



# **Synthesis Report: Expanded Summary**

Joint evaluation of the international  
response to the Indian Ocean tsunami

**By John Cosgrave**

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# Preface

This Expanded Summary of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition's (TEC) Synthesis Report has been written with the busy humanitarian professional in mind. It represents the TEC's commitment to make its findings and recommendations as widely available as possible. As with the full Synthesis Report, this summary clearly describes the tsunami context and the disaster response. Its main focus, however, is on the four key recommendations of the Synthesis Report and some of the practical implications of taking these forward. In comparison with the full 175-page Synthesis, the language and contents of this report have been simplified, and the figures and photographs increase its accessibility as well as create a useful reference guide.

The Synthesis Report itself draws on the five thematic evaluations undertaken by TEC members. These are:

1. Coordination of the international response to tsunami-affected countries
2. The role of needs assessment in the tsunami response
3. Impact of the tsunami response on local and national capacities
4. Links between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in the tsunami response
5. The funding response to the tsunami.

These evaluations involved in-depth country studies, beneficiary surveys and extensive consultation with stakeholders. The Synthesis Report also benefits from a wealth of secondary sources produced on the tsunami response.

The international response to the tsunami has been unique in many ways. The disaster hit multiple middle-income countries; the response was enormous and donors and the public gave generously. Unlike other disasters, there were no funding gaps this time. However, both the relief and recovery response could have been better. The efforts of international humanitarian and development cooperation agencies to respond to the tsunami highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses in the way these agencies go about their business. The TEC, as a coalition of over 40 of these aid agencies, therefore represents an important effort in reflection, transparency and self-critical analysis.

There are a number of pressing messages to emerge from the report:

- The profound need to put people's priorities at the heart of any future disaster response: The international community time and again descends into crisis situations in large numbers and often leaves the communities it aims to assist undermined. There is a tremendous need to do better and actually support and facilitate communities' own relief and recovery efforts, and work alongside national counterparts and structures.
- The necessity for national governments, with international support, to invest much more in disaster risk reduction and preparedness: Local communities were the first to assist in saving lives. With this in mind the humanitarian community ought to provide ongoing support to national and local preparedness measures at country level. The Hyogo Framework for Action provides a blueprint for work in this area.
- Perhaps the time has come to consider establishing a voluntary or more formal certification and accreditation system for international humanitarian aid actors. There are also those who believe that it is timely for the system to set up an effective inter-agency oversight mechanism that has the authority to provide performance feedback and measure improvements. These arguments need to be teased out, but the TEC and other initiatives seem to have put them back on the agenda.
- It will be important to translate lessons learned into doable action. Agencies have an individual and collective responsibility to take forward the recommendations made. There is a need to strengthen our partnerships with one another in order to strengthen future emergency response. Cultural and attitude changes are required so that we can improve on programming in the field. We must allow time to scale up, and should focus on building and strengthening our international capacity (by investing in training, staff retention and then recruiting wisely).
- In line with humanitarian principles of aid, we must do better at delivering aid that is based on sound and commonly-owned assessments. Assistance should be proportionate to need, and must be carried out with those we aim to support at the heart of spending decisions taken.

This summary report and all corresponding TEC reports are a clear indication of the collective desire of the humanitarian community to work together to share and learn from their experiences in order to continue to improve future performance. It is important that we take forward the lessons from the TEC initiative and deal with the challenges outlined in this, and other, TEC reports. Most of the lessons and recommendations affect the humanitarian system as a whole, and could usefully be addressed within the context of broader humanitarian reform.

Finally, the TEC reports could not have been accomplished with the support of many of you. We would like to acknowledge and thank all informants – in the countries as well as internationally – who gave generously of their time; the many donors who have allowed us to 'think big' and develop this common platform; the thematic evaluation teams; and the Core Management Group members of the TEC who have guided the TEC over the past two years. In particular, tremendous thanks go to the authors of the Synthesis Report and those in the TEC Secretariat at ALNAP who have worked hard over the past two years to publish the final reports on which this summary is based.

Susanne Frueh (on behalf of the Core Management Group)





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## 1 Chapter one

# Introduction

This report summarises and reviews the recommendations of the Synthesis Report of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC). The TEC is a group of aid agencies interested in encouraging learning from the international response to the December 2004 tsunami disaster through joint evaluation.

There was early recognition that the exceptional response to the tsunami disaster, including the amount of money given, not only demanded a high standard of accountability to a generous public but also provided an opportunity for learning by the international humanitarian community. A meeting in Geneva in February 2005 started a process that led to the formation of the TEC with three aims:

1. To learn from the response to improve the quality of future humanitarian action, including linkages to longer term recovery and development.
2. To provide some accountability to the millions of people who gave, either directly or through their taxes, to the tsunami response, as well as to the publics of the affected countries.
3. To test the evaluation model used by the TEC to inform future joint evaluations.

The TEC ran as a collaborative model with five thematic joint evaluations, each commissioned by different TEC members. A secretariat based at ALNAP (Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action) in London supported the TEC. The five joint thematic evaluations were:

1. Coordination of the international response to tsunami-affected countries
2. The role of needs assessment in the tsunami response
3. Impact of the tsunami response on local and national capacities

4. Links between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in the tsunami response
5. The funding response to the tsunami.

These topics selected by TEC members reflected the early concerns arising from the response, known areas of systemic weakness in the humanitarian sector, and the mandates of the organisations present at the meeting. The TEC studies are mainly about the response process rather than about the impact of the response.

Independent evaluation teams undertook fieldwork<sup>4</sup> in the autumn of 2005 and the TEC published the five thematic evaluation reports with a synthesis report in July 2006. These five thematic reports were underlain by 43 different TEC sub-studies, other evaluation reports, and by over 27,000 tsunami-related documents.

### The reports of the five TEC thematic evaluations

Bennett, J, Bertrand, W, Harkin, C, Samarasinghe, S & Wickramatillake, H (2006) *Coordination of the international response to tsunami-affected countries*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

Christoplos, I (2006) *Links between relief, rehabilitation and development in the tsunami response*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

de Ville de Goyet, C & Morinière, L (2006) *The role of needs assessment in the tsunami response*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

Flint, M, & Goyder, H (2006) *Funding the tsunami response*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

Scheper, E, Parakrama, A, Patel, S & Vaux, T (2006) *Impact of the tsunami response on local and national capacities*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

### The TEC Synthesis Report

Telford, J, Cosgrave, J & Houghton, R (2006) *Joint Evaluation of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami: Synthesis Report*. London: Tsunami Evaluation Coalition.

*Note: The 43 TEC sub-studies are listed at the end of the bibliography*

## Purpose and audience

This short report not only summarises the TEC Synthesis Report but also explains some of the analysis behind the TEC recommendations in greater depth, as well as provide possible ways forward. The report has been prepared with the busy humanitarian professional in mind; someone who may not have time to read the main 175-page Synthesis Report. It begins by providing a brief overview of the disaster and the response before going on to concentrate on the TEC recommendations and the logic behind them. It focuses more on areas in need of improvement than on examples of good or improving practice from the tsunami response.

The TEC has also commissioned a second summary report that is more suitable for a general audience. All the reports are available on the TEC website (<http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org>) as well as on the CD-ROM accompanying this report.

<sup>1</sup> Different TEC evaluation teams visited Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Thailand, Somalia, and India. Studies were also conducted in more than twelve donor countries.



## Terminology

This report uses the term ‘agencies’ to refer to humanitarian actors such as the Red Cross movement, United Nations (UN) agencies, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and the aid administrations of donor governments. It uses ‘affected population’ to refer to the people affected directly by the disaster. These may relate to aid agencies directly or through their regional and national political structures, depending on the context.

The term ‘relief’ in the report refers to immediate aid to prevent distress and suffering and the term ‘recovery’ to rebuilding people’s economic and social lives after the disaster. The term ‘local capacities’ refers not only to the resources, skills and knowledge of the local community, but also to their ability to set and influence policies and to hold accountable those with a duty toward the community (such as the aid agencies who raised money to help the affected populations).

‘Ownership’ in this report refers to the control of the response, to decisions about programme policies and priorities and the nature of the response.

## Limitations

The tsunami was a sudden-onset natural disaster and the worst affected countries were middle-income countries with well-developed local capacities. While some may think this might limit the general applicability of the TEC recommendations, not only do the operational problems seen in the tsunami response mirror those seen in complex political emergencies like Rwanda in 1994 or Kosovo in 1999, but lower income countries can also have significant local capacities. While every humanitarian crisis needs to be considered in its own context, the TEC recommendations are therefore considered to be more broadly applicable – and indeed are probably applicable in the majority of such crises.

The TEC focused on the first 14 months of the response by the international humanitarian community. It took a sector-wide approach rather than looking at individual agencies. The TEC reports make some reference to local organisations and national governments, but these were not the main object of the TEC evaluations. As a result the recommendations from the TEC are mainly, with a few exceptions, for humanitarian agencies rather than for the people and governments of the affected countries. The TEC reports do not reflect changes in practice that may have occurred after the first 14 months. In particular the report does not deal with the efforts toward humanitarian reform, including the cluster coordination model and the strengthened Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

## Summary of TEC findings

The TEC studies found the international response to the tsunami disaster helped the affected people and reduced their suffering. They identify many examples of good practice in emergency response, and some welcome innovations. However, overall the studies conclude that the response did not achieve the potential offered by the generous funding.

The TEC studies also found that:

- It was local people themselves who provided almost all immediate life-saving action and the early emergency support, as is commonly the case in disasters.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is often local capacities that determine how many survive in the immediate aftermath of a sudden-onset natural disaster. The TEC studies found that international agencies experienced major problems in scaling up their own responses. Those agencies that had invested (before the disaster) in developing their emergency response capacity had the potential to be more effective. Pre-existing links, and mutual respect, between international agencies and local partners also led to better use of both international and local capacities.
- International action was most effective when enabling, facilitating and supporting local actors. International agencies often brushed local capacities aside, even though they subscribe to norms and standards that call for engagement with and accountability to local actors such as governments, communities and local NGOs. International agencies often ignored local structures and did not communicate well with local communities nor hold themselves accountable to them.
- There were many examples of poor quality work in the response to the tsunami, not only in the relief phase (largely from inexperienced agencies) but also in the recovery phase. Different parts of the international humanitarian response community have, over the last decade, launched several initiatives to improve the quality of humanitarian work. These initiatives typically set up norms or standards, but none of them has an effective mechanism to sanction agencies for failing to meet them.
- The tsunami highlighted the arbitrary nature of the current funding system for humanitarian emergencies. This system produces an uneven and unfair flow of funds for emergencies that neither encourages investment in capacity nor responses that are proportionate to need. Despite the commitment to Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) by some donors, the TEC studies found that donors often took decisions on funding the response based on political calculation and media pressure.

The TEC Synthesis Report makes four recommendations: around ownership (and accountability), capacity, quality and funding. These are all about one central idea – that the humanitarian aid community needs to go about its business in a different way. It needs to cede ownership of the response to the affected population and become accountable to them. This change needs to be supported by more equitable and proportionate funding, the development of disaster response capacities, a greater focus on risk-reduction, and a system for controlling the quality of the work done by humanitarian agencies.

<sup>2</sup> This is very clearly true in sudden onset natural disasters, but even in complex emergencies it is often the local community that provide food and shelter for the displaced before international aid actors arrive on the scene in force.

# The disaster

The early morning earthquake of 26 December 2004 caused destruction in Banda Aceh and other parts of Aceh even before the arrival of the tsunami.

No one knows how many died in the earthquake as the tsunamis overtook the rescuers. The best estimate is that the death toll was the same as for the earthquake that struck the islands of Nias and Simuele three months later on 28 March (ie, about 1,000 people).



*The earthquake that caused the tsunamis of 26 December, 2004 destroyed this building in Banda Aceh. This is an example of a 'soft storey' building failure that simple earthquake-resistant construction measures can prevent (for an extra 5% of the building cost).*

The December earthquake led to an upward movement of seafloor across a strip over 1,200km long. This generated a train of tsunamis that sped across the Indian Ocean killing about 228,000 people across 14 countries (Figure 1, page 6).

Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand suffered the greatest loss of life. For loss of life by nationality, Germany and Sweden were the fifth and sixth worst affected (Figure 2, page 7).<sup>3</sup>

The impact of the tsunamis depended on location, with towering 20 metre waves in Aceh and a 2 metre swell in parts of the Maldives. By the time they had travelled 8,000km to South Africa the waves were barely distinguishable from the background pattern of normal waves. This difference in the severity of the tsunamis showed itself in

3 Sources for Figure 2: Tsunami mortality by nationality: (AFP, 2005a; Bagai *et al.*, 2005; BRR, 2005; Bundeskriminalamt, 2005; Danish Police, 2005; Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005; Government of Austria, 2005; Government of Hong Kong, 2005; Government of Sri Lanka, 2005; Morris *et al.*, 2004; National Disaster Management Center, 2006; Sharma, 2005; Swedish Police, 2006; UN Office of the Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, 2006; Wikipedia, 2006b). See (Telford *et al.*, 2006:159) for details of which data point is from which source.

**Figure 1: Map of the Indian Ocean showing countries affected by the tsunami**

the ratio between numbers of those who were killed and injured in different places. In Aceh the ratio of dead to injured survivors was 6:1, dropping to 1.5:1 in Sri Lanka and 0.3:1 in India.

The tsunami killed more women than men: the ratio of male to female casualties ranged from 20 percent more women to more than twice as many women as men (Figure 3, page 8).<sup>4</sup> The normal pattern with flooding is that floods kill more men than women. This is usually put down to men being prone to take risks or to overestimate their swimming ability. However, storm surges, where the sea rushes inland like in a tsunami, typically kill more women than men. The reasons include both sex (men's greater strength allowed them to hold on to trees and fixed objects for longer), and gender (knowledge of swimming, different locations, childcare duties, clothing and others).

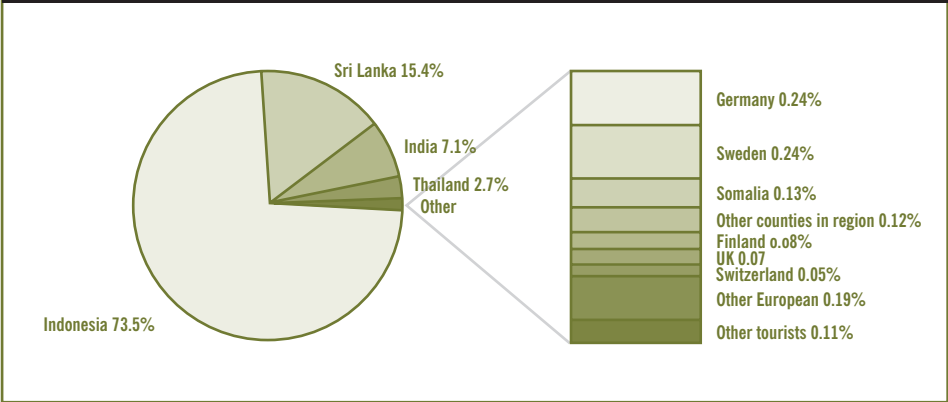
Death rates were also higher for those under 15 and those over 50.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes the elderly suffered the highest death rates and sometimes children did, but on average these groups were over twice as likely to die as adults. Adult men under 50 had the highest chance of survival, as well as the highest chance of surviving with injuries.

Less than 1 percent of those who died were tourists, but these got most of the media attention in donor countries. One study found that 40 percent of western media coverage on

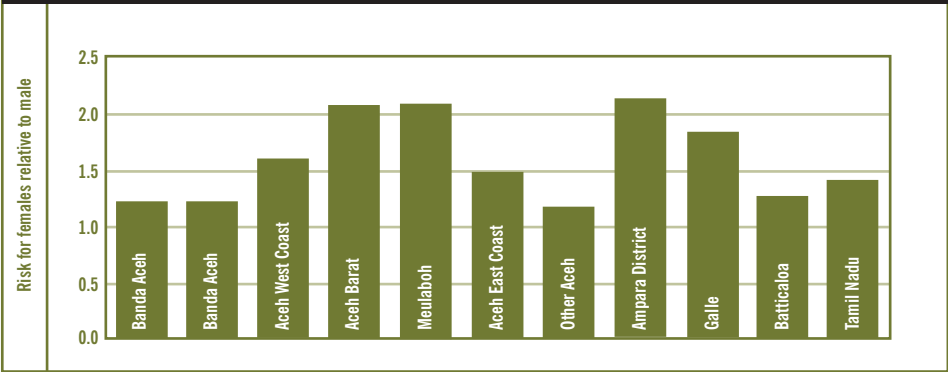
4 Sources for Figure 3: Women were more likely to die in the tsunami than men: (Birkmann *et al*, 2006; Doocy *et al*, 2006; Guha-Sapir *et al*, 2006; Nishikiori *et al*, 2006; Women Studies Centre, 2005). See (Telford *et al*, 2006:154) for details of which data point is from which source.

5 (Birkmann *et al*, 2006; Doocy *et al*, 2006; Government of the Maldives, 2004; Guha-Sapir *et al*, 2006; National Disaster Management Center, 2006; Nishikiori *et al*, 2006) see Telford *et al* (2006:153-154) for details.

**Figure 2: Tsunami mortality by nationality**



**Figure 3: Tsunami mortality risk for females in comparison to males**



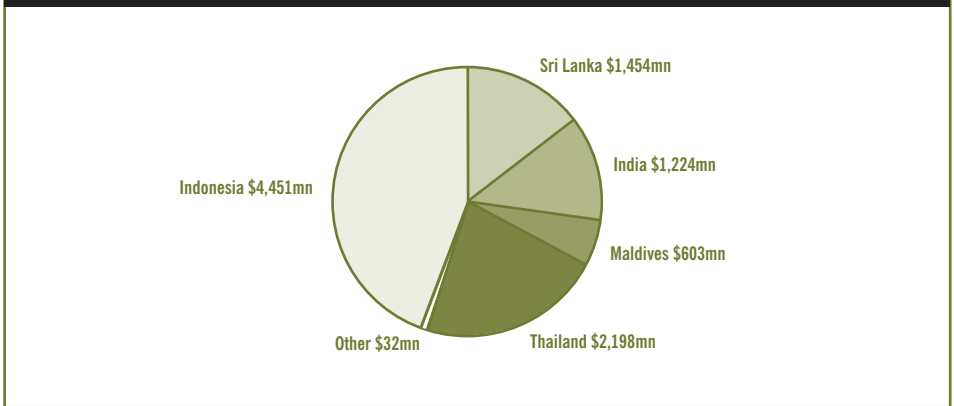
people affected by the disaster dealt with tourists (CARMA, 2006). Paradoxically, while estimates of local mortality increased up to the end of January those for tourist deaths fell from over nine thousand at beginning of January 2005 to 3,528 at the end of January, eventually to settle at 2,218.

The assessments after the tsunami estimated losses and damage at just under \$10 billion (Figure 4, page 9).<sup>6</sup> As with all disasters this is only a very rough estimate as damage (the cost of a factory) is relatively easy to calculate; the consequent losses (being without work for a long period) are far harder to estimate.

Indonesia suffered nearly half of the total economic losses and damage. The large investment in the tourist industry in Thailand and the Maldives led to significant damage and loss there.

The Maldives was badly hit economically. Although only 108 people died in the Maldives, the estimate of damage and loss was nearly 80 percent of a year's gross national income. In

<sup>6</sup> Sources for Figure 4: Losses and Damage from the tsunami: (BRR *et al*, 2005; IRIN, 2005a, 2005b).

**Figure 4: Losses and damage from the tsunami (by country)**

comparison, within Indonesia the damage was almost wholly confined to the province of Aceh where the estimate of damage was equal to almost a year's economic output from the province.

Industries based at the coast were the worst affected. In Aceh, ports and harbours were destroyed in addition to the fishing fleet and industries along the coastal strip. Fishing and tourism were the two worst affected sectors overall, but those with farms near the coast lost animals and saw their fields made infertile by debris and salt.

Although an appalling disaster, it was not the worst the world has ever known. A storm surge in the Bay of Bengal in 1970 killed 300,000 to 500,000 people in one night. The Tangshan Earthquake in China in 1976 killed at least 242,000 people. Flooding in Bangladesh in 2004 destroyed over 1 million homes, displaced over 4 million people, and affected over 36 million people. The Ethiopian famine of 1984–1985 killed over 900,000 people.

## 3 Chapter three

# The response

This section looks at the overall response using the four main recommendations of the TEC Synthesis Report as headings.

## Ownership and accountability

*Those who own a process control it; they decide which priorities and policies apply. Ownership can be vested in all levels of society, from the central government to the village committee. For example, a government may own the national water policy, but the regional government may own the implementation of that policy, while the community may own the management of the water points in their village. In a democracy, the community may still own central and regional government policies through the power of the ballot box. Ownership has come to the fore as an issue in development literature in the last two decades (Chambers et al, 2004:3), but has received little attention in relief.*



Only the floor remained of these houses in Banda Aceh.

*Accountability refers to organisations (or individuals) being held responsible to a particular group for the effects of their actions. Accountability can be to the affected population, to affected governments, to donors, to the tax-paying or donating public in donor countries, or to the broader group of humanitarian organisations. There are two prerequisites for accountability toward any particular group. First, the group must have accurate information about the policies and actions of the organisation and their impact. This demands transparency from organisations. Second, they must have a*



*mechanism through which they cannot only raise their concerns but can also have their questions answered and influence present and future policies and actions.*

In the tsunami-affected areas, survivors and their neighbours began rescue and recovery work using whatever means were at hand. People in areas further inland also provided assistance. In Sri Lanka and Thailand, it was mostly the public from nearby areas that did the life-saving and immediate relief during the first two days. In Indonesia, 91 percent of those interviewed by the Fritz Institute (2005c:3) reported that they had been rescued by private individuals. Local Red Cross volunteers played a key role in the initial response in Aceh. In this first stage of the response it was therefore the affected population that managed the response; their priorities were paramount and they had complete control or ownership of the first part of the response.

The local and national government response then began to take over from the response by the public, but the timescale for this varied between sites with the official response in India being the fastest. The official response in Indonesia was slower for several reasons:

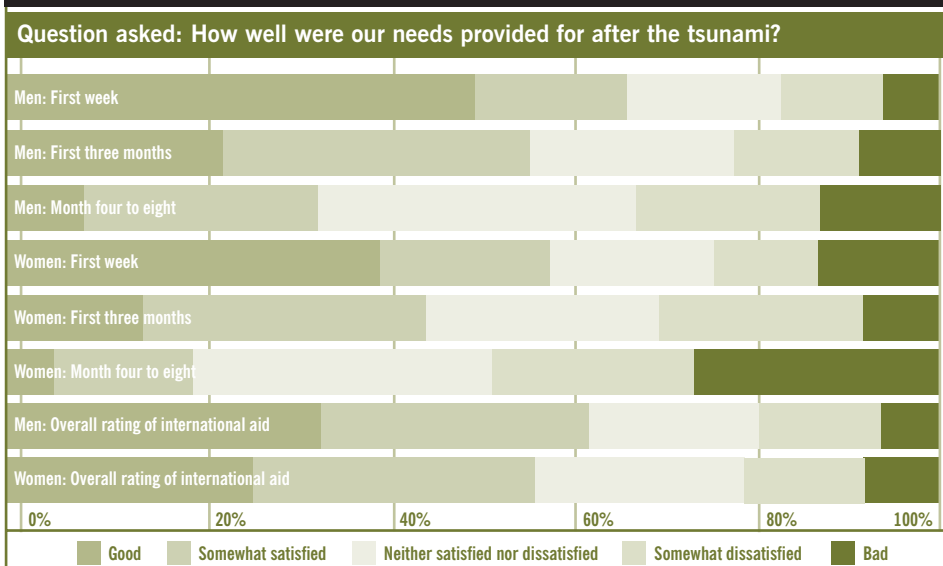
1. The tsunamis killed many local officials, particularly in Aceh. The TEC Capacities Study notes that the tsunami killed 10,475 staff from local and national government in Aceh. The military was also badly hit in Aceh, especially naval units.
2. The tsunamis destroyed government offices and transport infrastructure. The tsunamis destroyed main roads that ran near the coast and sections of these roads, as well as key bridges along the coasts of Sri Lanka and Aceh. The main airport at Aceh was unusable for a while because of flooding. Aceh's main seaports were also destroyed. The lack of access meant that it was up to 10 days before the most isolated groups got outside help.
3. When bridges and roads were carried away they took underground telephone cables with them. The tsunamis also knocked out mobile phone systems, either directly through destroying towers, exchanges, power supplies, or landline interconnection.

These three problems made it particularly difficult for local officials in Aceh to get a view of the true scale of the problem and to coordinate relief efforts at the beginning. There were also some additional local constraints. Parts of Sri Lanka had both government and Tamil Tiger administrations. In Indonesia, continuing administrative reform left some local officials in doubt over which level of government was responsible for what. Confusion and policy differences between the central, regional and local government also constrained some government action in some of the worst affected countries.

In Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and India, help soon began to pour in from other parts of those countries. First to arrive were volunteers and official teams. The national military played a key role in the early rescue and relief work. In India and Thailand, which both turned down outside help, national resources provided almost the whole response. India in particular kept national ownership of the response.

The international military, the INGOs and foreign Red Cross agencies were the next to arrive, followed by the UN. INGOs and the UN responded more quickly in Sri Lanka where access was easier and where many more agencies had programmes and staff. The few agencies present in Aceh, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, assisted



**Figure 5: Beneficiaries were happier with the initial response**

from the outset. The number of agencies grew quickly, making coordination more difficult. The arrival of international actors with huge resources brought much-needed help. International aid both replaced some local resources which the early relief effort had exhausted, and provided new resources which were either not available locally or available in only very limited quantities.

The TEC studies found that, despite these positives, huge amounts of funding encouraged a virtual obsession with 'upward' accountability to donors, the media and the public in donor countries. This discouraged accountability to disaster-affected populations and 'lateral' accountability to other agencies and the governments of affected counties. It also resulted in competition, duplication and waste (as discussed below in the section on quality).

Beneficiaries rated the first week of the response better than later periods. Figure 5 shows the results of the TEC Capacities Study in Sri Lanka, but other surveys also show the same decline in the affected population's satisfaction with the aid effort.

The first week was the period when needs were greatest, but also simplest. In the first week after any major disaster everyone needs help with food, water and shelter. By the second week some families are already meeting some of their needs from their own resources, and the pattern of needs becomes far more complex. But the first week is also the period when the affected people themselves have the greatest say over the response. This local ownership declined with time. The TEC studies found that international actors reduced local and national ownership of response as agencies sometimes brushed local capacities aside and set up parallel mechanisms. The TEC Capacities Study found that the international response eroded some local capacities through, for example, undermining local ownership or by lacking transparency.

Ownership and accountability are closely intertwined. The affected population cannot exercise effective ownership of the response when the international responders:

- reduce the population's capacity to exercise ownership;
- are not transparent (as this promotes corruption);<sup>7</sup> or
- do not hold themselves accountable to the affected population.

The TEC studies found that communities felt that organisations were not accountable to them, even over issues as basic as organisations not telling communities about what they were planning to do.

Figure 5 illustrates one key innovation in the tsunami response. This was the first time that the opinion of disaster affected populations in developing countries was surveyed to such an extent. Three of the TEC studies carried out their own affected-population surveys in at least two countries, and one of these included questions raised by the remaining two studies. Other evaluations and reviews also surveyed beneficiary opinions (Anderson, 2006; Dercon, 2006; Fritz Institute, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; IOM, 2005a, 2005b; IPS, 2005; Lindgren et al., 2005; Mattock, 2005; TNS et al., 2005; University of Madras Department Of Sociology, 2005; UNORC, 2006; Vaux et al., 2005; Wall, 2005).

Opinion surveys informed agencies, the public and the media as well as evaluators.<sup>8</sup> Such opinion surveys are important as they are one of the few channels through which the public in donor countries may get a view of how well agencies perform. However, there is a danger that surveying opinions becomes an end in itself rather than providing information for the better management of the response.

## Capacity

*Capacity refers not only to resources, skills and knowledge, but also to the ability to exercise ownership – that is, to influence and control policies and actions. Humanitarian emergencies are events that overwhelm the immediate local capacity and demand external help. In the tsunami, the huge needs for relief and recovery all clearly exceeded local capacity to provide them.*

*While the local community carried out the first response this relied on expedients like using university professors as labourers or schools as temporary accommodation. Such expedients are obviously only possible for short periods as children need schools and highly trained people need to return to their normal jobs. The key role of national and international responders is to take the load from the early local responders. The scale of the tsunami response also exposed problems with international capacity.*

Disaster risk reduction builds capacity to reduce the impact of natural hazards. Nowhere was the issue of capacity more clear than in the lack of early warning and of preparedness. There

7 Transparency was described by the World Bank sponsored Kecamatan (Sub-district) development programme (KDP) in Aceh as 'the mother of all anti-corruption measures' as well as the 'source of social control' (Adams et al, 2005:39).

8 One (non-TEC) evaluator confided to the author that, when they received the delayed beneficiary survey results for their evaluation, it forced a rethink of the work that they had seen. They then had to rewrite what had been a fairly favourable draft evaluation report to properly reflect the criticisms made by beneficiaries.

was no tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean in 2004, whereas there is one in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup> There were some examples of where early warning saved lives. However, it should also be clear that the violence of the tsunamis in Aceh, and the short lead-time between their generation and landfall, meant that even a working warning system might not have saved many lives in that province.

Some governments and agencies had made prior investments in disaster preparedness. These paid off for governments that had set up emergency response structures; agencies that had emergency response staff rosters; and agencies that had built up stockpiles of relief materials. Such preparedness increased capacity in the critical first days.

However, there was little preparedness, even through education, for the risk of tsunamis. Lack of knowledge about tsunamis contributed to the loss of life – for example, in Sri Lanka some people drowned when they went to collect fish stranded on the shore when the tide withdrew. In comparison, in the Nicobar and Andaman Islands some groups moved inland before the tsunamis struck based on their traditional knowledge of the risk of tsunamis.

No community or nation has a full set of resources to meet all possible emergencies from within their own capacities. Communities may need to call for assistance from the provincial capacities; provinces from national capacities; and nations from international capacities.

The TEC reports underlined the critical issue that these different capacities should act in consort rather than interacting negatively with one another. The constructive meshing of capacities was clear in some parts of the response, but one TEC finding was that such productive collaboration was rare.

Capacity is multi-faceted, and an effective response calls for interventions from a wide range of actors (Figure 6 on p. 14), each of which may bring particular capacities. The affected population can bring their knowledge of the context to the response; international agencies can bring their specialist medical or relief skills; the international military can bring their logistics capacity.

One good example of meshing capacities was the distribution of cash grants to the affected populations. Cash grants combine the financial capacity of the international agencies with the livelihood capacities of the affected population. Where there are functioning markets, cash allows the affected population to use their own capacities to the utmost. It allows them to meet their own priority needs rather than meeting the needs envisaged by the aid agency. Communities liked cash programmes, especially cash grants. The TEC Capacities Study found that 90 percent of respondents would have preferred cash to non-cash relief in the first three months (Scheper *et al.*, 2006:96).

Coordination is essential to generate such productive collaboration. The UN's appointment of a high profile figure<sup>10</sup> as a special envoy was an example of good practice that promoted collaboration. UN agencies themselves also appreciated the appointment of a UN special

9 One of the consequences of the December 2004 tsunamis is that a tsunami warning system has now been set up in the Indian Ocean. However, tsunamis are risk in all oceans and seas including the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was accompanied by three tsunamis that overtopped town walls in some cases and caused damage as far away as the Caribbean (James, 1998). Recent studies in the UK highlight the impact of historical tsunamis, with waves of 6m in height in one North Sea tsunami about 8,000 years ago (Bojanowski, 2006; British Geological Survey, 2005). Presumably we will see an Atlantic tsunami warning system set up after the next major incident in the Atlantic.

10 Former US President William Jefferson Clinton.

**Figure 6: Mixture of capacities in the response in Aceh****Capacities are cumulative**

coordinator. However, despite these positive elements coordination on the ground was weak and varied greatly between different classes of actors.

Coordination between civil and military actors is one example. The TEC Coordination Study found that international military capacities coordinated well with national military capacities because, usually, the national military set the tasks for the international military units. However, there was poor coordination between international civil capacities (such as the United Nations, Red Cross movement and INGOs) and national and international military capacities. This came about for several reasons, including lack of mutual understanding, suspicion of the motives of the military,<sup>14</sup> and the uncoordinated nature of the overall international civil response.

### International capacity constraints

The international response suffered from severe capacity constraints. Aid agencies normally work in an environment where there is not enough funding to provide all the required assistance for all those who need aid. Agencies commonly have to choose between providing all required assistance to selected sub-groups of those in need, or delivering some of the required assistance to all those in need. In the tsunami response, generous funding meant that this constraint simply did not exist for most agencies.

However, the TEC reports found that agency managers both overestimated what they could do with the available funds and underestimated how long it would take. They did not allow for the personnel, procurement and other factors that constrained their efforts to scale up. The limited funding for 'normal' emergencies constrained the capacity of the international system in the tsunami response (Bennett *et al.*, 2006:42) through limiting the capacity of agencies to scale up to meet sudden emergency needs.

<sup>14</sup> Some national and international civil agencies distrusted the national military's motivation given the history of conflict in Aceh and parts of Sri Lanka, and did not coordinate with them.

Significant international capacity constraints were soon obvious in the response. Agencies had the greatest difficulty in recruiting suitably qualified staff and several TEC studies referred to staff with inappropriate skill sets or inadequate experience. There were other capacity constraints also. One INGO had planned to hire a fleet of civilian helicopters, but found that there were simply not enough available on the market for short-term contracts at short notice.

However the biggest issues with capacity arose when agencies moved on to recovery programmes. Recovery is far more complex than relief. Relief needs are relatively uniform, whereas recovery needs vary greatly from family to family depending on what capacities they have, and what the context is. Problems that contributed to inappropriate and ineffective recovery programmes included:

- Lack of suitably skilled staff: this was already an issue for the relief phase but became far worse in the recovery phase when both interventions, and the skills needed to manage them, became more complex.
- Lack of awareness of the context both at an individual and institutional level. This led to errors like supporting expanded fishing in a context where stocks were already over-fished.
- The extension by some agencies into sectors they had no previous experience or competence in.
- Lack of linkages between agencies, communities, government and the private sector.

## Quality

*Quality is a measure of how good or bad something is. For aid it is the measure of how well the assistance provided conforms to the needs of the affected population. The search for better quality aid programmes is a recurrent theme within the humanitarian community. Every major emergency results in a repeat airing of concerns about the number of aid actors and the quality of their work. The Joint Evaluation of the Emergency Report to Rwanda (Borton et al, 1996) reported many of the same problems seen in the tsunami response, and itself led to several initiatives to improve quality within the humanitarian sector.*

*The Code of Conduct (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response et al, 1994) began as an INGO and Red Cross Movement quality initiative but now enjoys wide acceptance in the sector. The Humanitarian Reform process, beginning with the Humanitarian Response Review (Adinolfi et al, 2005), is a quality initiative within the UN system. The donor community has the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative (Good Humanitarian Donorship, 2003). The World Bank has sponsored the ProVention Consortium partly to improve the quality of disaster risk reduction programmes. There are also sector-wide initiatives such as ALNAP and the Sphere Project (Sphere Project, 2004).*

One of the most fundamental humanitarian principles is that aid should be based on an assessment of needs and be proportionate to those needs.<sup>12</sup> However, the TEC Needs

12 Principle 2 of the Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct states that *Wherever possible, we will base the provision of relief aid upon a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs. Within the entirety of our programmes, we will reflect considerations of proportionality* (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response et al, 1994).

**Figure 7: Proliferation of INGOs in Aceh**

Assessment Study found that assessments were of variable quality and that assessment reports failed to influence relief action. As a result: 'the international response was a poor match for the real aspirations of the people affected by the tsunami, who felt over-assessed<sup>13</sup> but not consulted' (de Ville de Goyet et al., 2006:14).

## Proliferation

One area where there was a clear lack of proportional response to needs in the tsunami response was the number of agencies. Organisations poured into the affected areas. Figure 7 shows the data for INGOs, but there were also military contingents, national NGOs, Red Cross Societies, UN agencies and private companies. There were also the less formal organisations with an individual or group who raised a sum of money, or simply used their own and came to help.

This proliferation had several impacts on response quality:

- The sheer number of organisations made coordination simultaneously more difficult and more expensive (in terms of staff time involved).
- The 'second tsunami' of aid organisations included many with little or no experience or competence in relief. There were many examples of inappropriate relief carried out by this group in particular. A private company with no medical experience became responsible for building health centres and coordinating health assistance in one part of Aceh. However, there were also quality issues with the work of more established and experienced agencies.
- Increased competition between agencies for beneficiaries. This led to agencies moving into sectors outside their competence and reduced information sharing between agencies.

<sup>13</sup> This refers to assessment visits by agencies rather than surveys. The leaders of one camp near Banda Aceh told the author that they had received as many as 10 assessment visits a day from different organisations in the first few weeks of the response.

While the number of agencies sometimes resulted in better levels of service for the beneficiaries, it also led to duplication and waste. For example, there were so many field hospitals for so few patients that the medical staff from two different hospitals scuffled over a patient (Schulze, 2005:13). Prosthetic limbs continued to flood into Aceh even after the number of limbs donated exceeded the numbers who needed them (Indonesia Relief, 2005c; Kompas, 2005). Proliferation consumed local resources as communities tried to sort out the competing agencies (Serambi Indonesia, 2005).

## Relief phase

In the relief phase, poor quality relief work was reflected in inappropriate aid. Examples of inappropriate aid included: inappropriate clothing; expired or culturally inappropriate food; and inappropriate drugs or medicines.<sup>14</sup> The ready availability of funding was partly responsible for the supply of un-needed or inappropriate items.

The many departures from established humanitarian norms and standards in the response were symptomatic of this lack of quality. The TEC reports found, for example, that agencies did not effectively consult beneficiaries nor properly consider the needs of the more vulnerable sections of the affected population. However, as noted earlier, the affected population was more satisfied with the relief phase than with later assistance. One reason may be that assistance far exceeded the expectations of the affected population in the relief phase. The oversupply of goods and the large number of agencies meant that almost everyone got some help during the relief phase.



*Boat yards sprang up all over the region, but many boats were unseaworthy leading to a large waste of money*

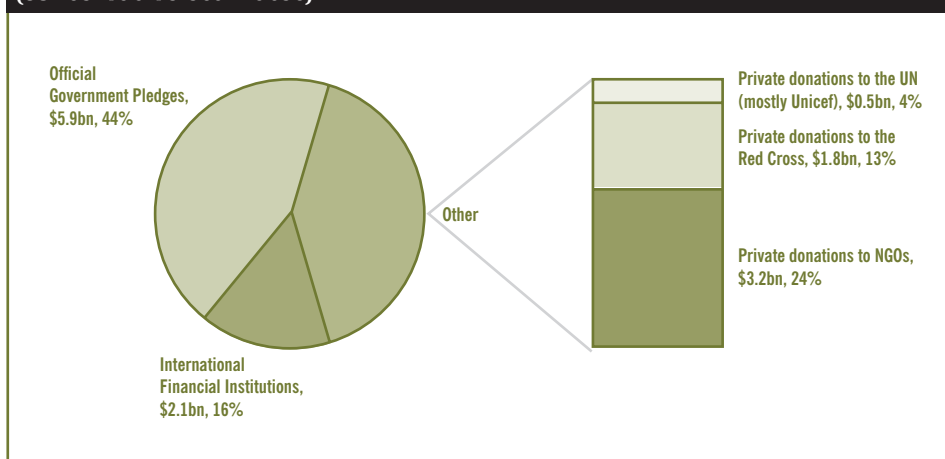
## Recovery phase

As agency programmes began to deal with recovery there were many issues with permanent shelter. In general, the promises by agencies for rapid replacement of homes were not met. Issues around land-rights, availability of raw materials, water and sewage services, and the impact that house location had on livelihoods all held up development. Land-rights issues sometimes seemed to come as a surprise for some agencies, despite this being a key issue in all post-disaster housing reconstruction.

The TEC reports found that programmes to help affected families recover their livelihoods were often flawed by a lack of contextual knowledge among agencies.

14 Dramatic examples of inappropriate aid in the tsunami response including Viagra and ski jackets (The Guardian, 2005) and Father Christmas costumes (AFP, 2005c) as well as the usual inappropriate medical supplies (Abarquez et al., 2004) and expired drugs. Indonesia Health Ministry on Wednesday destroyed some 75 metric tons of expired medicines which had been part of humanitarian aid (Indonesia Relief, 2005b). Tinned pork was sent to staunchly Muslim Aceh (Schulze, 2005:14). Expired food was also a problem: expired food aid was being sorted out and estimated will need another 4 trucks. Among the food destroyed is food that already expired since 2003 (Indonesia Relief, 2005a).

**Figure 8: Overall external funding for the tsunami response (conservative estimates)**



Agencies provided more fishing boats than had been lost, even where over-fishing had previously been a concern. Many recovery projects focused on physical assets. This meant that those who had held physical assets before had them replaced, with the effect of providing more aid for the better-off than for the poor.

Recovery projects were plagued by quality problems as well as by the lack of contextual knowledge. FAO found that in Sri Lanka, nearly 19 percent of the new boats were not seaworthy (FAO, 2006).<sup>15</sup> In Aceh it was estimated that 40 percent of the smaller vessels would be unusable within 12 to 18 months because of poor craftsmanship and the use of sub-standard raw materials (BRR et al., 2005:113). The TEC LRRD Study found the quality of some of the transitional houses was so poor that other agencies had to come in to correct the faults (Christoplos, 2006:45).

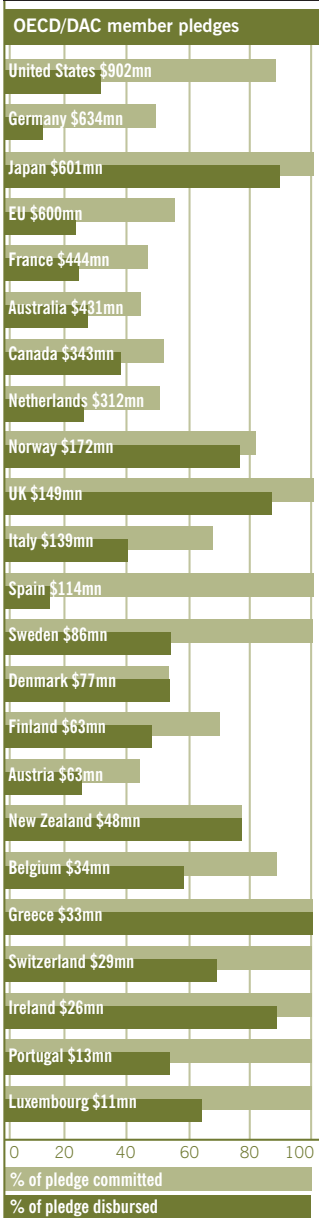
## Funding

*The funding for the tsunami was exceptional in many respects. Not only was the funding generous but INGOs and the Red Cross movement received a much higher proportion of the total funding than in most emergencies.*

*Funding for emergencies is uneven, with funding dependent on the television coverage that a disaster receives. The GHD initiative, mentioned earlier, is one effort to improve the uneven nature of funding. Another is the reform of the CERF (launched in January 2006) that seeks, among other things, to improve funding for 'forgotten' emergencies.*

<sup>15</sup> While FAO identified the problem of oversupply of small boats in Aceh, it continued to distribute them itself (Eye on Aceh, 2006:30). Oversupply and low quality of boats was also a problem in India (Alexander, 2006:11), and it was noted that supplying boats without nets made the boats useless in some cases (Srinivasan et al., 2005:15).



**Figure 9: Pledges, commitments, and disbursements**

## Generous Funding

The tsunami provoked the most generous funding response ever, netting at least \$13.5bn in cash and pledges (Figure 8). This figure excludes the private giving by people in the affected countries (worth \$190mn at least) and contributions from the budgets of the affected countries (\$2.7bn). It also excludes a further \$1.9bn from private giving in countries not covered by the TEC funding studies, as the data from the Red Cross movement and other agencies already included some of this.

Apart from the overall scale of the funding, the funding for the tsunami was exceptional in several other ways:

- Official funding normally dwarfs private giving, but in the tsunami private funding almost equalled official government pledges (Figure 9). The cash flow was also different as a result. Private donations were almost all in cash and were immediately available. Official pledges sometimes cover three to five years, and they are usually only released year by year.
- The speed with which donors converted their pledges (promises to contribute a stated amount to an appeal) into commitments (a written agreement to fund a particular agency) and disbursements (transfer of the funds) was unusually fast. In just over nine months time, the main donors disbursed 39 percent of their pledges and committed a further 30 percent (OECD/DAC, 2006a) (Figure 9). This was not only fast but also a better realisation of pledges than in previous disasters. In the response to Hurricane Mitch, donors disbursed less than one-third of the \$9bn they had pledged.<sup>16</sup>
- The donor pledges for the tsunami response were almost all 'new' money rather than recycled pledges. By contrast, in the response to Hurricane Mitch many donor pledges turned out to be 'old' or already pledged money.<sup>17</sup>

16 Oxfam report that less than one third of the \$9bn pledged in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch was actually disbursed (Oxfam International, 2005).

17 The four countries most affected by Hurricane Mitch (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) received less than \$1bn in ODA in the year of the hurricane (1998) and the five following years altogether, than had they received unchanged their average level of ODA for the previous four years continued unchanged (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2004; OECD/DAC, 2006b). OCHA's Financial Tracking System only recorded a total of \$683mn in contributions with a declared value for Hurricane Mitch (OCHA-FTS, 2001).

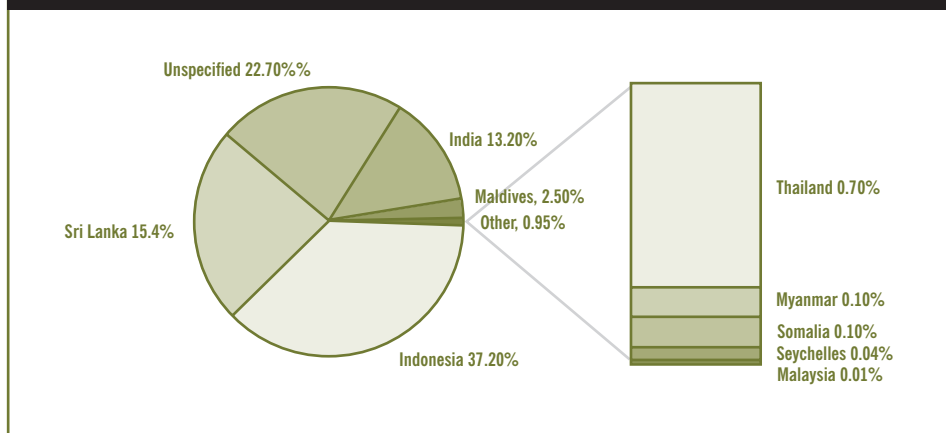
**Figure 10: Allocation of funding by country**

Figure 9 represents an innovation in tracking pledges and commitments. The tsunami response was the first time the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) actively tracked pledges made by DAC members. This was another instance of the priority given to accountability to the donor public. Unfortunately, the DAC did not follow this innovative good practice with later disasters such as the Kashmir earthquake in 2005.

## Funding Motivation

The reasons the public gave so much were complex. Two of the TEC funding studies (Bär *et al.*, 2006; Gasser *et al.*, 2006) surveyed the public in Spain and Germany to find the reasons for such generosity. The reasons given included: the scale of the death and destruction; vicariousness, or the feeling that 'it could have been me'; the wish to do something concrete; experience or knowledge of one of the affected countries; the time of year (just after Christmas); high media attention; it was a natural disaster and the affected were 'innocent'; and peer pressure – everybody was giving.

However, the TEC Needs Assessment Study made clear that it was media coverage and political or institutional factors and not needs assessments that drove donor decisions on pledges (de Ville de Goyet *et al.*, 2006:37).

The scale of public concern drew official donors into what the EU aid Commissioner called a 'donor beauty contest' (AFP, 2005b; Michel, 2005) with countries competing to announce spectacular aid pledges, regardless of the needs or capacities of affected countries. However, the worst affected countries did receive the largest flow of funds (Figure 10), and funding overall roughly matched the differing levels of needs (although The Maldives was slightly under-funded).

Nearly half the official pledges were for emergency relief, even though it was clear that reconstruction would be the biggest need. Despite the donor frenzy, official pledges were less than for other crises.<sup>18</sup>

## **Private funding**

However, private giving from the public (36 percent of funding) and from corporations (4 percent) broke all records. Over 80 percent of private funding went to 12 agencies and consortia. Funds flooded into NGO coffers. There were joint NGO appeals in many countries. In the UK, the Disasters Emergency Committee broke the world record for on-line giving, with the public donating over \$20.5mn<sup>19</sup> in 24 hours.

Elsewhere in the world collections also broke records. One positive outcome from the generous funding for NGOs was that there was an immediate transition from relief to recovery activities. In most crises there is a gap in assistance due to the delay between the end of relief funding and the start of funding for recovery programmes.

Funds continued to pour in throughout January. One agency, MSF, announced in December that it already had enough funding. This was not a popular stance with other NGOs. In mid-January, Concern, an Irish NGO, announced that it too had enough funds. Money continued to flow in and several other NGOs including CARE International announced that they had enough funds at the end of January.

18 Total pledges for Hurricane Mitch were \$9bn in 1998, donors pledged \$8.4bn for Afghanistan for 2004-07, and pledged \$9.2bn for Iraq in 2004 (Flint *et al.*, 2006:21).

19 £10,676,836 between 6.16pm on 30th December and 6.16pm on 31 December 2004 (Disasters Emergency Committee, 2005). Converted at the average exchange rate of \$1.922 dollars per GB pound for 30 to 31 December ([www.onada.com](http://www.onada.com)).



## 4 Chapter four

# Recommendations and the way forward

## Ownership and accountability

**Recommendation:** *The international humanitarian community needs a fundamental reorientation from supplying aid to supporting and facilitating communities' own relief and recovery priorities.*

The TEC studies go beyond the usual calls for greater consultation with the affected population. Humanitarian agencies have long recognised that inadequate consultation with intended beneficiaries is a problem, and there have been some efforts to address this.<sup>20</sup> However, consultation suggests that an agency merely consults the affected population about the agency's plans. The TEC reports suggest that the affected population itself sets the priorities and draws up the plans for recovery programmes.

This change will only be possible if the affected population 'owns' the relief response and aid agencies hold themselves accountable to affected people. As explained in the previous section, ownership here refers to having decision-making power or control over the response. When affected populations own the response they set the priorities and policies for that response, either directly at the village level or at regional or national level through their political representatives.

The reason for promoting ownership by the affected population is simple: the affected population is far more knowledgeable about their context, needs and capacities than external agencies. Interventions that are in tune with their priorities are more likely to make the best use of their capacities and result in a more appropriate, effective and efficient intervention. This becomes more important as interventions become more complex, as with the change from relief to restoring livelihoods.

<sup>20</sup> Including a multi-country ALNAP project on beneficiary participation (details on [http://www.alnap.org/publications/participation\\_study.htm](http://www.alnap.org/publications/participation_study.htm)).

## Accountability

Accountability is the other side of the coin from ownership. Accountability is not just about agencies reporting what they have done in ‘accountability reports’ but also about explaining why and being open to criticism of those actions. Here the idea is that those implementing the response should account for their actions to the affected population. Aid agencies are accountable to three major groups of stakeholders:

- Donor public, the media and taxpayers – ‘upward’ accountability.
- Other agencies or to the common standards agreed by the agencies – ‘lateral’ accountability.
- The affected population – ‘downward’ accountability.

The overt motivation for the donor public is to help the affected population, so when agencies are accountable for their actions to the affected population they are already accountable to the donor public. Similarly, the standards developed by humanitarian agencies are largely an attempt to ensure that aid to the affected population is of a satisfactory quality, so these standards are a proxy for accountability to the affected population.

Transparency to the affected population is not in itself enough to ensure accountability. The affected population must have the capacity to analyse the information and a mechanism both to ask questions and to influence and control policies and actions. This implies that the task facing agencies is a complex one, and that work to strengthen local and national capacity to control aid interventions is needed, as well as greater transparency.

There are many initiatives to promote accountability in humanitarian action,<sup>21</sup> but the lack of accountability found by the TEC studies suggests that these have so far had only limited impact. The focus of many of these projects is on improving the quality of the work done, rather than entrusting ownership to the affected population.

## Beneficiary surveys

One of the welcome innovations in the tsunami response, as noted earlier, was the use of beneficiary surveys. One clear point made by these was that the way in which agencies delivered aid, and not just the amount of aid they delivered, influenced beneficiary satisfaction. This is hardly surprising as dignity is a human need as much as food, shelter or clothing.

The management rule is ‘what gets measured gets done’. Measuring beneficiary satisfaction will encourage agencies to try to match their programmes to the affected population’s view of their needs, and not just the agency’s views of what those needs are. However, beneficiary surveys are not a cure-all. Third parties, rather than aid agencies, carried out many of the post-tsunami beneficiary surveys. While such third-party surveys have been useful in highlighting issues, such surveys are only effective when answers to survey questions lead to change in aid agency policies. Otherwise, surveys become yet another burden for the affected population.

21 These include the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership-International (HAP-I), the Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), the ‘Who Counts’ initiative of Management Accounting for NGOs (MANGO), and the NGO Impact Initiative of the Special Representative for Tsunami Recovery (American Red Cross *et al.*, 2006). Accountability is written in to various standards including Sphere and the IFRC/NGO Code of conduct.

**Table 1: Some possible practical implications of a fundamental reorientation**

Issue	Current	Reoriented
Primary accountability	Donors and supporters	Affected population
Locus of responsibility for accountability to the affected population	Agency field staff	The board or trustees of an agency
Role of the affected population	Aid recipients	Controlling aid policies and priorities within the response
Intervention logic	Agency mission and mandate	Needs of the affected population
Trustee or Board priority	Strategic direction of agency, funding trends, compliance with legislation, financial honesty, and others.	All of this plus accountability to affected population
Mission and mandate	Various	Changes to give primacy to supporting the affected population's own priorities
Relationship with the affected population	Consultation (at least the ideal)	Ownership of the aid response by the affected population
Priority skills for agency staff	Narrow technical skills	Skills in community relations as well as technical skills
Agency team composition	Specialist teams with a single technical focus	Multi-skilled teams with the skills to work with community, local and national structures, as well as to support good quality work
Communication department priority	Communication with potential donors	Communication with affected population
Presentation of affected population in annual reports	Human interest stories	Opinion surveys from the affected population
Information flow to affected population	Occasional meetings. Signboards in English for donors	Signboards in local languages giving project budgets, and details of where to complain
Performance standards	Based around some objective target agreed by agencies	Reformulated to put beneficiary satisfaction at the core
Primary quality standard	Sphere or other standards using universal benchmarks or indicators	Affected population satisfaction with an agency's efforts
End of programme determined by	End of funding	Whether the local community still needs the agency's help
Priorities	Set by agency management	Set by affected population
Performance standards	Based around objective measurement	Reformulated to put beneficiary satisfaction at the core.
Aid modality	Mostly in-kind; limited cash	Extensive use of cash if markets are working
Operational modality	Individual specialist agency	Consortia of agencies to reflect the range of priorities of the affected population
Spending plans	Agency management	Community committee advised by the agency
Project funding pattern	Discrete project funding	Funding envelopes for priorities defined by the community

## **A Fundamental reorientation in practice**

Table 1 lists some of the practical implications that such a fundamental orientation might have.

### **The difficulties of a fundamental reorientation**

The fundamental reorientation proposed is not going to be easy for several reasons. First, it will involve a change in the organisational culture of humanitarian aid providers. Deal and Kennedy (1982) referred to organisational culture as ‘the way things get done around here’. Organisational cultures become embedded in the policies and processes that organisations use, and in the belief systems of their managers. Organisational mandates may reflect the organisational culture (but may also reflect a previous organisational culture rather than the current one). As noted in Table 1, agencies may need to change their mandate and mission to reorient themselves to ownership by the affected population.

Organisation change is not a simple process and needs as a minimum:

- a champion at board level;
- operational staff who believe that such change is necessary;
- pressure for change from the organisation’s environment.

Second, this change requires that agencies cede power to the affected population. Humanitarian agencies have power through the resources they control. They often justify their reluctance to cede this power to the community with the concern that a community-owned response may be unfair. The TEC studies show the same objections can be made about agency-owned processes in the tsunami response.

Third, it was clear in the tsunami response that different levels of government sometimes had different priorities and policies. Agencies can meet this problem by promoting distributed ownership, with the community and different levels of government owning different levels of the response. However, it is recognised that this can be difficult and time-consuming to achieve.

Achieving ownership by the affected population will not be easy. It demands that agencies not only have the technical skills for interventions, but also the sociological skills for engaging with communities. There are some environments, such as societies undergoing violent conflict, where ownership by the affected population is problematic, especially as disagreements over the ownership of resources such as water or land may be driving the conflict.

Nevertheless the potential advantages offered by ownership by the affected population, including more effective, appropriate and sustainable aid, should be deemed to outweigh the difficulties. Some see humanitarian action as relieving the distress of the affected population without addressing the underlying causes. However, Article Nine of the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct states that ‘relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs’ (IFRC, 1997). The TEC Capacities Study links ownership by the affected population with reducing the risk of future disasters: ‘Only when vulnerable people take control of their environment will they escape from vulnerability’ (Scheper *et al*, 2006:44).

## Capacity

**Recommendation:** *All actors should strive to increase their disaster response capacities and to improve the linkages and coherence between themselves and other actors in the international disaster response system, including those from the affected countries themselves.*

This TEC recommendation is for both international humanitarian agencies and national responders, including government and local communities. It contains two elements:

1. improving disaster response capacity, both within disaster prone countries and with international humanitarian agencies; and
2. improving the linkages between different actors.

The first is obvious, but the second is less so. The heat of an emergency response is a poor time to start to try to establish relationships and the tsunami response clearly showed that prior linkages between different partners improved the chances for quality programming.

The tsunami response also showed that disaster preparedness can play a significant role in reducing casualties from disasters. Knowledge about tsunamis, telephone warnings, the ability to swim and first aid skills all saved lives. The existence of institutions like local Red Cross branches and local NGOs also helped to save lives.

Countries with proven national disaster response procedures were able to respond far more quickly. Prior preparedness by humanitarian agencies also allowed them to respond more quickly and deliver tents and water supply equipment from their stockpiles.

### The Hyogo Framework and risk reduction

Calls for improved disaster preparedness follow every major disaster, and the tsunami was no different. Even before the tsunami the UN had scheduled a major conference on disaster reduction for January 2005. The 168 governments represented at this conference adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, 2005) (Box 1). The TEC recommendation on capacities corresponds most closely with priority five of the framework.

#### Box 1: Priorities for action from the Hyogo Framework

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.



While the priorities set by this framework are laudable, it does not specify targets or deadlines. However, many countries have made little or no progress toward the priorities (Lord Chidgey, 2006).

There has been action on an early warning system following the tsunami. However, tsunamis on this scale are extremely rare and other natural risks, such as earthquakes in Indonesia or tropical cyclones in India, pose a greater threat in the region. It is suggested that more generic disaster preparedness would be a better investment than investment specifically for tsunami risks.

The tsunami aftermath may have damaged public acceptance of one useful risk-reduction strategy. Land-use planning can be useful in reducing risks from natural hazards such as tsunamis. The attempts to introduce rules forbidding construction within a certain distance of the shoreline (called the 'buffer zone' in Sri Lanka and the 'green zone' in Aceh) were contentious. These zones were unpopular because of their economic impact on the affected population. The governments eventually dropped them in whole or in part, but only after discrediting, in the popular mind, the use of land-use planning for risk reduction.

## **Humanitarian agency response capacity**

27

The total number of humanitarian workers has been increasing steadily over the last nine years (Figure 14, page 28) (Stoddard et al., 2006). Even so, the international humanitarian community still has a relatively limited capacity for scaling up in emergencies. Staffing issues, both in the lack of adequately qualified staff and high levels of staff turnover, are one of the biggest constraints on agency capacity. To address this issue there are some current initiatives on human resources in the sector.<sup>22</sup> There are also initiatives on INGO emergency capacity<sup>23</sup> as well as some broader work on capacity building.<sup>24</sup>

As well as aid agencies other emergency responders, such as the military, also need to develop not only their emergency response capacity but their linkages to the humanitarian response community. The TEC report on civil-military coordination (Harkin, 2006:14) calls for greater engagement between civil and military actors to prepare for emergencies where the military could play a useful role.

## **Practical implications of the recommendation**

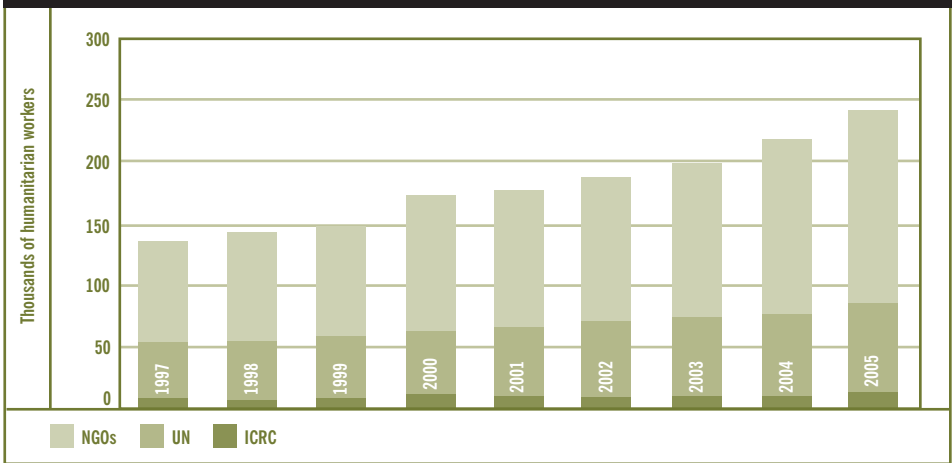
The practical implications of this recommendation for agencies are quite broad in that:

- agencies should increase their own emergency response capacity;
- agencies should support developing national disaster response capacity in line with the Hyogo Framework;

22 People in Aid (<http://www.peopleinaid.org>) has been addressing human resources issues for some time and there has been a recent Humanitarian Policy Group paper on the topic of staff turnover in humanitarian emergencies (Loquerio et al, 2006).

23 The Emergency Capacity Building project ([www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)) is an effort by seven leading NGOs to improve their emergency response capacity.

24 Including for example the Provention Consortium ([www.proventionconsortium.org](http://www.proventionconsortium.org)) which strives to reduce the impact of disasters in developing countries by forging partnerships and linkages. The ALNAP *Review of Humanitarian Action* in 2004 (ALNAP, 2005) focused on the issue of capacity building.

**Figure 11: Growing numbers of humanitarian workers**

- agencies should support developing community-based disaster reduction; and
- agencies should develop linkages with other potential humanitarian actors.

This can only happen with donor support. A good start is the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) whose policy is to use one-tenth of its natural disasters budget for disaster preparedness and mitigation.<sup>25</sup>

The issue of linkages and local capacity is critical. It is only through regular contact that different agencies build up a picture of the capacities of potential partners in an emergency response, and set up the networks essential for a joined-up emergency response.

A key part of this is strengthening the community disaster response capacity as the first response always falls to the local community. Such strengthening of community capacity puts the community in a much better position to keep their ownership of the response and to demand accountability from intervening agencies.

The first two recommendations (on ownership and accountability, and capacity) resonate with current issues in development. They are a good match with what Chambers (2005:66) calls the 'six power-and-relationship words' that are now so widely used in development literature: partnership, empowerment, ownership, participation, accountability and transparency. However, Chambers (2001:1-2) notes that even in development there is a wide gap between what is said and what is done.

<sup>25</sup> However, DFID may be failing to achieve this level of funding (Lord Chidgey, 2006).

## Quality

**Recommendation:** *The international relief system should establish an accreditation and certification system to distinguish agencies that work to a professional standard in a particular sector from the others.*

The TEC Synthesis Report made this recommendation to deal with recurring quality issues in humanitarian response. Despite the huge amounts of funding, the tsunami response showed the same problems of inappropriate aid, lack of consultation with beneficiaries, and competition between agencies as in other large emergencies. Both the response to the Rwanda crisis in 1994 (Borton et al., 1996) and the Kosovo crisis in 1999 (Wiles et al., 2000) showed many of the same problems as the tsunami. Agencies failed to meet the high standards that agencies set for themselves in Sphere, the Red Cross/NGO Code of Conduct, or the GHD principles.

While the humanitarian sector has high standards, there are no rewards for agencies that meet them or penalty for agencies that don't. It is for each agency to decide whether they are meeting the standards themselves. The same applies to many of the other quality initiatives in humanitarian response.

The lack of accurate information to the donor public on the performance of agencies makes this problem worse. The flow of information back to the donor public is rather haphazard. The principle route is the agency's own information, which is normally intended to promote the agency's brand rather than provide an unbiased and balanced account of their performance.

In theory, the international media provide the donor public with information about agency performance. The role of the media is complex, in that the media serve to entertain as well as inform. For the media the rule is: 'good news' is no news, 'no news' is bad news, and 'bad news' is good news. The international media have no specialist aid correspondents and need sensational stories to attract readers or viewers. Both of these facts lead to superficial coverage of aid operations that often stereotype aid workers as ministering angels and the affected population as helpless victims, or that represent the naturally slow pace of recovery work as agency incompetence. The international media does not, therefore, provide the sort of information which would allow the donor public to assess the performance of agencies.

### Accreditation and certification<sup>26</sup>

One key purpose for certification would be to improve such information flows by measures such as the compulsory publication of independent external evaluations of compliance with the certification standards, or the compulsory publication of independent surveys of beneficiary opinion. Providing good information to the donor public and taxpayers will provide external pressure for improving the quality of humanitarian response.

Accreditation and certification is not an end in itself, but is intended to:

<sup>26</sup> Certification refers to the certification of an agency as meeting specific requirements, such as the quality of assessments, etc. Agencies would be certified by a third party accredited by the humanitarian community as being competent to determine if agencies meet the certification requirements. For example, the Society General de Surveillance is accredited by the International Standards Organisation to certify organisations as being ISO9001 compliant.

1. Address the problem of proliferation, where anyone can set themselves up as an aid agency without necessarily having any knowledge or competence. Good intentions are not enough in themselves.
2. Provide a means of making agencies more accountable for compliance with the standards they themselves espouse.

There is no conflict with the primacy of accountability to the affected population in this focus on compliance with standards. It was earlier suggested that some current standards may need to be reframed to put beneficiary satisfaction at their core.<sup>27</sup> Given that the nominal purpose of aid is to assist the affected populations, the quality of any aid programme is the extent to which it conforms to the needs of the affected population. Many of the prevailing criteria used for evaluating humanitarian action relate directly to the quality of aid programmes in this way.<sup>28</sup>

## Practical implications of the recommendation

Introducing a certification and accreditation system for international humanitarian aid actors would have significant implications for both existing and new humanitarian actors. Certification and accreditation have a real cost, and this cost is only justified if certification and accreditation lead to better quality. This can only happen if the conditions set for certification and accreditation:

- encourage greater agency transparency and accountability to beneficiaries, through publishing evaluations and internal quality control reports;
- encourage agencies to concentrate their efforts, and develop deeper competence in specific sectors;
- encourage agency investment in their own emergency response capacity;
- discourage new agencies from entering the sector unless they have an obvious competence; and
- encourage collaborative, rather than competitive, relations between agencies.

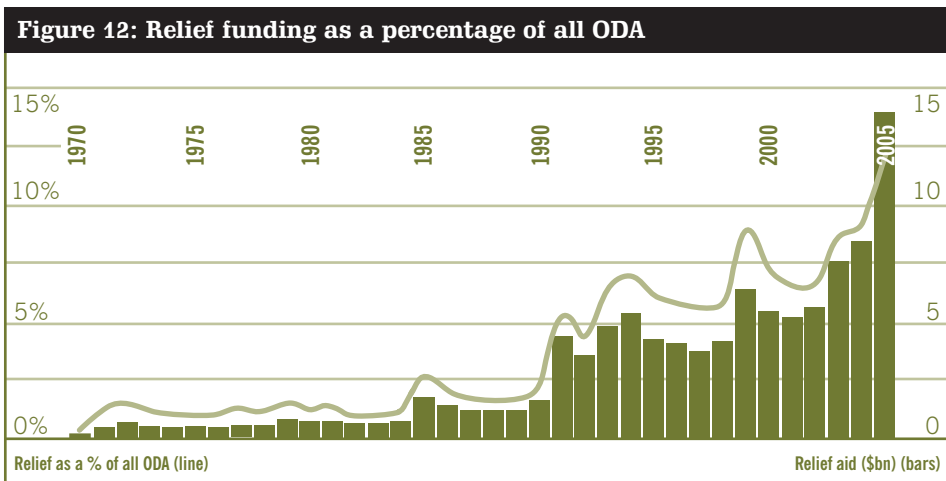
Obviously such a process is going to take some time to negotiate and set up. However, a failure by agencies to act on this issue could lead to the imposition by governments of certification systems that bring increased costs without any matching benefits for affected populations.

## Funding

**Recommendation:** *All actors need to make the current funding system impartial, more efficient, flexible, transparent and better aligned with principles of good donorship.*

<sup>27</sup> One consequence of this would be removing the issues that arise with the current Sphere Standards (Sphere Project, 2004) when one tries to apply the same indicators to programmes in rural Africa and urban Kosovo.

<sup>28</sup> Appropriateness, impact, coverage, coherence, and connectedness are all humanitarian evaluation criteria that reflect the quality of the response, and can readily be perceived by the affected population. Effectiveness to some extent measures the quality of agency planning, and efficiency measures cost efficiency rather than quality (OECD/DAC, 1999).



Funding for humanitarian aid has been growing in the last two decades, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of all Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, the growth is uneven, with sudden spurts followed by a tailing back (Figure 12). Even this figure understates the levels of variability, as for any particular country or crisis the changes in funding are much more dramatic.

Due, in part, to tsunami funding, humanitarian funding in 2005 was the highest ever (US\$13.9bn). The high funding for the tsunami only serves to highlight some of the general problems with the humanitarian funding system.

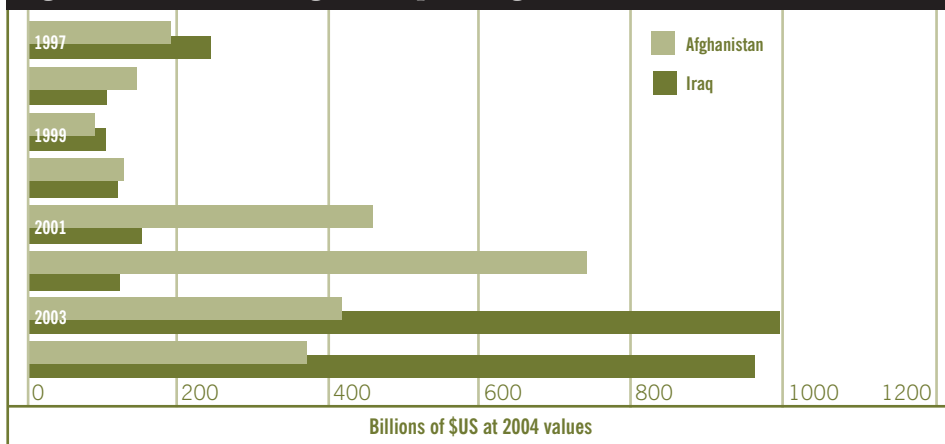
## Proportionality

In principle,<sup>29</sup> funding for humanitarian action should be proportionate need; it is not. The total funding for the nearly two million people affected by the tsunami was \$13.5bn or over \$7,000 per person. This compares with the \$3 per person provided by the international community for the 36mn people affected by the 2004 floods in Bangladesh (which destroyed or damaged 1.2mn homes). This does not mean there was too much funding for the tsunami, but rather that most emergencies have funding that is far inferior to need.

Politics and media exposure rather than humanitarian need decide the funding for any emergency. Political considerations and the 'CNN effect'<sup>30</sup> strongly influenced official aid giving. Figure 13 (page 32) shows how relief funding for Iraq and Afghanistan changed in line with the military interventions there. For Afghanistan, the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 brought about almost no change in humanitarian need, but saw huge changes in official funding for humanitarian action.

29 As defined in Principle 2 of the IFRC/NGO code of conduct (Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response *et al.*, 1994), or Principle 6 of the principles of good humanitarian donorship (Good Humanitarian Donorship, 2003).

30 The CNN effect is the supposed influence that 24-hour international television news channels have on government foreign policy and public opinion (Wikipedia). The US intervention in Somalia is only one of the many policies that has been linked to the 'CNN Effect' (The Brookings Institution, 2002).

**Figure 13: Relief Funding for Iraq and Afghanistan**

In the tsunami response, media coverage drove the funding from both the public and official sources. The media coverage influenced public generosity directly and produced public pressure on politicians to grant government funds. While the public gives generously for disasters that attract attention and touch a chord, emergencies that get little media attention get little money from the public.

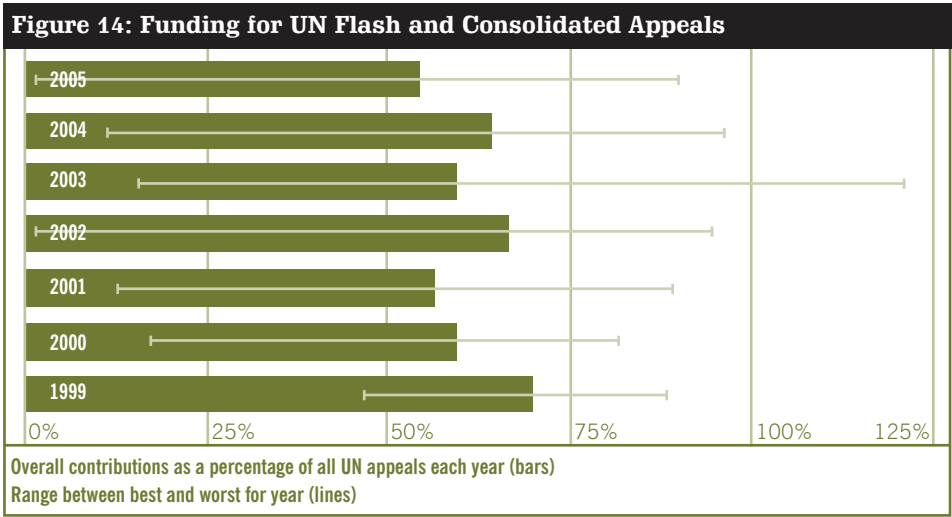
Figure 14 (page 33) shows the huge variations in support for different UN humanitarian appeals, with support for different appeals ranging from just a few percent for one appeal in 2002, to over one hundred percent for another appeal in 2003. This variability has consequences for those in need. WFP had to cut rations in Darfur in 2005 while donors continued to pour aid money into Iraq.

There were many positive aspects of the funding for the tsunami response. Aid for the affected countries was reasonably proportionate to the needs of the different countries. The DAC tracked donor pledges for the tsunami response as well as commitments and disbursements. Funding for the tsunami was flexible. Not all of these improvements have been sustained. For example, the DAC has not tracked pledges for later disasters, such as the Kashmir or Jogjakarta earthquakes, making official funding for these disasters less transparent than for the tsunami response.

## Practical implications of the funding recommendation

The TEC recommendation on funding is going to be difficult to carry out because of the factors that drive funding:

- Politics and media attention influence donor funding, as well as humanitarian concerns.
- Humanitarian concerns strongly influence public funding, but only to the extent that the amount and nature of media coverage produce such concerns.



The major initiative on principled donorship is the GHD. This contains three objectives and 20 principles, seven of which are general and 13 of which describe good practices in donor financing, management and accountability. The DAC/OECD has adopted the GHD principles as part of its regular peer review process.

However, the tsunami response showed many deviations from the GHD principles. These included:

- Funding decisions based on political and media pressure and not based on needs assessments (Principle 6).
- A general lack of beneficiary involvement in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Principle 7).
- Relatively little attention to mitigation (principle 8).
- Programmes that did not support recovery and long term development (Principle 9).

As one aid administration official said ‘When the tsunami hit, GHD went out the window’ (Telford et al., 2006, p. 96). However, the GHD initiative is still relatively young and it does represent a good chance for a change to a more principled funding system. Clearly, independent external review, added to the existing peer review by the DAC, could improve compliance with GHD.

One further initiative, after the tsunami response, has been the reform of the CERF of the United Nations. The CERF reserves one-fifth of its funding for ‘forgotten emergencies’.

Thus official funding for humanitarian action may be moving toward a more just system. However, the same is not true of funds raised from the public. This will only become more

balanced when both the public and the media have greater understanding of the nature of global humanitarian needs and the complexities of humanitarian interventions.

One key part of humanitarian funding reform is the proportion of funds that agencies devote to developing disaster response capacity both within their own agencies and within communities and countries at high risk of disasters. Such investment has the potential to make interventions both more efficient and effective, and support all emergency needs, not just those of the crisis currently topping the news agenda.

## Pulling it all together

All four TEC Synthesis Report recommendations are closely intertwined. Ownership by the affected population and agency accountability are closely linked to the capacity of the affected population to exercise ownership, and to the capacity of agencies to work under such ownership. Quality is linked to accountability and to the nature of the funding process. Existing initiatives appear to be improving the official funding to some extent. However, funding from the public, and from official sources in response to public pressure, shows no sign of becoming more proportionate to need. This can only happen when the media and the public have a better understanding of the nature of humanitarian need on a global level.

### First steps

The NGO Impact Initiative (American Red Cross et al., 2006) suggested that agencies undertake an audit of their accountability to affected populations. This is a good place to start. Such an audit by all agencies (and not just NGOs) can highlight some of the issues that agencies need to address in their own work to begin the reorientation the TEC studies call for.

However, leadership for sustainable change has to come from the top. Agency boards, trustees or other governing bodies of the Red Cross, NGOs, Donors, and UN agencies need to:

- decide which of the TEC recommendations they accept; and
- set up a process at board level to oversee the agency's progress towards implementing the accepted recommendations.

Only by involving governing bodies in this way can we bring about the changes needed to improve the quality and efficiency of the humanitarian response system.



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# The TEC recommendations summarised

