

Natural Disaster Management

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World Vision Australia's
Public Policy Position

World Vision Australia's position on natural disaster management

World Vision Australia and the World Vision partnership carry out all humanitarian work in accordance with humanitarian principles as they are embodied in the *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*,¹ *The Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*² and the *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*.³

Before, during and in the aftermath of natural disasters, World Vision Australia upholds the objectives of humanitarian action to strengthen preparedness for natural disasters before they occur; save lives; alleviate suffering; and support the right to life with dignity.⁴

World Vision Australia affirms:

- the primary role and responsibility of the state, including national and local authorities, in assisting affected populations during natural disasters.
- that its response complements that of authorities in providing assistance. It works cooperatively with national governments, United Nations coordination structures, and other humanitarian agencies before, during and after a natural disaster.⁵
- that in situations where military actors are involved in supporting responses to natural disasters, military activities should ultimately be under civilian control.⁶
- that it, as well as the broader World Vision partnership, seeks to transition to early recovery initiatives as soon as possible and is committed to ensuring that responses assist in 'building back better'.⁷

World Vision Australia considers disaster risk reduction and resilience as essential to assisting communities to prepare for, respond and adapt to natural disasters. World Vision is committed to working with communities to reduce vulnerabilities, mitigate the impact of hazards and help communities develop adaptive capacities.⁸

World Vision's mandate to advocate for natural disaster management

World Vision Australia, and the World Vision partnership, has responded to most major global natural disasters in the past 10 years, including the Boxing Day Tsunami (multi-country) in 2005, Cyclone Nargis (Myanmar) in 2008, Haiti Earthquake in 2010, Pakistan Floods in 2010, Typhoon Haiyan (Philippines) in 2013 and the Nepal Earthquake and Cyclone Pam (Vanuatu) both in 2015. World Vision has also responded to smaller scale natural disasters during this time.

In 2015, World Vision responded to 137 emergencies, invested USD511 million in humanitarian relief and assisted over 12.2 million people across 60 countries. World Vision has a 29-member deployable Global Rapid Response Team that covers all large-scale emergencies (disasters and conflict); and an eight-member deployable Australia-based Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs team to respond on behalf of World Vision Australia.

World Vision Australia's policy recommendations for change

Preparedness

World Vision Australia asks national governments to:

1. Ensure disaster management policies are developed, implemented and resourced at local and national levels.
2. Strengthen investment in community-level resilience capacity to disasters, through supporting age appropriate and child-centred approaches to disaster risk reduction.
3. Strengthen information and knowledge systems to ensure that early warnings are translated into life-saving actions for communities.

World Vision Australia asks the Australian Government to:

1. Support national governments' capacity to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises to ensure that local and national governments are better able to respond effectively to disasters.⁹
2. Ensure that all funded humanitarian partners fully adhere to humanitarian standards and promote accountability, efficiency and effectiveness and support appropriate mechanisms for contingency planning by humanitarian organisations.¹⁰
3. Continue to ensure the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is able to quickly respond to emergencies around the world with adequate discretionary funding.¹¹

Response

World Vision Australia asks national governments to:

1. Ensure safe delivery of humanitarian aid in the aftermath of a natural disaster to all affected populations, in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality.¹²
2. Facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations to implement essential humanitarian assistance for affected populations.¹³
3. Implement initiatives to help protect children in emergencies, including through:
 - a) Establishing safe spaces for children;
 - b) Prioritising education in emergencies to ensure children can return to education quickly; and
 - c) Comprehensive support to families at risk of abandoning their children, and reunification of children separated from their parents.

World Vision Australia asks the Australian Government to:

1. Provide flexible and timely funding to humanitarian partners.¹⁴
2. Ensure that military assets and personnel are deployed to assist in response efforts, do so in full accordance with the Oslo Guidelines and that military expenditure for humanitarian relief is not covered by official development assistance.¹⁵

World Vision Australia asks NGOs and UN Agencies to:

1. Work cooperatively with national and local government authorities and the international community, to ensure the delivery of coordinated and timely humanitarian assistance.¹⁶
2. Ensure that response governance compliments and supports local and national coordination structures, promotes national leadership and strengthens local capacities.¹⁷
3. Develop strong accountability mechanisms to ensure feedback from affected populations.
4. In all response operations draw on in-country expertise and local knowledge to understand the local context and cultural mores involved in operating in a particular area.¹⁸

Recovery

World Vision Australia asks all actors involved in natural disaster recovery to:

1. Ensure that humanitarian response planning integrates early recovery initiatives into all sectors and transition to early recovery programming as soon as practicable.¹⁹
2. Ensure national and local ownership of and participation in early recovery initiatives to the greatest extent possible.²⁰
3. Support early recovery programs that focus on building back better and strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities to future crises and shocks.²¹

Background

A natural disaster occurs when the human, physical, economic or environmental damage from a naturally occurring hazard, overwhelms a community's capacity to cope.²² Naturally occurring hazards can be geophysical (earthquakes, volcanos, landslides, tsunamis), meteorological (storms, typhoons, extreme temperatures), hydrological (floods, storm surges), climactic events (droughts, wildfires) or biological (epidemics, infestations).²³ While most often caused by nature, disasters may be aggravated due to human intervention.²⁴

International context

In response to any natural disaster, the primary responsibility for providing assistance to affected populations rests with the state, and is governed by the laws and processes of that country.²⁵ If a state is unable to respond sufficiently to the disaster, it is normal practice to request international assistance from other governments, United Nations (UN) bodies and humanitarian actors.

There is no international treaty or legal framework governing the provision of humanitarian assistance in natural disasters. The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) has been leading efforts to develop a new set of guidelines to help governments strengthen their domestic laws and policies for the provision of international disaster relief in emergencies. The State Parties to the Geneva Conventions unanimously adopted the "Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance" at the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.²⁶ The UN General Assembly then adopted three resolutions in 2008 encouraging states to make use of these guidelines.²⁷

The primary international body responsible for the coordination of humanitarian action during disasters is the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). OCHA was established in 1991 on a resolution of the UN General Assembly (1991 Resolution),²⁸ which also saw the creation of the high-level position of Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC).²⁹ The 1991 Resolution also created the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), as the central coordinating platform for humanitarian UN organisations, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement under the ERC.³⁰ OCHA is mandated to coordinate the United Nations response to complex emergencies and natural disasters.³¹

In 2005 the ERC initiated a humanitarian reform process in OCHA, with the IASC. One of the key elements of this process was the establishment of the cluster system to support coordination.³² Clusters bring together UN agencies, NGOs and other international organisations around a sector or service provided during disaster response³³. Each cluster is led by a designated UN agency. The World Vision partnership, including World Vision Australia actively participates in the cluster system both at a global level and during emergency operations.

In addition to the core humanitarian principles (Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality, and Independence)³⁴ there are globally agreed standards and guidelines for humanitarian actors in natural disasters. The *Sphere Humanitarian Charter and*

Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response seeks to improve the quality of assistance to affected people through the promotion of minimum standards in key life-saving sectors.³⁵ The recently released Core Humanitarian Standard sets out nine commitments that describe the essential elements of principled, accountable and high-quality humanitarian action.³⁶

Australian context

Humanitarian response is a strategic pillar of the Australian Government's development and humanitarian policy. DFAT's recently released Humanitarian Strategy seeks to strengthen international humanitarian action, reduce disaster risk, support preparedness and effective response and enable early recovery.³⁷ Under this strategy, Australia has committed to providing effective humanitarian assistance in the event of natural disasters, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific.³⁸

Further, DFAT has a range of standby personnel that are able to support humanitarian response, including the Australian Civilian Corp (technical specialists), the Australian Defence Force (military capabilities, including logistics and transport), and AUSMAT (multi-disciplinary health teams).

In the event of a natural disaster, DFAT has the ability to fund a range of different partners to support a response:

1. Bilateral Funding to the affected country, noting their primary responsibility for responding;
2. Funding to the United Nations appeal. Australia promotes and supports the leadership and coordination of the United Nations during disasters;
3. Funding to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement via a partnership with the Australian Red Cross; and
4. Funding to NGOs via the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (WVA is a partner). The AHP agreement is a set of pre-selected agencies and funding is able to be dispersed rapidly (usually within 72 hours).

In the most recent natural disasters in the Pacific (Cyclone Pam, Vanuatu and Cyclone Winston, Fiji) the Australian Government has deployed military capabilities and has indicated its commitment to continue using these capabilities in future responses.³⁹

In the past 18 months, DFAT has become an advocate for the humanitarian system in the Pacific to be fit for purpose. Significant departmental resourcing appears to be invested in achieving this goal.

Key resources & references

Key resources

[Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance.](#)

[Coordination to save lives: History and emerging challenges](#)

[Oslo Guidelines for the use of foreign military and civil defence assets in disaster relief](#)

[World Vision Disaster Management Standards](#)

[Guidance note on Inter-Cluster Early Recovery](#)

[Toward better Humanitarian Donorship](#)

References

¹ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief, 1994.

² The Sphere Project, The Sphere Handbook Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 1997.

³ CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere Project, Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, 2014.

⁴ World Vision Australia, *Humanitarian Principles Public Policy Position*, April 2017, P&A Director approved, available for **WVA internal use only**.

⁵ CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere Project, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2014, p.8.

⁶ World Vision, 'Civil-Military and Police Engagement: Partnership Policy,' 2009, p.11, available for **WVA internal use only** at: <https://www.wvcentral.org/civmil/Documents/Policies/WV%20CIVMIL%20Partnership%20Policy.pdf>

⁷ World Vision International HEA, *Disaster Management Standards*, 2011, available for **internal WV use only** at: <https://www.wvrelief.net/files/commstools/Disaster%20Management%20Standards.pdf>

⁸ World Vision International, *Disaster Risk Reduction*, website available at: <http://www.wvi.org/disaster-risk-reduction>

⁹ This is in accordance with Principle 8 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship, 2003.

¹⁰ This is in alignment with Principles 15 and 18 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship, 2003.

¹¹ The Sectors position has been that official humanitarian assistance should be maintained at a minimum of 10% of Australia's ODA on an annual basis (ACFID, Humanitarian Action for Results, April 2014). Given the declining aid budget, in 2016 World Vision has moved away from a 10 per cent ask and asked for a doubling of the emergency fund to AUD260 million (See WVA FY17-18 Pre-Budget Submission).

¹² In accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution (1991) A/RES/46/182e.

¹³ In accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution (1991) A/RES/46/182.

¹⁴ This is in accordance with Principle 5 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship, 2003.

¹⁵ This is in accordance with the Oslo Guidelines on the use of Foreign Military and Civil Defense Assets in Disaster Relief, 2007.

¹⁶ This is in alignment with obligations under the Core Humanitarian Standard, CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere Project, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2014.

¹⁷ This is in accordance with commitment 3 under the Core Humanitarian Standard, CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere Project, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2014.

¹⁸ Rebecca Barber, 'One Size Doesn't Fit All: Tailoring the International Response to the National Need Following Vanuatu's Cyclone Pam,' Save the Children, Care, Oxfam, World Vision, June 2015.

¹⁹ This is in accordance with Principle 9 of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles, *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship*, 2003.

²⁰ Global Cluster for Early Recovery, *Guidance note on Inter-Cluster Early Recovery*, January 2016.

²¹ See Lesson 2, OECD, *Towards Better Humanitarian Donorship: 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews*, 2012.

²² World Vision International, *What is a humanitarian disaster?*, website available at: <http://www.wvi.org/disaster-management/what-humanitarian-disaster>

²³ Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), *General Classification' Emergency Events Database (Em-DAT)*.

²⁴ Further information available at: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), *Aggravating factors*, available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/about-disasters/aggravating-factors/>

²⁵ According to the key UN resolution related to humanitarian emergency assistance affected state has 'the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination, and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.' For more information, see United Nations General Assembly Resolution (1991) A/RES/46/182.

²⁶ The Guidelines are a set of recommendations on how governments can prepare their disaster laws and plans for the common regulatory problems in international disaster relief operations. IFRC, *Introduction to the Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance*, 2011.

²⁷ See United Nations General Assembly Resolution (11 December 2008) A/RES/63/139; United Nations General Assembly Resolution (11 December 2008) A/RES/63/141; United Nations General Assembly Resolution (11 December 2008) A/RES/63/137

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly Resolution (1991) A/RES/46/182.

²⁹ The current Emergency Relief Coordinator is Stephen O'Brien.

³⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'Coordination to save lives: history and emerging challenges,' 2012, pp. 2-3, available at: <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Coordination%20to%20Save%20Lives%20History%20and%20Emerging%20Challenges.pdf>

³¹ OCHA's official mandate is to "coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors."

³² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), *Coordination to save lives: history and emerging challenges*, 2012, pp. 6-8.

³³ It is important to note that at the global level, clusters are operational not only during disasters. Clusters support policy development and the identification of best practice, training and capacity building, and operate standby rosters and material stockpiles. The key clusters and their leads are: Camp Coordination and Camp Management (IOM/UNHCR), Early Recovery (UNDP), Education (UNICEF & Save the Children), Emergency Telecommunications (WFP), Food Security (WFP & FAO), Health (WHO), Logistics (WFP), Nutrition (UNICEF), Protection (UNHCR), Shelter (IFRC/UNHCR), WASH (UNICEF). Further information is available at: Humanitarian Response, 'What is the Cluster Approach?' available at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/about-clusters/what-is-the-cluster-approach>

³⁴ See WVA Position Paper on the Humanitarian Principles.

³⁵ Sphere standards apply to the following sectors: water supply, sanitation and hygiene; food security and nutrition; shelter, settlement and non-food items and health action. Further information is available at: <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

³⁶ Further information is available at: <https://www.corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

³⁷ DFAT, 'Humanitarian Strategy,' May 2016, p.3.

³⁸ Australia is a signatory to the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles.

³⁹ Further information on these military deployments is available at: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian support to Vanuatu following Tropical Cyclone Pam – Fact Sheet, November 2015; Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Tropical Cyclone Winston.