



HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR RESULTS

Strengthening Australia's approach to preventing
and responding to disasters and conflict overseas



Devastation in Eastern Samar, Philippines, in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan.

JIRE CARREON/OXFAM





AUSTRALIAN
COUNCIL
FOR
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DEVELOPMENT

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The paper has been written on behalf of the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group, involving 14 leading humanitarian Non-Government Organisations (NGOs):

Access Aid International
Act for Peace
ActionAid
Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS)
Australian Red Cross
CARE Australia
Caritas Australia
ChildFund Australia
Oxfam Australia
Plan International Australia
RedR Australia
Save the Children Australia
World Vision Australia

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ACRONYMS

AACRS	Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme
AADMER	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
ACFID	Australian Council for International Development
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
ALWS	Australian Lutheran World Service
ANCP	Australia-NGO Cooperation Program
APC MADRO	Asia-Pacific Conferences on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHF	Common Humanitarian Funds
CRED	Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters
DAC	Donor Assistance Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ERF	Emergency Reserve Funds
FTS	Financial Tracking Service
GFDRR	Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GHA	Global Humanitarian Assistance
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
GNI	Gross National Income
HAP	Humanitarian Action Policy

HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
HPA	Humanitarian Partnership Agreement
HRG	Humanitarian Reference Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
MTR	Mid-term Review
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODSG	OCHA Donor Support Group
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
OPCW	Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNISDR	UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNRWA	UN Relief and Works Agency
WFP	World Food Programme



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Globally, we are witnessing a rise in the scale, frequency and impact of humanitarian crises on vulnerable people, pushing the international humanitarian system to its limits. Australia plays a vital role in responding to these challenges – both in our immediate region and globally. Australia was the 10th largest financial contributor to humanitarian assistance in 2012, accounting for 3.4% of reported humanitarian funding globally.¹ In addition to this, the Australian public are some of the most generous donors to humanitarian response in the world.²

The integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in November 2013 changed the structure through which Australia's humanitarian program is managed. Given the convergence between this structural change, rising humanitarian need and the impact of budgetary pressures on Official Development Assistance (ODA), now is a critical time to ensure that Australia's humanitarian action can deliver results.

This paper has been developed under the auspices of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG), involving 14 leading humanitarian Non-Government Organisations (NGO).³ It reviews Australia's humanitarian policy and practice to provide recommendations to the Australian Government on ways to improve the effectiveness of its humanitarian action – now and into the future. The paper highlights that Australia has a crucial role to play in assisting those caught up in humanitarian crises, working to reduce the risk of crises and the impact they have, and urging others in the international community to take responsibility on humanitarian issues.

RISING NEED

There are three principal drivers increasing humanitarian needs: the growing number of people exposed to disasters,⁴ the rising number of extreme weather-related disasters,⁵ and the failure to move most conflicts and fragile states towards sustainable peace and development.⁶

Rising disaster risk

Typhoon Haiyan, which struck the Philippines on 8 November 2013, is reported to have been one of the strongest super typhoons to ever make landfall. 6,268 people lost their lives, and 1,061 remain listed as missing, making it the deadliest rapid-onset disaster of 2013.⁷ While the scale of this disaster may seem exceptional, in reality it is part of a dangerous trend. The past 30 years have seen a steady increase in the number of disasters worldwide, and dramatic increases in both the number of people affected by disasters and hazard-related economic losses.⁸



- Since 1980, reported weather-related disasters have increased by 233% where records are available.⁹
- Between the 1970s and 2000s, the drought-affected proportion of the earth doubled.¹⁰
- Between 2001 and 2010, disasters affected on average 232 million people, killed over 100,000 people and caused US\$108 billion in economic damages each year.¹¹ Disaster mortality rates are generally higher for women than for men, and women face increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation in the aftermath of disasters.¹²
- Crises are also reportedly becoming more protracted. In 2010, 19 countries in Africa alone reported having experienced food security crises in at least eight out of the ten previous years. In 1990, only five countries reported this type of protracted crisis.¹³
- In the last four years alone, economic losses from disasters have exceeded \$100 billion each year.¹⁴ Without efforts to account for, and address, disaster risk, the world can expect losses from disasters to double by 2030.¹⁵

Insecurity and conflict

There are 1.5 billion people – more than 1 in 5 people around the world – living in areas affected by fragility, conflict or large-scale violence.¹⁶ In 2012, there were a staggering 28.8 million people forcibly displaced as a result of violence, armed conflict and human rights violations, up 2.4 million from the previous year.¹⁷ Civilians are increasingly bearing the brunt of conflict, and rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence are often used as weapons of war.¹⁸ Conflict also interrupts people's livelihoods and contributes to dependency on aid.

System overload

In 2010, the crises in Haiti and Pakistan threatened to overwhelm the international humanitarian system.¹⁹ In late 2013, it appeared as though the humanitarian system was on the brink of total system overload again. Catastrophic emergencies in the Philippines, the Central African Republic and Syria necessitated activation of the highest level category of system-wide UN humanitarian response (Level 3).²⁰ These responses had to compete for constrained resources with other large-scale crises such as the political violence that erupted in late 2013 in South Sudan and ongoing humanitarian responses in places like Afghanistan, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). With increasing environmental and population pressures, this strain on the system is only likely to grow.



Australia has a long and proud tradition of providing international humanitarian assistance. No matter what Australians think about foreign aid ... there is one thing everyone agrees on: as a nation we have an obligation and a duty to help others when disasters strike. We do it willingly, speedily and effectively – and our efforts are always highly regarded and appreciated by those whom we help.

Senator the Hon Brett Mason, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs²¹

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper argues that the following six overarching priorities should guide the Australian Government's humanitarian action in response to these challenges. These investments will increase Australia's ability to help save lives and alleviate human suffering in times of conflict and disaster as well as reduce the risk and impact of crises in the long term, thereby demonstrating the type of tangible impact the public wants to see from Australia's aid program.

To ensure that Australia's humanitarian contribution has maximum impact, the Australian Government should:

1. Continue to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles and quality standards

- 1.1 Allocate humanitarian funding on the basis of need and ensure that humanitarian programming decisions are made in a neutral, impartial and transparent manner. Such decisions should continue to be made in a stand-alone humanitarian division within the new DFAT structure.
- 1.2 Effectively monitor the quality of Australia's humanitarian aid to ensure that it is targeted to meet the different needs of men, women, boys and girls, and particular vulnerable groups of people.

2. Champion humanitarian system reform at regional and global levels to improve performance and results for women, men and children caught up in crises

- 2.1 Play a lead in role in facilitating regional consultations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.
- 2.2 Promote humanitarian reform through Australia's role on the UN Security Council, the World Food Programme (WFP) Executive Board, UN OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG), other global donor groups, and in regional forums such as the ASEAN Dialogue Partnership.

3. Make a significant investment towards preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) across the aid program

- 3.1 Maintain DRR funding to at least 3% of overall ODA, and steadily increase this investment over time. Investment in DRR should be prioritised in the Asia-Pacific region, with particular attention to countries with high vulnerability to disasters and low capacity to respond.
- 3.2 Continue to champion DRR in global and regional processes, including the post-2015 development agenda, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2 and ASEAN regional DRR and resilience initiatives.

4. Protect Australia's aid investment through predictable and appropriate levels of humanitarian funding to meet rising demand, as well as increased transparency of aid spending

4.1 Ensure that official humanitarian assistance is maintained at a minimum of 10% of Australia's ODA on an annual basis, which for the 2014-15 Budget equates to AU\$518 million, given CPI increases.

4.2 Endeavour to contribute Australia's fair share to consolidated humanitarian appeals, particularly to underfunded emergencies, in recognition that global humanitarian response is a shared responsibility amongst donors.

4.3 Improve the consistency of the reporting of Australia's official humanitarian assistance to enhance transparency and accountability to the Australian public, including through more accurate reporting to the UN's FTS.

5. Adopt a more balanced approach to allocating humanitarian aid through different implementing partners, based on their relative strengths and capacities

5.1 Ensure that humanitarian assistance is allocated to implementing partners – such as UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – on the basis of efficiency, timeliness, effectiveness and accountability, in accordance with Australia's Humanitarian Action Policy (HAP).

5.2 Increase the allocation of humanitarian funding delivered directly through NGOs to at least 20% of Australia's official humanitarian assistance, with a view to further increase it in line with the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) DAC average of 24%. This includes making full and effective use of the Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA) by increasing funding allocations through this mechanism.

6. Improve the effectiveness of responses to slow-onset and protracted crises through innovation

6.1 Invest in research and the development of a more rigorous policy framework to guide efficient, effective, timely and accountable responses to slow-onset and protracted crises.

6.2 Consider whether the HPA model may be adapted or extended to support timely responses to early warning signs of slow-onset crises.

6.3 Refine long-term country plans and explore options for multi-year partnership agreements to more strategically address the root causes and chronic indicators of protracted crises, including flexible, long-term funding arrangements with NGOs who have demonstrated capacity to implement a mix of humanitarian, early-recovery and development programs.

In pursuing these priority areas, the Australian Government should also invest in strengthening relationships and ways of working with the NGO humanitarian sector for policy dialogue and effective delivery of assistance. Australian humanitarian NGOs are well placed to work with the Government on its future humanitarian action agenda, in order to improve results in slow-onset, rapid-onset and protracted crises.

2 PRINCIPLED AND HIGH QUALITY ASSISTANCE

Australia has a long history of responding to humanitarian crises in accordance with humanitarian principles.²² The core humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (see box below) are the cornerstone of effective and accountable humanitarian action. They are enshrined in the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD Principles),²³ which Australia agreed to and endorsed in 2003.²⁴

CORE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

The GHD Principles state that humanitarian action should be guided by the following core humanitarian principles:²⁵

Humanity – meaning the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found

Impartiality – meaning the implementation of actions solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations

Neutrality – meaning that humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out

Independence – meaning the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

The GHD Principles enhance the coherence and effectiveness of donor action concerning humanitarian crises. They ensure greater accountability to beneficiaries, implementing organisations and domestic constituencies. Since endorsing the GHD Principles, Australia has taken concerted action to adhere to them in the management of its humanitarian aid program. Most notably, in 2005 Australia issued its inaugural Humanitarian Action Policy (HAP), which explicitly stated that the GHD Principles ‘provide the general benchmark against which Australia will improve the coherence, impact and accountability of its humanitarian actions’.²⁶ Australia reaffirmed its commitment to the GHD Principles and practices in the 2011 revised HAP.²⁷

As the Australian Government looks for ways to improve the effectiveness of its humanitarian action, it is important to ensure continued adherence to these principles. There are two key ways to achieve this. First, it is important to ensure that humanitarian funding is allocated in proportion to need – irrespective of where that need arises. Although it may be appropriate for the Federal Government to focus parts of its aid program on countries within the Indo-Pacific region where there is high disaster risk, this should not limit the provision of assistance in other regions where such needs arise. By restricting humanitarian funding to the Indo-Pacific region, Australia would limit its ability to respond in a flexible manner to humanitarian needs where they are most acute, including in protracted and underfunded emergencies.

RESPONDING TO NEEDS GLOBALLY

Australia has a long bi-partisan history of supporting humanitarian action globally. In 2004, Australia announced \$1 billion over five years in aid for relief and reconstruction in Indonesia after the Boxing Day tsunami disaster. At the time, this commitment was the largest donation ever made by the Australian Government.²⁸

Importantly, the aid package consisted of new aid money and did not involve reallocating assistance away from humanitarian crises outside Australia's immediate region, such as the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan. Australia provided \$40 million in humanitarian assistance to Darfur in 2004-05, in addition to responding to the Bam earthquake in Iran and floods in Bangladesh.²⁹

At the time, Prime Minister John Howard said, 'My responsibility is to make sure Australia's generosity matches the need of those in distress'.³⁰

There are some positive signs since the merger of AusAID and DFAT that the Australian Government is continuing to provide humanitarian funding where needs are critical outside the Indo-Pacific region, such as in South Sudan,³¹ the Central African Republic³² and Somalia.³³ Nevertheless it is not entirely clear to external stakeholders how these funding decisions have been reached and on what basis.

This has been an ongoing issue for some time. An OECD Donor Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review of Australia's aid program in 2013 found that while Australia's reputation for effective humanitarian action is well founded, 'It may be unclear to outsiders how Australia makes its [humanitarian] funding decisions, leaving Australia open to the risk of misperceptions over the principled nature of its funding'.³⁴ To demonstrate adherence to these principles, therefore, humanitarian decisions and their criteria should be transparent. (See Section 4 on 'Protecting Australia's Aid Investment'.)

Second, to avoid the politicisation of humanitarian assistance in ways that undermine the safety of beneficiaries and aid workers, humanitarian funding needs to be allocated 'independently of political, economic, military or other motivations' in line with the Principles.³⁵ This also avoids humanitarian response priorities from being unduly skewed, leading to inefficient gaps and overlaps in humanitarian assistance delivery.³⁶ To enable such an approach, key humanitarian decision-makers in DFAT (both at post and in Canberra) must have a strong understanding and commitment to the GHD Principles. Humanitarian decision-makers must also be empowered to allocate funds in accordance with the principles, so that humanitarian imperatives can be pursued without being subordinate to other foreign policy and trade interests.

In this respect, Australia's decision to establish a separate Humanitarian and Stabilisation Division within DFAT rather than integrate it into another Division is very welcome.³⁷ To maintain the integrity of Australia's humanitarian decision-making processes it is important that this arrangement be maintained, and that the Division has a high level of authority to determine humanitarian assistance priorities in line with humanitarian principles and Australia's capacity to respond. Moreover, in order to avoid the risk that DFAT staff will make decisions based on conflicting national security, foreign affairs, trade, development and humanitarian agendas, key decision-makers within DFAT (both at post and in Canberra) must have a strong understanding and commitment towards the GHD Principles, reflective of their importance in international humanitarian responses.

QUALITY STANDARDS

Australia is committed to gender equality in humanitarian action. We support the active participation of women, girls, boys and men, and increased disaggregation of data by sex so we can better plan for and understand the impacts of humanitarian action.

*Australia's Humanitarian Action Policy 2011*³⁸

Australia has a robust policy framework for adherence to internationally recognised standards for quality humanitarian action. In particular, Australia has a strong commitment to reaching vulnerable groups in emergencies (such as children and people with disabilities), mainstreaming gender equality and protection considerations through humanitarian action, and improving accountability to affected populations.³⁹ Australia's humanitarian action is guided by the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Government Organisations in Disaster Relief,⁴⁰ and the principle of 'Do No Harm'.⁴¹

Under the 2011 HAP, Australia has committed to assessing the quality of its humanitarian action against these standards. This includes evaluating Australia's humanitarian responses, jointly with humanitarian partners where possible, and measuring implementation of the HAP every two years.⁴² It is important that these efforts to ensure the quality of Australia's humanitarian aid are maintained by DFAT and incorporated into the benchmarking of the Australian's aid program.

Recommendation 1: Australia should continue to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles and quality standards

- 1.1 Allocate humanitarian funding on the basis of need, in accordance with transparent criteria, and ensure that humanitarian programming decisions are made in a neutral, impartial and transparent manner. Such decisions should continue to be made in a stand-alone humanitarian division within the new DFAT structure.
- 1.2 Effectively monitor the quality of Australia's humanitarian aid to ensure that it is targeted to meet the different needs of men, women, boys and girls and particular vulnerable groups of people.



A woman carries her belongings in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. Act for Peace supported households affected by the Horn of Africa drought.

2 REFORM FOR RESULTS

Australia plays an important role advancing humanitarian system reform and capacity both within our region and further afield, and should continue to do so. Under the 2011 HAP, Australia committed to increasing its efforts to advocate for effective regional and international humanitarian responses.⁴³ This includes advancing an increased focus on civilian protection, civil-military coordination, and the promotion of accountable and inclusive humanitarian action, as well as a greater focus on the role of regional organisations in humanitarian programming.⁴⁴

It is critical that the expertise developed by AusAID in these policy areas is maintained within the humanitarian section of DFAT. Opportunities may also exist for strengthening Australia's humanitarian diplomacy through closer coordination between the Humanitarian Division and other policy functions within DFAT, such as the ASEAN and Regional Issues Branch, International Organisations Branch, and the UN Security Council Taskforce.

REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

In the Pacific region, Australia has supported efforts to strengthen national policy and laws relating to reducing the risk of disasters and managing them effectively when they occur.⁴⁵ Australia has also provided valuable assistance towards the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), especially the operationalisation of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance.⁴⁶ Australia's Dialogue Partnership with ASEAN and bilateral relationships with neighbouring states have allowed for close and coordinated partnerships on DRR and humanitarian response.

These investments in regional dialogue and capacity building position Australia well to influence and advance strategic humanitarian reforms across Asia-Pacific. For example, Australia has played a critical role in the development and dissemination of Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets in National Disaster Response Operations, which have just been finalised in 2014 after several years of drafting.⁴⁷ In a region where military forces are regularly involved in disaster relief activities, such guidelines are critical for promoting regional alignment with humanitarian principles and standards.

Australia should continue to engage with governments and regional organisations across Asia and the Pacific to build capacity and willingness to lead timely and principled humanitarian responses when disasters or conflicts occur. Australia should also share lessons from engaging with ASEAN disaster management processes with other donors globally through forums such as the UN ODSG, given that ASEAN is leading the way in supporting its members to respond to disasters and, at times, catalysing them into action.⁴⁸

WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

The upcoming World Humanitarian Summit and preparatory regional consultations taking place between now and May 2016 present a unique opportunity for Australia to influence global and regional humanitarian reforms. In particular, Australia should play a principal role in the Pacific Islands regional consultation process leading up to the Summit (currently scheduled for mid-2015).

THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT – ISTANBUL, MAY 2016

Since the UN General Assembly established the international humanitarian system two decades ago, the landscape has altered dramatically. In the face of growing needs, and in an effort to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian action, the UN will hold an inaugural World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. The four key themes of the summit will be humanitarian effectiveness, risk management, transformation through innovation, and serving the needs of people in conflict.⁴⁹

A key challenge for the World Humanitarian Summit will be how to more effectively integrate disaster preparedness, response, and long-term development efforts. In this area, Australia has already demonstrated considerable diplomatic leadership, championing the importance of DRR as a development priority through the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development. Australia should continue to advance this agenda, building on its experience through the negotiation of the post-2015 development agenda and the HFA 2. (See Section 3, 'Preparedness and Risk Reduction' for more information.)

BROADER INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Australia has been a strong supporter of the UN's Transformative Agenda and of action to improve the performance and accountability of the international humanitarian system. Australia's active role on the ODSG, in addition to participation on the boards of the WFP, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), and UN Women, are all indicative of this commitment.

In relation to global security, Australia has demonstrated its leadership and diplomatic leverage. For example, in 2013-14, Australia has used its role on the UN Security Council strategically to advance the women, peace and security agenda; to protect children in armed conflict; and push for improved humanitarian responses in a number of countries including South Sudan, Mali and Syria. Notably, in October 2013 Australia worked with Luxembourg to draft a Presidential Statement on humanitarian issues in Syria.⁵⁰ In February 2014 Australia, with Luxembourg and Jordan, was instrumental in unifying the divided Security Council to adopt a Resolution aiming to facilitate the safe and unimpeded delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Syria.⁵¹

Australia should continue to support and invest in diplomacy and capacity building to improve the performance of the global humanitarian system. This includes monitoring the performance of UN agencies funded by the Australian Government and pushing for reforms through governance positions. For example, Australia is well-positioned to influence the provision of food assistance globally through its current role as the Vice-President and forthcoming role as President of the UN WFP Executive Board. Australia should focus on advocating for further innovation in improving food security and nutrition through, for example, cash and voucher programs. As demonstrated recently during the Typhoon Haiyan response, such approaches are critical for regenerating local markets and contributing to economic recovery.

Recommendation 2: Australia should champion humanitarian system reform at regional and global levels to improve performance and results for women, men and children caught up in crises

2.1 Play a lead in role in facilitating regional consultations for the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

2.2 Promote humanitarian reform through Australia's role on the UN Security Council, the WFP Executive Board, UN ODSG, other global donor groups, and in regional forums such as the ASEAN Dialogue Partnership.

3 PREPAREDNESS AND RISK REDUCTION

Disasters can have a devastating impact on development, reversing progress on poverty reduction and economic growth.⁵² According to the United Nations, over the past 20 years, disasters caused by natural hazards have affected 4.4 billion people, claimed 1.3 million lives and caused \$2 trillion in economic losses.⁵³ But the deleterious impacts of disasters on communities are not inevitable. While responding to crises will continue to be a critical need, efforts to support governments and communities to reduce future disaster risk are the best – and most cost effective – form of defence.

Over the past 20 years, disasters caused by natural hazards have affected 4.4 billion people, claimed 1.3 million lives and caused \$2 trillion in economic losses

UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction programs involve analysing and managing the causes of disasters and supporting communities to increase their resilience by absorbing, adapting to, and recovering from, shocks and stresses. DRR includes efforts to reduce exposure and vulnerability of people and property to disasters, wise management of land and the environment, early warning systems, and improved preparedness for adverse events. DRR also requires effective institutional frameworks, policy and legislation to reduce and manage disaster risk.

DRR programs are proven to protect long-term development gains, minimise economic losses, and prevent damage to infrastructure.⁵⁴ Many studies have shown the cost benefits of investing in DRR. In different contexts, \$1 dollar invested in appropriate, evidence-based DRR has been shown to save from \$2 to as much as \$80 in avoided or reduced disaster response and recovery costs.⁵⁵

Australia has been a leader on DRR, as a party to the HFA on DRR, a co-chair of the international Group of Friends of DRR, and as a leading voice on the importance of risk reduction in effective sustainable development. Australia is the third largest donor to the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), and a member of the GFDRR Consultative Group which is responsible for policy-making, setting long-term strategic objectives and overseeing results.⁵⁶

Shortly after the development of Australia's 2009 Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, Australia's aid investment in DRR almost doubled to 2-3% of the aid program.⁵⁷ Through this investment, Australia has been able to help communities to 'build back better' after major disasters such as the 2010 Pakistan floods.⁵⁸ Australia has also played an important role in strengthening the capacity of partner countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, to reduce disaster risks and detect and respond to early warnings.

This focus on the Asia-Pacific region is particularly relevant given that 10 of the top 15 countries most at risk from disasters are in this region.⁵⁹ Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Pacific have also required particular attention, given their comparatively low economic resilience and increasing exposure to extreme weather events.

A component of Australia's investment has also focused on fostering participatory and community-based approaches to DRR and disaster risk management. This has helped to help to build the evidence base for the effectiveness of DRR at the community level, and increased accountability through community participation in planning, policy development and decision-making.⁶⁰

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Preparations for Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November 2013 provide just one recent example of how sustained and diversified Australian support to national DRR efforts has helped to build community resilience and minimise the impact of disasters on people's lives. Effective Filipino early warning and response systems, which Australia has supported in recent years, meant that approximately 800,000 people were evacuated from coastal areas prior to the typhoon making landfall.⁶¹

Early findings from the response indicate that communities targeted under established community-based DRR programs were able to initiate preparedness activities ahead of Haiyan's impact. Based on established contingency plans and evacuation drills, barangay (village) leaders were able to warn communities to start emergency preparations and to pre-emptively evacuate populations.⁶²

While the devastating impact of the typhoon shows that more could have been done to ensure that all communities were given the information they needed to prepare for the disaster, the impacts of Haiyan would have been far worse without these long-term DRR investments.

Building on these programmatic investments, Australia has raised DRR as a priority concern in setting the post-2015 development agenda.⁶³ The absence of disaster risk indicators in the Millennium Development Goals was a missed opportunity to risk-proof development gains. Australia should address this by continuing to advocate for DRR and resilience to be a central plank of the post-2015 development agenda.⁶⁴

Sustained Australian investment and leadership in DRR will be critical to safeguarding growth and development, assisting governments to develop strategies for self-managing future small-scale responses, and reducing vulnerability in the longer term. Given Australia's leadership on this issue to date, the Government also has a key role to play in championing DRR financing amongst the donor community. This includes contributing to efforts to enhance the accuracy of donor reporting on DRR financing, which is notoriously difficult given the absence of a DRR marker in the OECD's Creditor Reporting System.

Recommendation 3: Make a significant investment towards preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction across the aid program

3.1 Maintain DRR funding to at least 3% of overall ODA, and steadily grow this investment over time.⁶⁵ Prioritise DRR investment in the Asia-Pacific region, with particular attention to countries with high vulnerability to disasters and low capacity to respond. Australia should support the effective implementation of the HFA on DRR across the region, as well as efforts to support community-based DRR programming, ensuring the active participation and leadership of women.

3.2 Champion DRR in regional and global multilateral processes. This includes advocating for DRR and resilience to be a central plank of the post-2015 development agenda, providing material and diplomatic support to the HFA 2 and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), and working cooperatively with ASEAN and Secretariat of the Pacific Community on national and regional resilience initiatives.

3.3 Pursue efforts to improve tracking of international financing to DRR, through for example a DRR marker for OECD's Creditor Reporting System.



Australian Red Cross aid worker Jess Letch supporting women and children with relief supplies including torches for safety after the Temotu earthquake in the Solomon Islands, which damaged villages in February, 2013.

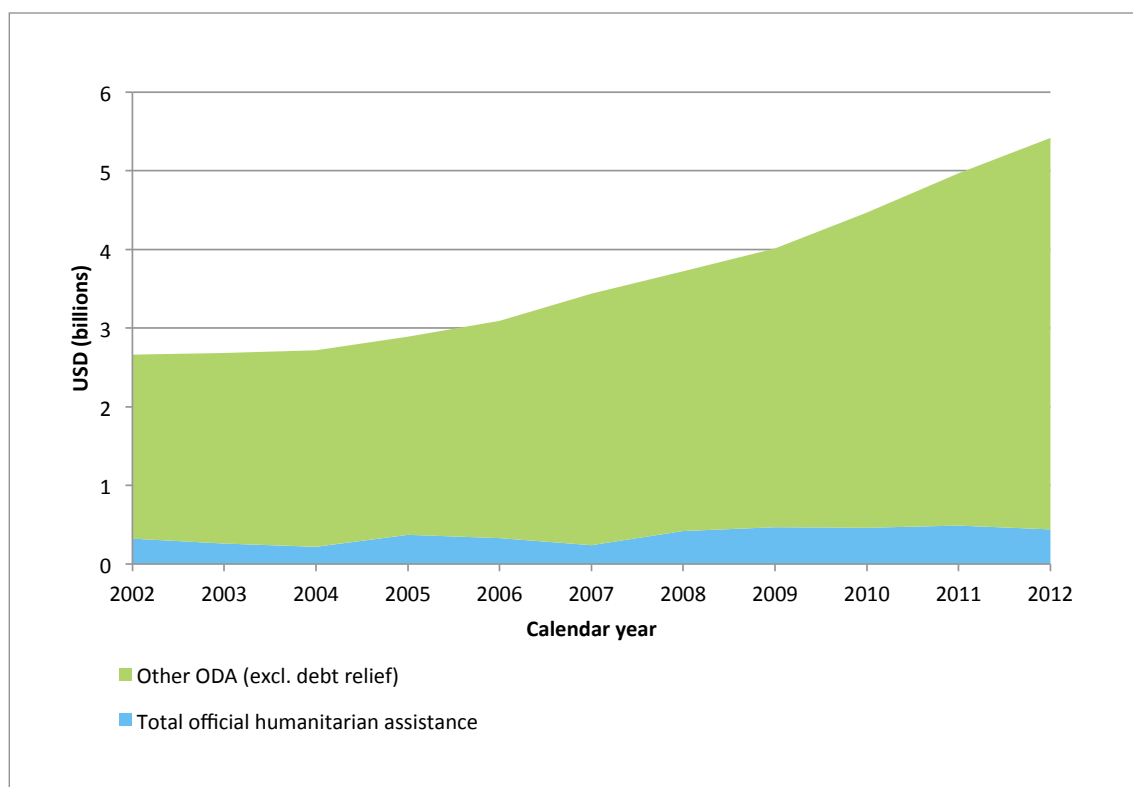
PHOTO: AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS/JESS LETCH

4 PROTECTING AUSTRALIA'S AID INVESTMENT

Over the past decade, OECD DAC members have committed on average 9.8% of their ODA towards official humanitarian assistance.⁶⁶ Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA) reached a peak in 2010, with governments collectively contributing US\$13.8bn to respond to crises – including the Haiti earthquake which resulted in more than 200,000 deaths and the Pakistan floods which affected over 20 million people.⁶⁷ Available figures indicate that since this time humanitarian assistance has been in decline – both as a proportion of overall ODA and as a consequence of decreasing ODA levels globally. In other words, humanitarian assistance is becoming a ‘smaller slice of a smaller pie’, whilst the impact of disasters continues to grow.⁶⁸

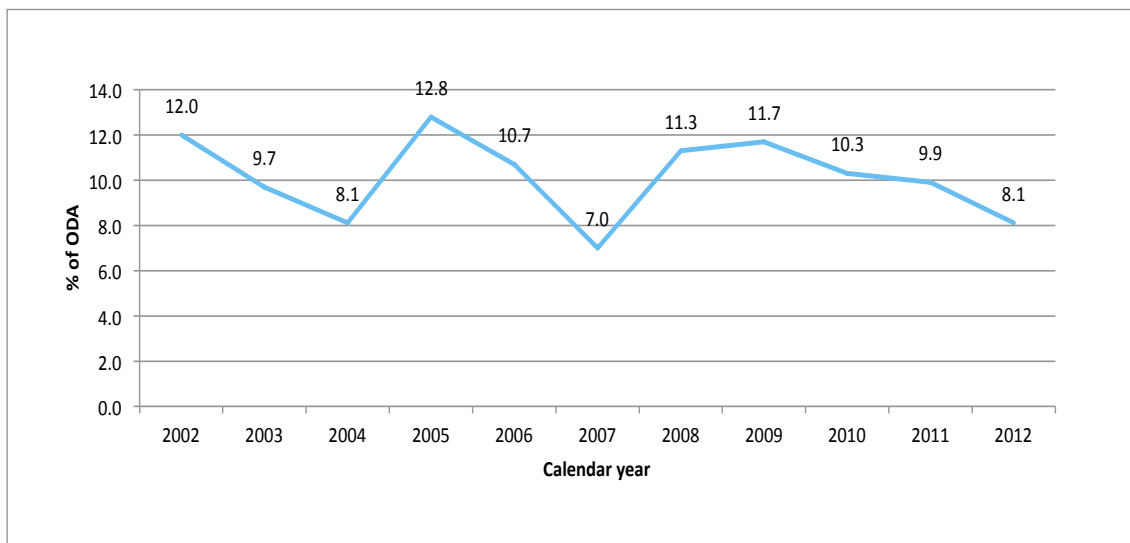
While Australia's ODA has increased steadily since 2002, official humanitarian assistance has not kept pace with this trend (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Australia's ODA and official humanitarian assistance figures, 2002 to 2012⁶⁹



OECD reports that Australia's official humanitarian assistance is approximately 10% of overall ODA, commensurate with the OECD DAC average.⁷⁰ The OECD DAC Peer Review team reported that they were assured by the Government that ‘this percentage would remain constant [at 10%] as the overall Australian ODA budget increases’.⁷¹ However, the proportion of ODA that Australia commits to official humanitarian assistance fluctuates from year to year (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Official humanitarian assistance as a % of Australia's ODA, 2002 to 2012⁷²



As Figure 2 indicates, Australia's reported humanitarian spend as a share of overall ODA has declined since 2009. In 2012, the proportion was particularly low at only 8.1%. While OECD figures for 2013 and 2014 are not available as at the time of publication, it is likely that both years will be proportionately low humanitarian expenditure years as well. This is due primarily to cuts and deferrals to budgeted humanitarian spending over this period, including:

- AU\$77.3 million cut and deferred from the humanitarian, emergency and refugee budget in December 2012. This equated to around 20% of the AU\$375 million in aid money reallocated by the Federal Government to fund its domestic asylum seeker policy.⁷⁴
- A total of AU\$119.7 million cut from humanitarian, emergency and refugee programs over 2013-14, as reflected in the revised DFAT aid budget announced in January 2014.⁷⁵

Under the revised 2013-14 aid budget issued in January 2014, the Federal Government allocated AU\$264.2 million to global humanitarian, emergency and refugee programs.⁷⁶ This amounts to around 5.2% of total ODA in 2013-14.⁷⁷ This does not, however, include humanitarian expenditure managed in the country and regional programs, of which AU\$148.3 million was budgeted in 2013-14.⁷⁸ It is unclear how the recent cuts to country program budgets may have affected each country program humanitarian spend.

The cuts have had an impact on Australia's capacity to respond in a flexible manner to humanitarian crises. In a Senate Estimates hearing on 27 February 2014, DFAT noted that four months prior to the end of the financial year, it had only \$20-30 million left in its 'mandated flexible fund' for emergencies, having spent \$77.4 million responding to Typhoon Haiyan and the conflict in Syria, as well as smaller allocations across a number of crises.⁷⁹ Since this time, Australia has publicly announced a further \$72.8 million for humanitarian assistance in Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Solomon Islands, the Philippines, South Sudan and Syria,⁸⁰ although the bulk of this funding has likely come from DFAT country programs. Even though Australia budgeted \$264.2 for GHA in 2013-14, and even more through specific country programs, only around \$95-\$105 million is flexible funding. This has potentially limited the responsiveness of Australia's humanitarian funding to meet needs as and where they arise.

Regardless of the relative size of the aid budget, during disasters and emergencies Australia will always be there to lend a helping hand.

*Prime Minister
Tony Abbott,
5 December 2013⁷³*

THE UNDERFUNDED 2014 SYRIA APPEAL

Last year, Australia contributed generously to the Syrian crisis, commensurate with an economy of Australia's size.⁸¹ The UN's US\$6.5 billion 2014 Syria appeal represents the largest amount ever requested for a single humanitarian emergency – in line with the enormous scale and complexity of the crisis inside Syria, and spreading across the region. Australia's fair share of this for 2014 is calculated as \$106m, based on Australia's GNI and compared with other donors.⁸²

To date, Australia has contributed just AU\$30m,⁸³ which equates to 28.3% of Australia's fair share of the overall appeal. This is low compared to other medium sized donors: Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the UK, have all already committed over and above their calculated fair share to the appeal.⁸⁴

It is critical that Australia strives to meet its fair share of major crisis appeals, such as Syria, in 2014 and beyond. For Syria, this could be achieved if Australia made a partial allocation this financial year (of between \$30 and \$40 million) and a second allocation in the first quarter of the 2014-15 financial year (of between \$56 and \$66 million).



Syrian children taking part in activities at Save the Children's Child Friendly Space near the Syrian border, in Lebanon.

JONATHAN HYAMS/
SAVE THE CHILDREN

ADDED VALUE OF INCREASING HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

As discussed, there are a number of compelling reasons for Australia to increase humanitarian assistance funding, alongside a significant DRR investment. We know that the intensity and human cost of disasters is growing, and being located in the most disaster-prone region of the world, Australia will feel that impact.⁸⁶ Australia is internationally recognised for its significant whole-of-government humanitarian response capacity and expertise, and Australia's humanitarian assistance has been proven to be highly effective and capable of being scaled up globally without risk of aid fragmentation.⁸⁷

At a time when GHA is falling and humanitarian needs are increasing, Australia is strategically positioned to increase its investment in humanitarian response – both in dollar terms overall, and as a proportion of ODA. At the very least, Australia should maintain official humanitarian assistance at 10% of ODA annually.

It is important that the Australian Government continues to treat humanitarian assistance as a strategic programming priority rather than an ad hoc response to exceptional phenomena. Disasters and conflicts are not exceptional. While they may fluctuate in terms of location and timing, they are extremely common – and the vast majority of humanitarian responses are under-funded.

In 2013 for example, out of the \$8.47 billion in UN consolidated appeals for humanitarian assistance, only \$5.25 billion was funded.⁸⁸ This means that only 62% of the global humanitarian appeal programs in 2013 could be implemented, which is a conservative estimate given that the true scale of need is often underreported, particularly in neglected crises such as Chad and the Central African Republic. It is critical therefore that Australia not only increases its humanitarian investment, but also commits fully to expending any humanitarian contingency funds, prioritising under-funded emergencies.

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY

Consistent and timely reporting of official humanitarian assistance is necessary for transparency and accountability. Australia has committed to accurately and transparently report its official humanitarian assistance expenditure through its endorsement of the GHD Principles.⁸⁹ Furthermore, since 2008 Australia has also been signed up to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)⁹⁰ as part of the global push to make donors accountable for the development assistance funding they provide.

Australia's humanitarian reporting is done through a number of mechanisms, including through the DFAT website, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) humanitarian Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and through reported ODA to the OECD DAC. Reporting is also analysed and collated by third party monitoring initiatives such as Development Initiatives' annual GHA report and DARA's Humanitarian Response Index.⁹¹

While Australia reports through all these mechanisms, the requirements for each system are different. As such, there are significant discrepancies between the figures reported through these various channels making it difficult for Australian taxpayers to determine where money was spent. For example, according to OECD DAC reporting, Australia spent US\$433.8 million on 'Humanitarian aid grants' in 2011.⁹² However, the FTS shows Australia reported just US\$313 million of humanitarian expenditure that year.⁹³ Contrasting again, the DFAT website reports that over the two full financial years 2010-11 and 2011-12, Australia's humanitarian preparedness and response expenditure was AU\$387.9 million.⁹⁴

It is important that the Australian Government continues to treat humanitarian assistance as a strategic programming priority rather than an ad hoc response to exceptional phenomena

ACFID
Humanitarian
Reference Group

Supporting disaster victims and helping them rebuild them rebuild is a simple humanitarian responsibility, but can also be one of the most effective forms of aid.

Australian Aid
Effectiveness
Review, 2011⁹⁵

Donors should ensure a high degree of accuracy, timeliness, and transparency in donor reporting on official humanitarian assistance spending, and encourage the development of standardised formats for such reporting.

– Good
Humanitarian
Donorship
Principle 23

The inconsistency of reporting has very real implications for the accountability of Australia's humanitarian assistance and for the Australian Government's plans to introduce more rigorous benchmarking for the aid program. To address this issue, the government should fully utilise the UN's FTS, given that this mechanism is the most useful for providing up to date information about humanitarian assistance. This real-time information is critical as an emergency is unfolding.

In addition, Australia could consider supporting efforts to improve standardised humanitarian donor reporting. For example, recently, Development Initiatives' GHA program, IATI and FTS held a stakeholder workshop on developing standardised reporting formats.⁹⁵ Australia's assistance and participation in such initiatives would be a valuable contribution to addressing the transparency gap. Further, Australia could consider developing an annual humanitarian report covering all of its official humanitarian assistance, which would provide clear information to the Australian public.

Recommendation 4: Protect Australia's aid investment through predictable and appropriate levels of humanitarian funding to meet rising demand, as well as increased transparency of aid spending

- 4.1 Ensure official humanitarian assistance is maintained at a minimum of 10% of Australia's ODA on an annual basis. For the 2014-15 Budget, this would equate to AU\$518 million given CPI increases.⁹⁶ Australia should maintain flexibility to increase this proportion over time – commensurate with humanitarian needs globally and Australia's comparative economic capacity to respond.
- 4.2 Endeavour to contribute Australia's fair share to consolidated humanitarian appeals, in recognition that global humanitarian response is a shared responsibility amongst donors. In particular, Australia should ensure that any unspent humanitarian response funding is directed towards underfunded emergencies towards the end of the Budget cycle either through UN Appeals, to NGOs or through other mechanisms.
- 4.3 Improve the consistency of reporting of Australia's official humanitarian assistance to enhance transparency and accountability to the Australian public and demonstrate the value of Australia's humanitarian program. Australia should do this by:
 - (i) Reporting all such assistance on the UN's FTS.
 - (ii) Publishing an annual official humanitarian assistance report to provide clear information to the public about how much humanitarian assistance Australia has provided, where and to whom the funding has gone, and its overall impact on the lives of people affected.
 - (iii) Continuing to engage with the IATI and promote efforts to improve standardised humanitarian reporting mechanisms.

5 GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

One of the main ways that Australia supports humanitarian action is through partnerships with humanitarian organisations including UN agencies, international and local NGOs, and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Australia also provides direct assistance in the form of specialist humanitarian personnel and supplies. Each of these partners has different strengths and Australia partners with them in different ways.

HUMANITARIAN ACTION THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The United Nations – Funding to UN agencies is typically provided under long-term funding agreements with the relevant agencies. Australia also allocates a significant amount of funding to UN pooled mechanisms. Within the UN system, there are three types of pooled humanitarian funds: the CERF, country-based Common Humanitarian Funds (CHF) and Emergency Reserve Funds (ERF).⁹⁷ These pooled funding mechanisms were established to improve the coherence of humanitarian aid and ensure that donor funds are allocated based on needs identified and prioritised by humanitarian actors in country. They provide an attractive option for donors without a field presence in the relevant countries and limited capacity to monitor bilateral grants to implementing partners.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – In 2010, the Australian Government entered into a Partnership Agreement with the Australian Red Cross. This Partnership Agreement formally recognises the role of the Australian Red Cross and its global partners, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), in delivering humanitarian assistance as well as contributing to humanitarian legal and political frameworks.

The Partnership Agreement is a mechanism through which DFAT can utilise the Red Cross networks to respond to emergencies anywhere in the world within 24 hours. It also supports a holistic approach to Disaster Management programming across Asia and the Pacific, linking emergency relief, recovery and sustainable development. Funding is further provided to support improvements in policy and legal frameworks of countries in our region, including national disaster legislation and strengthening of International Humanitarian Law.

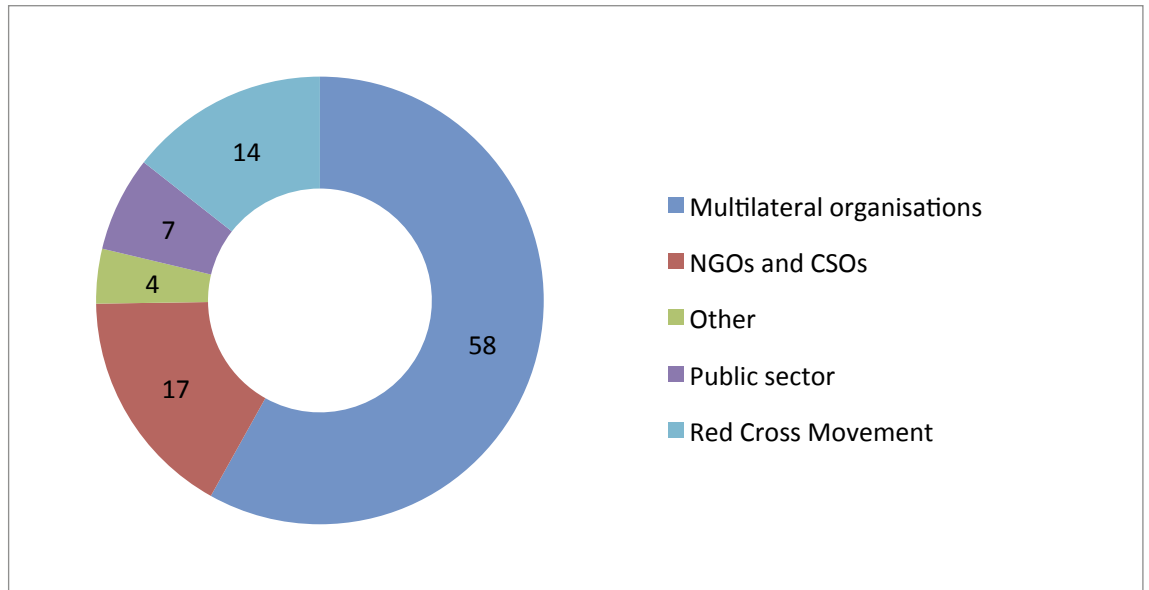
Non-Government Organisations – In recognition of the role that NGOs play in delivering direct humanitarian assistance to people in need, the Australian Government's 2012 Civil Society Engagement Framework states that 'delivering aid through civil society organisations enables us to benefit from these organisations' grass roots networks, areas of specialisation and presence on the ground'.⁹⁸

In 2011, the Australian Government entered into a **Humanitarian Partnership Agreement (HPA)** with six accredited humanitarian NGOs (Care, Caritas, Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children and World Vision). This agreement is one of Australia's primary mechanisms for funding NGOs to implement humanitarian emergency response programs. Australia also provides humanitarian funding for all types of humanitarian crises through bilateral grants. Such grants may be made to Australian NGOs that are not HPA partners.

Finally, the Government also has multi-year funding agreements with agencies that provide specialised humanitarian services, such as RedR Australia. Australia's 2010-2014 Partnership Framework with RedR is valued at approximately \$23 million,⁹⁹ and aids RedR to mobilise skilled professionals in response to requests from UN and multilateral agencies, strengthening the participation of the Australian humanitarian community in international crises. RedR maintains a large and active roster of emergency specialists for this purpose.

The majority of Australia's humanitarian assistance is channelled through multilateral organisations such as the WFP, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and OCHA. According to the UN's FTS, in the 2012 calendar year, 77% of Australia's emergency response funding was allocated to multilateral pooled mechanisms and agencies, with the largest recipients being WFP (30%), UNHCR (17%) and UNICEF (5%).¹⁰⁰ However, this likely represents an over-estimation, given the aforementioned inconsistency in Australia's reporting through FTS. For example, 2011 OECD DAC figures suggest that Australia spent closer to 58% of its official humanitarian assistance on multilateral organisations (see figure 3).¹⁰¹

Figure 3: Breakdown of percentage of Australia's official humanitarian assistance by partner, 2011¹⁰²



As Figure 3 demonstrates, the amount of humanitarian funding that the Australian Government allocates to NGOs is significantly less than for multilateral partners, at just 17% of Australia's humanitarian assistance in 2011.¹⁰³

Australia's significant support for the UN reflects a legitimate interest in delivering humanitarian assistance at scale and improving the coherence of humanitarian action globally. It also aligns with the GHD Principle of 'supporting and promoting the central and unique role of the UN in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action'.¹⁰⁴ UN agencies play an important role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian aid. They have near global reach and considerable technical expertise, and take the lead in setting minimum standards and coordinating the work of donors and implementing partners.

As summarised in the Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, working with UN agencies enables Australia to 'deliver activities beyond Australia's capacity; and facilitate access to global knowledge and expertise'.¹⁰⁵ However, considerable evidence suggests that channelling funding through UN agencies can also lead to increased costs, delays, and less flexibility in the delivery of aid.¹⁰⁶ This is because UN agencies do not typically implement humanitarian programs directly, but contract NGOs to deliver programs on their behalf. The implications of this in terms of timeliness, cost-efficiency and accountability are explained in more detail below.



Following the devastating 2010 Pakistan floods World Vision provided food and essential items such as tents, cooking sets, gas cylinders, bedding, hygiene kits, mosquito nets and water purification tablets to people in the Khyber Paktunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh provinces.

PHOTO CREDIT: TENILLE BERGIN/WORLD VISION

TIMELINESS

The rapid disbursement of funds is critical to being able to meet acute humanitarian needs and save lives at the outset of an emergency. The sub-contracting processes outlined above can not only be costly, but also slow down the delivery of humanitarian aid. A recent evaluation of the UN CERF, for example, found that the process for ‘soliciting, reviewing, approving and initiating activities’ was approximately 13 weeks for ‘rapid response’ emergencies and 19 weeks for underfunded emergencies.¹⁰⁷ In 2011, Australian funds channelled through UN agencies in the Philippines, Pakistan and Somalia took an average of nine weeks between funding decisions and the signing of funding agreements, and an additional eight weeks prior to the receipt of funds.¹⁰⁸

In the aftermath of a rapid-onset emergency, delays in the provision of funding to implementing partners can have significant implications for program relevance and effectiveness. For example, during the 2011 Pakistan floods the Australian Government provided funds to the WFP for food distribution which were then subcontracted to an Australian NGO. By the time the funds were received by the NGO, it was one and a half months after the peak of the floods, by which time ‘the needs had changed’.¹⁰⁹ The project targeted a particular area that was accommodating people displaced by the floods, but by the time the funds came through, most people had either returned to their homes or moved elsewhere in search of livelihood opportunities. Thus, while ‘the [food] distributions were still appreciated ... we weren’t targeting people who had been heavily affected by the floods’.¹¹⁰

In contrast, the HPA has proven to be a particularly timely mechanism. NGOs funded directly from the Australian Government under the HPA between 2011 and 2012 received funds and were able to start programming less than two weeks after the funds were announced.¹¹¹

HOW THE HUMANITARIAN PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT MECHANISM WORKS

The HPA is a mechanism by which the Australian Government provides funds for a particular humanitarian crisis to six pre-approved NGOs (Care, Caritas, Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children and World Vision). When the mechanism is activated, agencies have an agreed period of time (usually within 72 hours) to submit a joint proposal outlining the response to the crises and the proportion of funds allocated to each agency. The apportionment of funds between agencies is based on a rigorous peer review process, which involves the assessment of each agency's proposed activities against objective criteria.

The HPA mechanism has thus far been activated eight times – the food crises in the Horn of Africa in 2011 and Sahel in 2012, the Pakistan floods in 2011, Typhoon Bopha in the Philippines in December 2012, the Syrian refugee crisis (twice) in 2013, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November 2013 and flooding in the Solomon Islands in April 2014. A total of AU\$29 million has been disbursed through it. The HPA has proven to be an efficient and effective mechanism for channelling funding direct to NGOs for rapid and slow-onset emergencies.

The HPA Mid-term Review (MTR) found that in Pakistan, the Horn of Africa and Typhoon Bopha responses, the quick release of HPA funds enabled NGO partners to leverage funding from other donors, which in the case of Pakistan meant that partners could 'kick-start larger relief activities'.¹¹²

While the HPA mechanism has proven to be an effective way of delivering humanitarian funding, the portions of funding allocated through the mechanism to date have been small and have not been commensurate with the capacity of the members of this group to deliver humanitarian assistance.¹¹³ One way of addressing these transaction costs would be to explore increasing the funding channelled through the HPA mechanism for rapid-onset emergencies where the NGOs' partners have high capacity to respond. This will not only reduce the transaction costs incurred by implementing partners, but also lead to faster, less costly and more flexible responses to rapid-onset emergencies.

COST-EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The retention of overheads by UN intermediaries at different stages of the sub-contracting process leads to higher transaction costs and reduces the amount of funds available for implementing activities at field level. For example, where funds are channelled through the UN CERF, the UN Secretariat retains 3% in overheads, and then passes the funds on to a UN agency that may retain up to an additional 7% in overheads before passing the funds on to an implementing partner with their own overheads – usually an NGO.¹¹⁴

It is often difficult to track the flow of funds from multilateral agencies to implementing partners due to a lack of transparency in project-level reporting on the UN FTS. The UN's single audit principle also precludes project-specific monitoring and audits other than by the UN Board of Auditors,¹¹⁵ making it difficult to hold the various actors in the chain of delivery to account for expenditure, or to demonstrate the impact of funding on crisis-affected populations.

The importance of the UN single audit principle lies in reducing the administrative burden associated with several member states conducting independent audits on the same UN agency.¹¹⁶ However, the principle limits donors' capacity to reliably track how their funds have been spent. This is in stark contrast with the accountability required of NGO partners that are often required to share all financial data and commission independent audits if requested by the donor.¹¹⁷

A MIXED RECORD

Clearly, there is a need for the Australian Government to ensure a balanced approach to humanitarian funding, building on the strengths of each of its respective partners relating to cost-efficiency, timeliness and accountability. Australia's most recent allocations of humanitarian funding show a mixed record in terms of balance. For example, Australia provided no funds to NGOs or the Red Cross in its recent humanitarian aid packages for South Sudan (\$3 million to the UN's CHF, \$5m to WFP and \$2.8m to UNHCR) and Syria (\$280 million through UN agencies).¹¹⁸

More generally, the amount of humanitarian funding that the Australian Government allocates to NGOs has been comparatively low in recent years compared to the OECD DAC average of 24% from 2007 to 2011.¹¹⁹ Given the comparative advantages offered by NGOs in the delivery of aid, the Australian Government should increase the amount of funding it allocates directly to them. This assessment is consistent with the findings of Australia's Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness, which found that there was 'scope to increase' funding to NGOs as a proportion of the aid budget.¹²⁰ As a model on which to build in the future, Australia's response to Typhoon Haiyan was well balanced.

TYPHOON HAIYAN: A GOOD MODEL FOR BALANCED FUNDING

Australia quickly and generously provided \$40 million to the Typhoon Haiyan response in November and December 2013.¹²¹ Funding was allocated to a mix of partners:

47.5% to UN agencies

22.5% to Australian and Filipino NGOs

17.5% to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

12.5% in direct assistance (Australian personnel, stocks and equipment)

While it is too early to assess the full impact of this funding, it is clear that Australia's rapid disbursement of funds to a variety of partners working on the ground did enable fast delivery of live-saving assistance to millions of people.

In calculating appropriate selection of partners for Australian humanitarian assistance, the changing humanitarian landscape should also be part of the equation. In the Asian region for example, middle income countries in South East Asia such as Thailand, Cambodia and the Philippines have demonstrated that they are less likely to officially request a UN-led or international humanitarian assistance mission. Instead, these governments are more likely to welcome support from international actors in support of a government-led response plan.¹²² In such contexts, a mix of appropriate funding and support for a state-led approach should be considered.

Typhoon-affected families receiving materials for house reconstruction during a CARE Philippines shelter repair kit distribution in Maricum barangay, Pastrana Municipality, Leyte province.

EFREN MARIANO (CARE INTERNATIONAL SHELTER TECHNICAL ADVISOR IN THE PHILIPPINES)



Recommendation 5: Adopt a more balanced approach to allocating humanitarian aid through different implementing partners, based on their relative strengths and capacities

- 5.1 Ensure that humanitarian assistance is allocated to implementing partners on the basis of efficiency, timeliness, effectiveness and accountability, in line with its stated commitments in the HAP.
- 5.2 Increase the amount of funding provided directly to NGOs to a minimum of 20% of Australia's official humanitarian assistance, with a view to further increase it in line with the OECD DAC average of 24%. This includes making full and effective use of the HPA and increasing funding allocations through this mechanism.
- 5.3 Continue to support a diversity of NGO partners that are best equipped to respond to the various needs of affected communities and bring specialised expertise to the emergency response.

6 INNOVATION FOR SLOW-ONSET AND PROTRACTED CRISES

As with the rising incidence of rapid-onset disasters, the impact of slow-onset¹²³ and protracted¹²⁴ crises is also increasing. Humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected states has risen consistently over the last decade and was almost four times higher in 2011 than in 2000.¹²⁵ This trajectory is set to continue with protracted crises in Syria, the Central African Republic, the DRC, Somalia and South Sudan. Similarly, there is likely to be an increase in the humanitarian impact of slow-onset crises as a result of climate change, food and energy price spikes, mass displacement, population growth, and urbanisation.¹²⁶ In light of these trends, it is important for Australia to review its humanitarian policy and funding approaches to slow-onset and protracted humanitarian crises.

EARLY ACTION TO AVERT SLOW-ONSET CRISES

Despite significant improvements in early warning systems and conflict prevention tools, the global humanitarian system still tends to respond to slow-onset crises in a reactive manner, usually after the situation has escalated into a large-scale humanitarian crisis with high mortality indicators. Yet there is a considerable body of evidence which suggests that early and preventive interventions are much more cost-effective in terms of value for money and, more importantly, in terms of saving lives and preserving human dignity.¹²⁷

Experiences in the Horn of Africa and Sahel in recent years have brought home the need for early action to be taken in response to early warning signs.¹²⁸ The Australian Government was one of the most generous donors in its response to the Horn of Africa food crisis, contributing a total of \$128 million.¹²⁹ However, as with other donors, funds were made available only once the UN declared a famine in July 2011 – almost a year after warnings of the crisis first emerged. This had critical implications for the effectiveness of the response.¹³⁰

OECD DAC's Peer Review described Australia as a donor with the capacity to respond 'proactively, rapidly and flexibly to new and escalating emergencies'.¹³¹ But it also noted that while Australia had a 'highly developed system to monitor early warnings', this information 'could be used more systematically to guide funding decisions', and that 'the link between early warning and triggers for early response is not yet clear'.¹³² Experience in the Horn of Africa in 2011 suggests that DFAT must clarify these triggers in preparation to avert future slow-onset crises. It is important for DFAT to develop a policy and funding model that would allow it to provide funding to support early action in response to the early warning signs of slow-onset crises.

The independent MTR of the HPA supported the use of the HPA as one of the mechanisms to be considered by the Australian Government in responding to sudden escalations of slow-onset crises, particularly in circumstances where a rapid response is required to provide life-saving assistance.¹³³ However, there is a need to consider whether the HPA mechanism may be adapted to allow for the rapid release of funding in response to the early warning signs of slow-onset crises – not just sudden escalations. This requires refining the triggers for activating the HPA mechanism based on early warning systems. It is also important to consider extending the timeframe for implementing activities under the HPA mechanism beyond the current limit of 12 months to allow for a mix of humanitarian and early recovery activities aimed at building the resilience of communities affected by slow-onset crises.

FLEXIBLE AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO PROTRACTED CRISES

Protracted humanitarian crises typically arise as a result of conflict and fragility. The causes of conflict will vary in different contexts, but commonly derive from persistent poverty, inequality and weak governance. The humanitarian impact and costs of responding to these crises will only continue to rise if concerted action is not taken to address the root causes, not just the symptoms. However, there is a tendency for donors to only provide ad hoc, short-term funding for the delivery of immediate life-saving assistance in response to escalations in violence, without dealing with the underlying drivers of conflict.

There is growing consensus and recognition among donors that multi-year funding agreements are important instruments for addressing protracted crises, as they provide predictability, allowing partners to work more strategically; flexibility, so that partners can adapt programs to changing conditions; and they lead to decreased operational costs in the longer term.¹³⁴ They also allow for the implementation of a mix of humanitarian, early recovery and development activities. A number of donors, including the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), are in the process of expanding multi-annual funding mechanisms.¹³⁵

The 2013 OECD DAC Peer Review found that Australia is a flexible and predictable donor for protracted crises.¹³⁶ This is based primarily on Australia's multi-year flexible funding agreements with the ICRC and a limited number of UN agencies. In instances where Australia provides funding directly to NGOs for protracted crises, it often tends to be ad hoc and short-term, rather than part of an overarching strategy to tackle the root causes of protracted crises and build resilience. Fortunately, this is starting to turn around. Australia's plans to support multi-year NGO programs in Afghanistan and Somalia,¹³⁷ which will contribute to building the resilience of communities that are vulnerable to the effects of recurrent crises, are good models to build on. These programs could provide an evidence-base for expanding multi-year programming in other protracted crisis situations. Australia should ensure that such multi-year programs are sufficiently flexible to enable adaptations in order to address early warning indicators.

Recommendation 6: Improve the effectiveness of responses to slow-onset and protracted crises through innovation

- 6.1 Invest in research and the development of a more rigorous policy framework to guide efficient, effective, timely and accountable responses to slow-onset and protracted crises.
- 6.2 Consider whether the HPA model may be adapted or extended to allow for the timely provision of funding to implementing partners to take early action in response to the early warning signs of slow-onset crises.
- 6.3 Refine long-term country plans and explore options for multi-year partnership agreements to more strategically address the root causes and chronic indicators of protracted crises, including flexible, long-term funding arrangements with NGOs who have demonstrated capacity to implement a mix of humanitarian, early-recovery and development programs.

7 ENGAGEMENT FOR IMPROVED OUTCOMES

The relationship between DFAT and Australian NGOs is of critical importance, and not just because NGOs implement DFAT Australian Aid humanitarian response programs. NGOs also proactively engage with DFAT on specific projects, country and sectoral issues. For example, since Australia became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, a number of NGOs have actively engaged with DFAT in offering insights and recommendations on how to strengthen UN Security Council resolutions for the protection of civilians in humanitarian crises.¹³⁹

Australian humanitarian NGOs have a number of mechanisms for structured dialogue with the Australian Government:

- **ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group** – this inter-agency group meets on a quarterly basis with DFAT to discuss humanitarian policy and programming issues, share lessons learned, and promote good practice. It also provides consolidated data about the work that NGOs are doing in the immediate aftermath of large-scale emergencies.
- **HPA Partner Group** – this group is comprised of the six HPA Partner agencies meeting on a quarterly basis with DFAT to discuss general performance issues relating to the HPA mechanism and to exchange lessons learned. It also meets on an ad hoc basis prior to, during and after the activation of the HPA mechanism for humanitarian emergency responses.
- **ACFID Working Groups** – there are a range of ACFID Working Groups that focus on specific countries and sectors. These groups have proven to be effective mechanisms for the Australian Government to consult with NGOs on specific country or regional strategies, as well as policy initiatives. For example, the ACFID Protection Working Group provided significant input into AusAID's Humanitarian Protection Framework, approved by whole-of-government partners, including DFAT, in 2013.¹⁴⁰

Constructive engagement between DFAT and Australian NGOs can promote mutual understanding and increased transparency, and lead to improved policy outcomes. As such, Australia should continue to engage in regular and structured dialogue with civil society on humanitarian policy issues. Australian NGOs would welcome dialogue through the ACFID HRG, HPA Forum and ACFID Working Groups as well as with senior humanitarian agency leaders such as CEOs.

Australian CSOs [Civil Society Organisations] bring particular strengths to Australia's aid program. Some have been working in international aid and development for more than 60 years ... Many also have expertise in working in emergency situations where quick and flexible responses are essential.¹³⁸

CONCLUSION

The case for investment in humanitarian action is clear. At this critical moment in time – when disaster risks are rising, funds are contracting and policy frameworks are shifting – the impact of humanitarian crises threatens to stall economic development and wind back development gains. Humanitarian action and investment in DRR presents an efficient and effective form of aid in a resource-constrained environment, and goes to the heart of preventing and responding to the global instability caused by conflict and disaster risk.

It is imperative that Australia's aid program is well equipped to deal with the challenges of growing humanitarian needs and risks. To achieve this, the Australian Government will need to ensure continued adherence to humanitarian principles and quality standards. Australia also should aim to prevent humanitarian suffering and reduce disaster-induced economic losses by continuing to make a significant investment in DRR, and by pushing for key regional and global reforms to improve the performance of the humanitarian system.

Australia will also need to provide predictable and appropriate levels of humanitarian aid – at a minimum of 10% of ODA annually – to keep pace with commitments to help Australia's neighbours in the most disaster-prone region of the world, while also shouldering a fair share of GHA further afield.

Predictable funding must also be matched by increased transparency of aid spending, and effective and accountable delivery mechanisms in times of rapid-onset, slow-onset and protracted crisis. Australia should maintain an appropriate balance between different humanitarian implementing partners – be they NGO, multilateral, the Red Cross or other – given that each partner and mechanism brings different strengths to the table.

By making a serious and generous investment to these efforts, Australia will strengthen its position as a leading humanitarian donor and increase its ability to save lives and alleviate human suffering in times of conflict and disaster. This is exactly the type of immediate and long-term tangible impact that the Australian public wants to see from Australia's aid program.

ENDNOTES

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- 110 Ibid.
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- 113 Ibid, p. 19.
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- 131 OECD DAC, above n 34.
- 132 Ibid, p. 97.
- 133 Mid-Term Review Team, above n 111, p. 3.
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- 137 For example the Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme (AACRS) which is in design phase and involves five NGO partners: Aga Khan Foundation, Action Aid, CARE, Oxfam, World Vision.
- 138 AusAID, *Civil Society Engagement Framework*, above n 98, p. 4.
- 139 Since Australia became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, DFAT has held two events in Canberra to formally consult with civil society groups on thematic and geographic issues that are the subject of UN Security Council debates and discussions. Outside of these consultations, a number of NGOs have proactively engaged with DFAT's UN Security Council Taskforce to share briefing notes and reports containing recommendations on how to strengthen forthcoming Council resolutions. For example, prior to the Council discussion on the renewal of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) mandate in Afghanistan, Steph Cousins from Oxfam Australia authored and submitted a report to DFAT, with input from a range of NGOs operating in Afghanistan, containing recommendations on how to strengthen the UNAMA mandate to improve conditions for the protection of civilians (particularly women and children) and to ensure greater participation of women in the police and political decision-making processes. The report entitled 'Afghanistan at a Crossroads' was published on 31 January 2013 and is available at <http://www.oxfam.org/en/policy/afghanistan-crossroads>, accessed 16 April 2014.
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OUR MEMBERS

Full Members:

40K Foundation Australia	Door of Hope Australia Inc.	Project Vietnam
ACC International Relief	EDO NSW	Quaker Service Australia
Access Aid International	Engineers without Borders	RedR Australia
Act for Peace - NCCA	Every Home Global Concern	Reledev Australia
ActionAid Australia	Family Planning New South Wales	RESULTS International (Australia)
ADRA Australia	Foresight (Overseas Aid and Prevention of Blindness)	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
Afghan Australian Development Organisation	Fred Hollows Foundation, The	Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
Anglican Aid	Global Development Group	Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children
Anglican Board of Mission - Australia Limited	Global Mission Partners	Salesian Society Incorporated
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Anglican Relief and Development Fund Australia*	GraceWorks Myanmar	Save the Children Australia
Asia Pacific Journalism Centre	Grameen Foundation Australia	Service Fellowship International Inc.
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Australia for UNHCR	Hope Global	SIMaid
Australia Hope International Inc.	Hunger Project Australia, The	Sport Matters
Australian Business Volunteers	International Children's Care (Australia)	Surf Aid International
Australian Cranio-Maxillo Facial Foundation	International Christian Aid and Relief Enterprises	Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation Australia*
Australian Doctors for Africa	International Detention Coalition	TEAR Australia
Australian Doctors International	International Needs Australia	Transform Aid International
Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations	International Nepal Fellowship (Aust) Ltd	Transparency International Australia
Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific	International RiverFoundation	UNICEF Australia
Australian Himalayan Foundation	International Women's Development Agency	Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA
Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League	Interplast Australia & New Zealand	UnitingWorld
Australian Lutheran World Service	Islamic Relief Australia	University of Cape Town Australian Trust
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Australian Medical Aid Foundation	Kyeema Foundation	WaterAid Australia
Australian Mercy	Lasallian Foundation	Women for Women in Africa*
Australian Red Cross	Leprosy Mission Australia, The	World Education Australia
Australian Respiratory Council	Live & Learn Environmental Education	World Vision Australia
Australian Volunteers International	Mahboba's Promise Australia	WWF-Australia
Beyond the Orphanage	Marie Stopes International Australia	Affiliate Members:
Birthing Kit Foundation (Australia)	Marsh Foundation	Australian National University – School of Archaeology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation	Mary MacKillop International	Deakin University – Alfred Deakin Research Institute
Burnet Institute	Mercy Works Ltd.	La Trobe University – Institute for Human Security Refugee Council of Australia
Business for Millennium Development	Mission World Aid Inc.	Refugee Council of Australia
CARE Australia	Motivation Australia	RMIT – Global Cities Research Institute**
Caritas Australia	MSC Mission Office	University of Melbourne – School of Social and Political Sciences
CBM Australia	Nusa Tenggara Association Inc.	University of the Sunshine Coast – International Projects Group
Charities Aid Foundation	Oaktree Foundation	Vision 2020 (Also a Code Signatory)
ChildFund Australia	Openaid 1000 Villages	<i>* Denotes Interim Full Member</i>
CLAN (Caring and Living as Neighbours)	Opportunity International Australia	<i>** Denotes Interim Affiliate Member</i>
Credit Union Foundation Australia	Oro Community Development Project Inc.	
Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Overseas Aid Fund	Oxfam Australia	
Diaspora Action Australia	Partners in Aid	
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