



The Humanitarian Response Index 2010

The problems of politicisation

Executive Summary

December 2010

About DARA

Founded in 2003, DARA is an independent organisation committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of aid for vulnerable populations suffering from conflict, disasters and climate change.

DARA has recognised expertise in providing support in the field of humanitarian aid as well as climate change and disaster risk reduction management. We have conducted evaluations of humanitarian operations in over 40 countries across five continents for a variety of government, United Nations and European Union agencies, as well as other major international humanitarian organisations, such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

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AVINA STIFTUNG



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1. Introduction

Objectives of the HRI

The Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) is an annual report published by DARA – an independent, international non-profit organisation working to improve the quality and impact of development and humanitarian interventions. The conceptual foundation of the HRI is the *23 Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD) developed in 2003 by the world’s main donor governments and adopted by the members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) in 2005.¹

Created in 2007, the HRI examines the role of donor governments in supporting responses to humanitarian crises, and assesses governments’ commitment and application of the *GHD Principles*. It aims to identify and promote good donor practice and contribute to greater transparency, accountability and impact in humanitarian action. By providing an independent assessment of how individual donor governments perform, and ranking them against their peers, the HRI helps civil society and policy makers benchmark the quality of government humanitarian assistance while aiding efforts to improve the effectiveness and impact of relief and recovery efforts. The HRI complements other monitoring tools and assessments used by the humanitarian community but is an independent exercise that is not funded by any government.

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The HRI is **not** an index on the volume or quantity of funding provided by Western governments for humanitarian assistance. It looks beyond funding to assess critical issues around the quality and effectiveness of aid in five key areas, or pillars of donor government practice:

- **Pillar 1:** Are donor responses based on the needs of the affected populations and not subordinated to political, strategic or other interests?
- **Pillar 2:** Do donors support strengthening local capacity, prevention of future crises and long-term recovery?
- **Pillar 3:** Do donor policies and practices effectively support the work of humanitarian organisations?
- **Pillar 4:** Do donors respect and promote international humanitarian law (IHL), and actively promote humanitarian access to enable protection of civilians affected by crises?
- **Pillar 5:** Do donors contribute to accountability and learning in humanitarian action?

The HRI 2010 report draws on extensive independent field research, complemented by published information on donor government’s aid policies and practices. This year’s report covers donor governments’ response to humanitarian crises during 2009 in **14 countries:** Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Haiti, Indonesia, the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), Pakistan, the Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Yemen and Zimbabwe. These crises are a representative sample, both geographically and by type of disaster. Together, they received over 60 percent of the funding mobilised to respond to crises in 2009 and over 50 percent of OECD/DAC humanitarian funding allocations as recorded by the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). A preliminary HRI mission to assess the response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake also took place but is not included in the statistical calculations for the index.

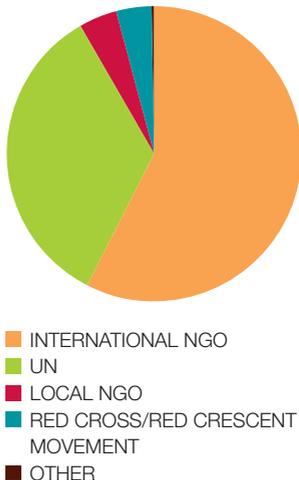
¹See: <http://www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/gns/principles-good-practice-ghd/overview.aspx>

2. Methodology

Research process

Between November 2009 and June 2010, HRI field teams interviewed 475 senior representatives of humanitarian organisations working in the 14 crisis-affected countries studied this year. Teams met the majority of the operational response agencies that receive donor government funding for the crisis, as well as government officials, local authorities and civil society organisations. In addition, teams interviewed over 75 donor representatives in the crises studied. The field research included a survey questionnaire asking respondents for their opinions and perceptions – based on their direct experience liaising with the donors who support their work – of how well donors are applying good practice. There were over 2,000 responses. The results of the field research were complemented by quantitative data on donor government funding from sources such as the UN, World Bank and the Red Cross/Red Crescent.

Graph 1: Survey responses by type of organisation



The HRI field survey

Nearly two-thirds of the interview respondents are male, confirming the predominance of men at the senior management level of humanitarian organisations. The implications of this gender imbalance on attitudes, perceptions and decision-making processes in humanitarian action are potentially huge. Preliminary analysis of the survey responses suggests that gender is a significant factor in determining how donors are scored in survey questions (other factors include the nationality of respondents, or the level of familiarity with the *GHD Principles*). DARA has compensated for these factors in the statistical analysis of survey responses, and intends to analyse this in greater depth in 2011.

Once the relevant data is collected, the HRI assesses and benchmarks donors against 35 indicators aligned against the main concepts contained in the *GHD Principles*. The indicators are organised into the five pillars of donor practice set out in the Table 1. Each has a qualitative component derived from field survey responses and a quantitative component based on publically available data, equally weighted within the pillar to ensure a fair and objective overview of donor government performance. The scores for each indicator and pillar are used to generate a comparative overall ranking of the OECD/DAC donors. This allows governments to better benchmark their humanitarian assistance against peers and to use the analysis to work with their stakeholders to improve their humanitarian assistance.

One innovation in this year's index is to expand the HRI's analysis beyond the comparative ranking of all 23 OECD/DAC donors by including a multi-dimensional analysis which classifies and groups donors according to the patterns of their similarities and respective differences in their performance. While the ranking provides a useful synthesis of donors' overall performance, there is a risk that the results can be over-simplified or misinterpreted, and the *relationship* between individual indicators and overall donor practice can be lost. The advantage of this new approach is that it analyses donors by using a more "holistic" approach. The analysis can also offer more details on a donor's strengths and areas for improvement compared to its peers, which in turn may help decision makers to refine and improve their humanitarian strategies.

Table 1: HRI pillars and indicators

<p>Pillar 1: Responding to needs (30% of index weight) This pillar assesses the extent to which donor funding and support are allocated in accordance to needs; respect the fundamental humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and ensure humanitarian objectives are not subordinated to political, economic or military objectives. The indicators in this pillar correspond to <i>GHD Principles 2, 5, 6, and 12.</i></p>	
<p><i>Qualitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impartiality of aid • Independence of aid • Adapting to needs • Timely funding to partner organisations 	<p><i>Quantitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding based on level of vulnerability & to forgotten crises • Timely funding to complex emergencies • Timely funding to sudden onset disasters
<p>Pillar 2: Prevention, risk reduction and recovery (20% of index weight) This pillar assesses the extent to which donors support capacity for disaster and conflict prevention, risk reduction, preparedness and response as well as support for recovery and the transition to development. The indicators in this pillar correspond to <i>GHD Principles 1, 7, 8 and 9.</i></p>	
<p><i>Qualitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary participation in programming • Beneficiary participation in monitoring and evaluation • Support for prevention & preparedness • Linking relief, rehabilitation and development 	<p><i>Quantitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for reconstruction and prevention • Funding of risk mitigation mechanisms • Reducing climate-related vulnerability
<p>Pillar 3: Working with humanitarian partners (20% of index weight) This pillar assesses how well donors support the work of agencies implementing humanitarian action and their unique roles in the humanitarian system. The indicators in this pillar correspond to <i>GHD Principles 6, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17 and 18.</i></p>	
<p><i>Qualitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible funding • Support for partners & funding organisational capacity • Donor capacity for informed decision-making • Support for coordination 	<p><i>Quantitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to NGOs • Un-earmarked funding • Funding UN & Red Cross/Red Crescent appeals
<p>Pillar 4: Protection and international law (15% of index weight) This pillar assesses the extent to which donors integrate protection and the application of international humanitarian law and other international guidelines and legal mechanisms into their funding policies and practices and ensure that operational actors apply them. The indicators in this pillar correspond to <i>GHD Principles 3, 4, 8 and 17.</i></p>	
<p><i>Qualitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for protection of civilians • Promotion of international humanitarian law • Facilitating humanitarian access • Advocacy towards local authorities 	<p><i>Quantitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International humanitarian law • Human rights law • Refugee law
<p>Pillar 5: Learning and accountability (15% of index weight) This pillar assesses how well donors support initiatives to improve the quality, effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian action. The indicators in this pillar correspond to <i>GHD Principles 15, 21, 22, and 23.</i></p>	
<p><i>Qualitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability towards beneficiaries • Transparency of funding • Appropriate reporting requirements • Support for learning & evaluations 	<p><i>Quantitative indicators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in accountability initiatives • Funding for accountability initiatives • Funding & commissioning evaluations

3. Summary of key findings

The HRI 2010 report shows that donor governments have been making progress, although slow, towards fulfilling their commitments to the *GHD Principles* and addressing some of the challenges identified in previous HRI reports. Nevertheless there are still too many gaps in actual practice. In many of the crises analysed in this year's report studied this it is apparent that humanitarian assistance provided by several donor governments is being subordinated to other objectives, thus undermining the *GHD Principles* that call on donors to ensure separation of aid from other interests. Additionally, many of the governments of crisis-affected countries studied this year, along with non-state actors, have manipulated crises and the international response to meet their own domestic interests and objectives. This is having further negative effects on the ability of humanitarian organisations to provide protection and assistance to affected populations. The complicated and challenging operating environment for humanitarian actors also points to a need to reform the humanitarian system to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of aid and be better prepared to respond to current and future challenges. This includes investing more strategically in prevention and risk reduction efforts. Finally, donor accountability towards crisis-affected populations – and not just domestic stakeholders – needs to be improved to ensure aid is focused on meeting their needs and priorities.

This year's report has five main findings:

1. Increasing politicisation of humanitarian assistance means millions of people are not getting the aid they need.

Donor governments need to ensure that aid is prioritised and allocated on the basis of the needs of civilian populations, not on political, economic or military objectives.

2. Continued gaps in the protection of civilians and lack of continued safe humanitarian access means that vulnerable populations are at risk of harm.

Donor governments need to prioritise protection of civilians and facilitate safe humanitarian access so that crisis-affected populations are not put at risk of harm and receive the support and assistance they need to survive and recover from a crisis.

3. A lack of political commitment and investment in conflict and disaster prevention, preparedness and risk reduction threatens to intensify the impact of future humanitarian crises.

Donor governments need to invest significantly more resources and political will in conflict and disaster prevention and risk reduction, including addressing climate change vulnerability.

4. Slow progress in reforming the humanitarian system means that aid efforts are not as efficient or effective as they should be.

Donor governments need to work together and with other actors, particularly local authorities and civil society in vulnerable countries, to scale-up efforts to reform the humanitarian system and improve aid effectiveness.

5. Donor governments are collectively failing to improve their transparency and “downward” accountability towards affected populations.

Donor governments need to significantly increase transparency around their funding and support for humanitarian action, and improve their accountability to help ensure that aid efforts have the greatest possible benefit for crisis-affected populations.

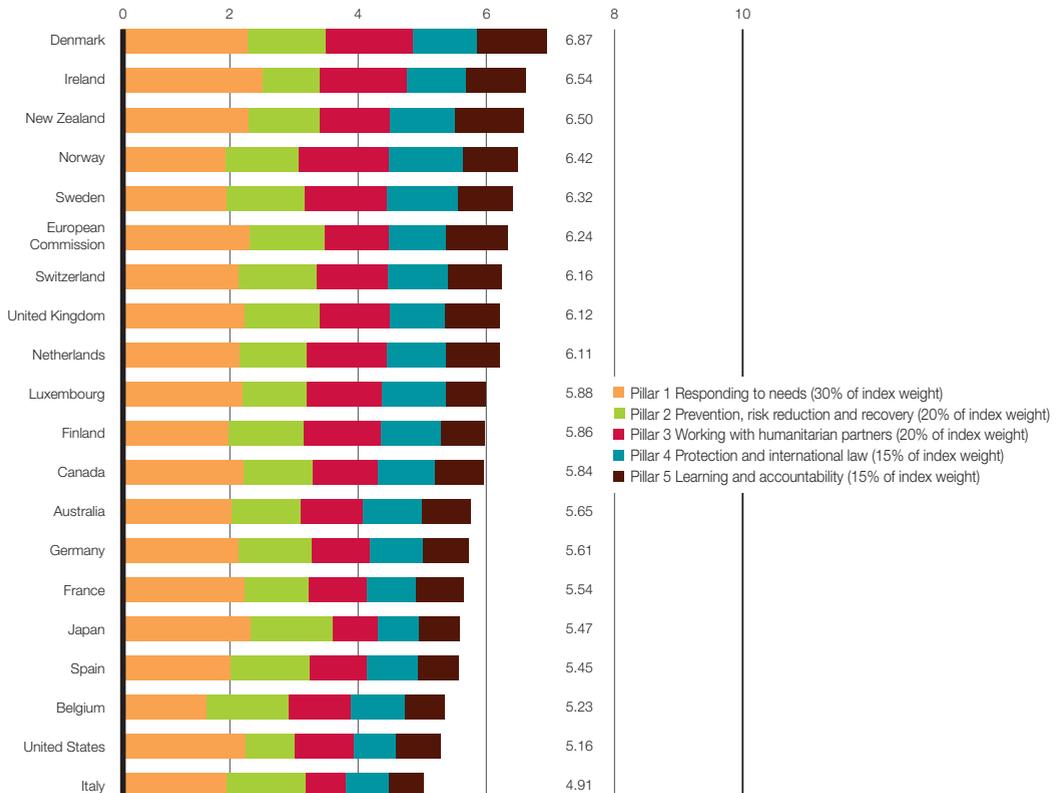
4. Donor ranking and classification

Donor ranking

The HRI 2010 ranking is calculated by taking as the basis a donor’s average scores by pillar as a basis and then adjusting the scores according to the weighting assigned to each pillar for the overall index. The resulting scores are ordered into a ranking that gives a composite picture of how well individual donors compare to other donors. A donor’s position in the ranking reflects how well it scores in the index’s indicators for its responses to crises in 2009. This means that *direct* comparisons between a donors ranking from one year’s HRI to another are not possible, and therefore any changes should be interpreted with caution. In addition, positive or negative changes in one donor’s performance can influence the position of other donors in the ranking. Nevertheless, the ranking does offer a quick overview of where individual donors stand in comparison to the overall group of GHD donors.

The overall ranking shows that there is still great room for improvement in the way all donor governments apply Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles in their policies and practices.

Graph 2: HRI 2010 donor rankings



Overall, all donors continue to do reasonably well in Pillar 1 (Responding to needs). However, there is a significant range between the highest scored and lowest scored donors, reflecting differences in the way donors understand and apply core humanitarian principles and GHD concepts around neutrality, impartiality and independence of aid. As previous editions of the HRI have shown, donors uniformly do less well in Pillar 2 (Prevention, risk reduction and recovery), showing that this is an area where all donors need to prioritise attention. In contrast, Pillar 3 (Working with partners) shows a high degree of variance in donors' scores, reflecting different approaches between donors, and opportunities for significant improvements in the way many donors interact with and support humanitarian actors. Pillar 4 (Protection and international law) shows reasonably consistent donor behaviour, with a smaller range of scores and the second-highest average scores compared to other pillars. However, there are still significant differences among donors in core indicators for this pillar, indicating that there is room for improvement. Finally, Pillar 5 (Learning and accountability) shows the highest variance in donor scores as well as the lowest average scores, indicating both that there are vast differences in the way donors are performing in this area and the reality that for several donors this simply is not a priority.

Donor classification

This year, the HRI donor ranking has been expanded to include an analysis of donor performance based on their characteristics and similarities with other donors. The donor classification uses a more sophisticated statistical analysis than the one used to generate the ranking in that it looks for relationships and patterns among donors based on their scores against all 35 indicators. After collecting all the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the HRI process, a number of statistical analyses were conducted to classify and group the 23 OECD/DAC donors assessed in the HRI into three categories, based on their performance against the HRI's five pillars of donor practice and key indicators:

- Group 1: donors with a consistently **high level of implementation** of GHD concepts.
- Group 2: donors with a **mid-range level of implementation** of GHD concepts.
- Group 3: donors with a **lower level of implementation** of GHD concepts.

Graph 3: Donor classifications

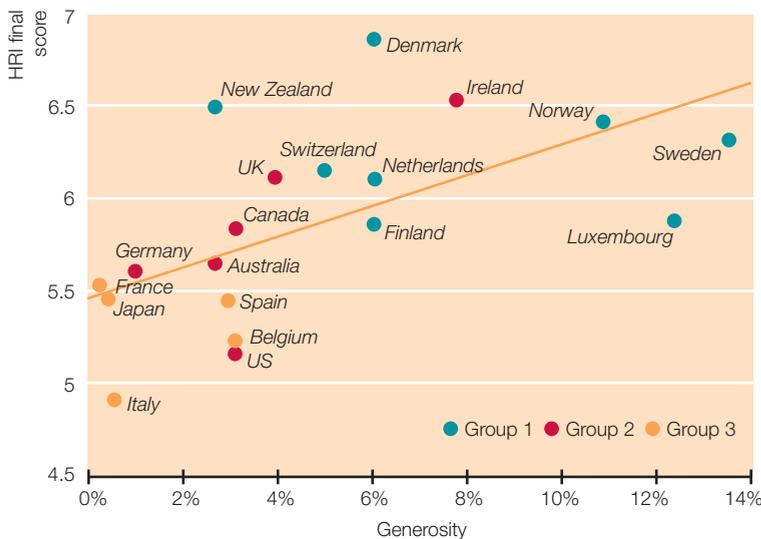


Group 1 donors include Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. These donors are characterised by scores consistently above the overall OECD/DAC average in most of the HRI’s qualitative and quantitative indicators, and have the highest overall scores in four of the five pillars of the HRI. The exception is in Pillar 1, where these donors perform slightly below the overall OECD/DAC average in the quantitative indicators. The overall average score for these donors is 6.27, compared to the overall OECD/DAC average of 5.89 on the HRI’s 10-point scale.

Group 2 donors include Australia, Canada, the European Commission (EC), Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US). Greece also meets some of the characteristics of this group but as data is incomplete comparisons should be made with caution. The scores for these donors are generally mid-range, with better than average scores in quantitative indicators, particularly in Pillar 1. However, in qualitative indicators from the HRI survey, this group of donors has scores only slightly better than the OECD/DAC average, indicating that there may be somewhat negative perceptions from the humanitarian agencies they fund, in contrast to donors in Group 1. This group has an overall average score of 5.88 in the HRI, compared to the overall OECD/DAC average of 5.89 on the HRI’s 10-point scale.

Group 3 donors include Austria (quantitative indicators only), Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, Portugal (quantitative indicators only) and Spain. Within the group, there is a relatively high range of differences in scores in Pillars 1 and 2. Scores are below the overall average in Pillars 3, 4 and 5 in both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The average overall score for these donors is 5.32 compared to the overall OECD/DAC average of 5.89 on the HRI’s 10-point scale.

Graph 4: Donor generosity compared to HRI final scores



Fair share and generosity of donors

The HRI uses the concept of “fair-share” in calculating some indicators. This implies that donor funding to appeals and pooled funds should be in proportion to their GNI, compared to the overall OECD/DAC group. The “optimal” value for a donor’s funding is based on the size of the country’s economy so that the burden is shared equitably among donors. As Graph 2

shows, the absolute volume of aid or the size and capacity of a donor is not necessarily a good predictor of the quality of its aid. However, there is a clear relationship between a donor’s humanitarian assistance as a proportion of its GNI and the donor’s HRI scores. More generous donors – those that invest a higher percentage of their GNI for humanitarian assistance, and thus carry more of their “fair share” – tend to score higher overall in the HRI, including in non-financial indicators such as adherence to good practice and international humanitarian law.

5. Issues and challenges

Politicisation and instrumentalisation of aid

The HRI report findings reveal a major and escalating concern; the politicisation and instrumentalisation of aid efforts. Local and international humanitarian actors' capacity to deliver aid in a neutral, impartial and independent way is being increasingly challenged amid a complex interplay between competing national and international political, military, security or development concerns. Access to affected populations is under threat, the security of humanitarian workers is at risk and affected people are not receiving the protection and assistance they need and deserve.

The politicisation and instrumentalisation of aid can take many different forms. OECD/DAC donor governments may:

- link their support for humanitarian assistance to political, military or anti-terrorism objectives
- prioritise state-building and economic development to the detriment of meeting immediate humanitarian needs
- uncritically fund and support recipient governments' agendas even when state actors are wholly or partly responsible for humanitarian crises
- use aid as an instrument to build goodwill or to meet domestic concerns.

DARA notes that many governments and non-state actors in crisis-affected countries themselves also politicise crises and manipulate the international aid response. Increasingly, they:

- deny the existence of a humanitarian crisis or manipulate assessments of the extent of needs
- misuse discourse around national sovereignty, the War on Terror or *the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* to limit external scrutiny of the humanitarian situation
- impose unreasonable restrictions on international aid agencies and limit their access
- use (and abuse) civilian populations and access to humanitarian assistance as part of conflict tactics.

Neutrality and impartiality of aid compromised

One of the key principles that donors committed to was respecting the principle that humanitarian assistance should be neutral and impartial, and independent of political, economic or security concerns. Yet many donors are disregarding this fundamental principle of *Good Humanitarian Donorship* and making aid contingent on other objectives.

Donors' humanitarian assistance must be independent of political, economic or security concerns.

For example:

- In *Afghanistan*, the use of military forces to deliver humanitarian assistance and win "hearts and minds" has put humanitarian organisations at risk of being targeted.
- In *Somalia*, US anti-terrorism legislation has restricted aid agencies working in areas controlled by Al-Shahaab, a group linked to Al-Qaeda, making it difficult for aid agencies – even those not funded by the US – to deliver aid. Many hundreds of thousands of crisis-affected people are thus denied aid they need.
- In *oPt*, donor prohibitions on contact with Hamas hampers effective aid delivery.
- In *Sudan*, donor attention on Darfur has meant needs in other parts of the country are under-funded. The International Criminal Court's indictment of Sudanese President Omar Bashir has further politicised the humanitarian crisis and fostered mistrust of humanitarian organisations.

- In *Colombia*, government efforts to discourage international attention to the humanitarian crisis by focusing on trade, development and military cooperation has further compromised humanitarian space and capacity to respond to displacement. Donors have been generally uncritical.
- In *Zimbabwe*, a government ban on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) activities prevented a timely response to a cholera outbreak. The initial unwillingness by the government to acknowledge the severity of the cholera outbreak delayed the response and raised the death toll. Many donors and response organisations seemed risk-averse, unwilling to challenge the government.

Continued challenges for access and protection

In several crises failure to sufficiently prioritise protection, combined with the unwillingness of some donors to forcibly advocate for access of humanitarian personnel means that vulnerable populations remain at risk.

Findings from the HRI field missions provide several examples:

- In *DRC*, mass rapes by militias have raised concerns about the ability of the UN peacekeeping mission to provide effective protection to civilians and also about donor willingness to invest in security sector reform to enable the DRC military and police to do so.
- In *CAR*, a UN peacekeeping mission has helped to provide some security for humanitarian operations in the north-east but armed groups and bandits have made access to other areas risky for humanitarian agencies.
- In *Somalia*, donors funded only 28 percent of funds requested for protection activities. Few donors are actively engaged in advocating for safe humanitarian access. Due to security concerns many organisations are managing operations remotely, making it difficult to actively support protection with a physical presence in the field. Some donors hampered humanitarian access by paying ransoms without coordinating with other humanitarian actors.
- In *Sri Lanka*, the government's tight control over access to military-run camps for those displaced by the conflict with the Tamil Tigers has created near insuperable constraints to meeting protection and assistance needs, with little concerted or coordinated action or advocacy by donor governments to address this.
- In *Afghanistan*, donors are blamed by many for being silent about violations of human rights by state actors and their supporters and, and for not advocating for the rights of women and children.
- In *oPt*, the EC was praised for advocating for access and protection and security of humanitarian workers. However, many other donors advocated at the political level for the lifting of the blockade only if it related to the projects they were funding. Donors did not speak out with one common voice, demanding that the Israeli authorities provide unrestricted access for all humanitarian goods and workers.
- In *Pakistan*, protection was not prioritised by donors, nor was the implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL). Lack of free access for humanitarian actors has been a recurring difficulty since displacement in north-western Pakistan began in 2007.
- In *Yemen*, donors were criticised for failing to advocate more proactively for protection. Some respondents described donors as gender blind when it comes to protection. Many NGOs are afraid that they might be expelled from the country if they are too outspoken.

Access to affected populations is under threat, the security of humanitarian workers is at risk and affected people are not receiving the protection and assistance they need and deserve.

Aid not being distributed according to needs

Another key part of the *GHD Principles* is that aid should be distributed in accordance to and in proportion to needs. Donors are still not living up to their commitments to distribute aid in accordance to needs, partly due to political concerns, but also due to difficulties in assessing needs objectively and consistently.

Donor governments' aid should be distributed in accordance to and in proportion to needs.

For example:

- In *Afghanistan*, the inability to access conflict zones means that needs assessments are either done by proxy or generally estimated. Aid tends to be focused on areas where donor governments already have a presence, leaving needs in less-publicised areas unmet.
- In the *Philippines*, donors largely accepted apparently inflated government assessments of needs after cyclones. Donors prioritised food aid, leaving gaps in critical areas like shelter. Meanwhile, the government under-estimated or under-reported the extent of humanitarian needs arising from the unresolved internal conflict in southern Mindanao.
- In *Indonesia*, two earthquakes, one in West Sumatra and the other in West Java, received hugely different levels of response. A wide range of donors and agencies conducted their own needs assessments with differing formats and templates.
- In *DRC*, donors are disproportionately funding eastern conflict areas, leaving equally impoverished areas without adequate humanitarian aid.
- In *Haiti*, accurate and reliable needs assessments were delayed, and not always used by donors, who in some cases were influenced by the massive media coverage of the earthquake. For example, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) rapid needs assessment did not appear to be known or used by many humanitarian actors. The prioritisation of costly foreign search and rescue teams at the expense of meeting other immediate needs was also questioned by some organisations.

Prevention, preparedness and linking relief to development (LRRD)

Despite many expressions of commitment donors and the UN system are still not investing in building local community capacity to prevent and minimise the effects of disasters and conflicts or to enhance capacity of local actors to respond quickly to new challenges. Examples from the HRI's field research show that:

- In *Indonesia*, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, very few donors support large-scale disaster risk reduction (DRR) programmes as an integrated part of the response to ongoing crises. There is a general trend for donor governments to separate DRR from emergency response needs.
- In *Pakistan*, donor governments generally performed poorly in terms of supporting conflict and disaster prevention. During the military offensive against the Taliban, their often uncritical support of the Pakistani Army meant they did little to prevent further displacement and violence.
- In *Haiti*, despite a long-standing international presence in the country, and the recent experiences dealing four back-to-back hurricanes in 2008, capacity-building efforts to strengthen preparedness, prevention and response capacities of vulnerable communities and local authorities appear have had little impact. As an example, internationally funded civil protection bodies such as the DPR and UPC were largely absent or sidelined in the immediate response. There is great concern that the pledges made by donor governments to support long-term recovery may not be honoured.

Timeliness and flexibility of funding

The *GHD Principles* call for timely, predictable and flexible funding to allow humanitarian organisations to better plan and to provide assistance rapidly and when it is needed at different stages of the response. DARA found that less than 10 of the 23 OECD/DAC donors committed and disbursed more than 40 percent of their funding within three months of the launch of an appeal for a chronic emergency, making it difficult for aid agencies to plan programming effectively.

Too many donors have inflexible funding and excessive earmarking that affects the ability of agencies to adapt to changing needs.

Too many donors have inflexible funding and excessive earmarking that affects the ability of agencies to adapt to changing needs. Some donor governments have invested in pooled funds such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) so that agencies had access to rapid, timely and flexible funding to meet priority needs. However, even these pooled funds, while an improvement, have been criticised by many actors in the HRI field research.

For example:

- In *Somalia*, donors such as Australia, Finland, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden were commended for flexibility to fill funding gaps, while others imposed too many restrictions and conditions on aid that it hampered an effective response. In addition, many donors were reluctant to fund extra overhead costs and provide contingency funds required in this difficult operating context.
- In *Indonesia*, funding from the CERF took six weeks to arrive at the scene after the earthquake had destroyed large tracts of Padang – a delay that was simply too long to address the emergency at hand. Organisations working on earthquake relief also found the CERF to be less flexible than other funding sources. The Emergency Response Fund (ERF), on the other hand, was considered to be an effective response mechanism for NGOs.
- In *Zimbabwe*, UN agencies were given preferential treatment and received 93 percent of the contributions from pooled funds like the CERF, while international NGOs only received seven percent. One of the biggest criticisms levelled at the CERF by many INGOs is that it does not coordinate well enough, or directly support the work of, many local or international NGOs, even though they are often the quickest responders to emergencies.
- In *Afghanistan*, CERF funds did not always go for emergency responses but instead for the purpose of sustaining normal, ongoing UN operations. This is a violation of its intended purpose, to fill immediate funding needs.

Supporting humanitarian reform and coordination

Progress towards implementing humanitarian reforms remains slow. Several issues consistently emerged in HRI interviews, including a perceived lack of leadership by senior UN officials such as the Resident Coordinators, and by donor governments to address issues around politicisation, access and protection; mixed performance of clusters and coordination mechanisms, and failure to engage with NGOs, and in particular, local actors.

Progress towards implementing humanitarian reforms remains slow.

For example:

- In *Zimbabwe*, many humanitarian organisations felt the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) was too closely aligned with the government, subordinating humanitarian concerns to other interests. A formal complaint was made by NGOs and UN agencies about the coordinator's performance, leading to a tense and mistrustful relationship between the RC/HC and the humanitarian community.
- In *Colombia*, many NGOs considered the RC/HC too passive, unwilling to forcefully challenge the government in its propaganda to deny the existence of an armed conflict and the applicability of IHL or advocate vocally against government measures that jeopardise neutral, impartial humanitarian action.
- In *Haiti*, the massive amount of actors in the field, many inexperienced in humanitarian response, and high turnover of staff made coordination next to impossible in the first phase of the emergency. Coordination with the different military present in the operation was also a real challenge, despite existing guidelines agreed to by donor governments.
- In the *Philippines*, the capacity of clusters and even their legitimacy was thrown into question by competition with a parallel cluster system used by the government to address the same needs.
- In *Afghanistan*, clusters suffered from problems with management, staff turnover, and regularity of meetings. Progress was hampered due to the predominance of military and security coordination instead of humanitarian coordination. Tensions between NGOs and UN agencies have damaged and undermined cluster effectiveness and created an atmosphere of resentment and distrust between actors.
- In *Haiti*, clusters lacked strong political leadership, essential in the prevailing complicated working environment. Many meetings are held in hard to access venues and in English, creating barriers to engagement and participation of Haitian government and NGO actors.

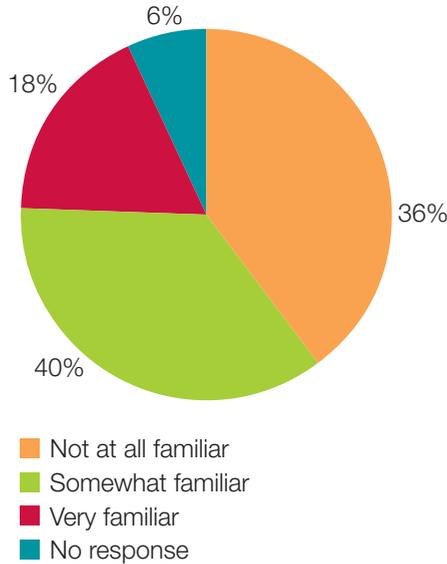
Lack of learning and accountability

Despite the importance of accountability in the GHD declaration, accountability to affected populations is largely missing from government aid policies and national debates on improving accountability in humanitarian action. A cursory review of policies and procedures of the 23 different donor governments assessed in the HRI shows that while accountability (or similar concepts) are mentioned by the majority of donors, virtually none make any direct mention of any specific commitment – or responsibility – to meet the needs and priorities of the people that their aid intends to help.

Accountability to affected populations is largely missing from the government aid policies and national debates on improving accountability in humanitarian action.

The majority of senior representatives of donor agencies and humanitarian organisations are not fully aware of or familiar with the *GHD Principles*. This makes it difficult for donor representatives at the field level to know what their governments are committed to. For representatives of humanitarian organisations it also makes it difficult to know what they can expect from donors in terms of good practice or whether it is feasible to try to hold their donors accountable for applying the principles and good practices they have committed to.

Graph 5: Familiarity with the Good Humanitarian Donorship declaration



Donor scores for indicators around learning and accountability are among the overall lowest average scores in the index. While most donor governments insist that partners apply learning, and quality standards in programming, support and follow-up is inconsistent. For example, the HRI field surveys show that humanitarian organisations consistently report that donors do not support them in implementing evaluation findings and recommendations. Similarly, engagement of crisis-affected populations in programme design, implementation and monitoring have long been recognised as a good humanitarian practice, and means to build and strengthen local capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to potential crises.

DARA found that the majority of donors do not require, monitor or actively promote beneficiary engagement with their partners.

For example:

- In *Haiti*, the enormous number of evaluations of previous crises, along with the multitude of evaluations currently underway, appear to have had little influence in terms of applying lessons learned, particularly around building and sustaining local capacity for prevention, preparedness and response.
- In *Somalia*, some donors were praised for their insistence on maintaining standards such as monitoring, beneficiary involvement and incorporating recommendations from previous evaluations, but the lack of physical presence makes implementation of evaluation recommendations difficult.
- In *Afghanistan*, despite the fact that donors expect agencies to be accountable and provide accurate information on their activities, the UN and the Afghan government have criticised donors' spending for a lack of transparency. Tracking aid funding invested in Afghanistan is a huge and persistent problem.
- In *Colombia*, efforts to increase accountability towards beneficiaries and awareness of quality and accountability initiatives in the humanitarian sector were largely absent from the discourse of both donors and humanitarian organisations.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Providing humanitarian assistance responsibly and in ways that show maximum results for people affected by crisis remains a major challenge. OECD/DAC donor governments have restated commitments to applying *GHD Principles* and practices. HRI 2010 findings show that donors still need practical orientation and guidance to apply the concepts of GHD in the way they fund and support humanitarian action. Donors are still not acting in a coordinated and coherent manner when it comes to applying core concepts of good practice. While each individual member of the GHD group of donors has strengths, the sum of the parts does not necessarily add up to a better whole. This reinforces the need for instruments like the HRI to provide an independent review of donor governments' performance and accountability against their commitments in the GHD declaration.

The growing politicisation of aid has serious implications for people affected by crisis. It hampers efforts of humanitarian organisations to access populations and provide protection and assistance. It puts crisis-affected people and humanitarian workers at risk by undermining the perception that the sole objective of humanitarian assistance is to prevent and alleviate suffering, impartially based on needs alone. Donors must look at means of ensuring their aid policies are not undermined by other interests and that other areas of government understand and respect the need for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. A more concerted effort is needed by donors to promote and uphold IHL and humanitarian principles. This may entail criticising a fellow donor. They should not shy away from doing so, for this is an inherent aspect of the *GHD Principles* they have signed up to.

After many years of acknowledging the importance of risk reduction, prevention and preparedness and recovery, it is discouraging to note the continued lack of donor government investment. Donors wanting to support ambitious reforms of the humanitarian system must promote dialogue on how to use resources efficiently and focus on needs of people affected by crisis. Leadership is needed, and donors can demonstrate this by working together to ensure that the system works for the benefits of crisis-affected populations. A first step would be for donors to place accountability towards affected populations at the centre of their funding and decision-making processes as well as the core of their relationships with partners.

HRI 2010 evidence suggests that donors need to:

- **ensure that aid is prioritised and allocated on the basis of the needs of civilian populations, not on political, economic or military objectives;**
- **invest significantly more resources and political will in conflict and disaster prevention and risk reduction, including addressing climate change vulnerability;**
- **work together and with other actors, particularly local authorities and civil society, to scale-up efforts to reform the humanitarian system and improve aid effectiveness;**
- **prioritise protection of civilians and facilitate safe humanitarian access so that crisis-affected populations are not put at risk of harm and receive the support and assistance they need to survive and recover from a crisis;**
- **significantly increase transparency around their funding and support for humanitarian action, and improve their accountability to help ensure that aid efforts have the greatest possible benefit for crisis-affected populations.**

DARA will continue to work closely with donors and partners to utilise HRI findings as an entry point for discussions on how to make aid more effective, transparent and accountable. As part of our determination to make the HRI ever more effective, we welcome suggestions from our colleagues in donor governments and the wider humanitarian community.

Recommendations

Pillar 1: Responding to needs

Key finding: Increasing politicisation and instrumentalisation of humanitarian assistance means millions of people are not getting the aid they need.

What can donor governments do to address these issues?

Donor governments can support neutral impartial humanitarian action and needs-based approaches to their funding and support by:

- **Allocating humanitarian assistance on the basis of needs alone and ensuring that humanitarian assistance is not subordinated to other priorities or objectives.** To do this, governments should support ongoing efforts to develop more integrated and objective needs assessments tools and methodologies. This may also require donors to revise their policies and procedures to ensure that funding and decision-making processes are based on clear, transparent and publically accessible criteria.
- **Ensuring government's foreign, trade and development policies complement and reinforce the independence, neutrality and impartiality of both donor government agencies and the humanitarian organisations they fund.** Donor governments should explicitly ensure that in cases of a crisis, neutral, impartial humanitarian action should take precedence over all other concerns. This requires governments to integrate and increase awareness of, and respect for, humanitarian principles into other policy areas.
- **Advocating more forcefully in situations where governments (either donors or host countries) and other parties are not respecting neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action.** Better coordination at the field and headquarter level can ensure that donors governments can use their access, influence and collective voice with host governments to more effectively address issues of access and protection and remind states of their obligations to respect IHL. Donors should consider other high-level mechanisms to monitor and take collective action in cases when donor governments' crisis responses contravene the spirit and intent of the GHD.
- **Disseminating and applying the *Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief* (the Oslo guidelines) and reviewing donors' visibility requirements to ensure that humanitarian organisations are clearly distinguished from non-humanitarian actors.** In a climate of growing mistrust and misunderstandings about the objectives of humanitarian action, donor governments should review the guidelines for collaboration between their military and humanitarian actors. Governments should also consider reviewing how they give visibility to their humanitarian assistance – including such requirements as “branding” with donors logos and national flags – to help reinforce that humanitarian aid and personnel are independent from governments.
- **Reviewing and reducing unnecessary aid conditionality and other donor requirements to ensure that humanitarian organisations have sufficient flexibility and independence to carry out their work effectively.** While governments should be concerned that their aid funding is not used for non-humanitarian purposes, legitimate, professional humanitarian organisations have developed working procedures that preserve their independence and impartiality and ensure quality and accountability in the use and distribution of resources. Donors should therefore review and reduce any restrictions that could hamper access and the provision of assistance and protection to affected populations.

Pillar 2: Prevention, risk reduction and recovery

Key finding: A lack of political commitment and investment in conflict and disaster prevention, preparedness and risk reduction threatens to intensify the impact of future humanitarian crises.

What can donor governments do to address these issues?

The continued lack of attention and investment by donors in risk reduction, prevention and preparedness strategies means that millions of people are unnecessarily affected by crisis each year. Governments can contribute to redressing this by:

- **Ensuring that beneficiary participation and “ownership” of humanitarian programmes are integrated as a requirement into a donor’s funding decisions, monitoring and reporting.** Despite the emphasis in the *GHD Principles* on beneficiary engagement in programming, surprisingly few donors make this a requirement for funding, monitoring and reporting.
- **Allocating a percentage of humanitarian assistance funding to conflict and disaster risk reduction and preparedness and for local capacity building.** Some donor governments already dedicate part of their humanitarian budgets to these areas, while others see this falling within the realm of development cooperation. Regardless of the funding model, donors could establish clearer and more transparent criteria to show how they will support this. They could consider integrating risk reduction and capacity building as an explicit requirement for partners that they fund and obliging partners to include local capacity building as an outcome of their humanitarian activities.
- **Investing in greater capacity building and contingency planning for local actors and the wider humanitarian system.** Donor governments need to prepare for a future of increased and changing humanitarian needs. The humanitarian system is hardly able to cope with existing needs and is ill prepared to anticipate and prepare for future needs. This is why an investment in preparedness, response and risk reduction at the local level and with governments in vulnerable countries is so important. Donors should set aside funding to strengthen the capacity of all components of the humanitarian system, particularly local actors.

Pillar 3: Working with humanitarian partners

Key finding: Slow progress in reforming the humanitarian system means that aid efforts are not as efficient or effective as they should be.

What can donor governments do to address these issues?

Strengthening and improving the effectiveness of the humanitarian system is essential to meet current and future needs effectively and have greater impact for people affected by crisis. Donor governments can support greater effectiveness and efficiency in the humanitarian system by:

- **Continuing to actively promote reforms of the international humanitarian system, not just UN reform.** Donors can continue to sponsor reviews and evaluations of efforts so far, such as the reviews of CERF and clusters. They must ensure that these mechanisms are accessible to more actors, particularly national NGOs and, when appropriate, national authorities. Donors can also invest in looking for new, innovative approaches to emerging issues and challenges.
- **Supporting and promoting more active leadership by the recently-appointed UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinators (HC).** Donors can jointly advocate for better-qualified leadership in the humanitarian system by insisting on a merit and experience-based approach to finding candidates for senior leadership posts in humanitarian crises. They need to encourage the organisations that they fund to engage fully with the HC. At the same time, donors can channel the concerns of their partners to the highest level to ensure that the ERC takes action to resolve outstanding issues.
- **Looking for means to harmonise and improve needs assessments to achieve more objective allocations of resources to crises.** Donor governments need to continue to support efforts for more accurate and reliable needs assessments as the best means to ensure resources are allocated in line with actual needs at the global and crisis level – and then use these mechanisms as the basis for transparent and objective decisions on where to allocate resources.

Pillar 4: Protection and international law

Key finding: Continued gaps in the protection of civilians and safe humanitarian access means that vulnerable populations are at risk of harm.

What can donor governments do to address these issues?

Respect for IHL, protection of civilians and safe humanitarian access are vital to minimise the devastating consequences for the people affected by crises. Donor governments can support this by:

- **Using every possible and appropriate means to advocate for the protection of civilians in situations of risk.** Donor governments have been silent in too many crises. They have not spoken out with one voice in other situations where access and protection are issues. Donor governments can exert pressure on parties through the Security Council and other channels but also work through mechanisms like the office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict.
- **Continuing to fund and support agencies with a dedicated mandate for protection, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and ensuring better cooperation and coordination of protection among all actors.** Donors should not neglect the important role of NGOs and local civil society organisations in monitoring and responding to protection issues. They should invest in building their capacities at the same time as those of larger multilateral agencies. Donors can also promote the development and implementation of operational guidelines on protection within the humanitarian sector.

Pillar 5: Learning and accountability

Key findings: Donor governments are collectively failing to improve their transparency and “downward” accountability towards affected populations.

What can donor governments do to address these issues?

There is an important and legitimate need for governments to show their citizens how and where taxpayers’ money has been spent for humanitarian assistance and with what results. But donors also need to collectively address the issue of increasing transparency towards partners and stakeholders. Accountability towards beneficiaries should be the foundation for any discussion on aid effectiveness. Donor governments can support increased transparency, accountability and effectiveness by:

- **Integrating concepts of downward accountability to beneficiaries into humanitarian assistance strategies, policies and procedures.** Donors should integrate more explicit definitions of accountability to beneficiaries and their own responsibilities in monitoring and implementing accountability into their policy frameworks. This could include, for example, specific requirements in funding proposals and reporting requirements from partners to show how quality and accountability are integrated into programming, as well as mechanisms for donors to report back to partners and beneficiaries on how they have fulfilled their obligations.
- **Ensuring that all relevant information on humanitarian funding, programming priorities and decisions is transparent and publically accessible.** Donor governments can demonstrate their commitment to accountability by facilitating access to information for citizens and stakeholders. Appropriate and relevant information should be made available in formats that are easily understood by all stakeholders, including partners and affected populations.
- **Committing to report consistently and to share information on funding pledges, commitments and disbursements to common international databases like OCHA’s FTS.** In order to facilitate more effective planning and avoid duplication of effort, donor governments should report their humanitarian assistance in a timely fashion, using standardised reporting formats, as called for in the *GHD Principles*. The data reported should be entirely consistent with data reported domestically or through other channels.
- **Supporting and participating in initiatives to increase aid accountability and transparency.** In addition to existing accountability fora such as ALNAP, donors can also support new initiatives on aid transparency, aid effectiveness and beneficiary accountability.
- **Reviewing GHD approaches and indicators to update them and align more coherently with advances in the UN-led humanitarian reform process.** The GHD was a significant breakthrough in promoting the collective responsibility and accountability of donor governments to ensure their aid contributes to more effective humanitarian action. However, the collective indicators agreed to by the GHD group do not capture the advances and complexities of the humanitarian system today. The GHD group is a powerful platform to advocate for positive changes in the system. Collectively, donors could take on more of a leadership role in promoting those changes, as they did when the GHD declaration was created.

“The Humanitarian Response Index is an innovative means of highlighting the *Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles* in order to encourage best practice and maximise the benefit of assistance to victims of crises and catastrophes.” - **Ross Mountain**.

In 2009, donors provided over US\$11.5 billion to respond to the needs of millions of people affected by conflicts and natural disasters around the world. Ensuring that aid is used correctly is no easy task, with humanitarian crises increasing in number and complexity. Today, humanitarian actors today face daunting challenges to provide protection and assistance to those in need, and often enter into a complex interplay of competing national and international interests related to political, military, security or development concerns. Add tighter budgets to this scenario, and the need for effective and efficient humanitarian assistance becomes more important than ever.

Based on nearly 2,000 surveys on donor performance and more than 500 interviews with humanitarian actors in 14 humanitarian crises (Haiti, Pakistan, Afghanistan, DRC and Sudan, among others), the Humanitarian Response Index seeks to be the reference for donors to assess the quality of their aid. Now in its fourth year, the Humanitarian Response Index is the world’s foremost independent instrument for measuring the individual performance of government donors against *Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles*. The Humanitarian Response Index provides an objective overview of donor performance, which can assist governments in ensuring that their humanitarian funding has the greatest possible impact for people in critical need of aid.

Founded in 2003, DARA is an independent organisation committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of aid for vulnerable populations suffering from conflict, disasters and climate change. DARA has recognised expertise in providing support in the field of humanitarian aid as well as climate change and disaster risk reduction management. We have conducted evaluations of humanitarian operations in over 40 countries across five continents for a variety of government, United Nations, and European Union agencies, as well as other major international humanitarian organisations, such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.