

Humanitarian reform

The lives of millions of civilians are at risk each time a natural disaster or complex emergency occurs, especially in poor countries with high population densities, less developed infrastructure and insufficient emergency preparedness.

This month's newsletter gives you an introduction to humanitarian reform, which aims to enhance the capacity, predictability, accountability and partnership of humanitarian response.

1.1 Why reform humanitarian response?

The reform process was first prompted to action in 2005, also known as the "year of natural disasters." It was in December 2004 when the international community was confronted with one of the world's worst natural disasters in modern history: The Southeast Asia tsunami. Evidently, the tsunami crisis called for a collective effort on behalf of international civil society to help save as many lives as possible in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

While the international community responded with unprecedented generosity to the tsunami, the response to the earthquake that struck South Asia about half a year later in October 2005 was weak in comparison. Only 38 percent of the original flash appeal was funded two months after the disaster, as opposed to 80 percent 10 days after the tsunami.

These inconsistencies in the response rate have supported an ambitious effort by the international humanitarian community to create a more comprehensive and targeted needs-based relief structure to reach more beneficiaries in a more time efficient manner. While governments have the primary role in organizing humanitarian assistance in a disaster, the scale of these catastrophes often require a multi-sector response with the participation of a wide range of international humanitarian actors.

The humanitarian coordination reform process is led by the United Nations (UN) mandated Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It includes three main pillars for reform: the cluster approach, humanitarian coordinators and humanitarian financing. The cluster approach clarifies the division of labor among organizations involved in emergency relief and better defines their roles and responsibilities. Funding is usually the central issue for an adequate response. This issue led to the creation of a restructured Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in December 2005, aimed at serving as a supplementary fund available immediately following a humanitarian emergency.

The last decade has seen a marked increase in the occurrence of natural disasters as well as other complex humanitarian emergencies. There are considerable gaps in the ability of the humanitarian

system to respond adequately to all humanitarian crises. This newsletter provides more information on the ongoing restructuring and coordination of humanitarian relief, including various analyses of progress to date.

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1.2 GOVERNMENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), Geneva, Switzerland

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for interagency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. The website features many documents related to humanitarian reform, including the Cluster 2006 – Appeal for Improving Humanitarian Response Capacity, which lays out the cluster/sectoral approach to relief as well as the 2005 Humanitarian Response Review, an independent assessment of the humanitarian system commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Coordination of Humanitarian Response, by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), New York, US

OCHA is mandated by the IASC to carry out the role of coordination. The website includes information about the newly established Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the reformed Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). For more detailed information about the CAP, visit the Humanitarian Appeal 2007 website, which provides information and figures to specific country/emergency funding allocations. Additionally, it includes evaluations and studies including OCHA's Annual Evaluation Report for 2006, which identifies key lessons learned from the year and makes suggestions for reform. The OCHA in 2007 Report clarifies in one of its sections the Implementation of the Humanitarian Reform Initiative.

OCHA Humanitarian Reform Support Unit (HRSU), Geneva, Switzerland

The Humanitarian Reform Support Unit (HRSU) was established for OCHA in July 2006 to support the implementation of all aspects of the reform process. The website includes information on the three main pillars of the process: cluster approach, coordinators and financing. It also includes a section on partnerships, which aims to bring together NGOs and UN agencies to enhance the dialogue for a more effective humanitarian response.

United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), New York, US

UNICEF has always been at the forefront of emergency relief and is currently taking the global cluster lead in emergency response for nutrition and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). UNICEF regularly publishes humanitarian response and situation updates, including, for example, one on the 2007 floods and cyclone in Mozambique, summarizing the UNICEF response.

1.3 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Oxfam International, Oxford, UK

Oxfam International (OI) is an international confederation, comprised of 13 independent non-governmental organizations dedicated to fighting poverty and related injustice around the world. OI's position on the reform process is laid out in a Policy Compendium Note on Humanitarian Coordination. Additionally, Oxfam identifies its views on the progress and effectiveness of the Central Emergency Response Fund in The UN Central Emergency Response Fund one year on.

The Sphere Project, Geneva, Switzerland

The Sphere Project created a handbook entitled the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, setting out what people affected by disasters have the right to expect from humanitarian assistance. The website offers information about the expectations of the relationship between OCHA and Sphere on humanitarian reform.

1.4 RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA

ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group, London, UK

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), a research group of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), is an independent team of researchers working on improving humanitarian policy. In a 2005 Briefing Note on humanitarian reform, HPG outlines its position on the initial call for reform.

Lost in translation: Managing coordination and leadership reform in the humanitarian system, by ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), London, UK

This policy brief released in July 2007 introduces a research project undertaken by HPG to analyze the operational consequences of humanitarian reform initiative and the interaction between them.

The implications of humanitarian reform, by Forced Migration Review, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, UK

The Forced Migration Review (FMR) is published by the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. This paper introduces the debate about suggested humanitarian reforms which will be presented in an FMR issue to be published in October 2007.

1.5 MEDIA AND INTERVIEWS

ReliefWeb, New York, US

ReliefWeb is the global hub for time-critical information (documents and maps) on complex emergencies and natural disasters. ReliefWeb updates its website around the clock, recognizing how critical the availability of reliable and timely information in time of humanitarian emergencies is.

IRIN News, Nairobi, Kenya

IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks) is part of the UN OCHA. Its principal role is to provide news and analysis about sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia for the humanitarian community.

Pakistan: A chronology of response to the South Asian Earthquake, by IRIN, Nairobi, Kenya
This article summarizes and makes an assessment of the successes and lessons learned of the international community's relief effort in response to the October 2005 South Asia earthquake.

Highlights of the Briefing by UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on the Mid-Year Review of the 2007 Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP), by ReliefWeb, New York, US
This article offers views and comments by John Holmes, Emergency Relief Coordinator, concerning the 2007 CAP. He remarks that it remains inadequate given the serious needs they represent.

Pakistan: UN launches flash appeal for flood-hit provinces, by IRIN, Nairobi, Kenya
This article summarizes the relief effort by the humanitarian community and the government of Pakistan to assist hundreds of thousands of victims of cyclone Yemyin, which ravaged parts of Pakistan in late June 2007.

UN urges disaster response reform, by BBC News, London, UK
This news story released in November 2005 identifies the initial call by the former UN emergency relief coordinator Jan Egeland to reform the response system to humanitarian disasters.