

Preface

Humanitarian action targets tens of millions of people every year. Its objectives are to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity during, and in the aftermath of, man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations. Providing the right aid to the right people in the right way is a tremendous challenge. We in the aid community have understood for some time that much remains to be done to enable us to provide better responses to increasing numbers of affected people. In this Herculean task, we fully realize that, as human beings, we do not always learn from experience, and make repeated mistakes. And while we know that aid, with all its limitations, in these contexts has mainly remedial value, we must continue to strive for progress and quality in humanitarian action.

Given the conflicts and disasters affecting many parts of the globe, humanitarian action, in its broadest conception, is of vital importance to the millions of people who endure the effects of crises and violence year after year. Those of us remote from the turmoil are moved by the images we see of people suffering from man-made, often protracted, violence in Darfur, Somalia, the Congo, Sri Lanka, the Palestinian Territories, or Colombia, and from sudden natural disasters, such as those which befell the people of Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru, or Nicaragua. The scenes we see are real and unbearable and every attempt should be made to immediately end the plight of those affected by these tragedies.

But it is clear that there is far more than meets the eye of the ever-present camera. The year 2006 was one of many new, re-emerging, and continuing crises. The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) presented in this publication has been constructed in the context of the continuing response to crises in eight areas: Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Lebanon, Niger, Pakistan, Sudan, and Timor-Leste. The HRI has been designed to help improve the quality of humani-

tarian action in the face of such crises, and to serve as a tool for the future, to respond more adequately to humanitarian crises which will continue to challenge us all.

In DARA we believe that donors—key actors in the humanitarian system—can improve the way humanitarian aid works. While the majority of state donors—whose role is far wider than that of funding humanitarian project—do not actually implement the aid they offer, they can have a profound influence on other parts of the aid delivery system and can be instrumental in providing the foundations for more appropriate responses. By their informed policies and practice, through increased information and analysis, cooperation, and communication, we believe that donors are already playing a pivotal role within the humanitarian system as a driving force for positive change.

The Humanitarian Response Index was conceived well over a year ago. During the first year, we faced the challenge of defining a methodology for what to measure, how to measure it, and for developing a road map for the HRI. More than a dozen different teams have carried out missions throughout the globe while a core team of experts developed comprehensive indicators. The overall project represents a unique attempt to benchmark donors and monitor progress in humanitarian action in relation to an initial baseline.

The Humanitarian Response Index presents information to help donors examine their role critically. When DARA undertook to analyse the donor studies of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, we found that, once donors and their overall budgets had been identified, many tried valiantly to make the best use of the funds available and to follow the *Principles* set out in the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative. However, despite these good intentions, and even with the GHD framework in place, they often lacked guidance and interpreted “good donorship” in completely different ways. Donors must commit and disburse funds

rapidly, yet their decisions must be based on the assessment of real needs. In practice, putting the emphasis on one of the GHD *Principles* as opposed to another can result in a wide variety of approaches. By being selective, donors face less competition and feel that they are getting more “value for money.” Unfortunately, in the business of humanitarian assistance, greater accountability is demanded of some than others.

The HRI has brought the GHD *Principles* closer to the field. By means of a thorough interview process, humanitarian actors in different crises and from different backgrounds have been given the opportunity to reflect on the principles of GHD and how they are actually practiced. This reflection has greatly enriched the HRI process and has stimulated our own understanding. Their responses have added a new dimension to donor accountability. Despite the difficulties faced during its first year, the enthusiasm and encouragement with which the many actors in the field have greeted this project have given us a greater clarity of purpose and made it possible for us to move forward more boldly.

The Humanitarian Response Index sets out to distil practices and rationales for the most important issues in international humanitarian aid. One of its main objectives is to monitor the progress made in official humanitarian donorship. We believe that the analysis of crisis responses offered by the HRI serves as an instrument not only to stimulate discussion and debate but to shed light on where the nations of the world stand in the task of delivering effective humanitarian assistance in the 21st century.

It is to be expected that we would want to know how our own country measures up when our governments and other donors pledge vast sums of money. The HRI provides a firm foundation of information for such reflection, for policy analysis, for reporting of data, evaluation, and monitoring.

Fully aware of the often overwhelming tasks facing humanitarian agencies and actors in all parts of the system, the authors of the HRI hope to further stimulate the political will and creativity to implement existing commitments, learn from past successes and failures, and find new responses to the work of providing and utilizing humanitarian assistance in all kinds of crises.

Change demands renewed activism. The world must be repeatedly reminded of the promises made to women and children, to the uprooted, to the sick and the hungry, to ethnic and racial minorities, and to other vulnerable groups. As citizens of a shrinking world, people must be made more aware of the laws, norms and

standards, resolutions and policies which have already been put in place to ensure the protection and preservation of life, of well being, and of human dignity. Equally important is the concept that aid, in and of itself, is limited if it is not viewed in the broader context of human development, local, national, and international. How assistance efforts are best integrated into local contexts, providing the right support to the right people at the right time, drawing on their knowledge and enhancing their own capacity can only be evaluated when local accountability mechanisms and the realities faced by affected populations are identified and dealt with.

It is in this spirit that we offer this first edition of the Humanitarian Response Index.

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