

Crisis Preparation Vital In Recession: Aid Study

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LONDON (Reuters) - Rich nations should do more to help vulnerable countries prepare for natural disasters

if they want their stretched humanitarian funds to go further during the economic downturn, a report said Tuesday.

The Humanitarian Response Index 2009, published by the non-profit organization DARA (Development Assistance Research Associates), ranked 22 wealthy countries and the European Union on the effectiveness of their aid efforts.

"Given the global economic crisis, more effective use of public money and greater quality and impact in humanitarian aid have never been more important," DARA's Executive Director Silvia Hidalgo said in a statement.

The study added that wealthy countries should increase investment in measures to prevent disasters and ease their impact to maximize the value of aid. This would reduce the amount that cash-strapped donors have to spend on responding to natural hazards, aid experts say.

Examples include planting mangroves in Vietnam and Bangladesh to protect against storms and coastal erosion, Chinese investment in flood control, early warning systems, evacuation and first aid training.

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The United Nations says \$1 invested in reducing the risk of disasters in developing countries saves around \$7 in losses.

The index is based on latest data such as the amount of aid given in 2008, and responses to a survey about donors gathered from over 200 humanitarian organizations in the first half of this year.

Participants were asked to rate donors against a number of global standards, including responding appropriately to needs, preventing disasters and working with aid agencies.

Norway replaced Sweden as the best donor, and Ireland joined the two countries in the top three.

The United States, one of the world's largest donors of humanitarian aid, moved up one position to rank 14th. The lowest-ranked donors were Portugal, Greece and Italy.

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