of goods and services free of charge, usually within a defined timeframe. Development on the other hand is about empowering people, takes a long time to pay dividends, and is adamantly opposed to handouts. As a result of these seemingly conflicting operating principles, development professionals see their relief counterparts as disruptive while the latter see development as a slow and sometimes counterproductive field (Harvey and Lind 2005). The Tearfund report makes some suggestions on how to overcome these blockades, a list of which will be briefly presented in the last section of this paper.

An added difficulty in assessing the usefulness of DRR activities, especially in highly vulnerable countries, is that full recovery is seldom possible before the next event hits. This constant state of near recovery presents significant practical and technical challenges to cost benefits analyses that disaster risk reduction activities have to overcome. For example, a World Bank report indicates that about 60% of disaster resistant construction projects in its portfolio were hit or interrupted by a subsequent disaster before project completion. Out of those, 40% were damaged to some degree (World Bank 2006). Worse yet, for these countries, not overcoming these issues can render long-term priorities and investments expensive and relatively moot.

That said, some heroic attempts to measure the impacts or benefits of ex-ante disaster risk reduction policies on the destructiveness of subsequent events are worth mentioning:

In a study conducted in Zimbabwe, Hoddinott and Kinsey (2003) simulate the impacts of alternative public responses to the drought shock of 1994-95. They are able to show that if ex-ante alternative funding schemes were used by the government, household welfare would have been raised in non-drought years while during drought years, poverty rates would have stayed the same as in non-drought years.

A study conducted by the World Bank estimates that shoreline protection systems designed to withstand cyclones provided most of the reasons why the 2004 cyclone Heta was substantially less destructive in Samoa than the less intensive cyclone Val in 1991. While cyclone Val caused damages estimated at 240% of real 2004 GDP, the impact of cyclone Heta was only 9% (World Bank 2004). Another study by the US geological survey confirms these facts and estimates that the 1990's economic losses could have been reduced by US$280 billion if a seventh of that sum was invested in preventive measures[8].

Similarly, a study conducted in the Caribbean also points to the effectiveness of prevention activities. The study indicates that the cost associated with mitigation would have involved only modest additional costs over the initial costs of the project (USAID/OAS 1998). The same conclusion can also be drawn from a study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Cyclone proofing was estimated to be only 10% of the cost of new buildings and would provide a cost benefit ratio of 4.3 (World Bank 2006b).

3 Trends in humanitarian Assistance

3.1 Scale and share of humanitarian assistance in total ODA

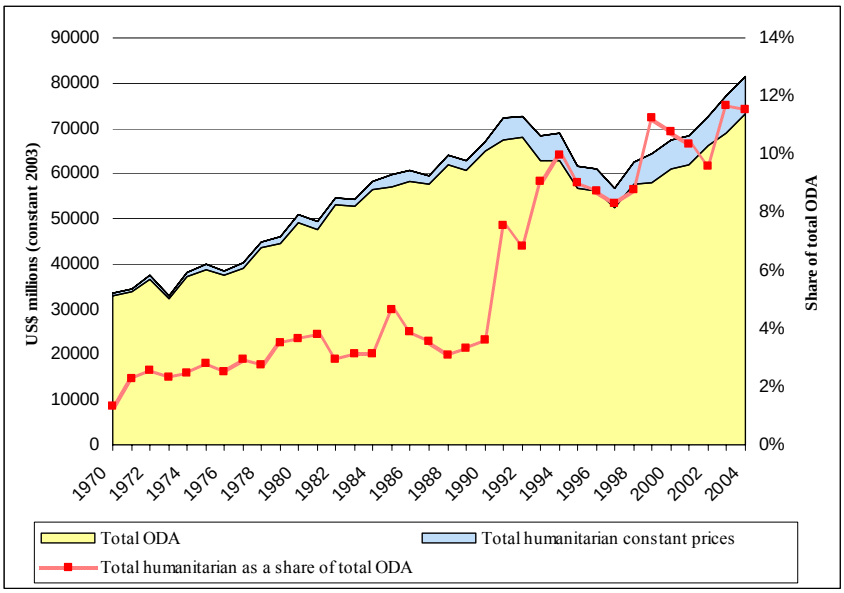
Both Official Development Assistance and global humanitarian assistance have increased by a great deal since 1970. During this period, overall development assistance doubled to about US$73 billion. Against the backdrop of relatively stagnant ODA figures between 1990 and 2004, global humanitarian assistance has tripled during the 1990s, increasing from an average of just under US$2 billion in the 1980s to more than US$6 billion in 2000. As a result of this threefold increase, global humanitarian assistance presently claims a greater share of total ODA than in the past. This share reached the 10% level for the first time in 1999 and stood roughly at 13% in 2005 (figures 1 and 2).

Increases is global humanitarian assistance have mostly been driven by a greater prevalence of complex conflict related emergencies ranging from the first Gulf war in 1991 to the Rwandan and Great Lakes crises in 1994 and 1995, to the Kosovo emergency in 1999-2000. In each of these instances, humanitarian aid peaked to new levels. A brief surge is observed in 1998 due to the outpouring of support for the victims of hurricane

[8] "Eluding Nature's wrath". World Bank Website. Accessed March 2nd 2007. http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20171304%7EmenuPK:34457%7EpagePK:34370%7EpiPK:34424%7EtheSitePK:4607,00.html

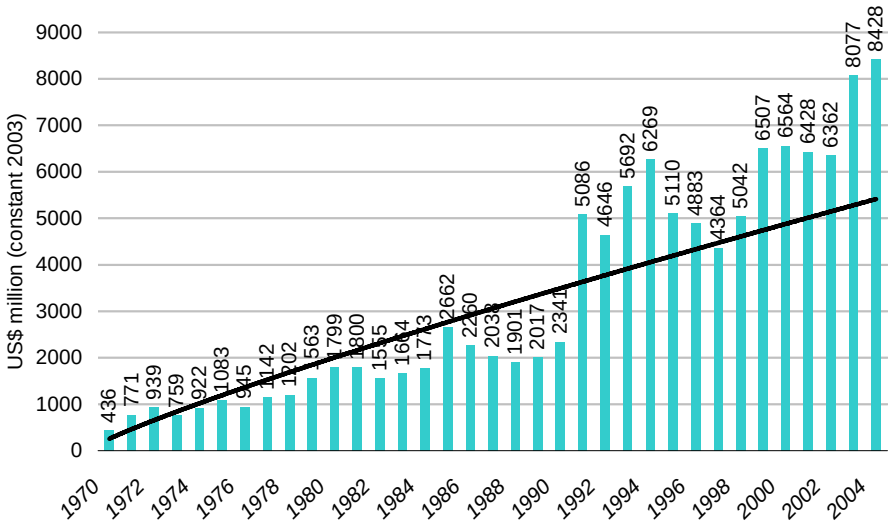
Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua. This is the only instance during the 1990's where increases in humanitarian aid are not the direct result of armed conflict. In 2003, global humanitarian aid reached US$8 billion for the first time, again as a result of the Iraq war. Figures for 2005 also indicate a further increase due to the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004 (figure 2).

Figure 1: Trends in development assistance and humanitarian aid



Source: OECD DAC database, cited in GHA (2006).

Figure 2: Trends in humanitarian assistance 1970-2004



Source: OECD DAC database, cited in GHA (2006).

Putting these figures into the context of natural disasters however reveals a sobering picture. Real annual economic losses from natural disasters averaged roughly US$66

billion a year during the 1990s or about 90% current ODA levels. Losses incurred from single destructive events can often overwhelm cumulative humanitarian aid budgets for that year. Hurricane Mitch alone caused direct damages equal to the entire humanitarian budget of 2000. Furthermore, based on its current exposure to extreme flooding—expected to occur once every ten years—a country such as Argentina stands to lose over 0.6% of its capital stock, translating into direct damages of almost US$8 billion (Freeman et al. 2002), an amount equivalent to the cumulative humanitarian assistance for 2004.

3.2 The 'bilateralization' of funding mechanisms

The increase in the levels of humanitarian aid has also coincided with a greater 'bilateralization' of its financing mechanisms. While the share of humanitarian assistance going to multilateral organizations has stayed relatively constant since the 1990s, the share of resources going to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) has increased by a great deal. Between 1996 and 1999, multilateral spending increased by 32% while the direct contracting of NGOs by donors increased by 150% (Macrae et al. 2002).

To a certain extent, the shift towards bilateral channels reflects the increased prevalence of emergencies worldwide, but also is the result of a shift in view that emergencies are generally a result of deeper structural issues that are context specific, requiring a degree of specialization, planning and effectiveness in execution. A less glamorous explanation that has been suggested however is that greater bilateral spending through national NGOs adds a level of visibility to donor funds (HPG, 2002). In any case, these factors have led to a greater level scrutiny regarding the effectiveness, operational efficiency and accountability of multilateral organizations.

This revolution in emergency management has paid particular attention to the performance of UN agencies which has been deemed unsatisfactory to varying degrees by different donors[9]. As a result the UN is increasingly seen as one of many actors in a crowded field where agencies have to compete for scarce funds from increasingly skeptical donors[10]. This combination of factors has ensured that equity and proportionality in humanitarian assistance are at the very best a work in progress.

The advent of the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) in 1992 has not provided a blueprint for a better coordination and apportioning of these resources. At its inception, The CAP was intended to provide a platform for a joint assessment of needs during an emergency by governments, UN agencies—through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee—and the other humanitarian actors (under the banner of NGOs hereafter). As emergencies have grown in scope, so has the CAP, generally through consolidated and

[9] Macrea et al. (2002) (pp.24) report for example that there are a number of important points of contention between donors and multilateral organizations which include the perception that the UN does not effectively account for its use of funds, has a patchy performance regarding its effectiveness and has a board that is unwieldy and slow, requiring a higher level of scrutiny. For example, the relationship between the US, which provides the lion's share in multilateral assistance, and the UN is marred with deep distrust, resulting in tightly earmarked and sometimes selective contributions.

[10] see Macrae et al. (2002) chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the changing role of donors in humanitarian financing

flash appeals. This soup of different actors, and the fact that smaller donors like Scandinavian countries pay more attention to its strategic value-added than the larger ones, continues to present major coordination challenges.

As table 1 shows, there is still a clear lack of correlation between needs assessed and resources allocated to different emergencies. For instance, of the first five countries in need of assistance identified in the CAP in 2004, only Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories figure in the first five DAC reported spending list (both are indeed political hotspots). This lack of correlation unfortunately leads to the concept of neglected emergencies; a topic discussed throughout this paper.

Table 1: Top 15 CAP and DAC priorities side-by-side in 2004: OECD DAC and OCHA

CAP appeals in 2004	US$m	Bilateral DAC-reported spending	US$m
1-Sudan	726.64	1I-raq	875.09
2-Palestine	300.48	2-Sudan	592.02
3-Bangladesh	209.91	3-Ethiopia	363.04
4-DPRK	208.80	4-Afghanistan	249.81
5-Chad	165.48	5-Palestine	322
6-DRC	162.60	6-DRC (Zaire)	157.58
7-Uganda	142.88	7-Angola	138.32
8-Liberia	138.02	8-Liberia	130.5
9-Angola	136.02	9-Uganda	118.6
10-Eritrea	125.54	10-Burundi	97.66
11-Somalia	120.03	11-Somalia	93.73
12-Burundi	119.00	12-Eritrea	92.33
13-West Africa	97.32	13-DPRK	81.98
14-Zimbabwe	90.05	14-Bangladesh	74.52
15-Great Lakes	85.46	15-Chad	71.47

Indicates country that was not subject of a CAP appeal
Indicates funding surplus to CAP-stated requirements

Source: Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006

The Central Emergency Revolving Fund, also set up in 1992 as a US$50 million revolving fund, is another one of those mechanisms. It has recently been upgraded into a response fund that would comprise both the original revolving loan fund of US$50 million and a grant facility of US$450 million that donors will replenish voluntarily. This fund holds great promise for sudden onset emergencies but will also serve as a litmus test for a greater coordination of humanitarian assistance. As of January 5th 2007, the total pledges to the fund stood at US$314.2 million[11].

3.3 Donors, recipients and sectoral distribution of humanitarian aid

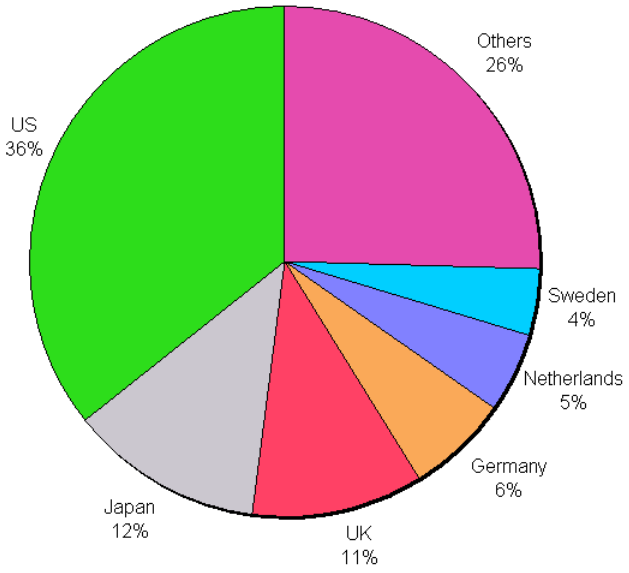
3.3.1 Share by donor country

The majority of humanitarian financing is provided by a handful of countries. The US is by far the largest humanitarian donor. In 2004, it provided nearly 36% of total bilateral

[11] Source: OCHA website, accessed January 5th 2007.

humanitarian assistance (figure 3). When measured on a per capita basis however, Luxembourg heads the list of donors with nearly $US 62 per head, followed by Norway and Sweden respectively at $US 47 and $US 32 per head in 2004. The US is 11th on that list at $US 8 per head (GHA 2006). This contiguous concentration of funds and the use of bilateral channels mentioned in the previous section raise a lot of questions regarding the fairness and effectiveness of humanitarian financing, suggesting to some degree that donor priorities will be key in shaping the extent to which certain events and sectors are funded while others receive much less attention. Figure 4 illustrates the skewed allocation of emergency assistance. Each year between 1995 and 2004, the top two funded emergencies were consistently allocated almost one third of the total funds disbursed. From 1995 to 2001, the Former Yugoslav States were the top recipients of emergency ODA. Subsequently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq made those countries the top recipients between 2002 and 2004. This funding pattern is indeed suggestive of a process that is all but equitable, based solely on the needs of the intended recipients.

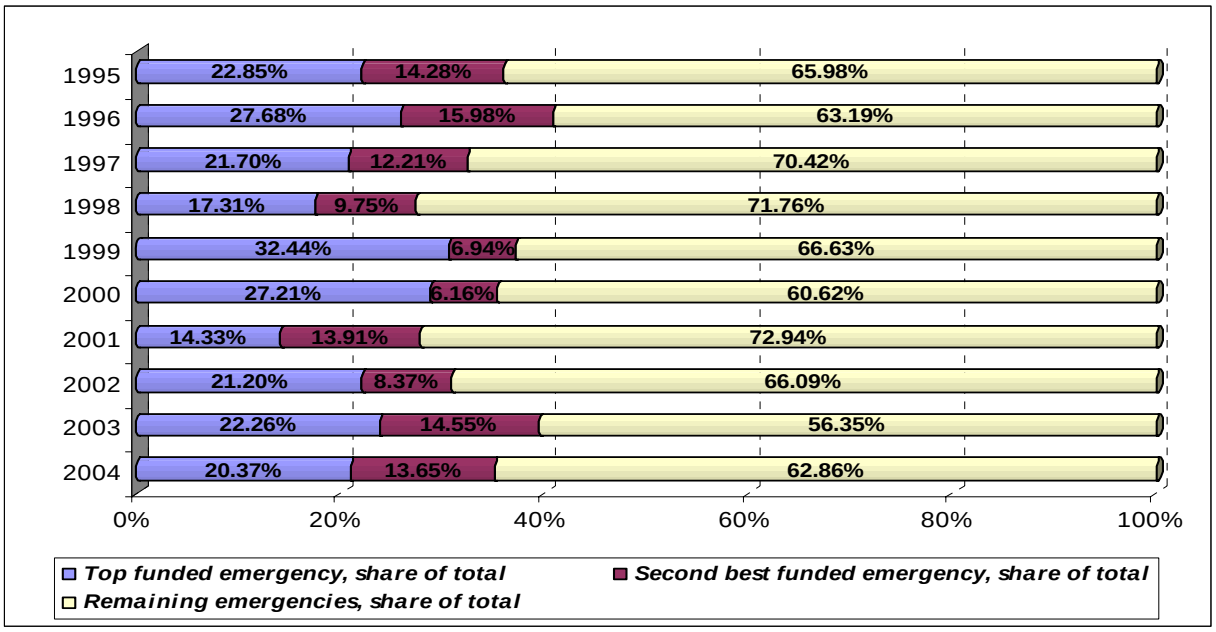
Figure 3: Share of humanitarian assistance by donor in 2004



Source: OECD DAC database, cited in GHA (2006)

A corollary to the funding patterns described above is that humanitarian assistance per beneficiary is highly unequal across emergencies. This has been suggested to hinge on factors related to donors' foreign policies, historical ties with the recipient country or region in question, opportunities for peace, and dumping of resources towards the end of the year (Macrea et al. 2004). For example, in 1998, while the consolidated appeal for Ethiopia was completely ignored by the donor community, the appeal for the Former Yugoslav countries was covered within and outside the CAP, resulting in an average of US$166 per recipient (Development information update 2000). As is evident from these statistics, donor countries are highly selective of the types of emergencies that they decide to fund, with the cost of doing business in specific parts of the world somewhat a marginal issue.

Figure 4: Share of best funded emergencies 1995-2004



Source: Calculated based on emergency ODA figures from OECD DAC database.

This selective pattern of funding some appeals and ignoring others has obvious adverse consequences on the lives and livelihoods of those affected. As the case studies for Ethiopia, Niger and Mozambique will show, the muted responses to their respective appeals contributed to a worsening of seemingly benign emergencies, culminating in very expensive relief operations once the media got involved.

3.3.2 Recipients and regional distribution of humanitarian assistance

As mentioned above, humanitarian assistance is concentrated among a few major recipients every year. The cumulative distribution of humanitarian assistance for the top 10 recipients between 1995 and 2004 is presented in table 2. Most of these countries are indeed characterized by chronic emergencies. Ethiopia is the only exception, a situation that reflects the relatively steady amounts of food aid it receives every year.

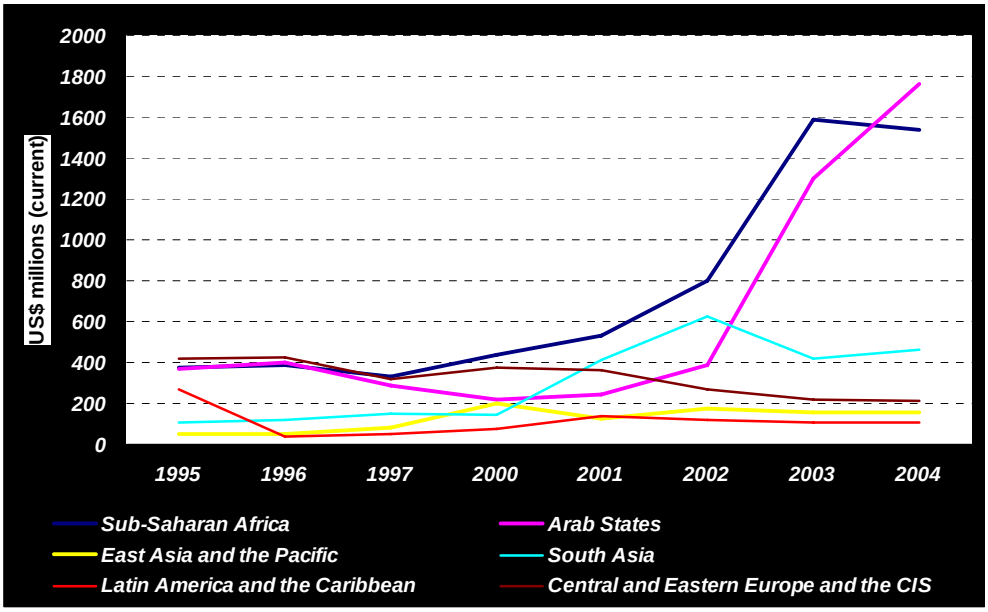
Table 2: Top 10 recipients of humanitarian assistance 1995-2004

Country	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total 1995-2004
Former Yugoslav States	809	693	544	310	1256	890	509	278	167	141	**5597**
Iraq	250	314	220	96	95	107	134	109	918	886.85	**3130**
Afghanistan	113	93	164	123	80	117	413	677	378	322	**2480**
Palestine	182	147	216	261	177	212	278	352	357	443.77	**2627**
Ethiopia	55	50	51	50	66	142	140	163	651	363.21	**1732**
Sudan	94	87	82	138	171	93	118	200	286	617.14	**1886**
Angola	83	81	83	66	117	80	89	186	224	163.49	**1173**
DRC (Zaire)	24	45	53	35	37	70	132	191	193	223.34	**1003**
Jordan	76	68	85	88	96	92	97	94	104	85.28	**885**
DPRK	0	7	42	34	183	30	57	117	71	95.01	**637**

Source: Global Humanitarian Assistance 2006.

The greater prevalence of hotspots in sub-Saharan Africa also explains why the region has consistently remained the biggest recipient of humanitarian assistance. From figure 5 below, we can also see the oft mentioned impacts of the war in Iraq on overall levels of humanitarian aid for the Arab region.

Figure 5: Regional distribution of total humanitarian assistance 1995-2004

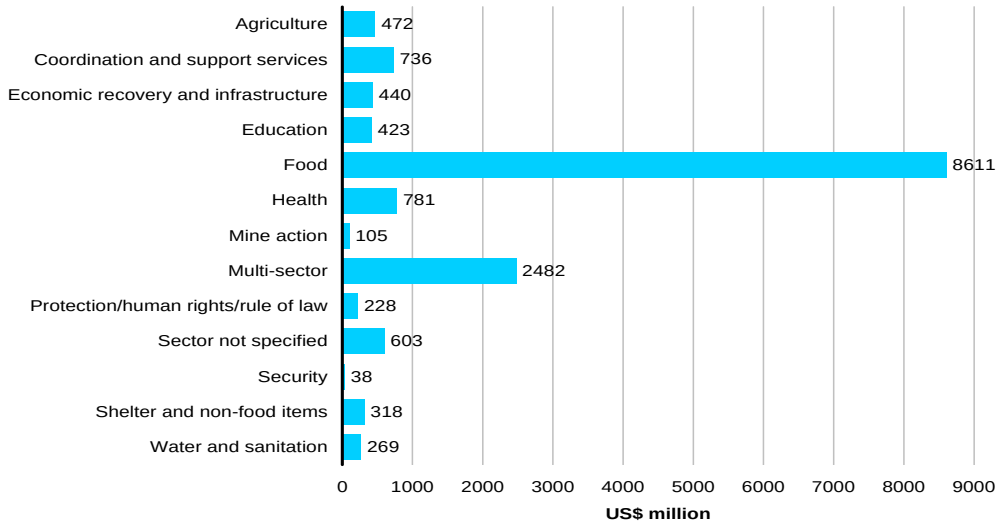


Source: Calculated based on emergency ODA figures from OECD DAC database.

3.3.3 Sectoral distribution of humanitarian assistance

Food aid still represents the major distribution channel of humanitarian assistance. Between 2000 and 2005, it represented more than half of the cumulative humanitarian aid budget (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Cumulative Sectoral distribution of humanitarian assistance 2000-2005



Source: OECD DAC database, cited in GHA (2006).

The prevalence of food aid primarily reflects its importance during the early phases of relief operations following an emergency. A more problematic explanation however, is associated with the complicated politics involved in it, and the deeper structural problems relating to its effectiveness as a long-term solution for chronically vulnerable people (see the case studies for Ethiopia and Niger).

4 Humanitarian aid and DRR: the role of incentives

4.1 Politicians in disaster prone countries

Disaster risk reduction strategies generally consist of a set of measures that are more cost efficient and work best when embedded into the initial stages of projects. These include planting trees to mitigate the impacts of floods and landslides, building early warning systems in the case of droughts or sea surges like the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, improving building techniques to withstand earthquakes, and shelters to reduce the human impact of windstorms. As is apparent from these measures, their time span is long and their results may not be immediately apparent.

This long time frame means that the results of these efforts sometimes materialize beyond the political life of leaders of disaster prone countries. This effect is compounded by the fact that these programmes are generally of low visibility vis-à-vis the electorate, and do not necessarily translate into praise or political gains. With scarce funds and competing claims for public funds, other popular projects like transfer schemes—whose effectiveness households can ascertain—will take precedence over the mitigation of low probability but high impact events[12] (DFID 2004).

Furthermore, the externalization of disaster response, ranging from the quick response of humanitarian organizations in high profile emergencies, to the relief aid that can be counted upon—generally dwarfing ODI levels by an order of magnitude—means that disaster risk reduction will not be a priority for the governments of disaster prone countries. Governments know that the fields of disaster relief and humanitarian aid are event-driven and highly responsive to catastrophic events. This in turn is a powerful incentive against prevention and mitigation programmes, initiatives that tend to be drawn out processes with donors highly reluctant to provide the necessary funds.

El Salvador provides a good example of this. Following hurricane Mitch, the country was in a prime position to focus on DRR. While Honduras and Nicaragua were most affected by the hurricane, El Salvador suffered only relatively marginal damages but benefited fully from the aid allocated for reconstruction. As a result, it was one of the signatories to the Stockholm agreement between aid recipients and donors calling, among other conditions, for the reduction of social and ecological vulnerability in the region. However, as Wisner (2001) indicates, a review of the recovery plan elaborated by the government after the 2001 earthquakes shows that none of the lessons learnt from hurricane Mitch were actually implemented.

[12] One must also recognize that under conditions of fiscal restrain imposed on most developing countries, spending on long-term projects with no visible or tangible returns is just not a viable option.

Finally, there are also political gains associated with being seen as active in disaster relief. The public generally equates a sign of a true statesman with conduct during times of stress. For instance, research conducted in India indicates that higher levels of newspaper circulation are associated with a greater responsiveness by local governments following a disaster, both in terms of food distribution and calamity relief expenditures (Robin and Burgess 2002). Reeves (2006) also reached the same conclusion for the United States during the period 1981-2004. His analysis shows that highly competitive states in presidential elections on average receive over 60% more disaster declarations than non-competitive ones, something that translates into "political brownie points".

This incentive structure inevitably points to a case of moral hazard (or alternatively called the *Samaritan's dilemma)* on the part of disaster prone countries who will have the tendency to wait for the onset of a disastrous event to issue an alarming appeal for funds.

4.2 Donors and the media: the politics of humanitarian assistance

Politicians in donor countries are also by no means immune from a diverse set of perverse incentives. Arguably, the most powerful catalyst for a rapid response from donor countries is the media. Some studies have looked at the impact the media can have on development and humanitarian aid. The results are startling. For instance, Rioux and Van Belle (2005) estimate that during the period 1986-1998, while the most important indicator of French foreign aid was the adoption of the French language, the levels of coverage of a country in the journal *Le Monde* explained consistently and significantly the levels of foreign aid allocated to that country by the French Government.

Similarly, as indicated in Drury et al. (2005), even though the drought in Botswana in 1986 lasted longer than the one in Ethiopia in 1985, the latter attracted more media attention due to a very high number of casualties. For that reason aid per victim was 10 times higher for people in Ethiopia. The paper also makes the shocking claim that, based on their estimations, media salience plays an extremely important role in US humanitarian assistance; a single article published in the *New York Times* is worth more disaster dollars than 1,500 casualties in a so-called silent disaster such as a drought that didn't materialize into a devastating famine.

Even though the extent of media coverage generally determines the responsiveness of donors, it does not by any means constitute the sole conditioning factor. Political considerations are very much alive and well. Politicians do not want to be seen as stingy or inhumane. This may cost votes, especially if a private response is forthcoming. For example, immediately following the Tsunami, the US promised US$15 million in relief aid. As news coverage began questioning the dismal amount offered by the richest country in the world, that pledge was substantially augmented to US$350 million—of which as of December 12th 2006 over US$217 million have not been committed[13]. Similarly, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair promised to top the total voluntary assistance offered by British citizens.

[13] Source: http://ocha.unog.ch/fts/reports/daily/ocha_R10_E14794___06121121.xls accessed December 12th 2006.

Moreover, after the announcement of the generous US contribution, the then Secretary of State Colin Powell suggested that this generous contribution may change the public perception towards the United States in Muslim countries (The Economist, 2005).

In its seventh Report Session of 2005-2006, the British House of Commons recognized as much:

> *"Other factors inevitably have an influence on DFID's decision [to provide humanitarian assistance], including the extent of the attention paid by other actors (including the media, NGOs and other national governments), and national politics and global politics" (HoC 2006, pp.15).*

It has also been suggested that donors were reluctant to contribute to the Central Emergency Response Fund mentioned above, because doing so would mean that their individual contributions would not be visible (HoC 2006). This is a clear indication that as with recipient countries, politicians in donor countries also have an incentive to exploit spectacular disasters for domestic political and strategic gains.

Relieving the high levels of poverty and suffering observed in developed countries has also become a quasi-obligation for developed nations, making development aid a necessity that does not always make headlines. They are contained in reports that the media pays scant attention to. Humanitarian aid on the other hand is highly visible as mentioned. Consequently, pledges and donations make headlines while they constitute merely a diversion of funds that were already committed to already existing development projects (DFID 2004). Donors in a sense get *"more bang for their money"*. As the waves subside however, relief money tends to go back into development projects; and of the funds that were pledged with great fanfares in the moments following the disasters, only a fraction is ultimately delivered (DFID 2004, HPN 2002). Table 3 shows the difference between pledges and contributions by various donors following the Tsunami.

Similar tales are also told for countries such as Iran where following the Bam earthquake of 2003, of the US$1.1 billion in pledges, only US$17.5 million were delivered. Mozambique also received less than the US$450 million promised after the 2000 floods, while about two thirds of the US$8.7 billion pledged to the victims of hurricane Mitch in 1998 still awaits delivery (Economist 2005; Walker et al. 2005). The case studies that follow will illustrate these points.

Table 3: Pledges versus donations by various donors following the Tsunami

Donor	Total pledges	Commitments/ Contributions	Uncommitted Pledges	Uncommitted as % of total pledges
Private	1,036,050.70	982,950.70	53,100.00	5%
Japan	502,579.90	502,579.90	0	0%
US	352,520.00	142,873.90	209,646.10	59%
UK	148,114.10	135,883.00	12,231.10	8%
Germany	107,858.00	105,174.30	2,683.70	2%
EC	168,017.20	87,842.90	80,174.30	48%
Norway	79,289.40	79,289.40	0	0%
Canada	216,480.00	68,134.60	148,345.40	69%
Italy	67,688.30	66,592.90	1,095.40	2%
China	64,273.80	62,673.80	1,600.00	2%
France	87,977.00	59,698.70	28,278.30	32%
Netherlands	44,906.60	44,906.60	0	0%
Denmark	43,689.60	43,689.60	0	0%
UAE	41,659.80	41,379.80	280	1%
Sweden	41,176.70	34,710.60	6,466.10	16%
Greece	32,283.40	32,283.40	0	0%
Australia	43,592.50	31,164.20	12,428.30	29%
Finland	29,273.60	29,123.70	149.9	1%
Qatar	25,000.00	25,000.00	0	0%
Switzerland	24,419.40	24,419.40	0	0%
Others	1,092,275.30	252,245.60	840,029.70	77%
Total	4,249,125.30	2,852,617.00	1,396,508.30	33%

Source: OCHA

4.2.1 Ethiopia and Niger: ignored appeals and institutional bickering

Disasters don't always constitute one-off events. Droughts and situations characterized by chronic vulnerability are slow onset events that can take years to develop into all out disastrous events. Chronic vulnerability in the context of food security in particular refers to situations where there is a latent susceptibility for seemingly benign shocks to adversely affect life and livelihoods. They are mostly prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and are characterized by conditions that are constant, cyclical and highly predictable.

These types of vulnerabilities are first and foremost the result of the high levels of poverty that are a hallmark of the region, but also reflect decades of policies bent on providing quick fixes to structural problems. These policies, especially the highly contentious provision of emergency food aid under the banner of humanitarian assistance have tended to address the consequences rather than the causes of the prevailing high levels of human suffering.

4.2.1.1 Ethiopia's "averted" famines and the perils of quick fixes

The perils of patch work policies intended to solve long-term problems can be inferred from the food crises in Ethiopia in 1999-2000 and 2002-2003. Due to the disastrous

famine of 1984-85 which killed up to 300,000[14] people by some estimates, both the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) and the major aid agencies have stepped up efforts to develop Early Warning Systems. These EWS are supplemented by NGO operated local EWS. In addition, a system of strategic grain reserves was instituted. The latter is designed such that in principle it can lend to different actors once pledges to replenish its disbursements have been received (Lautze et al. 2004). In 2000, all these systems failed to prevent the crisis.

Starting at least in 1995, the situation in the Ethiopian heartland started deteriorating in a significant way. The successive failures of the *Belg rains* (short rains) and the uneven distribution of the *Meher rains* (main rains) exacerbated this situation. This was well documented by the various EWS present in the country (see table 4). Repeated appeals by the Ethiopian government went unheeded. In its August 1997 update to donors, the shortcoming of funds to this appeal was even deplored by the government (Hammond and Maxwell 2002).

Table 4: Ethiopia's cereal food aid needs and amounts disbursed 1995-2002

Year	January Estimate (tonnes)	July Estimate (tonnes)	Delivered/ Distributed (tonnes)	Distributed as percent of estimated needs	Population requiring food assistance (million)
1995	427 000	492 848	347 379	70	4
1996	291 000	262 060	219 000	84	2.7
1997	186 000	329 450	306 000	93	3.4
1998	420 000	602 134	294 932	49	5.3
1999	181 871	460 609	391 558	85	6.6
2000	764 044	1 337 695	999 135	75	10.2
2001	545 394	630 610	540 000	86	6.2
2002	557 204	897 299	580 000	65	6.3
Average	421 564	626 588	459 751	76	5.6

Source: FAO (2002)

By mid-1998, early simmering disputes between Ethiopia and Eritrea heightened donor concerns that any provision of emergency relief would patronize an ill-advised war. The upward trend in the total number of people in need of assistance was finally driven upwards by open fighting in 1999 and the near total failure of the *Belg rains*. Early attempts by the WHO to involve the media were negated by the fact that widespread mortality and distress migration were not directly observable and "poverty, destitution and malnutrition were simply too old a story in Ethiopia to make headlines" (Hammond and Maxwell 2002).

In the absence of relief, distress sales of assets and livestock began. By July 2000, it was estimated that over 10 million people were on the brink of starvation. Indeed, malnutrition rates as high as 84% were recorded in some areas and a subsequent study by the Centers for Disease Control using recall data estimated that the famine may have killed over 100,000 people nationwide. Media involvement starting in March 2000 and

[14] Source EM-DAT.

the subsequent delivery of food aid in the second half of 2000 finally brought relief to the affected populations (Hammond and Maxwell 2002, Salama et al. 2001).

The 2000 crisis brought to its knees the vulnerable Ethiopian population, but also generated an incandescent but largely substance devoid debate of what constitutes a famine. While hailed by the academic community, the CDC paper was widely criticized within the donor community, and any talk of famine was greatly challenged (HPN 2004). This debate however failed to address the real issues that affect food security in Ethiopia. Another failure of the *Belg rains* in 2002 exposed these deficiencies. By December 2002, over 11 million people were declared in need of emergency food aid, with another 3 million in need of close monitoring. This figure was revised upwards by another million people by April 2003, becoming the largest ever Ethiopian food appeal on record. This appeal was subsequently covered in its entirety mostly through the actions of USAID (see below) (ibid.).

*4.2.1.2 **Niger, five years after Ethiopia and the lessons not learned***

There is also a high level of donor complacency in humanitarian assistance, fuelled to a certain extent by a lack of trust in the figures provided by governments and relief agencies. Donors are sometimes highly skeptical of incessant warnings of impending disasters, some of which do not materialize. To illustrate, in 2002 a chorus of voices indicated that disaster was imminent in Zambia after the government turned down genetically modified crops from the United States. This gloomy forecast of impending deaths never materialized, and to some extent vindicated donors' suspicions that governments, the UN and NGOs are all too often predisposed to 'cry wolf'(Astier, 2006). This complacency however leads to missed opportunities to prevent manageable situations from developing into full blown crises.

Niger is a case in point. It is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranked last in the 2004 Human Development Index. Life expectancy was a mere 44.6 years in 2004, and almost two thirds of the population lived below US$1 a day between 1990 and 2004 (UNDP 2006). These high levels of poverty, and the country's unfavorable geographical location, combined with high fertility rates of almost 8 births per woman between 1970 and 2005, have contributed to increased food supply pressures, with the demographic growth of 3.2% systematically surpassing the 2.0% average annual increase in food production (Mousseau and Anuradha, 2006).

As in Ethiopia, following the 1984-1985 famine and other various food crises in the Sahel region and in Niger particularly, numerous famine early warning systems (EWS) have been developed to insure that conditions are monitored on a timely basis. Besides the Government of Niger's (GoN) own assessments, the FAO Global Information Early Warning System (GIEWS) works in conjunction with governments in host countries, and monitors the conditions of the growing season which are contained in periodic reports. Parallel to GIEWS, is FEWS NET which financed by USAID, partly reflecting a lack of confidence in the figures published by the FAO (Clay, 2005). Two other EWS are also present in the Sahel region, the EU supported AGRHYMET—which monitors weather systems—and the regional Food Crisis Prevention Network of the Sahel (FCPNS), which

is a system of collaboration between the Sahel and West African Club (SWAC), a group of OECD donors and the CILSS, an organization of Sahelian governments committed to combating the problem of drought (ibid.).

As early as November 2004, the GoN issued an appeal for funds totaling US$42 million to cover the procurement of food needs and the provision of assistance to farmers and herders that were affected by a wave of locust infestation and prevailing drought conditions in parts of the country. In December 2004, a joint FAO/WFP/CILLS mission assessing the food situation crisis in Niger estimated that a deficit of 9% below the country's food needs was expected for cereal production, with more than an estimated 3 million people in 3000 villages at risk of starvation nationwide (FAO, 2004). Cereal price increases compounded the problem in 2005 and by March, the GoN confirmed its initial diagnosis that there was a severe localized food crisis which resulted in overstretched livelihoods (Mousseau and Anuradha 2006).

It was only 8 months after the initial appeal that the first donor funds started reaching Niger. By July 2005, only 10% of the requested funds were delivered and the GoN had run out the food it was distributing at subsidized prices. Meanwhile, Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF)—Doctors without Borders—saw an increase in the cases of acute malnutrition—almost double the internationally accepted standard of 10%—and started voicing an increasingly virulent criticism of the inadequate response both on the part of local authorities and the international community (ibid).

This criticism and the prevailing situation in Niger were echoed by the British Broadcasting Corporation and other media outlets, and pictures of starving babies finally made the nightly news. By July 2005, aid was disbursed on a massive scale and the initial appeals of the WFP were revised substantially from US$1.4 million to US$57.6 million, and its food requirement from 6,562 tonnes initially to 72,931 tonnes. This fresh new appeal was at last funded and a bigger calamity was averted. In the words of Jan Igeland, the then UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, while US$1 per child per day would have been enough to avert the crisis in October 2004, by July 2005, US$80 was needed to prevent it from being a full blown crisis as food shipments were subsequently airlifted to the affected areas (ibid).

Several conclusions can be drawn from these examples. Despite the plethora of EWS systems present in both countries and the warning signs prior to the crises, no actions were taken to preempt them, be it the lack of more proactive actions by the GoN or the muted response of donors in both cases. In the case of Niger, it took the action of MSF and the media—highly criticised thereafter—to bring the impending crisis to light. For instance, it has been suggested that the initial lethargic government response was due to a higher priority given to the contentious presidential and legislative elections at the end of 2004, and the need to downplay any impending crises (Chen and Meisel, 2006). Fresh on the minds of the current government officials is also the memory of the coup d'état in 1974 that was justified by the inability of the government to manage the famine (The current President took part in that).

In Niger, the government vehemently denied that a famine ever took place and labeled the events instead as a localized food crisis. This was seized upon by both the US through FEWS NET and France—though a mission by two senators. Both countries issued reports aimed at clarifying the chain of events that led to the crisis (Charasse and Gouteyron 2005, USAID 2005). Both of these reports, along with the GoN were highly critical of the unilateral actions taken by MSF and accused the media of inaccurately portraying the situation (Astier 2006, Chen and Meisel 2006). The GoN suggested that NGOs—MSF in particular—were exploiting the situation for selfish personal gains. In April 2006, the GoN even revoked the permission of a BBC team to report on the humanitarian situation after they found evidence of continuing hunger in the country (IFRC 2006). The French report also seemed to deplore the fact that MSF was flush with cash from the Tsunami and was able to use approximately US$15 million to jumpstart a programme to distribute free food.

In Ethiopia, as the 2002-2003 crisis started emerging, the USAID mission in Ethiopia took the extraordinary steps of bringing in a group of academics to see if the situation prevailing in the country could be labeled a famine. This was on the heals of a declaration by President Bush that there would be no famines under his watch, making it clear that each US mission would be held to account (Anderson and Choularton 2004). It has been suggested that this spurred USAIDs "overreaction" in 2003, actions that were—perplexingly enough—widely criticized within the donor community (HPN 2004).

Semantics aside, an area of common ground between these various groups operating in both Ethiopia and Niger is that the levels of malnutrition in both countries are high and above international standards at any given moment. In other words, the images shown on news channels around the world could have been taken at any point in time. These are attributed to a host of issues like unfavorable geography, inadequate public responses, a culture of dependency on international aid and cultural feeding practices that leave children vulnerable to malnutrition. Needless to say, all of these factors contribute to the acute levels of vulnerability observed in the region.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming favorite channel to deal with the situation has been the provision of costly food shipments. Instead of cash that can used in local markets or neighboring countries that would save on transportation costs and boost local economies, donors instead insist on providing food that is produced and processed in their countries, and transported in flag carrying vessels. This is the case for the US, which provides almost half of the WFP food stock but sources almost 99% domestically (Clay 2005, Mousseau and Anuradha 2006). These modes of delivery take a long time to reach the intended beneficiaries, long after coping strategies have been eroded and livelihoods destroyed, making people more vulnerable to the next event, and more importantly, dependent on donors' precarious 'generosity'.

4.2.2 Floods in Mozambique and Cyclone in India: the importance of the 'CNN effect'

"Lucky are the people of Yugoslavia and Somalia as the World's eyes rest on them. Condemned are the people of Juba for the world is denied access to the

town and even does not seem to care anyway. It may be a blessing to die in front of a camera—then at least the world will know about it. But it is painful to die or be killed without anybody knowing it (Olsen et al. 2003)[15].

Even though the quotation above is conflict related, it summarizes the fact that the media wields enormous power in humanitarian affairs. This power is derived from the role it performs as an information clearinghouse, serving as a link between donors and their constituents—presently the only group that donors are presumably accountable to. As a consequence, events that are widely covered tend to generate a much bigger response than those that are not. This is informally termed the "CNN effect".

In the humanitarian field, much criticism is labeled at journalists. Nevertheless, one must recognize that they have to be selective about the types of news that they decide to cover. Furthermore, they have to be responsive to what their audience can bear. This in turn can be a blessing or a curse depending on the accuracy and timeliness of the information reported. This selective process and the fact that the media thrives on the sensational—at least most of the time—mean that some events will be widely covered, while others will remain in the shadows.

The events in Mozambique and the state of Orissa in India illustrate the difference the media can make. Within months of each other, both the coastal areas of the state of Orissa and large areas of Mozambique were hit by a series of cyclones. During the second half of October 1999, a mild cyclone with wind speeds of 200kmh^{-1} killing about 200 people was followed by a *super cyclone* that packed wind speeds of up to 350kmh^{-1}, ravaging most of the coastal cities of Orissa, killing approximately 10,000 people and affecting another 19 million (Thomalla and Schmuck, 2004).

A few months later in Mozambique, in February 2000, a series of tropical storms were followed by tropical cyclones Eline and Gloria in late February. Incessant rains and wind gusts of up to 160kmh^{-1} induced a tidal wave that flooded the rivers that flow through Mozambique, to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Massive flooding throughout Mozambique killed approximately 800 people and left another 500,000 homeless (EM-DAT 2007, Wiles et al. 2005, SAWS 2000).

Judging from the figures above, the events in Mozambique pale in comparison to those in Orissa but they received much more coverage. Lack of access by the media due to the destructiveness of the events was cited as a major cause. In any case, this extensive coverage and by some accounts the heart wrenching footage of a woman giving birth on a treetop with rescue helicopters roaring by in Mozambique ensured aid per disaster victim was much higher than in Orissa (see table 5).

[15] This quote is from a handwritten letter smuggled out of the besieged southern Sudanese town of Juba, in August 1992 (Olsen and Carstensen. 2003).

Table 5: Orissa and Mozambique: Different impacts, disproportional media coverage and funding

	Orissa	Mozambique
Number of casualties[a]	9,927	800
Number of victims[a]	13,829,312	4,500,000
TV spots on Danish TV[b]	16	87
Articles in Newspaper (EU,US)[b]	91	382
Total aid disbursed	**23,097,000[b]**	**165,845,743[c]**

Source: [a] Figure from the CRED database; [b] Figures from Olsen and Carstensen (2003); [c] Figure from OCHA

The case of Mozambique also deserves further attention. Six months before the floods in 2000, the government appealed for US$2.7 million for emergency preparation purposes. This appeal was paid lip service to even though Mozambique is one of the darlings of the donor community. Only half of that amount was ultimately delivered. Immediately after the floods though, as noted above, over US$160 million was delivered in emergency assistance along with another US$456 million in pledges, slightly above the US$450 requested (ISDR 2004, World Bank 2006). Of the funds that were delivered or under execution by August 2001—an exceptional rate of 72%—a crucial component was to fund vulnerability reduction. To date, only half of the US$22 million requested has been committed and 20% of that amount has been disbursed (Wiles et al. 2006).

4.2.3 Aftermath of Hurricane Mitch: lots of unanswered questions

Hurricane Mitch, the deadliest Atlantic hurricane since 1780, is also one of the disasters of our times that tested the international humanitarian enterprise, exposed its weaknesses, and really questioned its motives. Between October 25th and November 1st 1998, Hurricane Mitch battered Nicaragua and Honduras, respectively the poorest and the third poorest countries in Latin America in 1997. Other countries in their surrounding including Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama were also affected, killing almost 19,000 people, affecting a further 3.3 million and causing cumulative economic damages of about US$6 billion (EM-DAT 2007, NCDC 1999).

The brunt of these damages was sustained in Nicaragua and Honduras. The two countries combined for almost all of the casualties and over US$5 billion in damages, with Honduras accounting for 80% of that amount (Telford et al. 2004). Following the emergency search and rescue missions in both countries, rather than funds for reconstruction, debt payment and HIPC ascension point dominated the debate during the meetings with donors. For Nicaragua, the Paris Club of bilateral creditors agreed to waive debt service payments for two years, starting in January 1999 and a Central American Trust Fund (CATF) established by bilateral donors at a May 1999 conference was subsequently used to service debt owed to multilateral development banks (UN, 2000).

For Honduras, the worst affected country, the May conference brought more of the same grief and inconsistencies as in Nicaragua. A total of US$2.7 billion was pledged in reconstruction funds. Of this amount, over US$600 million was non-financial and more

than US$1 billion was in the form of concessional and non-concessional loans, an amount that is almost equivalent to the HIPC initiative. Furthermore, US$70.5 of the US$71.9 million contributed by donors to the CATF was used to service debt from multilateral creditors. These contradictory responses to the emergency lead The Economist, in its November 12th 1998 edition, to ask if "it makes sense to give them disaster aid with one hand, while hindering recovery by insisting on (far bigger) debt service payments with the other" (UN 2000, The Economist 1998).

4.3 Relief agencies in humanitarian assistance: all you can eat policy?

The UN and NGOs are the principal delivery mechanisms of humanitarian assistance. These agencies along with national governments are responsible for actions on the ground and are the principal recipients of funds from donors. The UN in particular plays a dual role during emergencies both as the principal coordinator of activities and as a provider of services to those affected. NGOs, as mentioned, are also a major distribution channel that has grown exponentially over the past 15 years. This mix of different actors inevitably presents a challenge in coordination and accountability during an emergency. In a silent emergency, this leads to a competition for funds (sometimes among UN agencies), and in a loud one, the result is a glut in funding and a lack of capacity to absorb the windfall.

In the case of silent emergencies, the UN has borne most of the criticism as it is responsible for the CAP. Within a week of an emergency, the UN humanitarian coordinator in the country affected is required to issue a flash appeal in close coordination with governments and NGOs. These appeals are supposed to provide life saving services that are strictly emergency-related. A common criticism that has been labeled at the UN regarding its flash appeals is that they are either expensive and unrealistic or downright opportunistic. For instance, a House of Commons inquiry indicated that some UN agencies sometimes use the flash appeal system to fund projects that they were previously unable to find funds for; the report went on to say:

> *"It is vital that donors are able to rely on emergency appeals being precisely that, appeals to fund interventions which need to be delivered immediately in order to fulfill basic unmet needs. It should not be necessary for donors to fill that they have to scrutinize all the elements of a flash appeal for relevance and urgency. Including excessive or non-emergency programmes in flash appeals is counterproductive for everyone if it makes donors less inclined to fund them." (HoC 2006).*

In the case of loud emergencies, another set of problems arise. Among development agencies, there is a premium on the rapid disbursement of funds as a result of pressures from above. This excess supply of funds inevitably leads to an excess supply of implementing agencies, some with no operational experience in the country or region. Informally, they are referred to as "briefcase NGOs". Even among agencies with a strong track record, loud emergencies represent great funding opportunities even though a sudden glut in funding for one emergency can pose insurmountable logistical problems.

As a result, NGOs and multilateral agencies alike, in some sense, have an incentive to foster a culture of emergency as these represent great funding opportunities (HPN 2002).

These factors in the end only serve to damage the credibility of the entire humanitarian system, as well as to reduce the pool of funds that could have been used to finance legitimate DRR activities. For instance during the Mozambique floods of 2000, Christie and Hanlon (2002) note that some British NGOs were under pressure from headquarters to spend money donated through the Disaster Emergency Committee. In some cases, they had just 48 hours to submit a proposal to spend £3 million.

5 Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction: initiatives and recommendations

Despite the various hurdles mentioned in this paper, the importance of disaster risk reduction is starting to figure more prominently in development thinking, spearheaded mostly by the new focus on adaptation to climate change. Although there is much that remains to be done in the field, there are nonetheless several projects under way in various countries deemed at risk. A comprehensive global review of these projects is described in detail in ISDR (2004), and a survey of Early Warning Systems is provided in UN (2006). There are also several international initiatives under way to streamline DRR into development initiative, and more crucially to make sure that the funding is adequate.

5.1 The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction[16] (1990-2000)

In 1989, the UN General Assembly declared the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The broad theme of the IDNDR was to build a culture of prevention. Under these auspices, an international conference on natural disaster risk reduction was convened in Yokohama (Japan) in 1994. The ensuing Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World identified several principles on which DRR activities should be based upon.

Key among those principles was that prevention, preparedness and planning at the national, regional, bilateral, and international levels should be integral parts of development policy. An immediate consequence of this principle, also expressed in the final document, was that each country primarily bore the responsibility for protecting its people and infrastructure while the international community should demonstrate a strong political will and committed leadership to achieve the results set forth.

At the end of this decade, the UN general Assembly founded the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in 2000 in order to carry forward the objectives identified in IDNDR. ISDR is composed of two mechanisms: the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR), and the Inter-Agency Secretariat (UN/ISDR). The former was established in 2000 as a forum for UN agencies to devise strategies and policies to reduce risk, while the latter is designed as a focal point within the UN system, serving as a global information clearinghouse for a better coordination and dissemination of strategies and DDR activities.

[16] Source ISDR (2004).

5.2 The Hyogo Framework for Action[17]

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Hyogo Conference) was convened between 18th and 22nd of January 2005 in Hyogo (Japan) following a decision by the UN General Assembly. The conference was attended by some 4000 people, bringing together governments, NGOs and civil society. The location (Kobe) provided for a symbolic venue as it was the site of a devastating earthquake that claimed some 5000 lives ten years prior. The conference aimed among other things to:

- *Take stock and review progress made by countries in implementing the guidelines of the Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World (Yokohama Strategy).*
- *Identify specific activities aimed at ensuring the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development on vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management.*
- *Share good practice and lessons learned in disaster reduction to identify gaps and challenges.*
- *Increase awareness of the importance of disaster reduction.*
- *Increase the reliability and availability of disaster data.*

The conference identified several gaps and challenges that have hindered risk reduction initiatives, among which were issues relating to fund allocation, governance, risk identification, knowledge, the role of underlying risk factors (underlying vulnerability) and the perennial issue of preparedness. The final report of the conference highlighted an increased commitment of countries to reduce the risk of disasters, taking into account the principles set forth in the Yokohama Strategy (ISDR and World Bank 2006). These include increasing the prominence of DRR in international cooperation, developing an integrated multi-hazard approach to DRR, the inclusion of a gender perspective, and cultural diversity. These areas were highlighted as the future course of action for the decade 2005-2015.

5.3 The Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction and Recovery[18]

The GFDRR is a new global initiative of the World Bank in support of the Hyogo Framework for Action. It is intended to support national capacity building in disaster reduction and to enhance the speed of international assistance and recovery following such an event. It is also designed to support the ISDR system by fostering global, regional, and local partnerships towards achieving the goals set forth in Hyogo.
GFDRR is composed of three tracks:

Track 1: Global and regional support to ISDR system: This track aims to enhance global and regional advocacy, partnerships and knowledge management in middle and low income countries at risk identified in World Bank (2006)[19] through ISDR. It aims

[17] Source: ISDR (2005). The full conference report can be downloaded at http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/docs/Hyogo-framework-for-action-english.pdf
[18] Source: ISDR and World Bank 2006.
[19] The Natural Disaster Hotspots initiative was started in 2001 by the World Bank Hazard Management Unit and aims to contribute to efforts to reduce disaster losses by identifying geographic areas that are most vulnerable to hazards and encouraging development agencies and policy makers to incorporate disaster risk

also to standardize hazard risk management tools, methodologies and practices through the reporting of good practices in DRR—including environmentally sustainable practices—and recovery and country-owned risk assessment methodologies and assessment techniques.

Track 2: Support to countries for developing frameworks for disaster prevention and mitigation. This track is a multi-donor trust fund which will provide technical assistance to low and middle income countries to mainstream DRR in strategic planning through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process and other sectoral development policies. Its aim is to:

- Deliver ex-ante risk management strategies and institutional development including EWS and preparedness for these countries.
- Support innovative projects to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of hazard mitigation strategies relating to critical infrastructure.
- Enhance learning, research and knowledge of current and future risks
- Develop frameworks to catalyze investments in hazard prevention, mitigation and preparedness
- Develop ex-ante recovery financing mechanisms in middle income countries through the use of financial instruments like insurance, reinsurance, catastrophe bonds, weather derivatives etc.

Track 3: A Standby Recovery Financing Facility This track will serve to accelerate disaster recovery in low income countries. It is designed to support immediate recovery needs before medium and long term recovery plans are formulated and launched, but only for countries that have initiated investments in disaster prevention. It is designed as an incentive mechanism for countries to invest in prevention measures ex-ante, which will enable a greater institutional preparedness and rapid and predictable financing of recovery operation.

5.4 Tearfund's recommendations[20]

Following an extensive research process with nine major institutional donors, a few key recommendations for a better mainstreaming of risk reduction initiatives were issued. These issues are centered on two key themes regarding a proper knowledge and understanding of concepts around DRR, and the value added in mitigating to the extent possible the adverse effects of nature.

5.4.1 Knowledge

On the issue of knowledge, three key themes emerge:

- As mentioned earlier, there is a total lack of awareness and understanding of risk reduction within development agencies.
- Risk reduction activities are also very broad in scope and can encompass many different development related activities. As a result they tend to be confused with

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management into investment plans and decisions. The study identified a total of 86 countries that are at risk (World Bank 2006).

[20] Source: La Trobe and Venton (2003).

other poverty reduction related activities, on the premise that poverty reduction will mitigate the adverse effects of climate events, which is not necessarily the case.
- There is also a confusing breadth of terms—risk mitigation, risk reduction, risk mainstreaming and so forth. Agreeing on a set of consistent yet intuitive terms can help bridge the knowledge gap.

A total of five recommendations were issued regarding knowledge of the issue at hand:
- Clarify the issue and adopt a developmental language
- Communicate knowledge within organizations
- Emphasize the links between disasters and development
- Disseminate case studies
- Maintain a focus on the issue within the organization at all levels of decision making.

5.4.2 Ownership

The ownership of disaster reduction was also discussed extensively in the report. The problems highlighted are:
- There is a cultural divide between relief and development sectors
- The aforementioned assumption that poverty reduction automatically translates into risk reduction
- The holistic nature of risk reduction

The recommendations were to:
- Bridge the intellectual divide
- Incorporate risk reduction into development assistance through policy and strategy level commitment and engagement of development staff. On this point, donor commitment is instrumental in order to eliminate the set of perverse incentives mentioned earlier, not by withholding humanitarian aid, but by insisting on the development of strategies that can be easily built in the PRS process (DFID 2004; World Bank 2004).
- Evaluate the effectiveness of risk reduction measures by building evaluation tools into the conception phase of projects.

6 The way forward

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis:

Development and relief need to be integrated. As the case studies for Ethiopia and Niger have shown, short term fixes do not solve long-term problems. Pouring money into expensive relief and development efforts without taking into account the underlying vulnerabilities is an expensive way to do business, as the next hazard will negate all the gains that were made, perpetuating a cycle of relief, disaster, and relief again. Indeed it makes little economic sense to invest huge amounts of money to reach the Millennium Development Goals without making sure that the next hurricane or flood will not wipe out the country's entire capital stock.

For those unfortunate enough to grab worldwide attention, this strategy will provide temporary relief, while for those who are doubly unfortunate—the victims of silent disasters—death and destitution will meet the world's apparent apathy.

The world does not need more of one and less of the other; it needs more of both. Despite greater funding, humanitarian financing has not kept pace with the scale and scope of natural disasters over the past 15 years. As this paper has shown, the pace at which the humanitarian enterprise has progressed is woefully inadequate given the losses incurred. This lack of progress is due to a constraint in resources but also to a set of perverse incentives that have worked against reducing vulnerabilities to natural hazards.

The lack of irrefutable evidence that is often cited should not be a cause for inaction. The claim that the world needs more concrete evidence to take action is nothing but a smokescreen for the lack of will to take a more proactive approach to disasters. Developed countries have built mechanisms to protect their citizens long before the first signs of proof were available. These same standards need to be applied to those who are too poor to protect themselves.

With climate change already happening, the international community cannot afford to be complacent about these issues any longer. The whole of humanity is at risk but those most vulnerable will have the least ability to adapt to its consequences.

There needs to be a serious political commitment to reduce risk. As the examples in Niger and Ethiopia have shown, the international community hardly learns any concrete lessons from disasters beyond the constant rhetoric that greater attention should be paid to DRR. Both the GFDRR and the Hyogo Framework for Action are welcome initiatives, but they need to be backed by firm institutional commitments from all levels of decision making. For instance, it is really surprising that in 2005, the drafting committee of the Hyogo conference on DRR should haggle about including climate change as a risk factor in its final report[21].

When it comes to financing such activities, concrete actions commensurate with their potential to save lives and minimize damages, are still lacking. The list of incentives provided above constitutes a formidable obstacle to the effective mainstreaming of DRR into everyday policy, but greater donor coordination and true political commitment will, in time, trickle down to those operating on the field.

The humanitarian enterprise must adhere to its principles. It is time for humanitarian actors to adhere to the noble principles of humanitarianism enshrined in international law. For that to happen, the sector must be self-critical and devoid of politics. Constant bickering over who is to blame for these inadequacies does not serve the interest of those who provide relief, and is certainly irrelevant to the intended recipients, as most would have already reached a point of no return.

[21] The US, supported by Australia and Canada, was adamantly opposed to the mention of *climate change,* and also to the "excerpting" of the IPCC conclusions (IISD 2005)

The proposal to make the CERF a US$450 million grant based facility and a US$50 million revolving fund is a welcome initiative. Nevertheless, this will still fall far short of what is needed. In the short- to medium-term, a greater commitment to increase overall levels of ODA and humanitarian financing will be necessary.

The same standards of entitlement afforded to the humanitarian sector need to be applied to DRR. Recognizing that disaster reduction pays is not enough. There is now widespread recognition that people are entitled to humanitarian assistance when the need arises. However, vulnerability to hazards is the product of society itself. Poor people *do not* live in drought or flood prone areas because they want to; they live there because they lack better alternatives. Long gone are the days in 1991 when Lawrence Summer, then World Bank Vice President, advocated in an internal memo "the dumping of dirty industries in Least Developed Ccountries". Today, humanity bears the responsibility to protect those among us who are vulnerable to disasters. Consequently, the prevailing bottom to top approach to accountability in international cooperation needs to be revised. Those who are vulnerable should be actively engaged in DRR strategies and must be empowered to hold actors to account.

Furthermore, most aspects of DRR activities ranging from flood protection to early warning systems are public goods. As with all public goods, the provision of those services is the state's responsibility, with adequate support from the international community. As such, recognizing the risks that poor people face and disregarding them is tantamount to the implicit acceptance that wealth, not rights, decide who should live a decent life. There is no doubt that the international community recognizes this right and has the technical expertise to implement it. The only missing link therefore, is the political will to do so.

The media is not in the business of saving lives but can contribute to the debate. The media's primary function is to inform. Its primary duty however is to provide an accurate picture of the situation on the ground. Given the pressures involved in reporting and the rush to get facts first, this duty is sometimes ignored. The result is an incomplete picture of the situation being depicted, or facts that are downright misleading. As David Munk from the Guardian notes: "the media is generally parochial in its view of humanitarian situations" (HoC 2006). Nevertheless, media engagement, whether in DDR activities or during a humanitarian emergency, can be a powerful vehicle for change.

To better fulfill their role in disaster discourse, media outlets need to invest resources on the ground and move beyond the grim tally of how many were killed into the real causes behind the numbers. As the example of India above indicates, politicians are responsive to media pressures. Going public with the root causes of disasters and assigning responsibilities accordingly will help change perceptions and incentives significantly. Relief agencies can help in that respect, but they need to avoid the temptation of seeing the media as a fund raising tool.

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