
THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE INDEX 2008

Donor Accountability in Humanitarian Action

DARA

Development Assistance Research Associates

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About DARA (Development Assistance Research Associates)

DARA is an independent not-for-profit organisation based in Madrid, Spain, committed to improving the quality of humanitarian action and development aid through evaluation and research. Through its work DARA contributes to improving the effectiveness of international aid and global efforts to reduce human suffering, vulnerability, and poverty.

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Foreword

KOFI A. ANNAN

This year, the international community had to respond to a number of new disasters and complex emergencies, as well as continue to provide assistance to on-going humanitarian crises, which threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of people.

The increasing incidence of natural disasters due to climate change and environmental stress underscores the need to scale-up comprehensive disaster risk reduction initiatives to support the most vulnerable. The rise in world food prices and global financial turmoil have also sharply increased the number of people living in hunger, putting at risk the considerable gains made over the past decade in reducing extreme poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

We can and must do better. We have the resources, the knowledge and the capabilities to do so. The world requires concerted action to help all those in need. The equal worth of every human life demands that the delivery of humanitarian aid be neutral, impartial, and based on needs – not driven by geopolitical interests, historical ties, domestic political agendas, or the attention of the world’s media.

Last year, I had the privilege to launch the first Humanitarian Response Index (HRI), an innovative initiative to assess and rank OECD/DAC donor governments against their commitments to support good practices in humanitarian action. At the time, I spoke of my hopes that the Humanitarian Response Index, like the United Nations’ Human Development Index, would stimulate dialogue amongst stakeholders and contribute to improving effectiveness, transparency and accountability in humanitarian action.

Have we moved forward since then?

The HRI has been successful in generating growing interest in and debate about the performance and accountability of donors in their efforts to save and improve the lives of people affected each year by disasters, and complex emergencies. The HRI helps to ensure that donor efforts are benchmarked and progress

is tracked, so that good practices become the norm, and not the exception. In doing so, it is a valuable tool for stakeholders of the humanitarian community to develop and improve.

This year’s HRI is based on a rigorous analysis of data that tracks donor policies and funding practices, and draws on the views of more than a thousand key stakeholders about donor practice in 11 different crises across the globe. It reveals that there are still too many gaps between governments’ commitments to the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) and actual practice on the ground.

For example, we can see from the HRI Crisis Reports that in conflict areas around the world, donor governments’ military and security objectives too often take precedence over providing neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance and protection for civilians and non-combatants. Provision of safe humanitarian access is also a critical issue. In 2006 over 80 aid workers were killed across the globe. In 2007 humanitarian space has continued to come under attack in countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia, resulting in more than 40 aid workers being killed in Afghanistan alone. This is simply unacceptable.

The HRI also reveals that we need to pay more attention to the question of linking emergency relief to longer-term human development strategies, and rooting disaster risk reduction strategies in local capacity development. The current global food crisis is a clear illustration of how crucial this long-term approach is. In the short-term, food aid must be increased to the most vulnerable, but to address the root causes of this hunger we need to think of building strategies that reinforce sustainable agriculture, fairer trade, and contingency planning for the effects of disasters and climate change on food production at the local and global levels.

Donors have a key role to play in finding solutions to these difficult challenges. That is, after all, the point of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles – to

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systematically apply recognised good practice in the decisions and actions of key players in the humanitarian system. By focusing on individual donors, the HRI promotes debate amongst policy makers and the public about the performance of their governments in the area of humanitarian action. It provides an opportunity to help improve the delivery of humanitarian action at all levels. The HRI contributes to a deeper understanding of how donors – individually and collectively – live up to the standards of good practice established in the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles.

The HRI also draws attention to new and emerging issues that warrant further reflection and debate. How can we ensure that humanitarian aid is provided equitably, based on objective assessments of needs, and in accordance with humanitarian principles? And how can new donor countries – and a growing class of wealthy individuals – be encouraged to follow the lead of OECD-DAC countries by recognising and adopting good practices?

Improving the response and effectiveness of humanitarian action and of donor behaviour will not be easy or quick. Millions of people will continue to suffer the effects of disasters and violent conflicts in years to come, in part due to population increases, the impact of climate change and natural resource constraints. Humanitarian assistance will be required, not only for their very survival, but also for their long-term recovery.

As President of the *Global Humanitarian Forum* I am convinced that the HRI, as an independent and objective benchmarking exercise, will help us all to better understand the humanitarian system's strengths and weaknesses and significantly reinforce donors' commitment to good practice. The HRI helps guarantee that every dollar of humanitarian assistance is used to provide the right kind of aid, to the right people, at the right time. I am also convinced that over time, the HRI can help ensure that humanitarian assistance is used in ways that both help alleviate suffering and build a better tomorrow for those who are most in need. The millions of people affected by crises and emergencies deserve as much.

Acknowledgements

Producing the Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is a monumental task. DARA would like to express its deep gratitude to the hundreds of people who actively supported and contributed to this year's HRI 2008.

First, sincere and genuine thanks to the many hundreds of representatives from humanitarian agencies working in the 11 different crisis countries visited by the HRI field teams. All of you generously made time in the midst of operations to answer our questions and respond to the Survey questionnaire. Many of you were instrumental in providing DARA with useful background information and logistical and administrative support. Your enthusiasm for the HRI initiative has motivated us to continue to improve and make it a useful tool for the humanitarian community. We hope that the HRI is as much your project, and that it reflects the challenges you face in your efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need.

The HRI is constantly being improved, thanks to the valuable input and wise advice of the members of our Peer Review Committee. The individual members of the Committee are especially important, as each one offers broad experience of the humanitarian sector, fresh insights, and important perspectives. All have enriched our understanding of the issues and refined our approach. We would therefore like to mention the contributions of Jock Baker, Christian Bugnion, James Darcy, Veronique de Geoffroy, Claude Hilfiker, Eva von Oelreich, David Roodman, Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, Manuel Sánchez-Montero, and Ricardo Solé-Arqués. Their support, encouragement, and constructive criticism have been key to ensuring that the HRI continues to evolve into a useful tool for policy debate and advocacy, to improve the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian action.

DARA also benefits from an Advisory Board whose members provide useful advice on how to ensure that the HRI is connected to the wider debate on humanitarian issues and global affairs. Without Jose Maria

Figueres, the HRI would be entirely impossible. His unflagging enthusiasm and leadership has helped steer the entire project forward. Larry Minear's past work has been an inspiration to all of us working in the humanitarian sector. His contribution to this year's efforts and his endorsement of the HRI provided us with additional stimulus. Our heartfelt thanks, as well, to Iqbal Riza and Pierre Schori for their support, insight, and advice.

Dozens of staff members at the headquarters of humanitarian agencies have generously given not only helpful advice, but the key data used in constructing the Index. In particular, we would like to thank the staff of the IFRC, ICRC, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, ISDR, UN/CMCS, OHCHR, UNRWA, and WFP for their valuable input. We would also like to thank all the representatives of the OECD/DAC donor agencies who provided data to DARA and who supported the HRI initiative. Without their support, we would not have been able to obtain the comprehensive set of data which enabled us to construct the Index.

While the entire staff of DARA has made an extraordinary effort to bring the HRI into being, there is a core group of people who deserve special mention for their work on the HRI 2008. Carlos Oliver was instrumental in managing the missions. With Ana Romero's help, he made sure that our teams were able to cover 11 humanitarian crises around the world. Riccardo Polastro's willingness to travel the distance for the HRI was greatly appreciated. Daniela Mamone's devotion to the project ensured that we were able to carry out HRI activities, manage the data, and function as a team. Without Nacho Wilhelmi's help in logistics, none of us would get from point A to point B. Daniela Ruegenberg provided outstanding research assistance in collecting and analysing much of the information that goes into the Index. Igor Hodson and Marybeth Redheffer have both played key roles in providing editorial support and research assistance in the preparation of the many texts for the HRI. Special thanks are due to

Philip Tamminga, who recently joined the HRI team to manage the project. Philip is spearheading efforts to consolidate the publication and help it to evolve as a practical tool for humanitarian policymakers and practitioners alike. Our sincere gratitude to all the members of the DARA teams who participated in field missions, or who contributed their labours in so many other of the critical tasks that make the HRI possible.

We would like to especially acknowledge the efforts of the principal editor of the HRI, Nancy Ackerman of AmadeaEditing, for her outstanding editing work, and to Hope Steele and Ha Nguyen for their painstaking efforts in getting the HRI ready for publication. Thanks to all of you for your patience and professionalism.

Finally, we would also like to extend our gratitude to Kofi Annan for his continued encouragement, support and great interest in the HRI.

Silvia Hidalgo, Director, DARA
Madrid, September 2008

Executive Summary

In 2007 the world continued to bear witness to the suffering of millions of people caught in humanitarian crises, ranging from earthquakes to decade old conflicts. Despite the considerable efforts and funds invested in humanitarian relief interventions, too many people did not receive the degree or form of assistance they so desperately needed. The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is a tool which aims to assess the performance of one crucial part in the humanitarian system: donor governments. As the principal providers of humanitarian assistance, donor governments have the power and responsibility to make the humanitarian system more effective and ensure that responses are aligned to needs, so that aid reaches the people who need it most. By measuring donor performance against the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship – a set of guiding principles established by the donors themselves – the Humanitarian Response Index aims to contribute to the debate on how to make humanitarian action more accountable and more effective.

Part One: The Humanitarian Response Index: Donor Accountability in Humanitarian Action

Chapter 1, “The Humanitarian Response Index 2008: Donor Accountability in Humanitarian Action,” by **Silvia Hidalgo** and **Philip Tamminga** presents the background and methodology of the HRI, as well as the findings of this year’s HRI.

The HRI ranks the performance of the 22 donor countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) plus the European Commission in funding and supporting humanitarian action. The aim of the HRI is to contribute to ongoing efforts to improve the accountability and quality of humanitarian aid and ensure that aid is used to assist those most in need in the most effective way possible. Built against the background of other international benchmarking and ranking tools, the HRI draws on 58 quantitative and qualita-

tive indicators which capture the essence of the Principles and Good Practice of Good Humanitarian Donorship, divided into five Pillars of good practice: Responding to needs; Supporting local capacity and recovery; Working with humanitarian partners; Promoting standards and enhancing implementation; and Promoting learning and accountability.

The chapter outlines the HRI process and methodology, as well as the principal humanitarian actors’ response to the first HRI report in 2007 and subsequent changes and improvements made to this year’s HRI. A Technical Appendix at the end of the chapter provides a detailed explanation of all of the indicators used to construct the HRI rankings and scores.

The chapter also provides an analysis of the results of this year’s rankings, which show Sweden, Norway, and Denmark as the three top performing donors. The analysis first illustrates how well donors collectively perform within each Pillar, highlighting issues around donor practices that emerge from the eleven different crises studied as part of the HRI field research process, and then provides an overview of the performance of each individual donor. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the five areas where donors could work to make improve the quality, effectiveness and impact of their humanitarian assistance:

- Donor countries could do more to provide aid in an impartial, neutral and independent manner, not based on other objectives
- Donors should contribute to efforts to improve the quality and use of needs assessments to ensure that aid is in accordance to need
- Donors could do much more to harmonise and link relief efforts to early recovery and longer term development strategies
- Donors should invest more resources to strengthen the humanitarian system’s capacity at all levels to

ensure that the system is better prepared to respond to future crises

- Donors should assume more responsibility for ensuring implementation of international standards and good practice, and for improving accountability and performance.

Although these conclusions are not new – confirming much of what is already known in the humanitarian sector – the HRI offers a solid body of evidence to help understand the current state of affairs in donor practice, and highlights areas where donors and other humanitarian actors can work together to improve the quality, effectiveness and impact of humanitarian action.

Part Two: Perspectives on the HRI and current trends in humanitarian action

In each issue of the Humanitarian Response Index, we invite a number of specialists to provide their perspective on particular aspects of the humanitarian field. This year, the topics include a review of how well the HRI matches and validates the conclusions of other independent evaluations, with a specific focus on the United States as a donor, lessons learned in similar ranking exercises and the results can be used as policy and advocacy tools, the limitations in the use of needs assessments for funding and decision making, the imbalances underlying the relationship between donors, humanitarian actors and affected populations and the real difficulties of translating principles and policy statements on participation into effective mechanisms on the ground, and reflections on the challenges of implementing effective humanitarian action in the context of a “forgotten” crisis.

In Chapter 2, **Larry Minear** contributes his essay “the United States as Humanitarian Actor,” to provide a balanced analysis that largely validates the “decidedly mixed review” of the United States in the HRI 2007. With considerable candour, backed up by careful research, he compares US practice in the field with the prevailing American self-image as a paragon of “generosity” and “compassion.” He concludes that the five pillars that form the basis of the HRI’s analysis are not only appropriate, but “broadly confirmed” by the independent studies by Minear and his colleagues (under the auspices of the Feinstein International Centre at Tufts University). Referring throughout to the 2006 OECD/DAC Peer Review (which also corroborates the problems flagged by HRI 2007), he discusses the deficiencies in the way

the United States carries out specific core principles of the GHD, focusing on the low marks received by the U.S. for alleviation of human suffering, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, and how these key features of the GHD have been compromised by security concerns and foreign policy objectives. He analyses the difficulty facing many countries (including the U.S.) in making the connection between relief and development, arguing that “getting [this] contextualisation right . . . is one of the four critical challenges facing humanitarian actors in the next decade,” and that the current push to establish “coherence” between humanitarian and political/peacekeeping agendas often work to the disadvantage of humanitarian activities. Using field examples from many countries, Minear offers a helpful glimpse of efforts, successes, and failures US humanitarian enterprises in working with partners, building local capacity, implementing international guidelines, and promoting leadership and accountability. He concludes with some thoughts on how the HRI could be improved, and concludes that “accountability is too important to be left to donors, whether individually or severally. . . [a] workmanlike and forthright examination of the individual components of the system will surely help unleash missing synergies. The HRI is worth strengthening . . .”

In Chapter 3, “A Tale of Two Indices: the Commitment to Development Index as a Model for the Humanitarian Response Index,” author **David Roodman** shares his views about the history of the earlier Commitment to Development Index (CDI) and the lessons it offers for the HRI, now in its second year. Roodman begins by reviewing the initial design of the CDI and the process by which its developers engaged target audiences, learning from both critics and detractors, gradually refining the instrument. He examines aspects of theory (or its absence), scaling and weighting, sensitivity analysis, and the trade-off between precision and transparency, and how each affects the design of an index, especially those aspects dealing with complexities of government policy, ethics, human psychology, political philosophy, and cultural interaction. By acknowledging with humility the debatable compromises involved in methodology and incomplete data, engaging with policymakers, welcoming commentary, dealing constructively with inevitable criticism, and partnering with organizations having credibility with target audiences, he encourages index makers to develop fruitful two-way relationships, so as to overcome the “inherently impolite” nature of an index, and gain broader acceptance of the goal of their work and message, namely, the

improvement of humanitarian aid. For Roodman, “indexes are vehicles for interaction between people [who] expect from their interlocutors a blend of openness and strength of inner compass.” After describing some of the reactions and critiques which greeted the CDI, both positive and negative, helpful and less so, he offers a number of “lessons” for other index makers, including the clear expression of goals and limitations, accessibility of the structure, and the ability to capitalize on change while achieving stability.

In Chapter 4, “Humanitarian Funding and Needs Assessments,” author **John Cosgrave** discusses one of the thorniest challenges of humanitarian aid: how needs assessments are used (or not) for funding decisions, and looks at how humanitarian donorship has evolved since the enunciation of the core principles of the GHD in 2003. He examines recent developments in humanitarian funding, the extent to which needs are now being met, whether funding for different crises varies in proportion to needs, and how needs assessments can be improved. Basing his analysis on the findings of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD and the UN Financial Tracking System, he illustrates Official Development Assistance from 1990 to 2007, showing the value of development relief grants, official humanitarian aid as a percentage of all ODA, aid to Afghanistan and Iraq from 2000 to 2006, and concludes that the GHD appears to have little or no impact on support for Appeals up to 2007. Cosgrave then briefly analyses the effect of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the impact of the media on humanitarian funding. Because the poor quality of needs assessments are a “recognized weakness of the humanitarian system,” often referred to by donors as the cause of variable funding, Cosgrave looks to the four key aspects of the current humanitarian reform process as a hopeful prospect for improvement. Inadequate needs assessments cause delays in CERF applications and are fraught with methodological problems, often compromised by the contradiction between speed and quality. Illustrating his conceptual framework with a context knowledge tetrahedron, and concrete examples from the field, he offers specific recommendations for the improvement of needs assessments, including four kinds of knowledge: the disaster type and probable needs, the likely response to a disaster, its geographical extent, and the nature of the affected population and their capacities.

François Grünewald, in Chapter 5, entitled “New Approaches to Needs Assessment: Comprehensive and Rolling Diagnosis” adds to the analysis of the previ-

ous chapter and tackles many of the challenges involved in applying Principle 6 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, the allocation of humanitarian funding “*in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessment.*” He first discusses the weak links between needs identification and project design, pressure from media, politicians or domestic public opinion, high insecurity, and difficult choices among varying priorities and organizations, considering them central constraints for those who must make critical first decisions in the allocation of aid. The author then discusses in greater detail three major obstacles to good diagnosis: lack of comprehensiveness, lack of connection to funding requests, and evolving crisis conditions, before offering a number of concrete recommendations for “rolling diagnosis” and thinking “out of the box.” Drawing on the work of his own colleagues and others researching the area of decision-making and analysis, Grünewald focuses on the need to improve the methods of gathering information, the importance of properly assessing the activities, capacities, and survival strategies of local actors, and on the characteristics of flexibility, humility, and an orientation to the social, as opposed to the hard sciences, which enable those involved in diagnosis (as opposed to needs assessment) to deal more sensitively with rapidly changing conditions in the field. With reference to the GHD “principles for developing allocation frameworks,” he offers an analytical matrix for engaging with local partners and suggests a new methodology for achieving more adequate participation and diagnosis.

Mary Anderson, in Chapter 6, entitled “The Giving-Receiving Relationship: Inherently Unequal?” shares the results of a unique undertaking in the humanitarian field: the Listening project. In order to test the perception of many humanitarian actors that the very act of giving to those in need creates an unequal relationship, the project, now in its third year, systematically and comprehensively interviews not only people on the receiving end of humanitarian aid, but also those participating in, or observing the chain of delivery. The results of the Listening Project are revealing and instructive. From the outset, Anderson says, people “recognize, welcome, and are grateful for” help received, and are impressed by the generosity and courage of those who “did not have to come” but who often take significant risks to do so. It is the “buts” which follow, which provide much food for thought for those engaged in the humanitarian enterprise. Anderson’s paper focuses on how well humanitarian signal respect for the dignity and capabilities of communities in need, target delivery

more effectively, enable fuller local ownership of projects and outcomes; in other words, treat people as equals in practice. Carefully distinguishing between acts of generosity and aid “programmes,” and providing a rich array of eye-opening examples, she concludes that the inequality problem is a “product of conscious and intentional choices and approaches of providers.” Some of these include predetermined or inappropriate donor agendas, an over-emphasis on speed of delivery, the lack of donor presence among aid recipients, and – despite the best intentions – exclusion of recipients of aid from the planning and delivery process. Anderson’s conclusions underscore the contradictions between principles and policy statements such as the GHD and actual behaviour within the donor and humanitarian community.

In Chapter 7, “Tackling Ignorance and Neglect: Advocacy for a Broader Humanitarian Response in the Central African Republic,” **Toby Lanzer** gives us an inside glimpse of how the crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) was put on the humanitarian map, complementing this year’s crisis report on that humanitarian crisis. How did it go from a country mostly unknown and ignored, characterised by Jan Egeland as “the world’s most forgotten crisis,” to more than tripling its total humanitarian funding in the space of a single year? Drawing on his previous experience with OCHA, Lanzer describes the processes which were put in motion during his tenure as Humanitarian Coordinator in the CAR to focus world attention on the development and humanitarian needs of this tiny African nation. He describes how France lobbied other countries, the BBC’s visit in late 2005, and the engagement of UNICEF. By attracting prominent goodwill ambassadors, ensuring that information was widely available in English and in high-tech modalities such as Websites and blogs, drawing in major media, and tying the situation of CAR closely with neighbouring crises, CAR became more visible and better known to the aid community. Lanzer pays particular attention to the transition in humanitarian presence, from three wary UN agencies based in the capital, Bangui, making only 12 visits outside Bangui per month, to ten times that number, engaged in 145 missions per month, and from situation of suspicion and aggressiveness on the part of the government and population to one where NGOs were welcomed to all parts of the country. With increased presence came improved analysis, learning, participation, and the more effective use of aid, all of which, in a virtuous circle, attracted the involvement of greater numbers of humanitarian partners, and greatly increased funding. Lanzer concludes with a discussion of the methods and criteria used to select projects submitted

for funding to CAR’s Coordinated Aid Programme set up in CAR. His reflections provide insights into the real challenges for donors to live up to the GHD principles and provide aid equitably to all countries in need, and serves as a good introduction to the crisis reports (including a report on CAR) which follow in Part Three.

Part Three: Crisis Reports

As part of the data collection for compiling the HRI rankings and scores, teams visited 11 different crisis locations to survey humanitarian actors and how they perceive donor actions in light of the GHD principles. Part Three offers overview analyses of crises in the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nicaragua, occupied Palestinian territories, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Sudan. Several countries (Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan) were included in the HRI 2007 report, allowing readers to see how the response to the crisis in each has evolved over the past year. Each report provides a brief outline of the crisis background and the humanitarian response, with particular emphasis on how donors contributed to the response, and an analysis of the successes and shortcomings of the international response. The countries visited provide a broad overview of how the GHD principles and related initiatives to improve humanitarian action, such as the UN reform process, are playing out in different situations ranging from disasters, conflicts, forgotten crises, and complex emergencies. As such, the crisis reports provide an excellent framework for putting the overall findings of the HRI in Part One and the issues raised by the authors in Part Two in context.

Part Four: Donor Profiles

Part four of this report offers an overview of donors’ performance for each of the 22 countries ranked in the HRI 2008, as well as the European commission. Taken together, they provide a comprehensive overview of countries’ humanitarian aid programmes, including how much aid is being given, how timely it is, to which emergencies, parts of the world, and to which sectors it is directed.

We also provide a list of the many acronyms used throughout the publication, a Glossary of frequently used terms, and an Appendix containing the full Survey which formed the basis for the qualitative measures in the Humanitarian Response Index.