

Department for International Development
Responding to Humanitarian Emergencies



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
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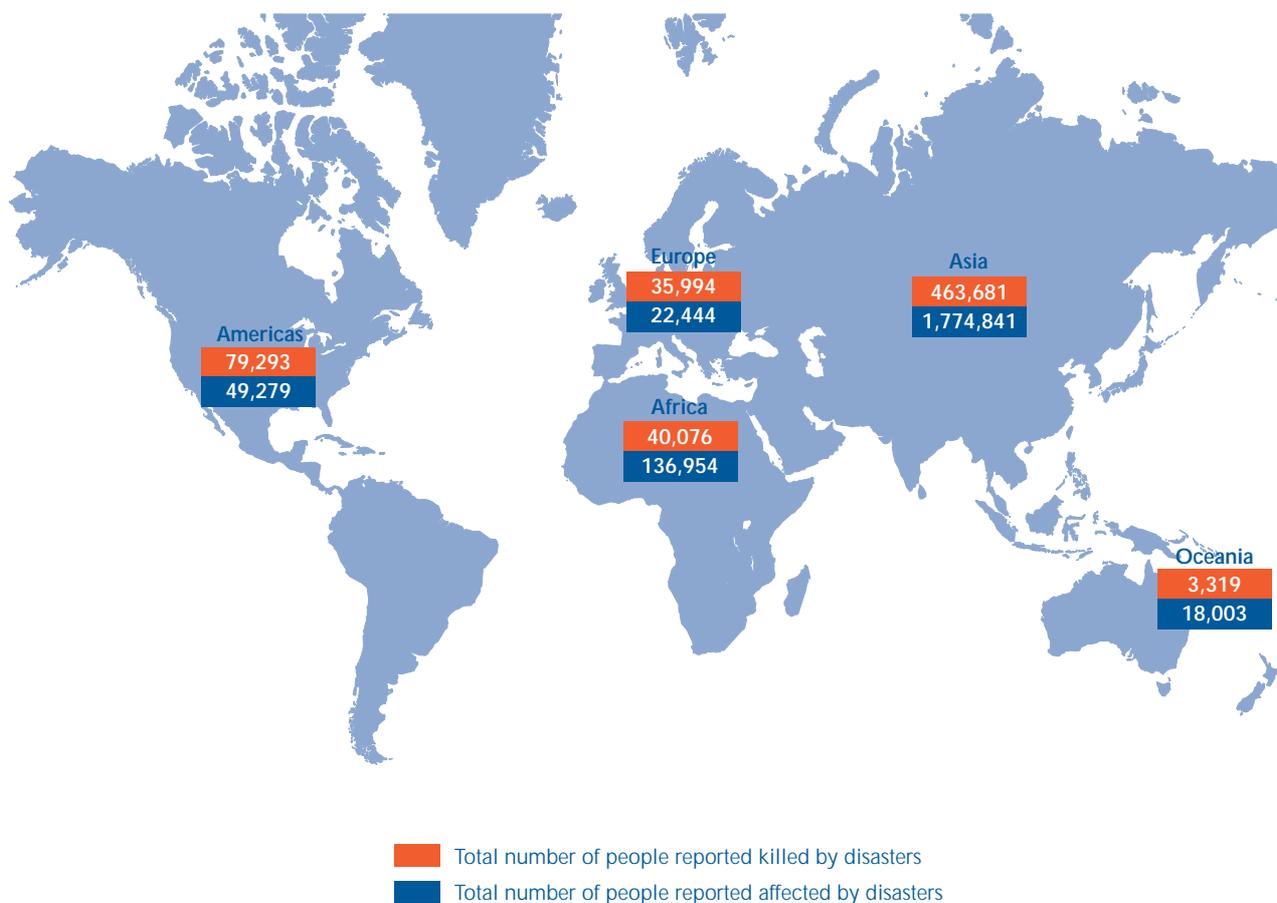
executive summary

The scale of humanitarian emergencies

- 1 On 26 January 2001, an earthquake measuring 6.9 on the Richter scale hit Gujarat State in India. Over 18,000 people were killed and more than 160,000 injured. Some 200,000 houses, 1,200 schools, 300 health centres and three hospitals were completely destroyed. Around 900,000 houses were damaged. In 2002 when civil war ended in Sierra Leone, estimates of the number of people killed during the preceding nine years were put as high as 200,000. Humanitarian disasters, whether caused by sudden or slow developing natural catastrophes, or by man-made events such as civil war, can have a devastating effect and their incidence is increasing. The annual total of disasters has grown from between 300 and 400 during the early 1990s to between 700 and 800 since 1999¹; and certain regions have been affected more than others (**Figure 1 overleaf**). The consequences of disasters can be far reaching: destroying development advances built up over decades, with the poorest people suffering the most; and causing significant economic damage. In some countries disasters may jeopardise achievement of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals which propose halving by 2015 the proportion of the world's population living in extreme poverty. The Millennium Development Goals were adopted by member countries of the United Nations in 2000 and provide a global consensus on objectives for addressing poverty.
- 2 The Department for International Development (DFID) leads the United Kingdom's response to humanitarian disasters. The response is largely in the form of bilateral funding to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and funding to multilateral organisations such as United Nations agencies. DFID can also provide direct operational, technical and logistical support. In 2001-02, DFID provided £279 million in humanitarian assistance, around eight per cent of its total budget of £3,644 million, making it the second largest humanitarian aid donor after the United States of America. In providing humanitarian assistance DFID seeks to: save lives and relieve suffering; hasten recovery; protect and rebuild livelihoods and communities; and reduce risks of and vulnerability to future crises. DFID has also established *Principles for a New Humanitarianism* (Appendix 1) which commits it to '... seek to promote a more universal approach to addressing humanitarian needs. People in need - wherever they are - should have equal status to rights and assistance ...'. This report examines:
 - the effectiveness of DFID's relief measures when a humanitarian emergency occurs;
 - the extent to which DFID integrates its emergency response into longer-term development initiatives; and
 - whether DFID is working effectively to minimise the occurrence and impact of humanitarian emergencies.

¹ *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2002), World Disasters Report: Focus on reducing risk, page 185.*

1 The regional distribution of people killed and affected by natural disasters 1992-2001

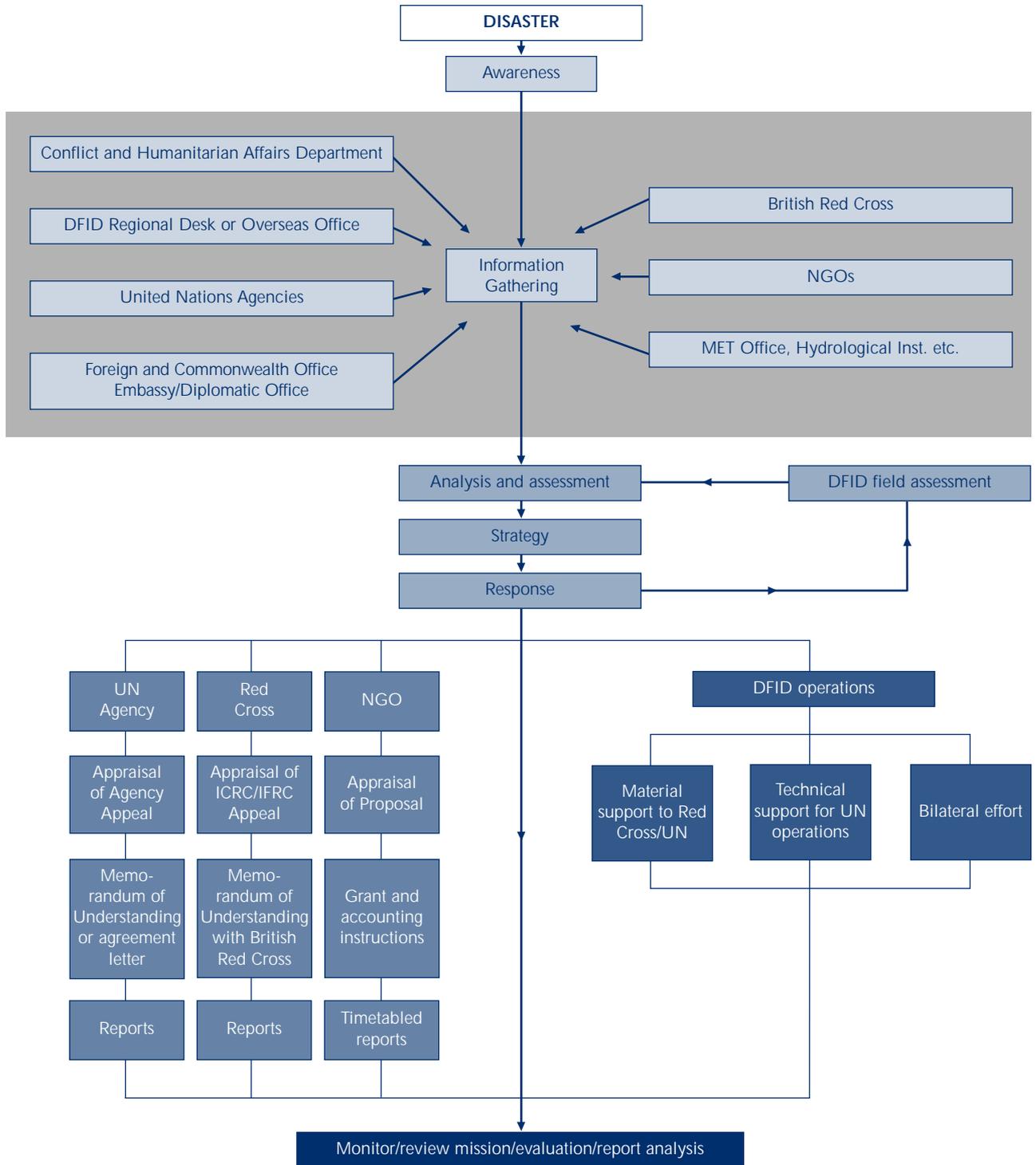


Source: National Audit Office mapping of data from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent World Disasters Report 2002

Responding to humanitarian emergencies

- 3 The particular circumstances of an emergency determine the action taken by DFID, although there are common stages to the response DFID is likely to make (Figure 2). Within DFID, geographical divisions are responsible for responding to a humanitarian emergency, especially in slow-onset and complex political emergencies, and recurrent natural disasters. When a sudden-onset disaster occurs, such as an earthquake, or if the disaster occurs in an area where DFID has no ongoing programme of development, DFID's Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance Department (CHAD) takes the lead. CHAD also provides advice and support to geographical divisions on a range of subjects, including conflict prevention and resolution; emergency response preparedness and contingency planning; and initiatives intended to reduce the vulnerability of people to future disasters. CHAD also has an operations team which provides field-level humanitarian expertise to assist with a response.
- 4 DFID has been generally effective when intervening in humanitarian emergencies, with short-term objectives in providing food, shelter and water being met in the majority of cases. In particular, DFID has been quick to respond to sudden-onset disasters. In such emergencies, speed of response is crucial, as people can only survive three to four days without water and three to four weeks without food. DFID's partners, such as NGOs and multilateral organisations, told us that its speed of response was impressive when compared

2 The stages of DFID's humanitarian response



- Following a disaster, the different organisations involved in responding to an emergency gather data and share information.
- DFID analyses the different sources of information to assess needs. It then designs a strategy to target its resources.
- DFID assesses project appeals and proposals. It then allocates funding to selected partners who implement the project on the ground. DFID requires its partners to submit reports to demonstrate how funds have been used.
- DFID may also give direct assistance through its operations team, for example Search and Rescue Teams or by providing staff to help co-ordinate the international response.
- DFID has an ongoing role in visiting, monitoring and evaluating the interventions that it funds to ensure that projects meet their objectives.

with that of other donors. For example, following the Gujarat earthquake in 2001, DFID was the first donor to arrive, with an assessment team in place the day after the disaster occurred. A British search and rescue team arrived within 50 hours of the earthquake; began work within 15 minutes of landing; and had saved one person within three hours of deploying to the worst affected area. In total they saved six people and supported a search and rescue team from the Russian Federation who saved a further 17 people. While these are small numbers, compared with the numbers of people killed, this action illustrates the successful use of specialist skills and assets in circumstances where speed of deployment was vital.

- 5 The division of responsibility between geographical divisions and CHAD, however, has often not been formalised, with CHAD's role being decided in many instances on a case by case basis. A degree of flexibility in DFID's organisational response will always be needed but this ad-hoc approach creates a risk that humanitarian assistance will not be provided in a timely manner whilst roles are clarified. The capacity of regional and country teams to respond to emergencies varies across DFID and clarity about respective responsibilities, reflecting those variations as appropriate, would be particularly helpful for those teams who have limited specialist humanitarian expertise of their own.
- 6 Targeting humanitarian assistance at those most in need is a key principle which guides DFID's response. Assessing need, however, is not always straightforward and can suffer from the lack of comprehensive data both at the global level, and at the level of an individual disaster. DFID is working with other donors and multilateral agencies to develop clear and measurable ways of assessing humanitarian need. DFID recognises that without a global assessment of humanitarian need it cannot identify whether its response to one emergency is appropriate compared with another. DFID has calculated that, since 1997, the per capita level of humanitarian assistance it has provided in European emergencies has been five times higher than for emergencies in Africa. It concluded that this difference could not be explained just by differences in the cost of delivery and associated security. Rather, it raised the possibility that wider strategic considerations were important in determining the allocation of resources. This was an issue for other donors as well.
- 7 In relation to particular emergencies, choosing between different delivery channels on the grounds of cost-effectiveness can be difficult, given the need for speed and flexibility in any response; and the limited practical choices which DFID might be faced with in different situations. Despite these difficulties, benefits exist in country teams being able to identify the strengths and risks associated with different options. But DFID currently does not have guidelines to help country teams identify the sort of criteria they should employ when carrying out such assessments.
- 8 There are few specified performance measures for humanitarian assistance, and none that relate directly to humanitarian principles or outcomes. While each emergency will have unique features which need to be addressed, the lack of a core of common indicators hinders consistent planning as well as performance monitoring. Notwithstanding the scope for better indicators, DFID needs to evaluate the success or otherwise of its humanitarian assistance work in order to learn lessons for the future. In 1997, DFID helped set up the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action with other bilateral and multilateral donors, United Nations agencies, and NGOs. This network brings together the results of evaluations carried out by its

members to identify common themes. However, within DFID itself, there appear to be significant gaps in the evaluation of its humanitarian assistance. Since 1997, DFID's Evaluation Department has only assessed the success of DFID's response to the Montserrat volcanic eruption. CHAD and country teams have carried out a number of evaluations in the last three years, but most focused on the performance of a specific partner rather than on DFID's performance. Only one evaluation gave a view of DFID's response overall.

Linking emergency response and longer-term development

- 9 Emergencies, even those of a protracted and complex nature, usually have a finite life. At some stage, relief work will need to be integrated into longer-term development programmes designed to reduce poverty. How well this is done can help or hinder the success of these programmes. DFID recognised the importance of managing this transition and we found, in the countries we visited, that those working with DFID saw it as relatively more effective than other donors in this respect. In particular, in some countries, DFID was seen as being more flexible with funding and in considering the broader picture during a response.
- 10 DFID could do more, however, to ensure that its NGO partners understand its strategy for moving from humanitarian relief work, through rehabilitation and reconstruction, to longer-term development assistance. Without this understanding, other key organisations are less able to identify their own roles, which may undermine the success of any transition. In Sierra Leone NGOs considered that DFID had been slow in communicating its strategy. And in Sudan, DFID had prepared an Approach Paper to indicate its strategy for transitional assistance. Multilateral partners were aware of this but some NGOs in the south of the country had not seen the paper at the time of our review and thus expressed uncertainty about its content. In contrast, although NGO partners were not party to DFID's planning prior to military intervention in Iraq, they welcomed the work DFID had done to communicate its intended approach to rehabilitation once military action began.
- 11 Achieving an effective transition from relief work to development is also helped by funding which enables longer-term planning by those organisations through which DFID works. Multi-year funding agreements available to multilateral organisations allow them to be less constrained by the short-term nature of humanitarian funding, and to plan transitional work more effectively. NGO partners expressed interest in DFID making such agreements more readily available to them as well.
- 12 A particular challenge faced by DFID and other humanitarian organisations is maintaining a safe and secure environment for humanitarian assistance. The creation of such 'humanitarian space', in which aid agencies can operate and victims recover, is particularly relevant when the humanitarian emergency results from conflict. Although outside a strict definition of humanitarian assistance, DFID may fund some activities carried out by peacekeeping forces to help save lives and reduce misery, as in Sudan. Alternatively, British forces may make a contribution in kind, as in the Balkans; or as an occupying force, upholding associated legal obligations, including maintenance of security as currently in Iraq. The situation in Iraq illustrates the need for proper co-ordination between security and reconstruction efforts in order to minimise the impact of poor security on the safety of aid workers and their ability to progress reconstruction.

Avoiding and minimising the impact of humanitarian emergencies

- 13** Reducing and preventing disaster and conflict are seen increasingly as important factors in limiting humanitarian suffering. By reducing the vulnerability of populations, especially the poorest, they are better able to withstand the effect of disasters. The World Bank and the United States Geological Survey have calculated that economic losses estimated at US\$400 billion worldwide as a result of disasters in the 1990s could have been reduced by US\$280 billion if US\$40 billion had been invested in mitigation measures.
- 14** Recognising the importance of reduction and prevention work DFID has sought to reduce risks and vulnerability to future crises. Since 2000, CHAD has adopted a more strategic approach with the use of its £3 million annual disaster reduction budget, through which it has funded international initiatives designed to increase the safety of vulnerable communities and reduce the impact of disasters in developing countries. We also identified examples of work being carried out by DFID on the ground in order to reduce the risk of humanitarian suffering. These include £50 million to fund work designed to halve extreme poverty in the Chars areas of Bangladesh which are subject to annual flooding.
- 15** But DFID has had no formal strategy for this work at a policy level. A review in 1998 of the Emergency Aid Department by DFID's Consultancy and Review Section also concluded that '*... geographical departments often do not have the time, the resources or the inclination to support disaster preparedness*². In 2000, DFID-funded analysis indicated that of the 18 most recently revised strategies for hazard-prone countries and regions, 11 recognised natural disasters as factors in their contextual analysis; but only five had risk reduction as a significant component of their plans; and only one included a budget specifically for mitigation and preparedness³. National Audit Office analysis of a number of country strategies confirmed the marginal coverage given to humanitarian and/or disaster reduction issues.
- 16** This situation has improved with the development of new Country Assistance Plans, which are gradually replacing Country Strategy Papers. Country Assistance Plans or draft Plans for those countries we visited gave greater attention to disaster reduction. For example, through promoting regional approaches to food security in southern Africa; and recognition of the role of livelihoods work in tackling vulnerability in Bangladesh. But despite this, there remains scope for improvement in the quality of risk assessment, and the degree to which the response is clearly articulated and linked to resource allocation and performance objectives. Good analysis does not mean that DFID has to take the lead in - or attach highest priority to - risk mitigation; but in some countries we visited it was not clear how the level of importance afforded to disaster reduction had been decided.



² Mosselmans, M (1998), Consultancy and Review Section Study of Emergency Aid Department.

³ Twigg J, C Benson, M Myers and D Steiner (2000), *NGO Natural Disaster Mitigation and Preparedness Progress: A Study of International Development and Relief NGOs based in the UK.*

Overall conclusion and recommendations

- 17** The overall effectiveness of DFID's response to humanitarian emergencies was widely recognised by other donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs. It was seen to be quick and flexible, particularly when responding to rapid-onset disasters, and has contributed to the saving of lives as a result. There are, however, issues which DFID needs to address when responding to other types of emergencies; and in developing further the integration of relief work into longer-term development programmes, and realising the potential of disaster prevention and reduction work.
- 18** In order to ensure that it is well-placed to respond to all types of disasters, DFID should:
- i) consider extending Africa Division's and CHAD's formalisation of their respective responsibilities for specified types of disasters to other geographical divisions;
 - ii) build on current work to improve the quality of humanitarian needs assessment, and establish a better defined process to move from humanitarian principles, through needs assessment to resource allocation;
 - iii) provide guidelines for country teams to use when assessing the strengths and risks associated with available channels through which to route assistance (Appendix 2 sets out some relevant questions to be considered when designing such guidance);
 - iv) seek to ensure that all major humanitarian interventions, where DFID has provided a response, are evaluated either jointly with others, or by others or DFID alone; and
 - v) devise a set of performance indicators related to its humanitarian principles that help in emergency planning and performance monitoring.
- 19** To make sure relief work is effectively integrated into longer-term development work, DFID should:
- i) communicate clearly to partner organisations:
 - a) where responsibility for managing the transition between relief and development lies within DFID; and
 - b) the approach to integration, so that they can be clear as to the circumstances in which DFID will support such work.
 - ii) consider extending, where appropriate, its use of multi-year funding to a wider range of partner organisations.
- 20** To reflect the importance of disaster reduction and prevention work, DFID should:
- i) complete, as quickly as possible, research to establish the impact of disaster reduction and preparedness on achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in order to highlight its importance to longer-term development;
 - ii) make sure staff in charge of country programmes understand the significance of that research when assessing risks to successful development;
 - iii) where a major emergency has occurred, require country teams to address its impact on future development plans; and
 - iv) make sure that strategies, particularly for disaster prone countries and regions, have explicitly considered the risks posed by humanitarian emergencies and whether prevention and reduction work could minimise those risks.