

Acknowledgements

Ross Mountain, Director General of DARA

The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is a shared effort that involves the participation of numerous individuals and organisations. DARA is most grateful to all of those who have shared their understanding of good donor practice and worked with us to further our common goal of improving the quality, accountability and impact of humanitarian assistance.

I would like to begin by expressing special gratitude to the over five hundred people working in countries in crises who, despite their busy workloads, kindly agreed to be interviewed for the HRI 2010. Without their help, insight, knowledge and enthusiasm, the HRI 2010 would not have happened.

I would like to especially mention those organisations who provided invaluable logistical and administrative support for our field researchers. Our particular thanks go to representatives of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) for ensuring the safety of our teams in difficult circumstances.

As we expand our collaboration with partners, DARA would like to thank the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) – for collaborating with us on a joint field mission to Haiti – and Dubai Cares – who participated in the HRI field mission to Yemen. The knowledge they brought to analysing these crises and their committed support and helpful suggestions to improve the HRI were invaluable.

At the headquarters level, we are grateful to the many staff from NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and UN agencies who provided valuable data to help construct the quantitative components of the index, as well as providing us with advice, guidance and support in getting the HRI message out.

In our field missions we spoke to over 80 representatives from different OECD/DAC government donor agencies, as well as numerous staff in donor headquarters. Understandably, some donors had expressed misgivings – for, after all, the role of the HRI is to assess performance – but we have been genuinely pleased with the general spirit of donor engagement with the HRI and the many frank and open discussions DARA has had with donor representatives. We look forward to continued engagement with the donor community and to building stronger ties with donors to ensure humanitarian assistance is leveraged to achieve the most impact possible for people affected by crises.

Our Peer Review Committee has worked to ensure the HRI achieves its objectives and becomes an ever more useful humanitarian tool. We would like to gratefully recognise the contributions of Jock Baker, James Darcy, Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, Véronique de Geoffroy, Claude Hilfiker, Eva Von Oelreich, David Roodman and Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop. We would also like to thank Dennis Djikzeul for his invaluable advice and support.

HRI's Advisory Board helps us broaden our horizons and advance policy debate and analysis. I would like to acknowledge Larry Minear, Moisés Naím, S. Iqbal Riza, Mary Robinson and Pierre Schori. We are especially grateful to DARA Board members Aldo Ajello, Emma Bonino, Jan Eliasson, Jose María Figueres, Beatriz Iraburu, José Manuel Romero and Juliet Pierce for helping refine the vision and advocating for HRI and also to Diego Hidalgo, our President, for his generous support for DARA and the HRI from its inception.

The HRI would not be possible without the generous support of AVINA STIFTUNG, the Dutch Postcode Lottery (Nationale Postcode Loterij) and Agility Logistics.

We are honoured that António Guterres (who also serves as an Advisory Board member), Jakob M. Kellenberger and Margaret Wallstrom have contributed to this year's HRI and thank them for their support and endorsement.

The HRI is a team effort and the entire organisation's staff contributes to its success. I thank you all for your commitment and enthusiasm.

Short of listing all DARA's staff, I would especially like to mention Beatriz Asensio, Philippe Benassi, Raisa Bruner, Covadonga Canteli, Fernando Espada, Rebecca Moy, Magda Ninaber, Nnenna Odeluga, Marybeth Redheffer, Daniela Ruegenberg, Philip Tamminga, Frank Vollmer and Nacho Wilhelmi. Working in a collegial spirit, they have all played vital roles organising the logistics of missions and interviews, analysing data to generate indicators and rankings, drafting text, designing and publicising this publication. They have all demonstrated great professionalism and serenity. I would also thank David S. Bassiouni, Anas Bukash – from Dubai Cares – Gilles Gasser, Nahla Haidar, Ian Hopwood, Matthew Kahane, Ricardo Solé, Manisha Thomas – from ICVA – and Albertien van der Veen for their valuable contribution to the success of our missions to the field. Thanks also to our consultant editor, Tim Morris, for his meticulous work.

Finally, I want to express our gratitude to Silvia Hidalgo, the co-founder of DARA and Director General for its first six years. It was Silvia's insight, conviction, and vision that donor governments can and should do more to ensure aid efforts are better directed that led to the creation of the HRI.

Introduction

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It is encouraging to note that when countries and communities are beset by earthquakes, floods or violent combat, the reports and TV images of resultant human suffering almost invariably evince a broad outpouring of public and private sympathy, virtually irrespective of the country concerned. Often such catastrophes occur in countries with shaky governments, dictatorship, corruption or unchecked militias. Yet the sight of adversity moves citizens, civil society organisations and consequently governments to contribute to the mitigation of the suffering.

Until relatively recently, the response was manifested in contributions of old clothes, food items or expired or inappropriate drugs. Though well-intentioned, such gestures were not only unsuitable, but indeed slowed down and distorted the whole process of providing urgent help to affected populations. We have learned that emergency aid must be quick. Items supplied must be suited to the needs and circumstances of those affected.

There has been much progress to ensure the most effective use of international and national assistance, including in countries where governments are unable or unwilling to provide the support that their citizens have the right to expect. In this context, new initiatives have developed to attempt to make maximum use of resources and to get them to the victims as quickly as possible.

In the wake of the Armenian earthquake in 1988, the UN Disaster Relief Organisation – the forerunner of today's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) – was tasked with ensuring the effective coordination and delivery of humanitarian assistance. Over the years, the World Food Programme (WFP) has moved from being essentially a development agency to a vital source of food in a full range of crises. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has recognised the need for substantial investment in emergency response capacity while the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has broadened its concerns from refugees to also assist substantial numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

A dozen years ago in Security Council debates, the fate of IDPs was regarded by defenders of national sovereignty as an internal issue and not a matter for international scrutiny. Today, the protection of IDPs and other equally vulnerable civilians is recognised as a prime objective of UN peacekeeping missions. Indeed, for many of us in the humanitarian field, the issue of how to offer protection for those caught in the crossfire or those whose vulnerability has been exacerbated by natural disasters through no fault of their own has become at least as important as providing them with food, medical care and shelter.

The importance of humanitarian assistance being available to victims irrespective of the leadership or political regime that governs them is a cardinal principle. It also makes practical sense. Those who deal with the political aspects of conflict hope to bring about reconciliation and peace between warring parties. It follows that they should not seek to deny health care and welfare to those who have the bad luck to be in areas facing a daily struggle for survival. Yet all too often this is not understood and those in a position to provide support to the needy also seek political leverage. The result – as we now tragically see in Somalia – can be whole communities virtually denied any humanitarian assistance.

In 2003, a group of the world's major traditional donors – the nations belonging to the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) – came together in Stockholm. After lengthy negotiations that lasted until the early hours of the morning, they agreed to a set of 23 principles that constitute the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative.¹ The principles are a mixture of policy objectives and technical measures which reaffirm the key principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian assistance. By agreeing to these principles, donor countries committed themselves to supporting efforts to ensure access to and protection of victims of natural disasters and conflicts. The principles remain valid today and are those that all countries reviewed in this report have subscribed to.

¹ See: <http://www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org>

The importance and significance of donor governments promoting and defending these principles is indispensable for ensuring both that affected populations receive the best assistance possible but also that the now considerable resources allocated to humanitarian aid are most effectively utilised.

The goal of the Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is to work with the humanitarian community, and in particular OECD/DAC donor governments, to assist them to meet the objectives to which they themselves signed up to as part of their commitment to Good Humanitarian Donorship. This year's HRI draws primarily on DARA's carefully designed field interviews with nearly 500 implementing agencies and donor representatives, bringing together the experiences of humanitarian partners. We have, as in previous years, quantitatively assessed responses focusing on key areas such as volume and kind of aid or timeliness of funding. This year we have additionally gathered data on the extent to which donor countries are helping to reduce climate-related vulnerability.

My first awareness of and interaction with the HRI and DARA colleagues was in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where I served, among other roles, as the UN Humanitarian Coordinator. During the inevitable series of evaluations of the programmes for which I was responsible, I was struck by the novelty of an approach that looked not only at the amount of money made available by donors but also at the way in which these funds were allocated and how other support was provided. This highlighted in my mind the important role that can be played by donors in meeting urgent humanitarian needs beyond the cash component – vitally important though it is and will remain.

In the DRC, the humanitarian operation came to serve as something of a guinea pig for the UN humanitarian reform process launched in 2005. This involved implementation of the cluster system (both in the capital and at regional level), establishing a pooled fund to encourage more pragmatic and prompt response to needs, working with UN military forces to protect civilians and designing comprehensive and transitional strategies that addressed the population's need for security as well as social services and governance.

While for many these new mechanisms were objectives in themselves, we sought to apply these approaches in a way that put the beneficiary in the centre. Thus, the objective was to find the speediest targeted delivery approaches that could maximise the use of the resources that were always limited in relation to the challenges, notwithstanding the generosity of donors.

In its systematic sounding of key partners in crises countries, the HRI is unique. Some will find the rankings resulting from this independent analysis surprising or even unfair. Yet they should be viewed as a reflection from the field of how governments in their roles as humanitarian donors are regarded by their partners.

The objective of the HRI is not the donor ranking but to provide feedback to those responsible for humanitarian policymaking on how their efforts are seen from the ground with the view of helping to improve aid efficiency for the benefit of those who need to receive it.

Achievement of maximum benefit requires not just coordination but the engagement of all sectors, donors, implementing partners and beneficiary representatives in seeking to maximise the impact of resources available.

In my experience on the ground, such a consensus on maximising impact is not so difficult to achieve. Donor representatives, NGOs and UN agency colleagues on the ground generally share this concern – even in circumstances where the same cannot be said as a result of institutional preoccupations in their headquarters.

I hope that the HRI 2010 will reinforce this process on the ground and lead those in the headquarters of donors, NGOs and UN agencies – and governments in crisis-affected states – to reflect on the measures they may have put in place. I urge them to particularly study our findings on the risks that political instrumentalisation can have by inhibiting the most effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need.

In the course of the compilation of this year's report, I have had the opportunity to revisit a number of countries – and territories, alas still in crisis – in which I had previously worked, either as Resident Coordinator or during my years with OCHA. I would like to thank the partners and donors on the ground for their commitment and for sharing their perspectives and frustrations as they seek to identify ways in which their work can be more effective. It is encouraging that a number of donor representatives are so well aware of, and committed to, the *GHD Principles* that they urged DARA to criticise their governments in the hope this would lead to changes in the way they manage humanitarian aid programmes.

Sadly, despite general progress, millions of people are still trapped in the consequences of seemingly intractable political stalemates. These include Somalia, the occupied Palestinian territories and Afghanistan, among others.

Life has also become more dangerous for humanitarian workers: casualties – mostly of national staff – continue to rise. Negotiated access has also become more complicated as the international community seeks to isolate militant organisations that are accused of promoting or perpetrating acts of terrorism. Too often political preoccupations are cited to limit access to victims.

This is the fourth year that DARA has produced the HRI. Throughout the years, our project has undergone considerable changes and transformations based on much valued feedback from humanitarian partners, including donors. This year we have sought to further broaden our analysis while continuing to emphasise the responsibility of each donor for the policy and measures that they apply to bring support in humanitarian crises.

The humanitarian reform process has brought about changes but we can all do better. All certainly includes the UN agencies and NGOS, but also significantly, the donor countries.

This year we highlight a number of important findings regarding increasing politicisation of aid; gaps in the protection of civilians; slow progress in the reform of the humanitarian system; lack of investment in prevention, preparedness and risk reduction; and unsatisfactory accountability towards affected populations.

In a year that has seen two huge natural disasters – in Haiti and in Pakistan – and at a time when there is a growing fear that climate change may well have more of the same in store in the future years, we have seen that many of the lessons documented from previous catastrophes have not been learned. This remains an abiding challenge for all of us in the humanitarian community this year, next year and the years to come. We need to find ways to provide more effective, targeted and quicker assistance to victims of crises, primarily for their sake but also to be able to assure those contributing funds through government and non-government programmes that we are doing the best we can.