

1st Edition

# Disaster Management Ethics



Disaster Management Training Programme

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# Disaster Management Ethics

Module edited by:  
Eva Jenson, *InterWorks*



DHA

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Cover photos: “A victim of man’s inhumanity, or indifference, to his fellow man,” (Turkey), UNICEF/A. Vollan, *DHA-UNDRO News*, July-August, 1992; and Iraqi children, refugees at Haj camp, Silopi, Sirnah Province (Turkey), UNHCR/A. Hollmann, *DHA News*, January-February, 1993.

## ■ FOREWORD

The dilemmas facing humanitarian assistance providers are numerous and often entail choosing between undesirable alternatives. In the context of disaster, decisions made on an ethical basis may have significant and lasting impacts on the communities served. The questions to be asked include: Who has the authority to make such significant ethical decisions? How should ethical decisions be made? What principles and values should guide those engaged in ethical decision making processes? and, What is responsible action in response to human need?

The methodology needed for ethical decision making must reflect the complexity of human and international relationships, technological developments, environmental vulnerability, and interdependency. Tensions and shifts in fundamental concepts of reason, truth and goodness challenge our long-standing decision making procedures. The traditional tools of “objective” logic, rationality, and consistency may not be adequate.

*The Disaster Management Ethics* module addresses some of the ethical issues and dilemmas faced by the humanitarian assistance community as it seeks to respond to human need in the context of natural and human-caused disasters. The format simulates a discussion which aims to foster conversation and interaction. It brings together the voices of fifteen practitioners and scholars to discuss five ethical issues in humanitarian assistance. While no collection of papers can adequately present a truly global perspective, it is hoped that the differences and conflicts in values and questions presented here hold promise for new understanding.

It is hoped that as this module is used, additional perspectives and contributions to the conversation will be recorded and included. Ethical decision making cannot be carried out by any one person or community. It requires discussion and a commitment to being open to the history, experience and perspectives of those who are different. Mutual critique will lead to a more adequate ethical foundation to guide our action in a world of diversity. The process of implementation may also be facilitated if the ethics guiding the decision making process address the values and concerns of all engaged in the commitment to alleviate human suffering and vulnerability.

I extend my thanks to each of the contributors to this resource. In addition, I thank the many people who provided suggestions and participated in conversations with me as I designed and edited this resource. Within the disaster management community there is, indeed, great concern, careful thought and commitment to alleviating the suffering of people in the context of disaster. There is also a concern to create durable solutions, addressing the root causes of disasters. I believe a commitment to inclusive ethical decision making process that are sensitive to power imbalances and that move beyond narrowly reasoned approaches will contribute to this effort.

*Eva Jensen*

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the study of standards of conduct and moral judgement, or a system or code of morals (concepts of right and wrong). Professional ethics involves the application of accepted principles or a moral code to the practice of a particular profession. Ethical behaviour and action of individuals, groups or professions is that which conforms to values, morals and standards of conduct. One example is the “Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief”, an outline of which is attached at the end of this module as Annex 1. Certain ethical dilemmas may involve choices between equally undesirable alternatives or conflicting moral codes.

Rather than assert absolutes or provide definitive answers to the ethical dilemmas that arise in the context of disasters, the *Disaster Management Ethics* module focuses on five specific aspects of disaster management that involve complex ethical issues. These are:

1. the use of military intervention in disaster relief
2. assistance for displaced populations
3. the relationship of disaster response to participatory development
4. disaster fund raising
5. and disaster declaration and response

Each aspect is addressed by a main contributor who discusses the ethical issues and the implications of various decisions. Two additional contributors responded to the original essays, providing alternative perspectives.

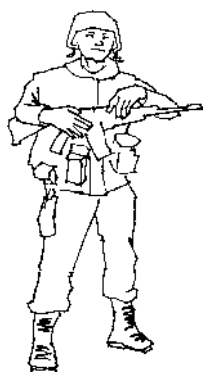
All five essays and ten respondent pieces were reviewed by Arthur E. Dewey, the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees from 1986 to 1990 and former Director of the Task Force for Newly Independent States in the office of Humanitarian Assistance, USAID. Mr. Dewey provided a focused response to each ethical situation and examples to illustrate the effects of ethical decisions. The purpose of this module is to:

- increase understanding of major aspects of disaster management that require important ethical decisions
- assist recognition of ethical dilemmas involved in disaster management
- enhance the ability to evaluate ethical decisions that arise in the coordination of disaster management efforts.

The module has been further developed by adding case studies and questions to help practitioners develop skills for ethical analysis and decision-making. Annex 2 contains additional resources which provide valuable contributions and thoughtful reflection on various aspects of disaster management ethics.

Please complete the evaluation form at the end of the module which will be used to improve future publications and subsequent editions of this module.

A *Trainer's Guide* accompanies this module. It has suggestions for training techniques and exercises as well as overheads for use in presentations.



## 1 TOPIC

### Military intervention in disaster relief: cooperative relationships and implications for long-term rehabilitation and development



*Iraqi refugees in Isikveren camp, Sirnak Province, Turkey.*

DHA NEWS, JAN/FEB, 1993

#### Introduction

The post Cold War era has brought many changes in international relations and new challenges for the global community. Not the least of these are the responses to both natural and human-caused disasters in situations of armed conflict. There are now more than 35 armed conflicts world-wide that inflict over 1,000 civilian or military deaths. Rather than international, these mainly internal situations are based primarily on ethnic and/or religious differences. They place the civilian population, particularly women and children, at severe risk. The situations in Bosnia, Somalia, Liberia, and Azerbaijan, among others, pose serious dilemmas for the international community in terms of responding to needs and protecting vulnerable populations.

While it is common internal practice in many countries to deploy military forces in times of disaster-often to prevent looting, establish communication or restore calm it is only recently that international military intervention has been undertaken as a mechanism of disaster response in internal conflicts. This essay addresses ethical dilemmas posed by the use of military force. The discussion reflects the viewpoints of policy makers as well as field workers in situations of armed conflict. First, a brief conceptual framework is presented to link disaster response and conflict resolution perspectives. Second, the challenge of integrating short and long-term tasks is addressed. Finally, the ethical dilemmas posed by military intervention are discussed and some guiding principles are suggested.

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#### TOPIC AUTHOR

**John Paul Lederach**, Associate Professor of Sociology, Eastern Mennonite College, Harrisonburg, VA, has worked with the Mennonite Central Committee in Belgium, Spain and Central America. With a Ph. D. in Sociology and a concentration in social conflict, he has provided mediation training and consultancy services in Latin America, the United States, and Canada.

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#### RESPONDENTS

**Cole Dodge** is the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Director for Eastern and Southern Africa. His UNICEF experience has included work in Bangladesh, Sudan, Uganda and Somalia. Prior work with Oxfam in the UK and in Boston involved field work in South India/Sri Lanka, Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

**Elizabeth Ferris**, director of the Immigration and Refugee Program for Church World Service (CWS), is responsible for refugee resettlement, asylum and other international concerns. She works in liaison with UN agencies, voluntary organizations, international ecumenical partners and the US government. She represents CWS and the National Council of Churches on refugee and immigration issues. Ms. Ferris previously directed research for the Life and Peace Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. There she supervised and developed research projects and proposals on a variety of topics, including militarism and war, in different regions and disciplines.



### Sustainable transformation as a conceptual framework

The management of **disasters** calls for quick relief to address immediate needs and stabilize the affected population. While often understood in these immediate terms, disaster responses also include planning aimed toward **rehabilitation** and **development**. This planning is usually described in terms of the transitions from emergency disaster response, to relief operations, to rehabilitation, and ultimately, to reconstruction and development.

Central to a conceptual framework is the idea of **change** as a goal in the intervention, perhaps best depicted in the concept of **sustainable transformation**. *Sustainable* suggests the concern not only for how to initiate such change, but how to **create** a proactive process capable of regenerating itself over time. *Transformation* underscores the fundamental notion of moving a given population from a status of extreme vulnerability and dependency to one of self-sufficiency and well being.

Disaster management and humanitarian assistance language has a corresponding set of concepts in the field of conflict resolution. Three broad categories have emerged in this regard, particularly in recent UN documents. First, “**peacemaking**” refers to activities supporting active conciliation, mediation and possible military enforcement aimed at “stopping the fighting” and providing space to move from war to negotiations. This often involves the arduous tasks of confidence building and initiating the cessation of hostilities, including cease, fires. Second, “**peacekeeping**” efforts are focused on maintaining and implementing agreements reached, often with monitoring functions. Finally, “**peacebuilding**” refers to activities aimed not only at final implementation but also at reconstructing the social fabric of war-torn societies as well as rebuilding of relationships.

**Figure 1**  
The relationship between disaster management and conflict resolution terminology

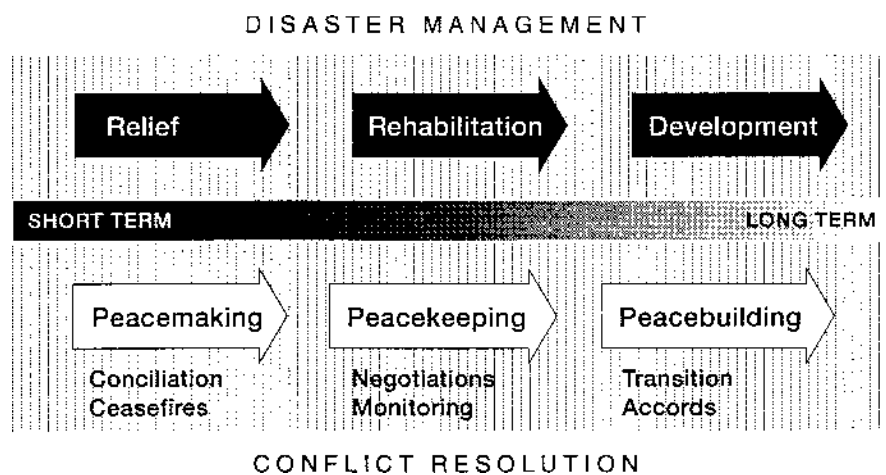


Figure 1 outlines how these two sets of ideas might relate, connecting disaster management and humanitarian assistance with conflict resolution categories. The spectrum runs from short- to long-term. A further distinction is that disaster responses tend to be defined in terms of *specific projects and measurable outcomes*, while what really is at “issue” in war and in conflict resolution is the nature of *relationships* with all that they encompass at psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political and military levels.

This comparison illustrates that a comprehensive approach to sustainable transformation must integrate disaster management and humanitarian assistance and conflict resolution. Second, while disaster responses must

move toward immediate “fixes” for saving lives in the short term, “quick fixes” in protracted conflict rarely lead to sustainable solutions. A crisis driven approach to conflict resolution that pushes exclusively for cease-fires as the measuring stick of peace must be avoided and the painstaking task of relationship and confidence building that sustains the transformation must be encouraged.

*“Quick fixes” in protracted conflict rarely lead to sustainable solutions.*

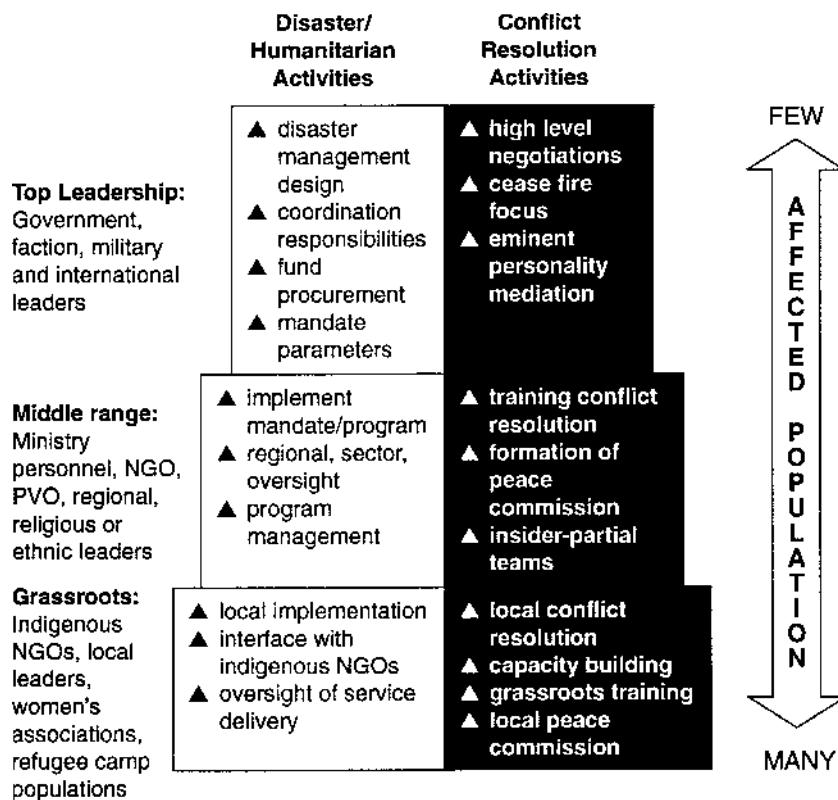
**Q.** *What are the two key elements of the comparison between the disaster management and conflict resolution continuums?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



**Levels of intervention**

The level of intervention within the affected population is a second important element in the sustainable framework. Figure 2 outlines an analytic scheme with three levels of intervention (actors and activities) for humanitarian assistance and conflict resolution perspectives.



**Figure 2**  
*Humanitarian assistance actors and activities*

### ***Top level leadership***

At Level 1, humanitarian assistance is engaged with top level leadership. Focus at this level is on the overall design of the intervention, the coordination of responsibilities and activities and the important task of raising funds. Conflict resolution activities are aimed at achieving cease-fires through high level negotiations between representative leaders, often brokered by high profile mediation efforts involving eminent personalities. Two points are important here. First, these activities receive enormous publicity and media attention. The actors involved are constantly dealing with high stake positioning and fluid perception shifts and are vulnerable to pressure from inside and out to achieve quick results. Second, these processes and decisions often involve a very limited number of people assumed to be representative, acting on behalf of and capable of delivering large numbers of people in the various constituencies.

### ***Middle range actors***

Level 2 involves more numerous actors connected to multiple sectors and regions. These are often religious, ethnic or sectoral leaders, as well as key NGO, PVO and middle level military, movement and government officials. Particularly in protracted conflicts with intense religious or ethnic divisions, these leaders may represent regional and/or factional interests. They are often in contact with decisions made at the highest level but may or may not feel bound by them. They are also in more direct contact with day to day ground operations in their respective areas. Humanitarian assistance activities at this level involve the coordination of responsibilities for implementing programs as well as the negotiation for carrying out those activities with recipients. This often involves brokering and interpretive roles between high level leaders and decisions, and on the ground realities.

Conflict resolution activities often involve broadening participation in the peace process and establishing an *infrastructure* and *capacity for dispute resolution* within the setting and across the lines of conflict. These may involve workshops addressing immediate decision making issues, conflict resolution training or the development of peace commissions for dealing with ethnic issues. Mediation teams, built from within the context, may be formed in what can be referred to as insider-partial teams as opposed to outside neutrals.

### ***Grass roots actors***

The grass roots level involves program implementation directly with recipient. Far more in number, they are the most vulnerable within the context. Key actors are local and indigenous NGOs, community developers, women's associations, local religious, health, municipal, and business leaders, as well as those involved in refugee camps. At this level, disaster management focuses on carrying out programs, coordinating with local officials and ensuring delivery of aid to the affected populations. Conflict resolution extends training to the conflicts taking place at local levels. The encounters can be extremely volatile with face-to-face contact between people who see each other as enemies and as perceived threats to life. These efforts involve the formation of local peace commissions and education programs aimed at long-term relationship building, prejudice reduction or dealing with the psycho-social trauma of war.

A sustainable approach will attempt to link all three levels and will not operate on the assumption that transformation trickles down from the highest level, though it receives the most attention. Sustainable transformation must be constructed. The “middle range” plays a crucial role in this infrastructure given its network capacity between the other two. The middle range, however, is often marginalized given the focus on high level negotiations on the one hand and the felt need to protect the most vulnerable grassroots population on the other.

**Q.** *Specify the actors and activities involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance and conflict resolution.*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



**Dilemmas and ethical issues**

*Three primary reference points*

The sustainable transformation strategy suggests three primary needs:

1. the need to think about military intervention in a framework that links disaster management and conflict resolution
2. the need to integrate short and long term goals and transition
3. the need to build an infrastructure for input and implementation of peace and development that integrates all levels of the population

*Dilemmas and ethical issues*

Using figures 1 and 2, it is possible to identify some ethical issues raised by military intervention in disaster management. “Military intervention” refers to the placement of international troops in a situation of protracted, internal, and on-going conflict for the purpose of protecting vulnerable populations (safe havens) and/or delivering humanitarian aid.

1. As a mechanism employed to achieve immediate disaster response goals, military intervention may adversely affect and even impede progress in the long-term resolution of the conflict. Short-term and often narrowly defined goals on the “disaster/development” spectrum may easily become the primary focus of energy and the gauge of success. Long-term transformation of the conflict, the root cause of the disaster itself, then becomes increasingly peripheral to immediate concerns. This highlights the “chicken/egg” dilemma of disasters principally caused by protracted conflict. Response to the symptom has the net effect of aggravating the root cause of the disaster.

***Military intervention may adversely affect and even impede progress in the long-term resolution of the conflict.***

ANSWER (from page 11)

1. The need for disaster responses and the obstacles to development are both rooted in situations of protracted conflict.
2. “Quick fixes” rarely lead to sustainable solutions. While rapid emergency disaster assistance is often necessary to save lives, and cease-fires may be a beginning to the end of violence, neither deal adequately with the root causes of disaster and conflict.

*In practical terms  
all actors and goals  
become subservient  
to military  
effectiveness and  
its immediate goals.*

2. Disasters principally caused by protracted conflict become more acute when military intervention on behalf of humanitarian assistance is undertaken without full approval of the parties to the conflict. This can create a dilemma in that the international troops are easily perceived as a party to the conflict and as strengthening or weakening factions, thereby increasing the fighting. Further, as has been the case in Somalia and Bosnia, international aid workers not directly connected to the military apparatus may be perceived as allies of the “foreign” intervention, increasing their vulnerability and decreasing their effectiveness. Perceptions, whether true or not, often have real consequences.
3. Military culture assumes a certain independence and superiority of mission over that of longer established disaster management/ humanitarian assistance efforts. In practical terms all actors and goals become subservient to military effectiveness and its immediate goals. This is accompanied by the military personnel a) protecting themselves, often with massive logistical support; b) establishing hierarchical decision making for effecting military strategy; c) making decisions which affect many non military personnel and operations; and d) establishing their own relationships with local populations and leaders.

Consequently, humanitarian workers may experience a sense of displacement, marginalization, and increased tensions with local partners. Further, the military is likely to place primary emphasis on the establishment of relationships with their factional counterparts thus raising the legitimacy of military and faction leaders, enhancing their role in decision making and in defining the peace process. Simultaneously, this may marginalize the role of humanitarian, civic, women’s, religious, and sectoral groups in the affected population. In other words, people in the middle range and grassroots levels, most likely to be the counterparts of humanitarian assistance and the foundation of long-term infrastructure for sustainable transformation, are undermined.

4. International military intervention will inevitably raise issues related to national sovereignty. If the international community deploys troops over local objections, it is faced with the dilemma of the criteria by which intervention is justified and to whom the intervenors are accountable. At a second level, in many internal conflicts, self-determination of minority populations and their declared secession are central issues. Outside military intervention can be manipulated to support or undermine the case of one or another of the sides, depending on where troops are placed, who is chosen to be protected or receive aid, and with whom one negotiates in the placement of troops. In contexts of conflict, responding to disasters is rarely seen as neutral. Responding with military intervention on behalf of disaster aid increases suspicion and volatility.

## **Guidelines for policy makers**

On the basis of the discussion of sustainable transformation and the identified ethical dilemmas, policy makers and disaster management teams may consider the following recommendations

**1. Disaster management and humanitarian assistance should be linked with conflict resolution activities, particularly where the principal cause of the disaster is protracted conflict.** Assumptions that disaster management is independent of the conflict in either the cause or effect should be avoided. Disaster planning should include conflict resolution expertise in all stages.

2. The need and outcome of military intervention for humanitarian purposes should be evaluated in terms of its impact on longer-term transformation of the conflict rather than on its short-term capacity to effect disaster and relief goals.

**3. Counterparts should be approached as resources rather than recipients.**

Long-term transformation can be sustained only through local infrastructure. This recommendation reflects several key programmatic principles:

- Relationship building and networking, particularly at middle range levels, are more important to long-term transformation than the outcome of immediate program goals, especially in terms of conflict resolution processes.
- Process matters as much as outcome. Involving and empowering middle range and key local level counterparts in the design and implementation of any intervention is crucial for establishing and maintaining local resources. This may be counter to the focus aimed at top levels of leadership as decision makers.
- Operational relationships across the lines of conflict should be fostered, creating “cross-line” teams for program consultation. Solid relationships built over time are the key to long term transformation. Such relationships may help to solve problems arising from international military intervention.

**4. Disaster and humanitarian objectives should be promoted as the primary objectives rather than the military/security objectives.**

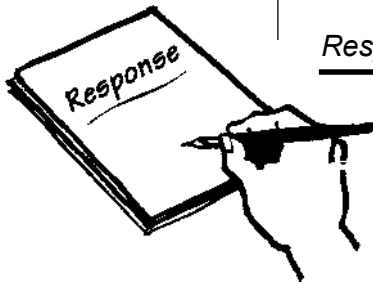
Military intervention must be understood as a limited response, taken at extraordinary expense. If military intervention is undertaken, it should fit into an integrated disaster/conflict paradigm and not vice versa.

Where this paradigm is not integrated, disaster management and humanitarian assistance are subservient to the military frame of reference and decision making process. At the point of military intervention, a coordinating team should be established that includes leaders in disaster management, humanitarian assistance, conflict resolution, cross-line counterparts and military leaders.

*Process matters as much as outcome.*

*ANSWER (from page 5)*

1. Government, faction, military and international leaders—high level negotiations, cease-fire focus, eminent personality mediation
2. Ministry personnel, NGO, PVO, regional, religious and ethnic leaders—training in conflict resolution, formation of peace commissions, formation of insider partial teams
3. Indigenous NGOs, local leaders, women's associations, refugee camp representatives—local conflict resolution, capacity building, grassroots training, local peace commission



## Conclusion

Dilemmas and guidelines for assessing military intervention in disaster management emerge out of an underlying set of assumptions. In this essay, sustainable transformation is utilized as the central framework. Sustainable transformation promotes a comprehensive approach that explicitly links humanitarian goals with processes of conflict resolution, integrates short-term objectives in long-term perspective and moves to build a durable broad-based infrastructure for peace and development within the setting.

### *Response by Cole Dodge*

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Relief agencies have struggled but failed to establish an effective *modus operandi* to reach civilians caught in civil war. Statistics show upwards of 80% of casualties are civilians in all post-colonial wars in Africa. Although ICRC and the UN have developed the legal framework of civilians' rights, they have not been able to translate these into effective relief programs. The major stumbling blocks have been: 1, sovereignty of state parties, 2, destabilization, and 3, tribal or ethnic reprisals in the conduct of civil war. Relief efforts have failed also because the response was too late, inappropriate, or ineffective. Therefore, the issue of survival of civilians is a major challenge to both relief agencies and military commanders who are challenged to establish safety or maintain peace.

Local communities of refugees and displaced persons, indigenous NGOs and religious groups have emerged as both recipients and middle range agents within the internationally mandated system of the Red Cross organizations (International Federation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and International Committee of the Red Cross), the UN and northern NGOs. However, none have sufficiently developed the concept of self.-sustainability. Therefore, even when the more routine emergencies such as drought, famine and floods are over, there is too little prospect for a transition to self-help rehabilitation or development. Complex emergencies involving civil war are even more difficult. Therefore, the importance of involvement and participation is even more critical.

The Cold War left behind a stockpile of armaments, a legacy of corrupt military governments and little commitment to democracy. So, too, the relief community failed to develop the peoples' capacity to cope with their emergency situations. Local participation should span the entire spectrum — not persons employed as middle persons, but as **partners** if sustainable relief, reconciliation and development are to be achieved.

Perhaps one way to facilitate participation is with the issue of schooling. Evidence from experiences related to World War II where children were displaced from their home areas or traumatized by bombing suggests that children who experienced these, suffered a lifetime of psycho-social problems. The evidence indicates that we need to lessen, where it is possible, the terrible impact of war on children. The question is "How?"

Article 39 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly provides the basis of care for victims who have been traumatized. The current practice of providing therapeutic and supplementary feeding, vaccinations, medical services, clean water and sanitation are vitally important, but not enough. Psycho-social care also needs to be incorporated for the long-term prospects of shattered communities. Although relief donors are currently reluctant to fund education in emergency situations, schools should be established as a place for children and adults to talk over their trauma and concerns and to provide a center for the community.

The involvement of the local community, the arrangement of security for the delivery of food and the provision of schooling and medical care can be incremental steps which create the confidence necessary to encourage reconciliation. If the military is to be part of the solution, then both the relief agencies and the military must work together to seek a new plateau.

*If the military is to be part of the solution, then both the relief agencies and the military must work together to seek a new plateau.*

### *Response by Elizabeth Ferris*

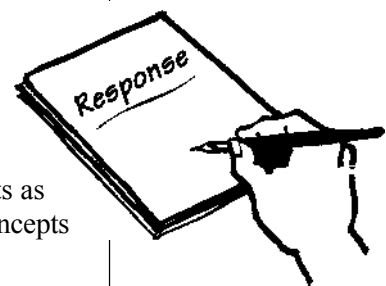
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This essay raises a number of important issues: the need to link humanitarian relief with conflict resolution, the impact of humanitarian assistance on peace building, sustainable transformation, the need for military forces involved in disaster relief to understand their counterparts as resources rather than as recipients of assistance. These are all essential concepts which need to be incorporated into the training of military personnel.

It is necessary, however, to move beyond talking about high-level political leaders, mid-level NGOs and low-level grass roots groups, as this terminology affects the importance credited to work at various levels. While a cease-fire negotiated by political leaders may be essential for grass roots groups to operate, the community-building and reconciliation efforts of those groups may be as essential to long-term peace as the diplomatic accords negotiated by political leaders.

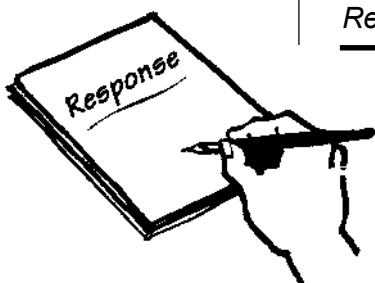
There are a number of related issues which need to be addressed in the issue of military intervention in disaster relief.

1. While military intervention can make it more difficult to resolve long-term problems, especially when the military is perceived as favoring one party in the conflict, it must be recognized that military forces are not all the same. For example, at least some NGOs active in protected zones in Iraq were pleasantly surprised when working with the military, finding them to be task-oriented, responsive to NGO needs and less bureaucratic than some United Nations agencies. Presently in Somalia, NGOs find that reactions vary according to the nationality and predisposition of the forces.
2. While it is necessary to work toward international responses to crises which will make sustainable transformations possible, is also important to be ready for situations such as Bosnia and Somalia where even large-scale diplomatic or civilian intervention will be unable to meet humanitarian needs of the population, much less resolve serious internal conflicts. Criteria are needed for deciding when military intervention is necessary as well as the terms of engagement for those military forces. The border between peacekeeping and peace enforcement is a murky





*Creative thinking is needed about how the international community can intervene early enough in emerging conflicts to make military intervention unnecessary.*



one, as evidenced in Cambodia and Liberia. Exploring the ethical dimensions of military intervention must include not only analysis of the macro-level issues, but also a willingness to engage in real world tangled decision-making where the slate is never clean.

3. Ethical issues around the use of military forces for humanitarian relief raises other questions: Who decides that a given situation has deteriorated to such an extent that military intervention is necessary? What criteria should be used? Given the realities of international power, decisions to intervene require the support of the major Northern powers, particularly the United States. In the absence of internationally accepted criteria for intervention, charges of political motivations, subjectivity and (increasingly) the media-driven nature of responses are inevitable. Why intervention in Somalia in 1992 and not in Southern Sudan? Why in Bosnia (at great cost if not effectiveness) and not Armenia, Tajikistan, Liberia and a dozen other places where crises have either exploded or are likely to explode in the near future?
4. It is necessary to look more closely at the relationship between quick fixes (e.g. cease-fires) and the kinds of actions that could make them genuine steps toward peace building. Cease-fires may be necessary but provide insufficient conditions leading to peace. What are the conditions under which cease-fires lead to long-term peace building? How can both the international community and grass roots groups take advantage of such cease-fires to take a step toward peace building?
5. Finally, creative thinking is needed about how the international community can intervene early enough in emerging conflicts to make military intervention unnecessary. What actions could be taken now in countries such as Zaire, Haiti and Burma which would prevent widespread human suffering and the disintegration of social order which leads to call for military intervention?

The ethical dilemmas around military disaster relief are many, particularly when we move beyond abstract concepts to real world situations of protracted armed conflict and widespread civilian suffering. But, if we are to move beyond band-aid solutions and if we are to ensure that the “solutions” do not make the conflicts worse, we must be willing to grapple with the ethical questions raised by military interventions.

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*Response by Arthur E. Dewey*

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Treatment of this subject is refreshing, since it avoids what has become for some NGO representatives an obligatory condemnation of any tainting of humanitarian efforts with military associations. While avoiding the label of cooperation with the military as immoral, this discussion treats most of the other issues in their practical, as opposed to their ethical, context.

Although the discussion of a “transformation” framework in relief assistance is somewhat cumbersome, the articulation of the principles and dilemmas in general is clear and sound. Especially important is the insistence that in humanitarian operations relief is the central function. The military

must play, and be perceived to play, a subordinate, facilitating and supporting service role.

Ms. Ferris's response is particularly helpful in insisting on criteria for the "if" and "when" of any military involvement in humanitarian operations. Her call for resolve and fiber in the civilian international community is highly supportable as the timely attention can sharply reduce the necessity for a disciplined military resource to pick up the pieces from indecisive and disorganized civilians.

While each resource person noted the necessity for a comprehensive approach, incorporating military resources in an appropriate subordinate role, this principle requires re-emphasis and expansion. Following are some of the essential elements of such a comprehensive approach:

- Appropriate opportunities must be employed to strengthen, not weaken, the principle that there are universal human rights. Gross violators of these universal human rights, particularly at policy levels, can expect to be defendants in trials for crimes against humanity. Every drop of deterrent value needs to be squeezed out of this principle.
- Member States of the UN need to cultivate a culture for political decisions which draws on political will, toughness and resolve. Such will and resolve exercised early can play the defining role in avoiding the necessity for military toughness and discipline. The horror of the former Yugoslavia is, of course, the over-arching imperative for such concerted action by a few key influential states concerning preventive and mitigation actions which must be taken. Such informal consultation and action further clarifies what steps should be taken by individual states, as well as what appropriate roles the UN Security Council and the UN Departments of Humanitarian Affairs, Political Affairs, and Peacekeeping should play and should be equipped to play.
- Appropriate and timely use should be made of all the tools available to avert and meet human need, including military tools. This requires a much stronger humanitarian coordination capacity in the UN, in the form of a revitalized Department of Humanitarian Affairs. Just as important, there is a need for coherent, effective humanitarian coordinating mechanisms within national governments, commencing with the United States.
- Special emphasis needs to be placed on joint planning and training in national governments and in the UN. This must include appropriate military assets. To minimize support of relief operations, as in Somalia, consideration must be given to such creative options as the establishment of humanitarian task forces, with organic security and logistic components supporting the main humanitarian element. Contingency planning and public statements should never rule out the use of military force, as was done early on for the former Yugoslavia, but instead should keep in mind the deterrent value of preserving the military option.

**Q.** List the ethical dilemmas and issues of disaster management and utilization of military forces that are identified by the authors of this section.

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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## ■ CASE STUDY

**“Boutros-Ghali angrily condemns all sides for not saving Rwanda”**

Paul Lewis, *New York Times*, May 26, 1994

Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali expressed exasperation today at the refusal of most countries to send troops to Rwanda. He called the continuing slaughter there “genocide” and said it was a “scandal” that the world has not acted speedily to end the blood-letting.

At a news conference in New York, the Secretary General described the United Nations efforts in Rwanda in harsh terms, saying: “It is a failure not only for the United Nations; it is a failure for the international community. And all of us are responsible for this failure. Not only the great powers but the African powers, the non-governmental organizations, all the international community.

“It is a genocide which has been committed, More than 200,000 people have been killed and the international community is still discussing what ought to be done.”

Mr. Boutros-Ghall said he had done all he could to persuade African governments to give him the 5,500 troops he wants to send to Rwanda to protect refugees and help aid workers.

“I have tried,” he said, by writing to more than 30 heads of state after the United States and Western countries made it clear they would not get involved. “I begged them to send troops. I was in contact with different organizations and tried my best to be able to help them find a solution to the problem.

“Unfortunately, let us say with great humility, I failed. It is a scandal. I am the first one to say it.” The Secretary General placed the blame on “donor fatigue” among countries that frequently assign troops to the United Nations but now find themselves being asked to support 17 such operations with personnel and money.

In Annapolis, Md., today, President Clinton listed Rwanda among the world’s many bloody conflicts where the interests at stake did not justify the use of American military power.

We cannot solve every such outburst of civil strife or militant nationalism simply by sending in our forces,” Mr. Clinton said in a commencement address at the United States Naval Academy.

At an emergency meeting today in Geneva, the United Nations Human Rights Commission voted unanimously to send an investigator to Rwanda for a report back within four weeks. It also called for “human rights field officers” to be stationed in Rwanda to deter abuses.

In Kigali, the capital, the army and the forces of the Rwanda Patriotic Front battled today for control, trading artillery and mortar fire that killed two people at a Red Cross hospital and ended Tuesday’s brief truce. A United Nations envoy, Iqbal Riza, drove through the fighting in an armored car to confer with Government ministers, who have fled to Gitarama, 35 miles from Kigali.

The renewed fighting has stopped deliveries of food and water to all but 3,000 of the 12,500 refugees under United Nations protection at 11 sites in Kigali. Nearly half the refugees are children.

Roger Carter, of the United Nations Children Fund, said in Nairobi, Kenya: “As the siege of Kigali goes on, the situation is going to get worse. In the next few days you are going to see malnutrition in Kigali.”

So far the United Nations has received firm pledges from Ghana, Ethiopia and Senegal for about 2,000 of the 5,500 troops it wants for Rwanda. The United Nations is asking Western nations for equipment for the African troops and has asked Australia for soldiers specialized in logistics.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali indicated today that he still hopes Egypt, Nigeria and Zimbabwe will provide soldiers. Although Italy has said it is ready to send troops to Rwanda, no firm offer has been received, he said.

His display of near despair over Rwanda is not the first time Mr. Boutros-Ghali has appealed emotionally for troops to rescue a country degenerating into chaos. Two years ago, he helped push the Bush Administration into sending troops to Somalia after contrasting the world’s indifference toward the catastrophe there with its extensive effort to halt the fighting in Yugoslavia, which he described then as “a rich man’s war.”

African diplomats say most countries are shying away from offering soldiers because of the obvious dangers. But there are other inhibitions.

Nigeria and several African countries have already sent peace-keeping forces to Liberia. And East and Central African countries generally have small, poorly equipped armies or are consumed by civil war themselves. Newly democratic South Africa has a large modern army but apparently has not been approached. Furthermore, few African countries can afford the cost, especially when the United Nations’ own financial difficulties are delaying reimbursements to nations contributing troops.

The Secretary General emphasized that the troops he wants to send to Rwanda cannot impose a solution, but he said a large United Nations force could “contain” the deteriorating situation and “reinforce” the position of his mediator there.

“They may help protect both Tutsi and Hutu,” he explained. “But the mandate is limited so it is not our intention to impose on the protagonists of the dispute a certain formula.”

When last year’s peace agreement collapsed on April 7 and fierce fighting broke out between Hutu and Tutsi, the United Nations cut its 2,500-member force in Rwanda back to a few hundred at the urging of the Clinton Administration.

As the killing got still worse, the Secretary General backed African calls for a new larger force to be sent in. But the Administration, which had just set tight guidelines for supporting new peacekeeping operations, successfully opposed doing more than restoring earlier cuts until certain conditions are met.

These conditions include progress toward a cease-fire, a firm schedule for ending the operation and agreement that the emphasis should be on protecting refugees along the borders rather than sending troops into Kigali airport, as the Secretary General favors.

**Q.** *Using the points made by the authors, list the pros and cons for military intervention as depicted by the case study.*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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ANSWER (from page 20)

1. A focus on short-term goals may hinder progress on long-term goals
2. International military troops may be perceived as taking sides in the conflict rather than supporting conflict resolution and providing emergency disaster assistance
3. Humanitarian assistance operations may become subservient to military operations
4. military intervention and national sovereignty
5. Who decides that military intervention is necessary?
6. Preventive intervention: is it an option?

**Q.** *What actions, from your experience and as mentioned by the authors, might have prevented the need for the appeal described in the case study?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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## 2 TOPIC

### Providing humanitarian assistance to displaced populations and refugees



*Bosnian refugees arriving in the Port of Rijeka after leaving Split by boat.*

#### The nature of the working environment in contemporary emergencies

While each humanitarian emergency is unique and unpredictable, there has been a shift in recent years in the general pattern of emergencies, and the challenges they pose for the provision of relief. These reflect both new kinds of conflicts with the end of the Cold War and changes in the way in which the international community conceives of its rights and obligations to protect affected people (and hence what defines “an emergency”). These changes transform and increase the ethical dilemmas faced by frontline relief officials.

Decisions about how to provide assistance are complex because of unresolved foreign policy debates amongst the major donors, and massive but shifting public demand for action. Major emergencies become media events, although their complexities are rarely conveyed. The international community has intervened in “humanitarian matters” with varying degrees of legitimacy and political will. The boundaries of political and military affairs remain blurred and disputed. The numbers and levels of involvement of UN bodies have increased alongside other agencies, and new coordination initiatives have yet to clarify management. Relief programs increasingly run alongside “peace keeping” or other types of military intervention whose mandates and methods of working may be different or unclear.

#### TOPIC AUTHOR

**Ken Wilson** is an ecological anthropologist principally concerned with the use of participatory, livelihood-centered research and management methods for improving relief and development programs. His research has covered various aspects of refugee survival strategies and relief in Sudan, Zambia and Malawi. He joined The Refugee Studies Programme, Oxford in 1989, focusing his research on the situation of displaced Mozambicans both within and outside Mozambique, and on repatriation and reconstruction with peace.

#### RESPONDENTS

**Phil Anderson**, a Lutheran pastor, has worked in community-based development and disaster relief in Latin America since 1977 including: the 1985 volcanic eruption in Colombia; internally displaced communities, human rights and grassroots development organizations in El Salvador; elections in Nicaragua (1989-1990), Haiti (1990), El Salvador (1991), and Guatemala (1991); coordinating repatriation programs for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, and serving as a representative to the international mediation team in Guatemala on the return of Guatemala refugees from Mexico (1992-1993).

**Jacques Cuenod** is the former executive director for Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development (ACORD), an international consortium of non-governmental organizations working together for long-term development in Africa. Previously, Mr. Cuenod worked for two UN agencies, UNHCR and UN Relief and Work Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), for a total of 33 years.



## **Strategies for the negotiation of rights**

An ethical challenge for relief officials is to negotiate a compromise between the interests of the major actors that reflects the needs and aspirations of the displaced people and refugees. The victims of conflicts will only be protected if the parties involved are convinced of the benefits of jointly respecting human rights, and face international condemnation when they abuse those rights. The strategies available for promoting these interests include:

- a thorough knowledge and active deployment of international humanitarian and refugee law
- an in-depth understanding of the political and military agendas of the various parties (any hence the ability to see windows of opportunity)
- a reputation for being trustworthy and nonpartisan
- having well-presented and highly reliable first hand knowledge
- the judicious use of local and international media
- active networking to mobilize opinion and build agreements
- the forging of links with progressive organizations and social movements in the affected region which can in turn put pressure on the authorities and the military.

Humanitarian agencies should avoid agreements that facilitate their access for relief, to the detriment of their impact on general levels of suffering. For example, serious dilemmas occur when humanitarian agencies need to ignore human rights abuses in order to obtain access to beneficiaries. Careful weighing of the compromises and effects of different strategies, in the short and long-term, is required. In some cases, the maintenance of a field presence is important symbolically, but less significant logistically. In other cases, the presence of an agency may facilitate and legitimate civilian abuses. Agencies' positions are strengthened when they present a common front.

Relief agencies may work on all sides of the conflict, arguing that this demonstrates impartiality and enables them a fuller perspective. Such an approach may generate distrust and hostility from all, although it can provide leverage for assistance. The advantage of working on one side only is the need to convince only one party and is most effective when the agency's beneficiaries are allied to the authorities of that party.

## **Identifying and understanding the limits to available policy instruments**

The problems arising in humanitarian emergencies reflect fundamental social, economic and political dislocations, with multiple causes and effects. Most emergencies have been years in the making and will persist in changing ways for many years. Experience suggests that one common error in such situations is that policy makers are over-ambitious in their planning. Naive commitments to a particular "solution" may shape policy objectives without real consideration of the attainability of this solution, or the effects of policies being adopted in the meantime. The lack of realism and critical reflection might have significant impacts.

*Serious dilemmas occur when humanitarian agencies need to ignore human rights abuses in order to obtain access to beneficiaries.*





*Labeling of needy people in a way that does not qualify them for assistance is clearly unethical.*

Relief programs often fail to recognize survival strategies, resulting in the waste of precious resources and duplicating or damaging people's own efforts. Effective programs use ethical criteria to guide selection of key policy thrusts. Such ethical criteria include the importance ascribed to different age and sex categories and social groups within the population, consideration of short- versus long-term outcomes, and physiological versus socio-economic and psycho-social well-being. In addition, professional judgements determine how limited time and resources can best be directed to achieve desired outcomes.

### **Labeling and counting beneficiaries**

Logistical and bureaucratic pressures demand that field officials categorize the population into different beneficiary target groups (refugees, displaced persons, returnees, vulnerable, etc.), and provide population statistics for each group. Apart from being extremely difficult and costly, this exercise is fraught with ethical dilemmas. Labeling tends to stereotype needs, and if carried out superficially, can lead to unnecessary suffering. Investigative labeling may invade privacy, evoke painful memories, or involve expenditure of resources that could be provided directly to the beneficiaries.

Labeling of needy people in a way that does not qualify them for assistance is clearly unethical. For example, different assistance regimes for neighboring populations with different labels, but actually similar needs, inevitably cause confusion and resentment. Census and registration systems usually reduce freedom of movement and home, as well as infringe upon personal rights. When done sufficiently rigorously to control cheating, these exercises often exclude deserving beneficiaries from assistance schedules. Administrative benefits gained from accurate counting are often lost through damage to relationships with beneficiaries and local host population authorities. Indeed, replacing local systems of distribution and accountability with policed and centrally managed ones can sometimes reduce the fidelity of distribution systems. The problems posed by the need to label beneficiaries for distribution purposes require imaginative solutions.

### **Providing relief versus securing rights: ethical assistance strategies**

Mass distribution of relief items is facilitated by concentrating beneficiaries into camps or their equivalents. Encampment is often justified by security and political concerns about keeping migrants separated from the host society and economy. Such policies of separation may even be pursued with internally displaced populations despite their rights as citizens. People may be encamped who have sought refuge with relatives and friends in the host community, or who have settled themselves with support from local institutions, such as churches.

Encampment and dependency on relief systems, justified in the emergency phase, may become permanent because people are denied the rights to move, work and integrate themselves in the local community. Consequently, they cannot become self-sufficient. Since relief is rarely adequate and will usually be reduced when donor political attention shifts, hardship can persist unnecessarily in camps. Where refugees illegally engage

in economic activities or enter the labor market in order to survive, rights are often abused. Corruption of host country officials and police may be encouraged. Epidemics are more likely in crowded conditions. More ethical and effective policies would involve efforts to secure for beneficiaries the rights to a livelihood and to self-sufficiency. Host institutions and service structures need donor support to facilitate integration with minimal negative consequences.

### **Dilemmas in participation**

The appropriateness of interventions and the efficiency of their implementation is enhanced by the participation of beneficiaries. However, securing “participation” remains difficult because of bureaucratic pressures by donors on assistance agencies. Further, because of the timeliness required to meet emergency needs, it is difficult for outside institutions to identify representatives of different sectors of a displaced population, particularly in a chaotic or politically tense situation.

The greatest institutional pressures in emergencies involve coordinating the efforts of UN agencies, international and local NGOs, as well as the national government and its various ministerial and local governmental institutions. In contexts of conflict and confusion between the major actors, it is hardly surprising that little consideration is given to beneficiary perspectives. Information is collected through rapid field visits, often involving short-term consultants whose knowledge of aid delivery systems is often much greater than it is of refugee experiences, livelihood strategies, and the local context. This leads to the multiplication and persistence of relief system models conceived by technocrats generally unaware of the significance of local factors and the extent to which the knowledge and skills of the displaced people can be a major resource.

Such top down planning is unethical as well as ineffective. It can be countered from the outset, through the involvement of local institutions and expertise, the posting of senior staff with appropriate social and linguistic skills at the real field level, the use of participatory research, and the prioritizing of early identification of leaders among the refugee population. The introduction or recognition of democratically elected and civil society institutions should also occur as quickly as possible and be included in the discussion of actual policies as well as in the arrangement of its implementation.

### **Displaced people, refugees and local hosts**

Relief systems somewhat artificially label the displaced or refugee population as distinct from the local hosts and can create tensions where people are part of common social networks, and have similar needs. In cases where hosts consider themselves to be very different from the displaced, a negative reaction to targeted assistance is likely. This can undermine host political will to provide asylum, and can damage livelihood because access to host resources (rather than relief items) is usually the greatest determinant of refugee well-being. It is ironic that local hosts who provide the key assistance in the early stages of any emergency can become alienated by subsequent relief efforts, and even hostile to the refugees.

*Top down planning is unethical as well as ineffective.*

*ANSWER (from page 23)*

#### **Types of ethical dilemmas**

1. Choices between options with conflicting merits and costs
2. Values of intended beneficiaries clash with those of humanitarian institutions
3. Ethical conflicts are perceived within a hierarchy of moral obligations

#### **Methodology for resolution**

1. Professional training provides skills to make most effective decisions
2. Mechanisms of participation and empowerment facilitate negotiated decision-making and problem resolution
3. Consensus around the sanctity of life can serve as the ultimate value superseding moral constrictions of military, economic and political interests

*The special protection needs of women in war and forced migration situations need far greater recognition by relief officials and the international community.*

Policy approaches that maintain local host understanding of, and commitment to, the refugees' needs are therefore advised — alongside programs with mutual benefit to both hosts and refugees. Programs where the two groups benefit alongside one another (e.g., by attending the same schools or hospitals), foster a sense of integration. Where it is unavoidable that refugees be assisted separately from hosts, it is appropriate to improve services for the surrounding host populations. When refugee repatriation occurs, in the immediate post-departure period, new initiatives are particularly needed that address the residual economic and ecological impact in host countries.

### **Addressing the needs of women**

Women are usually at greater risk from physical and sexual abuse during war and flight, and when living under assistance programs. Assistance policies, however, often do not prioritize women's welfare, largely because of a lack of gender awareness and commitment by agencies and relief officials. Women, however, should not be seen only as victims. They generally deploy considerable initiative in maintaining their dignity and in sustaining the livelihood of their families. Dramatic improvements in the welfare of displaced and refugee women (and also of their families) could be achieved if humanitarian assistance programs were more sensitive to the needs and abilities of women.

The special protection needs of women in war and forced migration situations need far greater recognition by relief officials and the international community, in particular by:

- discussing the issues regarding systematic rape
- enhancing the capacity to understand and respond to women's needs by male and female staff in relief institutions at all levels, from the field to senior management
- assessing the degree to which the types of goods and services offered meet male and female beneficiaries' needs
- considering how women's access to rationing and assistance distribution affects the relationship between men and women within households and the community (e.g., the policy of allocation of items to male 'household heads')
- securing the opinions and representation of women in consultations and in refugee and displaced community representative committees
- seeking policies for addressing women's needs and participation through approaches rooted in local cultural and religious traditions, conceived and led by local people.

### **Obligations to staff**

Relief institutions have special ethical obligations to their staff during humanitarian emergencies. In particular they must protect them from the negative effects of psycho-social stress resulting from exposure to extreme suffering. Many humanitarian emergencies also expose relief workers to physical risks such as mines and military attacks. Such stress leads to immediate declines in professional standards and often to longer-term

psychological damage. Adequate preparation and training beforehand, and effective counseling and support during and after operations are strongly advised.

The main institutional dilemmas are how to assess and respond to such risks. On one hand, it is difficult for agencies to rely on local officials to assess risk and decide when to withdraw operations. On the other hand, senior officials in distant offices may have little data upon which to base their judgements. The use of military forces or armed guards may or may not prove effective in the short and long-term, and it may affect the perception of the humanitarian operations. Furthermore, the employment of guards can institutionalize protection rackets. Finally, humanitarian agencies who withdraw assistance from populations because of threats to their staff risk being manipulated by the actors in a conflict situation, and of precipitating catastrophic suffering and mortality.

### **Conclusion**

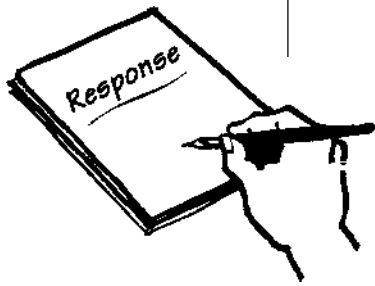
In emergencies the officials of powerful institutions are called upon to address the needs of dispossessed populations. Their crucial contribution of humanitarianism is often constrained by local and international political interests, as well as inadequate resources. The stress of being unable to address adequately the often overwhelming suffering is immense. Disaster management officials need training, support and counseling in order to sort through the ethical dilemmas of providing humanitarian assistance and make effective decisions. An approach centering on supporting people's own efforts and on working together with them can make this work more effective and less stressful.



**Q.** *List the ethical issues specified by Ken Wilson which are involved in providing humanitarian assistance to displaced persons and refugees.*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Response by Phil Anderson*

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Four major issues are emphasized in regard to the ethical dilemmas presented by Ken Wilson:

- 1. Ethical values motivating different agencies vary considerably depending on the nature and origin of the agencies.** For example, a UN agency has a different mandate, access to governments, and capacity of resources than a church-related international or local NGO. How both approach a given situation will reflect those differences.

Is it possible to arrive at common ethical standards? By definition, it is assumed that agencies are interested in being of assistance to the displaced and refugees. How this goal is implemented varies considerably. NGOs need to work with a variety of other agencies, to learn of their strengths and limitations as well as to assess their own. Only with constant dialogue could some level of consensus be reached as to how to work together as agencies. There are many questions: With which agencies do we communicate? How do NGOs and UN agencies relate? The latter are often more subject to host government agreements and donor country guidelines. Yet NGOs need the strength of UN agencies for specific tasks serving the needs and interests of the displaced or refugees.

- 2. Fundamental human rights, in the broadest sense (cultural, political, social as well as civil and legal), need more understanding by humanitarian assistance providers.**

Indigenous Guatemalans, for example, are tired of being treated as if they should accept second or third class standards. Direct, participatory, community-based decision-making regarding the welfare of local communities from their point of view must be strengthened, respected and protected by national and international authorities and agencies. This is most crucial when indigenous lands, cultures and human survival are at risk. The encroachment of non-indigenous people who exploit the land and the people, often in the name of “progress” or “national development,” victimizes a population perceived as standing in the way of development. Such populations may even be treated as “the enemy” to be militarily eliminated. The gap needs to be closed between what is taken for granted by the wealthy minority and what is considered sufficient for the vast majority poor.



*The gap needs to be closed between what is taken for granted by the wealthy minority and what is considered sufficient for the vast majority poor.*



- 3. Agencies need to build trust at all levels, but particularly with the displaced and refugees.** This implies listening, communicating, and being with those whom the agencies serve. People will speak out when confident that an agency will treat them with dignity and advocate for their expressed needs. Such relationships with the displaced add credibility as agencies speak with governmental agencies, UN officials, diplomatic missions, agency headquarters supervisors, visiting delegations, and other

official representatives. Refugees rebel at simply being told what to do by agencies or governments, as was evident in the conflicted mass repatriations of 40,000 refugees from Honduras to El Salvador during the mid- to late- 1980s. These refugees often had a clear sense of what they wanted to accomplish, and organizational structures and skills to achieve their goals. What they needed was moral support, as well as financial and other material resources. Agencies had to learn to take risks, expanding the perceived limits of the possible and politically pragmatic.

**4. Agencies need to work politically as well as in direct service as they respond to disasters.** Inter Action and ICVA (International Council for Voluntary Agencies) provide models by conducting assessments and distributing reports to generate financial resources and/or to affect public policy and action. Conflict management and long-term thinking, as well as training for non-violence, need to be a part of agency training. The international community can work to mitigate disasters and needs to commit resources to such efforts. In addition, substantial efforts to coordinate responses are essential. An excellent example of such coordination is CIREFCA-1987-1994 (Conferencia Internacional para Refugiados en Centro America/International Conference on Refugees in Central America). Coordination was enhanced and structured with a high degree of mutual respect among national and international NGOs, local governments, donor governments, the UN system and refugees and displaced persons.

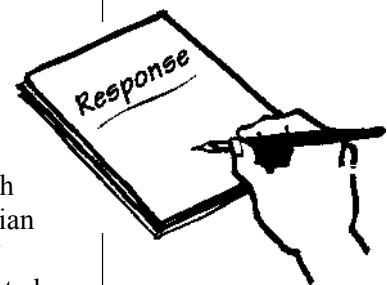
*Response by Jacques Cuenod*

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When a situation of refugees or displaced persons occurs, the first choice is whether to provide humanitarian assistance. According to which criteria should this decision be taken? Who decides whether a humanitarian intervention is “ethical,” and in conformity with the highest standards of moral principles? The recent Vienna Conference on human rights illustrated that what is ethical according to one culture is not necessarily ethical in another cultural environment.

The changes in the nature of the working environment in contemporary emergencies increase the ethical dilemmas faced by front line relief officials (e.g. the decision of the truck driver to let part of the transported relief goods be looted, with the hope that the rest may reach the intended beneficiaries). In addition, top decision makers of this world are called upon to make moral decisions with great ethical implications (e.g. the UN. High Commissioner for Refugees deciding to suspend temporarily relief convoys in certain parts of former Yugoslavia, the Italian Government withdrawing its troops from the UN contingent in Somalia, the UN Secretary-General withdrawing all UN humanitarian personnel for security reasons, etc.).

The role of humanitarian institutions is to defend the interests of refugees and displaced persons. They should not negotiate compromises with major actors on the needs and aspirations of the victims. Their reputation of being trustworthy will otherwise suffer and so will their credibility for the future.



***Labeling refugees in  
order to satisfy  
donors is a  
fundamental error.***

ANSWER (from page 29)

1. Negotiating the interests of major actors to obtain a compromise that, as far as possible, reflects the needs and aspirations of the displaced people and refugees
2. Trading rights of access to beneficiaries in return for keeping quiet about human rights abuses
3. Maintaining "neutrality" and working on all sides of a conflict or working on only one side
4. Selecting key policies and program priorities
5. Labeling and counting beneficiaries
6. Providing relief versus securing rights
7. Developing participatory processes
8. Assisting displaced people, refugees and local hosts
9. Addressing the needs of women
10. Obligations to staff

Institutions providing emergency assistance are faced with a difficult choice. Either they rush in with stereotyped relief, risking that it may not be appropriately suited to the needs of the victims and may create problems; or, they send experts familiar with the region and customs of the affected group to assess the capabilities of the people to develop survival strategies and design an emergency response program limited to the coverage of their vulnerabilities (cf. *Rising from the Ashes* by Mary Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow). In the second alternative, the 3 to 5 days required for experts to make a list of relevant emergency goods to be shipped immediately may result in the deaths of a number of uprooted people. This decision, however, may have long-term beneficial effects.

Labeling refugees in order to satisfy donors is a fundamental error. The choice should be to direct the assistance from the international community to the impacted areas and to provide the aid required to care for the increased population irrespective of their status. The durable solution is to develop services and the economic potential of the hosting areas without trying to classify the entire population into categories. Putting a label on a refugee is a great disservice and it is likely to prevent his or her (temporary) settlement among the host population.

The uniqueness and abilities of women need to be recognized and addressed. Several relief agencies have adopted positive assistance and protection policies on uprooted women. The main problem is that these policies are often not being applied consistently and comprehensively.

In many situations, particularly in Africa, international assistance has reached less than half of the refugee population, those living in camps rather than those dispersed among the host population. The choice, made more for practical considerations than as a result of a well-thought policy, was often criticized (cf. *The Forgotten Refugees* by Robert Chambers). However, in the long run, it appears the dispersed refugees are better off than the refugee camp population which has become dependent, living at the mercy of international aid. It is possible that the mortality rate among the displaced refugees is higher than in-camp refugees, but this has not been established since it is easier to keep fairly accurate statistics on refugees living in camps than on refugees who live among the local population, often not registered as refugees.

Involving refugees in the assessment of their needs and the formulation of an assistance program is a must if the program is to be tailor made to the needs and reach its objective in the shortest time possible. Not promoting refugee participation in the programming cycle favors an open-ended care and maintenance program, several of which have lasted over ten years until a political solution brought an end to such a situation. These care and maintenance programs require a large number of personnel in national administrations (usually paid out of international funds) and in international agencies, and the staff is not motivated to promote sustainable solutions.

Psychological preparation, support and therapy before, during and after an assignment to an emergency situation where the staff is likely to be exposed to extreme hardship conditions, should be part of the normal staff regulations.

The decision to keep or withdraw the staff from an emergency operation due to the insecurity and threat for the lives of the relief workers is probably one of the most difficult ones to make for the head of an agency. In choosing to become a relief worker, the person is aware that such a profession entails risk. It follows that relief workers should expect to be among the last foreigners to be evacuated when the humanitarian mission can no longer be performed.

The last main dilemma faced by the head of a relief agency is to decide whether to call for armed guards or military forces to protect relief workers so they can fulfil their mission. The relations between humanitarian affairs, political affairs, peace making and peace keeping is a delicate one which has not yet found a proper solution. There is a tendency in some quarters to believe that problems can be resolved by force. We should strongly resist this tendency. Moreover, the use of military force for humanitarian goals should be decided by those in charge of humanitarian operations and only by them. Even when forces are used to support a humanitarian operation, the “chief commandant” should be the official responsible for humanitarian affairs.

*The use of military forces for humanitarian goals should be decided by those in charge of humanitarian operations and only by them.*

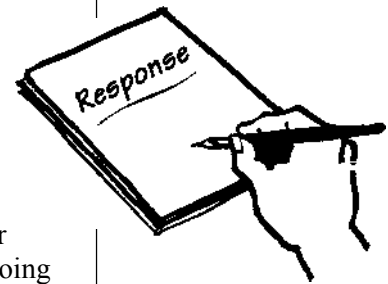
### Response by Arthur E. Dewey

Ken Wilson correctly notes that “...challenges for the relief officials and institutions are even more complex and decisions that constitute ethical dilemmas fall increasingly to them because of the extent of the policy uncertainties and the breath of the mandates.” In simpler terms, the junior field official needs to be ready to make the ethical call. He or she is not going to get much help from above.

Some of the most inspiring profiles in courage within the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees are based on junior and middle level officers making correct and courageous ethical calls, often in the absence of specific guidance from headquarters and sometimes in defiance of guidance from Geneva when the field officers’ reading of the local situation convinced them Geneva was wrong. These inspirational actions by junior officers consulting their moral compasses by far eclipsed the occasional lapses in morality and courage which also occurred in the field.

To be sure, it is dispiriting when leaders at the policy level fail to recognize and reward such behavior in the field. It is devastating when headquarters staff try to penalize a junior officer who has made an ethical call which conflicts with the interests or values of the headquarters bureaucrat. Peer sanctions were attempted, for example, when a courageous young UNHCR officer assisted Ethiopian Jews fleeing into Sudan in the early Eighties because it was not considered politically correct by some of the staff in UNHCR. Another more senior official was chastised for a rescue operation which facilitated the flight to safety of 80,000 Ugandan refugees in Southern Sudan back across the river into Uganda because the staff person involved did not have a visa.

Jacques Cuenod’s response also cites several specific cases to illustrate the moral dilemmas facing persons assisting and protecting refugees and the displaced. This is by far the most illuminating and effective way to articulate





*The personnel on the spot seem to have less and less guidance from their supervisors to help them cross check the moral compass.*

the complexities of these issues and the requirements for the highest qualities of courage, professionalism and moral fortitude in order to discharge adequately one's assistance and protection duties.

The dilemmas associated with protection and assistance of refugees and displaced, as the authors so rightly state, are arguably the most complex and difficult of all the ethical calls in the humanitarian field. In today's vastly more dangerous and complicated world, these dilemmas can only grow more intense. And the personnel on the spot seem to have less and less guidance from their supervisors to help them cross check the moral compass.

As long as assistance staff are willing to put everything on the line for ethical principles, there is hope for progress in adhering to higher standards of ethical norms in the ever growing field of disaster management. To the extent that the work of research projects such as this are embraced in the international humanitarian community, there is hope for better performance in assisting the victims of these disasters to achieve self-sufficiency and escape from their vicious cycle of despair.

**Q.** *What steps might agencies take to improve their response to the ethical dilemmas involved in assisting displaced and refugees?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q.** *Describe an experience you have had regarding ethical decisions made by staff which conflict with agency prerogatives. How might agencies and staff resolve these dilemmas?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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*SUGGESTED ANSWERS  
(from top question)*

Promoting inter-agency communication; providing human rights training; building trust with displaced and refugees; understanding the political environment; preparing staff psychologically to deal with ethical challenges.



### 3 TOPIC

## Disaster response and its relationship to on-going participatory development



Mozambican refugees in Myangombe camp, Zimbabwe working on a construction project.

### The dilemmas

If a disaster response does nothing to prevent future disasters and, in fact, leaves the victims it intended to help more vulnerable than they were before, can it be morally justified?

This is the basic ethical dilemma posed by the relationship of emergency disaster response to on-going economic and social development. How is it possible to continue to provide emergency relief assistance to the many people who suffer the effects of disasters when there is mounting and incontrovertible evidence that this assistance often undermines, rather than supports, their ability to achieve development? To what extent is the heroic act of disaster response undertaken as a one-time, dramatic gesture which is satisfying for the giver of assistance in its apparent measurable success (lives saved, hungry people fed), while the more dogged and less clear work of long-term poverty alleviation is avoided precisely because it is not so satisfying? To what extent does the disaster-response community have a moral responsibility to address the longer-term implications of its immediate, life-saving actions?

### TOPIC AUTHOR

**Mary Anderson**, president of Collaborative for Development Action, Inc., which provides technical assistance, training and education for social and economic development. Ms. Anderson has a Ph.D. in economics and has written extensively on disaster response and development; she co-authored the book, *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies at Times of Disaster*, with Peter J. Woodrow, published by Kumarian Press.

### RESPONDENTS

**Tony Beck**, principal investigator, Institute of Asian Research, University of British Columbia on a two-year study entitled "Natural and Social Resource Use by the Poor in West Bengal, India". Mr. Beck serves as a consultant to the Canadian International Development Agency and British Overseas Development Administration, including the Relief and Development Institute. With a Ph.D. in geography, he has published several articles and written *The Experience of Poverty: Fighting for Respect and Resources in Village India* (forthcoming, Intermediate Technology Press).

**Solomon Gidada**, Ambassador to The United Kingdom for the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, who worked for ten years as the Director of Rural Development for the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus in Ethiopia with responsibilities for relief and development programs. He has served on the international development committee of the Lutheran World Federation, worked with several NGOs in relief and development work and traveled extensively throughout the world for work related to international development.

*The disaster response can, itself, become a contributor to the causes of future disasters and the suffering that they entail.*

This fundamental dilemma of disaster response and its relationship to development arises from the dynamics of emergency assistance as it is traditionally conceived and offered. It has at least four different aspects.

First, many people believe that the urgency of disaster response requires rapid decision-making, amassing of significant resources and logistical efficiency which, in turn, necessitate top-down management by the people and agencies that are providing assistance. The dilemma arises because such actions negate the possibility of consultative and participatory processes which are essential for grassroots development. Traditionally, those who provide disaster assistance have felt that speed required for effective relief and the deliberations and planning required for effective development mean that relief assistance and development assistance are incompatible and cannot be combined. Thus, it is commonplace for people in both relief and development to speak of the stages of disaster response and to assume that development comes after relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

When this separation is maintained, however, experience shows that, especially among poor populations, a dependency syndrome gets established in the early days of relief assistance that is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to reverse or overcome. Thus the victims whom the aid was intended to help end up becoming dependent on it and its providers. The result is that their disaster proneness is actually increased and the disaster response community finds itself required to provide emergency assistance over indefinite time periods or repeatedly to the same groups.

The second aspect of the relief/development dilemma arises from the question of whether it is justifiable to save lives today when it is clear that the people who have been saved will survive only to face increasing impoverishment, growing political marginalization or escalating conflict (when the disaster is war). In situations where one cause of a disaster is the pressure put on limited resources by over-population, the saving of lives may actually increase the rate of impoverishment, marginalization or conflict. Thus the disaster response can, itself, become a contributor to the causes of future disasters and the suffering that they entail.

Third, often the very goods that are delivered as relief to the victims of disasters undermine the production and distribution systems which operated before the disaster. Thus, relief assistance can make it almost impossible for people to recover and rebuild their lives after a disaster. For example, it is widely recognized that the provision of food aid can undermine the incentives of farmers to replant because a surplus of free food lowers the price they can get in the market for their crops. Also recognized is the dependency that whole segments of societies (and their families) can develop on employment through the agencies that move into a disaster situation to provide relief. Again, the relief response can contribute to disruptions or distortions of economic processes that, in turn, prolong, rather than alleviate, suffering or contribute to, rather than prevent, future disasters.

Fourth, provision of disaster assistance has very often exacerbated existing social and political inequalities among peoples in the disaster area, leaving some people better off and others worse off. In particular, when there is little consultation with the recipients, disaster assistance has often changed the roles and relations of men and women, usually (but not always) disadvantaging women relative to men. In particular, households headed by

women (which frequently increase as a result of a disaster) may not have access to relief assistance unless special arrangements are made. In the pressure of responding to urgent massive needs, many disaster managers do not find (or make) time to address what they see as a sub-group problem. The result of this judgment has sometimes been a disproportionate rate of deaths among children of female headed households or of the women has led to their increased impoverishment and political marginalization over the long term.

In all disaster situations, people who are more powerful before the disaster will be able to use relief aid to increase their power relative to those who were weaker. What are the ethical implications of, even though inadvertently, serving some people more effectively than others through disaster responses, thus increasing the relative vulnerability of certain groups?

These four aspects highlight the core issue of this question: Is it ethical to respond to disasters in ways which do nothing to address the causes of such disasters and which, very often, actually increase the likelihood of future vulnerability and suffering on the part of at least some of those who were intended to benefit from aid?

**Q.** *Specify four aspects of traditional emergency disaster assistance which create ethical dilemmas.*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q.** *Based on your experience, is it ethical to respond to disasters without addressing the root causes of those disasters and seeking to reduce the vulnerability of those who are intended to be beneficiaries of the aid? What ethical reasoning informs your response?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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*There is a psychological resistance on the part of individuals engaged in disaster response to recognizing that they should assume responsibility for considering the long-term impacts of their efforts.*



## **Approaches to addressing these dilemmas**

It is not inevitable that disaster assistance should harm, rather than help, people. It is inevitable that it will continue to do so unless and until the disaster response community faces the long-term implications of both its conceptualization of the “disaster problem” and its methods of operating in response to disasters.

### *Conceptualization of disaster response*

There are two points to be made about the traditional conceptualization of disaster response that have contributed to the disaster/development dilemma(s) posed above.

1. First, there is a psychological resistance on the part of individuals engaged in disaster response to recognizing that they should assume responsibility for considering the long-term impacts of their efforts. They have been moved by compassion to work, often under extreme duress and danger, to alleviate the suffering they witness. They want to do good and they are willing to make personal sacrifices to do it. To be told the good they would do often produces damage later is distressing. We all want to find clear and unambiguous ways to express our humanity. Disaster response seemed to offer such an opportunity. It is difficult to give this up.

An aid worker just returned from Somalia in 1985 reported as follows: “You arrive and there are people dying right in front of you. You know you must do something to save them. Every night you are absolutely exhausted, but you know you’ve done good. Your efforts have saved the lives of children and adults who would not have survived without your food, your medicines, your help. It is really gratifying to be able to do this work.”

The evening news showed the arrival of trucks loaded with donated food at the Ethiopian feeding camp: As the soldiers unloaded the bags, a few grains fell from a torn corner of one bag and landed in the dust. An old woman came along and bent over and carefully began to pick up each of the lost grains. An aid worker came over to her. “What are you doing old lady?” She responded, “I am trying to save these grains of food.” “Oh no, don’t do that.” he responded. “Come sit down. Wait. We will feed you.”

Is it an act of mercy and respect to tell the woman to sit down and wait to be fed? Or does this reflect the aid worker’s need to control the chaotic situation, to “do” the good that is done, to “manage” the alleviation of hunger? How does it feel to be told to wait, to do nothing? It will be done for you. After that, how does one pick up and become independent again? Is it surprising that the woman becomes dependent on the aid worker as he assumes the responsibility for handing out her food?

2. Second, traditionally disasters have been conceived of as unpredictable and unpreventable. However, the human role is now recognized in contributing to disasters through such acts as the construction of housing on unstable lands; the depletion of forests that cause downstream flooding; or land-degradation that causes reduced agricultural productivity; or inter-group conflict that leads to food shortages, to name only a few. Acknowledging that human actions play a significant role is a first step toward assuming responsibility for mitigating the consequences of, and preventing, future disasters. On-going grassroots development is the most effective “disaster response” (i.e. preparedness, prevention, mitigation) strategy. It is critical that the essential linkage between disaster proneness, the provision of assistance through disaster response programs and long-term development be recognized as a first step in the necessary new conceptualization for addressing the disaster/development dilemma.

*Acknowledging that human actions play a significant role is a first step toward assuming responsibility for mitigating the consequences of, and preventing, future disasters.*



Along the southern coast of Bangladesh, community people and government officials are realizing that, though they cannot alter the annual pattern of cyclone hazards that hit their country, they can take actions to prevent these events from becoming massive disasters. The first action of the government has been to develop effective prediction and warning systems, and to undertake educational programs for the local people so that they understand and heed the cyclone warning signals when they are issued.

In addition, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry in charge of water resources, together with UNICEF and local NGOs, have found that they can quickly meet emergency needs for medical supplies and clean water by deploying staff and supplies from other parts of the country to reach all affected areas in a matter of a few days. Government and international donors are currently assessing the costs of building sufficient cyclone shelter to house everyone who remains in the stricken areas. Evidence from the past shows that people who were able to reach shelters have survived while the death and injury rates among those who remained outside shelters have been high.

Finally, and most important, scientists are now realizing that the destruction of stands of mangrove trees along the coastal regions has increased the likelihood that tidal surges will come ashore and do extensive damage. Attempts are now being made in Bangladesh, and in other countries where the pattern has been similar, to replant these “natural” disaster mitigation features which human beings have destroyed. Everyone realizes that many of the people who live in the high risk coastal areas of Bangladesh do so because they have no options. Land is scarce and population pressures coupled with poverty force poor and marginalized groups to live in areas which are subject to the damage of cyclones. One thrust of government development policy is to provide options to these people so that they do not have to occupy and depend on these vulnerable lands.

*ANSWER (from page 37)*

1. A focus on urgency which requires rapid decision-making
2. A focus on expediency and the concern for saving lives
3. Importation of resources and relief assistance
4. Exacerbation of existing inequities

**Q.** Referring to the Bangladesh case study, specify:

**A.** the disaster proneness of the community: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

long-term development efforts and needs of the community:

\_\_\_\_\_

the impacts for emergency disaster response: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q.** How does the Bangladesh government's disaster management plan and response overcome the ethical dilemmas of traditional emergency assistance?

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_

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***Disaster management operations***

There are also two ways in which the disaster-response community should alter its operations in order to address the disaster/development dilemma.

- 1. First, providers of disaster assistance must develop systems for incorporating the human, social and political aspects of their work rather than operating as if disaster responses are wholly (or even primarily) managerial and logistical endeavors.** The people and agencies involved in disaster response need to develop new decentralized and participatory management approaches that facilitate timely, efficient and accurate identification of real relief needs and efficient and equitable delivery of assistance. These approaches must involve victims, relying on their knowledge and competencies to set priorities and to make allocation decisions and arrangements. If such new approaches are developed, it is very likely

that both the efficiency and equity of disaster assistance will be improved in the short run. Even if, in some cases, involvement of victims in planning and implementing disaster responses delays a response, the results in the long run in terms of the reduced likelihood of long-term dependency-creation will be significant.

- 2. Second, systems of accountability should be developed that can be used to assess and monitor the longer-term impacts of disaster response programs.** To date, systems accountability emphasize the importance of tracking relief goods to ensure that they reach appropriate target groups and of financial accounting both concerns primarily are of the donor communities. Alternative systems that incorporate the perspectives of recipients, particularly those that monitor such things as tendencies toward increasing dependency or disruption of markets in ways that will have lasting negative incentive effects, must become as important in our evaluation of the effectiveness of relief as those that are focused on logistical efficiency.

Many bi-lateral donor nations provide a great deal of their emergency response funding through their nation's NGOs that work "on the ground" in countries struck by disasters. In one such situation, the agency which provides the conduit for government funds to the operational NGOs has established a "Relief and Reconstruction (R&R) Committee" to receive applications from the NGOs for the emergency programs they wish to have funded.

Time is always an issue. When an emergency strikes, the NGOs want funding rapidly in order to launch their relief programs. Nonetheless, this R&R Committee has established a procedure for fund applications which requires that the NGOs analyze and demonstrate the ways in which their immediate and urgent relief effort will affect the prospects for long-term development among the relief recipients. When evaluations are later conducted of these relief efforts, they examine in detail these influences on development as well as the more usual issues of fiscal responsibility and timely deliverance of relief supplies.

## **Closing**

The ethical dilemma posed by the relationship between disaster response and on-going development should not lead us to curtail our responses to the needs of disaster victims. A failure to respond to such suffering would pose its own serious moral challenge. Rather, the dilemma prompts us to find new ways to plan and conduct disaster responses so that they support rather than undermine on-going, basic development. In reality, the only permanent and, therefore, ethically legitimate disaster relief strategy is one which helps victims to achieve their own long-term development, including a reduction of their disaster vulnerability.

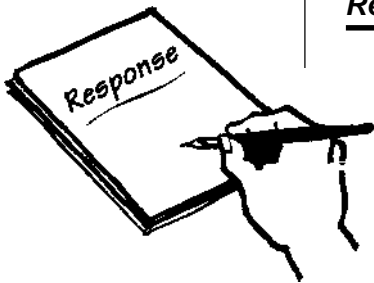
*The only permanent and, therefore, ethically legitimate disaster relief strategy is one which helps victims to achieve their own long-term development, including a reduction of their disaster vulnerability.*





**Q.** *What questions for accountability are suggested by the author?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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***Response by Tony Beck***

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Mary Anderson’s paper raises several important issues, particularly the effects that disaster intervention can have on local markets and the need for disaster relief officials to confront the long-term consequences of the programs they are running. There are, however, a number of points that require clarification or further thought.

1. The central ethical question that is posed by the paper is: “To what extent does the disaster-response community have a moral responsibility to address the longer-term implications of its immediate, life-saving actions?” The paper proceeds to assume that this moral responsibility exists. However, the question of responsibility is a complex one, and some disaster officials might question whether such moral responsibility exists. A case needs to be made as to why moral responsibility exists, after which a practical approach might be to give examples of situations where moral responsibility exists and where it does not. Also, the description of disaster response as a “heroic act—which is satisfying for the giver of assistance” may not appear as a realistic ethical characterization to many working in the disaster field!
2. The conceptual point that there is a continuum between disaster relief and longer-term development work, rather than an absolute break between the two, can be clarified. Much disaster relief work, for example the supply of housing or clean water, or the provision of relief food work, overlaps with development projects. Similarly, many of the failures of disaster responses it catalogues are also failures in longer-term development programs, for example the failure to really get local people involved in development. If this point is made more clearly, then there will be a greater understanding of the connections between relief and development, and subsequently a better sense of where moral responsibility of disaster response might lie.

3. In its penultimate section, the paper provides some prescriptions for the disaster response community to alter its operations. These prescriptions have been made before but are rarely acted on. It might be useful to consider the ethical (rather than practical) reasons why such prescriptions have been largely ignored to date.
4. The problem of “dependency syndrome” of affected populations may imply a negative view of the so-called “victims” of famine and their abilities. A positive conceptualization of the abilities of disaster affected populations is crucial if disaster officials are to rebuild their communities over the long-term, and therefore take part in long-term participatory development projects. Assuming that disaster affected populations are likely to become victims of dependency syndrome is not a positive conceptualization.
5. The author argues that disaster responses may lead to greater inequality. This raises a complex ethical question related to the connections between relief and development. If inequality among the affected population is likely to lead to future disasters, should the initial disaster response be designed to reduce inequality?

*Assuming that disaster affected populations are likely to become victims of dependency syndrome is not a positive conceptualization.*

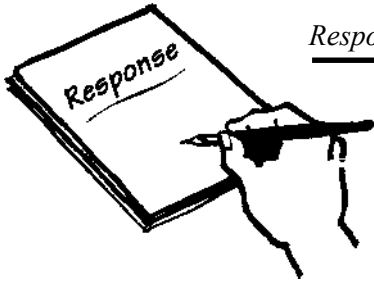
**Q.** *Do you think the disaster response community has a moral responsibility to address the long-term implications of its emergency efforts? Specify ethical reasons in your response.*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Q.** *What ethical reasons might justify a continued focus on traditional disaster management practices?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Response by Solomon Gideda*

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There are four primary issues raised by the author which require response: whether to help in a given situation; who should benefit and agency accountability for assistance; questions of cause, responsibility, prevention and early warning; and concerns for dependency creation.

First of all, if there is a disaster, people in the disaster area *must* be helped. Representatives from humanitarian organizations have to find the means to fulfill agency obligations and respond to human suffering. The division of labor among organizations should be evaluated rather than whether or not assistance should be given. One organization may be more experienced in transportation, another may be more expert in the area of health care. Again, others may be more experienced in providing water. The bottom line is, there is a disaster in an area and the international community must get together and devise a means of tackling the problem.

At this stage of a united effort, the second ethical question arises: "Who should be the beneficiaries?" How do we isolate the needy from those who take advantage of the situation to fill their own pockets? Organizations often use the existing disaster situation to build up their own images rather than focusing on the problem. Funds are often used for purposes other than those for which they were secured, including diversion to administration and the building of organizational structures. Responding to the needs of the suffering population must remain the primary focus.

Thirdly, what is the nature of the problem? Was it a natural disaster or a human creation? Was the disaster avoidable? Was enough warning and information given prior to the disaster? Did the government of the country behave in a responsible manner or was the government itself the cause of the worsening situation? What about the world community? Are those countries that have the means to help, willing to help or are they bound by their political ideology, responding only after the death of thousands of people? The root causes of disasters need to be addressed in order to prevent disasters from occurring and early warning indicators must be taken seriously in order to avert or minimize disaster impacts. A very high government official of a donor country once said "we just wanted to teach your President a lesson." When disaster strikes it does not strike the President of a nation or their family, the disaster strikes the common people.

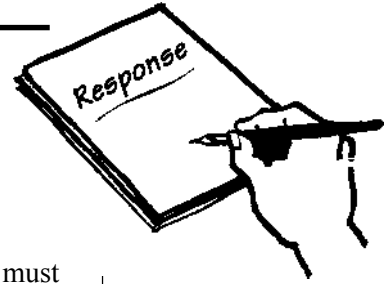
The fourth problem is the possible creation of dependency. Dependency is not created by receivers, it is created by donors and relief workers. If help is given, it should be given together with the means for people to overcome their problems in the future. Too often agencies say that their responsibility is to "feed them." What happens after people have been fed and made strong? Should they be abandoned so that they have to revert to the same situation and the agencies have to be requested to come back to feed them again and again and again? It would be even more appropriate and meaningful if relief was combined with long range development, call it integrated rural or urban development. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the community and the NGOs to arrive at a better format to coordinate their combined efforts.

*Dependency is not  
created by receivers,  
it is created by donors  
and relief workers.*

*Response by Arthur E. Dewey*

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This essay rightly makes the point that response to human need must be a continuum-not a series of free-standing preparedness, response, relief, rehabilitation and development stages. The following qualities of this continuum need to be added, or re-emphasized:



- The relief-development continuum is not simply back-loaded. It must be seen as a circle, with an important front-loaded responsibility to use preventive development to the maximum to prevent and mitigate complex disasters.
- Analysis and correction is required with respect to the current compartmentalization of functions and funding for relief and development in the United Nations and within donor states. The present compartmentalization is unethical to the extent that it virtually decrees a patchwork approach to human need, delaying the right to survival, to self-reliance and to self-respect.
- There is an increase in rhetoric concerning the continuum, but still no sense of urgency among serious UN member states to correct this immoral and unethical behavior.
- Responsibility must be assessed for lack of progress in achieving a workable continuum. NGOs, when playing their important advocacy roles, have tended to concentrate elsewhere, perhaps because they are still not convinced this is an ethical issue. The media has too long evaded its prophetic responsibilities in publicizing this unconscionable lack of a continuum in the international system.
- Ethical behavior and the commitments to achieve it must begin at home. For example, the US government still needs a comprehensive structure and doctrine for coordinating its own resources to be effective in any kind of prevention-relief-development continuum. This situation impedes efforts at reform by the UN.

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*ANSWER (from page 42)*

For donors:

- have resource allocations been tracked?
- have appropriate groups received assistance?
- do financial records support operational reports?

For disaster survivors:

- does assistance increase or decrease dependency?
- are local markets disrupted and economies destabilized?
- is community inequality exacerbated or diminished?





## 4 TOPIC

### Disaster fundraising, appeals and the utilization of funding resources



Mozambican refugees in Tongogara camp, Zimbabwe.

#### Funding sources for disaster relief

The response needed in disaster situations is a significant intervention to provide adequate safety for human lives and safeguards for livestock, shelter and other essential property. This is in itself a complex task that requires substantial financial resources. Since these resources are rarely available automatically and immediately, fund-raising for disaster relief and disaster prevention represents a complex task that requires its own type of skill and poses its own ethical dilemmas.

The resources mobilized in major disasters generally originate from four sources:

1. the local population in the host country or receiving community
2. the government in the affected country
3. donor governments elsewhere in the world
4. the population at large in the donor countries

The international debate on disaster relief tends to focus primarily on the two last sources, thereby overlooking the fact that the host and affected communities and countries often pay the highest price in disasters and relief efforts. The ethical dilemmas which arise as different funding sources are or are not recognized, considered and utilized are discussed here in relation to the funding source.

#### TOPIC AUTHOR

**Jörgen Lissner**, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Lithuania, has worked for the UN Development Programme since 1982 in Ethiopia, Liberia, New York and Nepal. Mr. Lissner has also worked with European and International NGOs in development education, project identification and preparation, fund-raising and disaster relief activities. He is the author of *The Politics of Altruism*, (1977).

#### RESPONDENTS

**Jerry Aaker** has worked with relief and disaster programs since 1966. He is currently Director of Training for Heifer Project International. As former director of the Andean Regional office of Lutheran World Relief, he has travelled extensively in Latin America and the Caribbean, visiting dozens of projects carried out by various agencies. Jerry Aaker has witnessed life in the context of disaster, having worked in war-torn Vietnam, the urban slums of Peru and earthquake devastated Nicaragua. Mr. Aaker is author of the book, *Partners with the Poor: An Emerging Approach to Relief and Development*.

**Joel Charney**, Overseas Director for Oxfam America, a non-profit relief and development agency based in Boston. Mr. Charney has worked for Oxfam America since 1980 when he served in Cambodia during the famine emergency. He has written extensively on Cambodia and emergency response, including *Obstacles to Recovery in Vietnam and Kampuchea*, "Coping with Crisis: Oxfam America's Disaster Responses" in a 1993 volume published by Kumarian Press, *The Tragedy of Famine: Recent Experience, Lessons Learned*.

*It does not make sense, nor is it politically acceptable, to help the survivors without extending some form of assistance to the surrounding population.*

### **1. The local population in the host country or receiving community**

Those who have observed first hand a natural or a human made disaster know what a devastating price it exacts from the local community. While it will come as no surprise to most observers that those directly affected often lose everything they own, it is less frequently recognized that the local population in neighboring areas often pay a very high price as well. First, they provide food and shelter to the victims for weeks or months (in some cases even years). Subsequently, the local economy may be seriously disrupted because the purchasing power of neighbors (and thus regional trade) is often destroyed, or at least significantly reduced, overnight. Such direct costs must be factored in for any medium-to-long-term disaster mitigation strategy to be adequate or complete.

While disaster aid from the outside may be significant at the time of the disaster itself, the world's attention is soon diverted elsewhere. The local community is forced again to fend for itself with its own limited-resources. In many situations, disaster relief agencies therefore find themselves faced with the dilemma that the local population surrounding the survivors is almost as exposed and deprived as the immediately affected population. It does not make sense, nor is it politically acceptable, to help the survivors without extending some form of assistance to the surrounding population. This is typically the case with the influx of refugees into areas with a very poor rural population (e.g., the Bhutanese refugees in southeastern Nepal or the Afghan refugees in certain parts of Pakistan and Iran) or when earthquakes occur in areas of endemic poverty.

### **2. The government in the affected country**

The government of a country affected by a serious disaster typically mobilizes significant amounts of its own funds to relieve the suffering of its own people. This is obviously how it should be. But, unfortunately, there is no shortage of examples in modern history where governments have shown neglect of human suffering among their own people.



In some cases, the government in an affected country considers the affected population to be "politically unimportant" or of marginal significance to the economy of the country. This was clearly the calculation of Emperor Haile Selassie when the Ethiopian highlands were hit by pervasive droughts in 1973-1974. In other cases, the government does not want to divert funds from what it considers concerns of a higher priority, be it large infrastructure projects or military hardware. In either case, the ready availability of foreign aid for the survivors of disaster makes it possible for such a government to pursue a benign neglect policy and to avoid reassessing and revising its priorities.

Cases of malignant neglect are found particularly when the affected population is seen to be in direct opposition to those who control the reins of government. In such situations—exemplified in Southern Sudan or in the Kurdish provinces of northern Iraq—disaster relief becomes a central element of contention, if not an outright weapon of war.

### 3. Donor governments elsewhere

The Paris-based “Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development” (OECD) includes virtually all the traditional donors of disaster relief and development assistance. Although they have a clearly expressed preference for development assistance of a long-term nature, they also have certain funds earmarked every year for disaster relief.

In a world of limited resources and seemingly unlimited needs, the allocation of donor government resources to specific disaster situations is inevitably based on a set of explicit or implicit criteria. In an ideal world, the volume of aid being provided in any given situation should be in direct proportion to the magnitude of the problem. However, it is well known that factors such as proximity and cultural affinity play an important role as well. For obvious reasons, the governments of Australia and New Zealand involve themselves more readily in disaster relief in the Pacific than in the Caribbean, just as the donor governments in North America are more likely than those in Europe to take a keen interest in disasters in Latin America.

Underlying this problem is the fact that, although governments in the donor nations do not have to raise funds for each and every disaster, they cannot ignore the general views of their taxpayers. Every government has to strike a balance between what humanitarian impartiality requires and what is politically acceptable to its taxpaying constituencies. This fact inevitably leads to compromises. The needs of the disaster survivors are not the sole factor determining what is being done—as exemplified by the dispatch with great fanfare from the capital of the donor nation, large aircraft with relief supplies, some of which were readily available (and at lesser cost) in the recipient country itself or in one of its neighboring countries.

### 4. The general population in the donor countries

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in disaster relief can rarely afford to have large sums of money earmarked for future interventions. In most cases, they get involved immediately when a new disaster occurs using their reserve funds and then initiate specific fund-raising efforts to sustain and expand their involvement.

The main focus of such fund-raising efforts is normally on the plight of the disaster-stricken people. However, as information on any problems in remote parts of the world is often only part of a multitude of other information usually about matters more close by, any fund-raising NGO is under considerable pressure to dramatize its message in order to receive attention. Experience shows that “the starving child image” (which includes variations on the theme, such as despairing fathers and grieving mothers) is one of the most potent tools at the disposal of fund-raisers.

Many will argue that the starving child image is a necessity to ensure that sufficient funds will be mobilized, and the disaster relief agencies will remain in business. The public display of an African child with a bloated stomach in advertisements is indecent because it exposes something in human life that is deeply personal: suffering. What many consider ethically unacceptable is not that certain segments of reality are shown for what they are, but that repeated dissemination through the mass media of the starving child image (almost invariably emanating from the Third World) has a problematic long-term effect on the international psyche. It is not conducive to an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity.

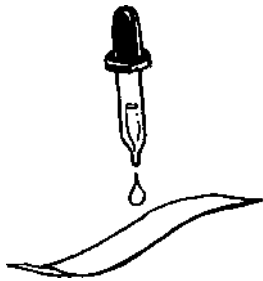
*Every government has to strike a balance between what humanitarian impartiality requires and what is politically acceptable to its taxpaying constituencies.*

*The public display of an African child with a bloated stomach in advertisements is indecent because it exposes something in human life that is deeply personal: suffering.*



**Q.** *What are the four ethical fund-raising and resource utilization issues identified by the author and applied to the four populations involved in emergency disaster management?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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### **An ethical litmus test for disaster relief**

The world today is simply too complex and too diverse for prescriptive ethics. What serious ethics can and must do is to ***define the questions*** and ***identify the pitfalls*** known to exist in every field of human endeavor. On the basis of the analysis above, an ethical litmus test for fund-raising in support of disaster relief might look as follows:

1. Are we giving due recognition in our operational strategy and in our public pronouncements to the role and contribution of the affected population and its neighbors?
2. Have the resources of the affected local community and of the affected country at large been adequately recognized, factored in and drawn upon in our operational strategy and in our fund-raising efforts?
3. Have we constructively solved, or at least avoided, what is at times referred to as the “luxury island” problem whereby the victims of a particular disaster end up being substantially better off economically and with respect to social services than the local population surrounding them?
4. Does our intervention play a genuinely supportive role vis-à-vis the recipient government’s own disaster relief efforts, or does it directly facilitate or indirectly condone the recipient government’s neglect (be it benign or malignant in nature) of the plight of its disaster-stricken citizens?
5. Does our assistance for disaster relief in a given situation have a built-in long-term perspective, promoting disaster prevention and disaster preparedness, so that the recipient country will be better equipped to solve its own problems the next time disaster strikes?
6. Are the needs of the disaster victims the sole or the primary factor determining what we intend to do in a given situation? If other considerations are at work, are they justifiable as a means of maintaining public interest in the donor country and preventing future “compassion fatigue?” Are there other legitimate long-term reasons informing the plan for humanitarian assistance?

7. Do our fund-raising efforts project a true picture of the situation in the disaster-stricken country? Do they convey respect for the dignity of the survivors? Have we carefully considered the effect of the images of reality we project on the psyche and inter-cultural attitudes in the constituencies from which we hope to raise funds?

There may have been a time, some decades ago, when disaster relief was seen as a simple question of getting as much money as possible as fast as possible. Clearly, a rapid response is still essential, but we have learned through the last few decades that there are no “quick fix” solutions in disaster prevention and mitigation, even if it has been possible to achieve spectacular operational results with the help of modern technology, particularly in the fields of communications, transport and logistics.

It follows that hard-sell fund-raising aimed at income maximization for the disaster relief agencies is no longer acceptable as an overriding objective in disaster relief. Money is obviously necessary, but it is a very blunt instrument which can only be used responsibly in the context of carefully calibrated long-term policies and considerable inter-cultural sensitivity.

**Q.** *How does competition for funds pose ethical problems? From your experience, what were the major ethical dilemmas faced when you or your organization applied for funding?*

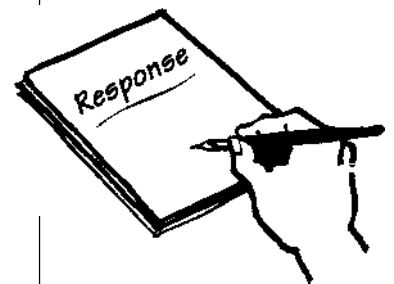
**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Response by Jerry Aaker**

Disaster fund-raising by private agencies often divides the world into two spheres, “we and they.” Those to whom an appeal for donations is made must choose which of the many agencies seem to have the best track record and the most integrity. The international community has choices, to give or not to give, and to whom to give; but “they” are victims of circumstances. They are often, at least temporarily, left without many choices.

Appeals aim to touch the compassionate side of people. The danger, and certainly a serious ethical issue, is in not recognizing the importance and need for empowerment of the survivors of disasters as well. Many times these people are already vulnerable and poor. The problems of paternalism

*Hard-sell fund-raising aimed at income maximization for the disaster relief agencies is no longer acceptable as an overriding objective in disaster relief.*

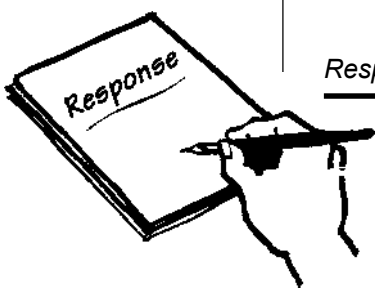


*Appeals, with images of helpless victims, most certainly need to focus on the positive giving response.*

and indifference to the poor and disaster victims in both donor countries as well as in segments of the population in affected countries are real. More frequently, however, we note the heart warming outpouring of good will in the charitable response.

Appeals, with images of helpless victims, most certainly need to focus on the positive giving response. However, there must also be ways to enhance our understanding of the response and internal strengths of the survivors of disasters. We need to give attention to the design of a phased response from relief, to reconstruction, to development over time, working with local people and institutions from the start. An ethical litmus test may be helpful for relief professionals, on both the fundraising and programmatic sides. These are additional questions to be asked.

1. Will there be any possible negative consequences of our relief response on local people and communities? For example, uncoordinated and spontaneous contributions of too much food had the effect of depressing local prices of crops for campesinos after a major earthquake in Guatemala. Crops were still in the fields, ready to harvest, and were not destroyed by the quake.
2. What is the effect of the infusion of massive relief, either in money or materials, on local organizations in the affected country? For example, local leaders who set up a new organization, CEPAD, after the major earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua decided very early to switch from a relief to a community development approach, leading eventually to a long-term, locally managed development program.
3. Are credible persons on the ground in the disaster area making needs assessments and interpreting locally determined needs? Too frequently in the past people of good will have sent everything and anything collected. Coordination and appropriateness are mandatory.
4. Is attention given to the psychological effects of disasters on people, especially children? Whenever possible, the best human resources to confront these needs are found locally among volunteers, professionals, doctors, pastors, elders and respected leaders in the community.



*Response by Joel R. Charny*

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The fundamental irony in responding to disasters is that while the affected community may be devastated, it is the only long-term source of resources for its own recovery. Humanitarian agencies have for too long responded by transferring immense amounts of assistance to the affected population, using resources gained from fund-raising appeals which play on the loss and helplessness of the survivors, the **victims**. More effective disaster assistance builds from an inventory of the needs and capacities of the affected population and responds to the needs in ways which build capacity.

The underlying philosophy of Oxfam America's long-standing disaster response policy is very much in keeping with the principles of the "ethical litmus test" contained in the essay. This policy, developed after the Cambodia relief effort in 1979, emphasizes the importance of reconstruction

and development work even within a disaster response. In fact, large-scale disasters, to the extent that they shake the traditional structures and norms, actually provide an opportunity for oppressed and marginalized communities to work for fundamental change. For this reason the policy supports indigenous institutions, the enhancement of local capacity, and education and advocacy regarding the basic causes of the particular disaster and the reasons why the poor and vulnerable suffer disproportionately.

A number of additional issues are highlighted in regard to the ethics of fund raising mentioned in the essay:

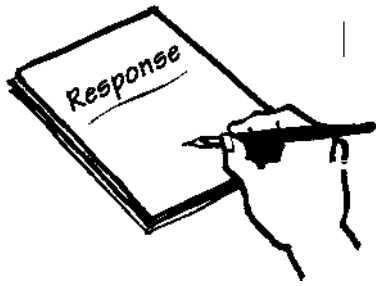
1. With the general public's capacity to receive and analyze information completely saturated, there is a tendency in the relief community to exaggerate the level of suffering involved in overseas disasters. Dire predictions are made (Cambodia: 3 million dead by Christmas; Somalia: the very survival of the Somali people is at stake), which turn out not to be true, precisely because the recovery and self-help capacity of the disaster victims has been grossly underestimated. Unfortunately, the net effect of these statements is to dull the impact of accurate assessments of future disasters. Even accurate assessments become easier to ignore or dismiss as another example of "crying wolf" to get attention.
2. A fundamental problem in disaster response is not lack of funds, but how funds are spent. A major ethical issue in disaster response is that millions of dollars are spent on salaries, per diems, transportation, and other support costs for the expatriate disaster relief experts. This money is spent back in the industrialized world or in the country which serves as the logistical base for the relief effort (Thailand for Cambodia, or Kenya for Somalia). Far more disaster response spending should be done by contracting services from the affected communities themselves, placing resources directly into the hands of the community whenever possible, and allowing the community to make decisions as to priorities for spending.
3. Many relief workers lack even the most rudimentary knowledge of the languages, cultures, and politics of the countries they are working in; they are profoundly outsiders, prescribing solutions precisely when the devastated population is most vulnerable. Too many relief workers ignore the ethical problem posed by the power they can wield through relief assistance.
4. The issue of "starving babies" is not that the images are indecent, but rather that the image portrays utter helplessness. No community is utterly helpless, even in times of war and famine. Repeated use of these images has dulled the public to real suffering, while encouraging the public to view people as unable to solve their own problems. The dignity and capacity of the affected people must be conveyed, along with real analysis as to causes of the disaster. Only with understanding created through analysis of root causes will the public begin to understand and support long-term solutions to the problems which create large-scale disasters.

*A fundamental problem in disaster response is not lack of funds, but how funds are spent.*

*Repeated use of these images has dulled the public to real suffering, while encouraging the public to view people as unable to solve their own problems.*

*ANSWER (from page 50)*

1. Emergency disaster assistance must fairly respond to both immediately and secondarily affected populations.
2. Priority responsibility should target population needs.
3. Humanitarian assistance should be needs-driven, not resource driven.
4. Fund-raising appeals should present more complex and accurate disaster information.



*Contributions driven by resource convenience or availability, over objective need, must be seen for what they are—both national embarrassments and immoral responses.*



### *Response by Arthur E. Dewey*

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This section touches on a central ethical concern, yet the result is more puzzling than clarifying. The real issues with which practitioners have had to wrestle far too often include:

- Neglect of, or short-changing of, prevention as the ultimate immorality of a fund-raising strategy. It must always be the centerpiece, the pillar, of such a strategy.
- When prevention and deterrence fail to avert complex emergencies, the only moral response is a timely, rapid and effective intervention with assistance effort. The failure to do this with respect to the former Yugoslavia may well represent yet another extreme moral and ethical breakdown of this century.
- Humanitarian assistance must be needs-driven, not resource-driven. The US and Western European response to needs in the Newly Independent States in 1992-1993 represents a classic violation of this principle. Contributions driven by resource convenience or availability, over objective need, must be seen for what they are—both national embarrassments and immoral responses.
- Needs assessments must be independent, inter-disciplinary, and professionally expert. Resource applications which are inconsistent with these objective findings must claim a higher moral—not political-rationale, or be condemned as unethical.

The classic immorality in reporting had to do with UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson's inability to fulfill his promise to the British people that following the Nigerian Civil War, all possible aid would be rushed to the civilian victims. When the Nigerian Government turned back Wilson's air relief armada, Wilson felt he then had to demonstrate that the aid was not needed after all. So, he instructed an otherwise honest and respected emissary to go to Nigeria and report back to parliament and the people that the post-war relief needs were being adequately handled. With great personal anguish, the emissary followed instructions. His actions potentially condemned masses of Eastern Nigerians to prolonged and unnecessary suffering, but saved Harold Wilson's government.

- Relief agencies have too often been guilty of misleading advertising to raise funds. The indecency of displaying a child's bloated belly often misrepresents the general state of health and needs of the beneficiaries.
- Actions of some very few NGOs, like that cited above, are an exception to the serious, honest majority, and can put the entire resource mobilization effort in jeopardy. Quick action is essential to identify and stop such practices before the damage is irreparable. Unfortunately, NGOs are not very good at policing each other on this score. Charitable "better business" groups have similarly failed to discharge their responsibilities in this area. Too often, it has fallen to responsible persons in government to facilitate corrective action. Such a source, however, tends to raise eyebrows.

***Q.** What additional questions of your own should be added to the “Ethical Litmus Test” as mentioned by author Lissner and further developed by the reviewers?*

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***Q.** Use the test on a situation from your own experience. Which of the questions poses the greatest ethical dilemma?*

***A.*** \_\_\_\_\_  
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## 5 TOPIC

### Disaster declaration and response



#### Introduction

In the complexity of disaster situations, international disaster and emergency managers have many difficult ethical decisions to make which affect millions of lives each year. Economics, power, politics, racism, sexism, and classism are intricately interwoven in causes of disasters as well as in decision-making processes that declare certain emergencies as disasters while others go unrecognized and without support from international response networks.

Vulnerable people worldwide and particularly those in developing countries are affected disproportionately by most disasters. The resources available are not keeping up with emergency response needs. Disaster managers have the responsibility to strive for the purest ethical standards for asserting the rights of individuals and communities to receive assistance and to utilize their own resources in equitably planning and implementing humanitarian assistance. In this context, disaster and emergency decision-makers must turn vision into reality with the highest degree of personal and institutional integrity.

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#### TOPIC AUTHOR

**Kenlynn Schroeder** has been Director of National and International Disaster Response for Church World Service (CWS) and has worked in disaster response since 1988. Previously, she worked for 12 years in refugee settlement and first asylum projects. She has travelled extensively throughout the world, in part to conduct disaster assessments as director of the international disaster response program of CWS.

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#### RESPONDENTS

**Larry Minear** is co-director of the Humanitarian and War Project, a joint undertaking of the Refugee Policy Group in Washington, and Brown University's Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies. He has worked on development issues since 1972. From 1975-90 he directed two NGO offices on development policy in Washington DC seeking to influence US public policy as it affects the poor in developing countries. Books and articles include: *Humanitarian Action in Times of War* (with T.G. Weiss, '93), *Humanitarianism Under Siege: A Critical Review of Operation Lifeline Sudan* ('91), "Do International Ethics Matter? Humanitarian Politics in the Sudan," *Ethics and International Affairs*, (v.5, '91).

**Bruce Nichols**, former director of education and studies at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, New York, served as editor of *Ethics and International Affairs*. An article on peacemaking between the Sandinista government and Miskito Indians in Nicaragua is in *Religion: The Missing Element of Diplomacy* (Oxford, '94). Other books: *The Uneasy Alliance: Religion, Refugee Work and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford, '88) and *The Moral Nation: Humanitarianism and U.S. Foreign Policy Today* (Notre Dame, '90).



## Some ethical issues and exploration of responses

Seven major ethical issues are discussed here with regard to disaster declaration and response.

### 1. Disaster managers need to achieve balance in disaster response—recognizing the local capacities while also recognizing the need.

The international community has a moral duty to assist when a disaster causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude that the needs of individuals and families, community, region, or country are beyond the capabilities of the region and of the national government. If needed resources are available in the region, however, it is not appropriate to import them. Cash infused into the local area to purchase resources stimulates the economy. This in turn helps integrate relief and recovery into long-term development and economic sustainability.

For disaster response efforts to be most effective, participation from all levels of society must be involved in the pre-disaster planning. Awareness of the racial and socio-economic status of a given community is critical in planning. Individuals and communities must be encouraged to assert their rights to both receive and give assistance. “Traditional” disaster response must be redefined to include issues of social justice so as to assist with a dignified emotional and physical recovery.

### 2. A second ethical issue in disaster response involves identifying the vulnerabilities, needs and abilities of marginalized populations.

A crisis or an emergency event must affect vulnerable people to be a disaster. Levels of vulnerability are determined by capacities to resist disaster emotionally and physically, as well as to rebuild family and community after disaster strikes.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies defines vulnerability as “...those at greatest risk from situations that threaten their survival or their capacity to live with a minimum of economic and social security and human dignity.” Those already least able to cope are usually even further marginalized. Women, children, minorities, refugees, and others are doubly or even triply vulnerable.

Certain ethnic or cultural traditions tend to keep some disaster survivors out of the formal aid network. Disenfranchised groups may be routinely denied access to vital information and resources that others take for granted. The policies and standards that guide organizations must be re-examined to eliminate social inequities in aid access including the exclusion of minorities, women and the poor. Institutional neglect and resistance to providing information is likely to be greater for groups such as women and minorities who have low income and poor housing, education and health.

### 3. A third ethical issue related to power indecision-making. Who has the right to determine acceptable levels of risk and vulnerability as well as whether and at what level humanitarian assistance is provided? Many international disaster relief organizations fail to recognize that local people know what they need and that they are the first to respond to an

*Policies and standards that guide organizations must be re-examined to eliminate social inequities in aid access including the exclusion of minorities, women and the poor.*

emergency. The mandate of assistance organizations should be to supplement the efforts of those affected and their available local and regional resources. International assistance should be sought only when regional and national resources are likely to be exhausted.

When individuals and communities are involved in assessing risk and vulnerability, they can collaborate in prevention, mitigation, and preparedness activities in cooperation with their government and other organizations. This has proven helpful with planning and resource management. Empowerment is the key to transforming the widening gap between needs and resources to sustainable development. When people are empowered to fully participate in planning and decision-making:

- there is ownership in the plan and initiative to seek out their own cultural resources
- assistance may arrive from nearby through an expedient, culturally acceptable, and usually less expensive process
- there is potentially less unmet need, and therefore less need for national and international assistance

**4. A fourth issue involves national sovereignty versus individuals' human rights.** National governments reserve the sole right to issue an international appeal through the U.N. A problem arises when governments give priority to their political considerations over the needs of the people. All people within national borders, including displaced people and refugees, have the right to decent, humane treatment, as well as to protection and assistance when needed. When governments blatantly violate human rights, the international community has a moral duty to intervene.

An aware, knowledgeable, self-sufficient population that participates in government structures is able to determine its own acceptable levels of risk, vulnerability, and need for assistance. When the affected population is not aware of risk and vulnerability nor sufficiently empowered to prevent or mitigate disaster, it is unlikely to have a say in disaster response and reconstruction needs.

**5. Of fundamental humanitarian concern is the safeguarding of human rights and the protection and welfare of the individual.** In the area of human rights, it is not sufficient to be a neutral intermediary. Disasters have their greatest impact on those least likely to claim their human rights. Because vulnerable populations are more burdened in recovery, decision-makers must actively advocate for the effective implementation of human rights for all. This advocacy is key to disaster relief and rehabilitation. Without these safeguards, disaster survivors cannot recover either emotionally or physically.

The usually hidden pattern of discrimination and violence against women is brought into sharp focus in disaster situations. Frequently, personnel from national and international organizations hastily interact with local and regional traditional people, assuming that the leaders who emerge first represent and serve the entire population.

*When governments blatantly violate human rights, the international community has a moral duty to intervene.*

*The right of an individual to receive equitable disaster relief and recovery aid that is culturally and gender-appropriate should be an inalienable right and not subject to negotiation.*

International disaster and emergency management personnel have a responsibility to become aware of, include and help others recognize the contributions, human rights and special needs of women.

All women, men and children have the right to be free from violence including: verbal and physical assault, rape, female infanticide, genital mutilation, and sex tourism as well as discrimination in health care, employment, social, economic, and political opportunities. While the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights is understood to include women, violence and the abuse of women have been minimized or even dismissed as common practice. Men who perpetuate patterns of violence against women sometimes claim that these patterns should not be subject to public or international jurisdiction.

The right of an individual to receive equitable disaster relief and recovery aid that is culturally and gender-appropriate should be an inalienable right and not subject to negotiation. If there is a duty to bring relief aid to disaster survivors, then that duty must include non-discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, class, and political affiliation.

- 6. A sixth ethical issue facing the international disaster management community involves the utilization of military force provided by another government.** The military brings logistics, skills and resources that may meet immediate needs. The military, however, directly represents the foreign policy of its government and is specifically trained to perform a confrontational role. Development issues of the local people and region must be considered. It may be more culturally appropriate and cost-effective to stimulate the local and regional economy by contracting with local civilian entities rather than paying for military or other international services from abroad. Culturally appropriate responses bolster the survivors' will to recover. Cost-effective responses leave more resources to meet other needs. Well-planned stimulation of the local and regional economy fosters long-term sustainable development.

The U.N. Security Council took a historical decision in December 1992 to allow the use of all necessary means to halt famine and anarchy and to establish a safe environment for humanitarian relief operations. It is important to establish safe corridors for transport, security, and distribution of relief aid, including protection of relief personnel and supplies.

- 7. Disaster managers face a seventh issue when donor nations and nations impacted by disaster have conflicting standards of justice and national public policy.** Whose values count? How are differences negotiated? Many nations contend that Western standards of justice and fairness do not necessarily apply to them. In some cases, these countries accuse donor countries of using their standards as an excuse not to give aid. When disaster strikes, these countries will want assurances that industrialized countries will not withhold aid contingent on a "democratic" system, human rights records, or "prudent" economic policies set by Western and Northern standards. The perspectives of diverse opinions must be considered when working to resolve these issues.

**Q.** *When do you think a crisis ought to be recognized as a disaster?  
 Who should be involved in deciding if a crisis is a disaster?  
 What kind of responses should be mobilized and by whom?*

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**Some goals and priorities for disaster response**

*Focus on prevention, mitigation and preparedness*

Disaster and emergencies, many of which are complicated and multi-faceted, call for a close look at root causes with the focus on prevention. New preventive measures must be sought by all people and organizations. Emphasis must be on peace-making and weapons reduction to prevent initial conflicts. Prevention of human-caused, technological and environmental disasters must be given the highest priority at local, national and international levels.

Disaster preparedness and response involves a matrix of evolving education and awareness building, resource planning and sharing, and communication at all levels: from village councils to regional and national governments, and to international coordinating bodies. More sophisticated diplomatic and political skills are needed at all levels. The effectiveness of the response depends on the level of mitigation and preparedness, involving representatives of all people, from the village to the national level.

For disasters that cannot be prevented, mitigation and preparedness must be the highest priority. When catastrophe occurs, effective cultural and gender-appropriate responses must be carried out. These responses must be fully integrated into sustainable development.

*New preventive  
 measures must be  
 sought by all people  
 and organizations.*

*Improved criteria for organizational funding  
 and accountability*

To receive funding, organizations should focus on the above priorities and assist those most in need: those vulnerable before the disaster occurred, such as the children, women, elderly, developmentally disabled, physically challenged, and others with special needs.



Priority funding for disaster response should go to groups with a high priority on social justice that work with and emerge from vulnerable grass-roots communities. Program priorities should include awareness-building and prevention of human-caused disasters, including peace-making, low-cost disaster mitigation measures, leadership training and exchange, and communication linkages that cut across geographic, class, and political boundaries. All programs must be planned integrally within long-term sustainable development systems.

Each organization's accountability is of vital importance. Many times, however, the groups that are well organized and have a "track record" of public relations receive the lion's share of funding in disaster situations. Their commitment to relate culturally or geographically to those most in need is essential to consider. International organizations have special responsibilities to upon the highest ethical standards in their roles as enablers, coordinators and facilitators to meet human need.

**Q.** *Describe a disaster situation in which you were involved (or which you know about) and list the local resources, knowledge and skills that were available and utilized versus those that were imported. Can you identify ethical strengths or violations related to utilization of resources in your example?*

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**Q.** *Based on your experience, give an example of inequitable power relations and identify the ethical issues created by such inequity.*

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**Q.** Read the following excerpt from *Disasters and Development* by Fred Cuny (p.97) and identify the ethical issues involved.



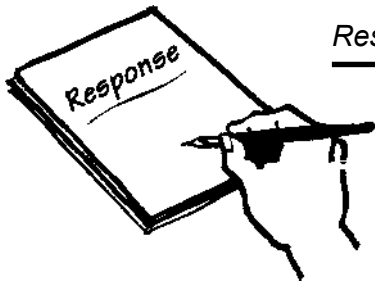
“No longer are just food, clothing and blankets provided to disaster victims; often an entire range of goods that would make a department store owner envious are shipped to the scene. When the distribution system is set up, it is almost always controlled by the relief agency acting through its representatives in the community.

When disaster strikes a community, the economic systems of the community are also affected. Physical facilities may be destroyed or damaged, and the distribution of goods and services disrupted. If the community is to return to normal, it is essential that these systems be restored as quickly as possible. But just as these systems are struggling to recover, new systems in the form of relief and reconstruction programs appear and compete directly with them. A recent example occurred on Fiji. One island group was severely affected by an intense hurricane that destroyed much of the agricultural production of the country and approximately 80% of the housing. Massive relief efforts were organized by the government. To qualify for the relief, family members had to show they were unemployed as well as being disaster victims. During the period that the aid continued, the normal economic systems (such as small stores, material suppliers, and their respective distribution networks) were bypassed. The aid, in effect, became a competing system. Thus the victims were denied much-needed capital that would have enabled them to recover more quickly. Several of the smaller stores eventually closed, and a number of suppliers put off reordering stock.

The relief program delayed recovery of the normal economic systems within the community.”

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*Response by Larry Minear*

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Most disaster organizations and managers probably accept at a theoretical level the many goals enumerated in “Ethical Dilemmas in Disaster Declaration and Response.” In an ideal world, they would seek to implement them all. When major disasters are involved, however, the world is anything but ideal. The situation is difficult enough in “natural disasters.” Complex emergencies escalate the challenges further still.

It may be tempting to debate overarching objectives such as empowering people “to participate fully in planning and decision-making,” adopting an inclusive approach to the special needs of “minorities, women and poor,” or functioning according to “the highest ethics of human values.” However, it is more productive to focus on the obstacles—institutional, political, financial, or professional—which complicate putting such eminently praiseworthy objectives into practice.

In the area of **empowerment**, for example, agencies firmly committed to strengthening local institutions frequently mount programs first and address empowerment issues later. In practical terms, they give higher priority to saving lives than to institution-building. But are the trade-offs as stark as frequently presented? Could more ingenuity not produce the best of both worlds, or at least do better by both?

As regards **neutrality**, the materials suggest that “it is not sufficient to be a neutral intermediary.” Disaster managers, we are told, must be concerned about underlying causes of emergencies and become advocates for durable solutions. What about those who believe that being other than a neutral intermediary can undercut effective disaster response? How can shared concerns about the underlying causes of disasters and shared desires to see changed government policies be most effectively expressed?

Concerning **objectivity**, the Cold War which infiltrated the declaration of and response to disasters is now past. However, as the materials suggest, the international community still lacks uniform and consistent ways of proceeding to establish and respond to such crises. What are the sources—political, commercial, or otherwise—which continue to impede responses based on the severity of the need? What criteria can be agreed upon to help assure more businesslike action in the future?

There are probably divergent views about what constitute the “purest ethical standards” of **accountability**. The idea that disaster assistance should be accountable to the beneficiaries suggests that it may be more than “gifts” bestowed by outside “donors.” The new approach, in addition to shifting greater power to disaster-prone areas and institutions, would demand better performance from outsiders. The suggestion that funds should seek out organizations “which focus on the above priorities” also raises questions, given the multiple sources of existing funds and the diverse agendas of those who provide them.

Action in these areas would have wide-ranging implications for the current disaster management system as we know it. The existing division of labor, for example, would be overturned. Such implications deserve review.

*It is more productive to focus on the obstacles—institutional, political, financial, or professional—which complicate putting such eminently praiseworthy objectives into practice.*

Practitioners are more aware now than a decade or two ago about ethical dilemmas in disaster management such as these. Perhaps a discussion of the various factors which have produced that greater awareness would be illuminating. Based on the progress of the past decade, where would the profession like to be ten years from now, and how might it get there from here?

**Q.** *Respondent, Larry Minear, identifies four points to keep in mind as ethical issues of disaster management are deliberated, decisions made and strategies implemented. What are those points?*

**A.** \_\_\_\_\_  
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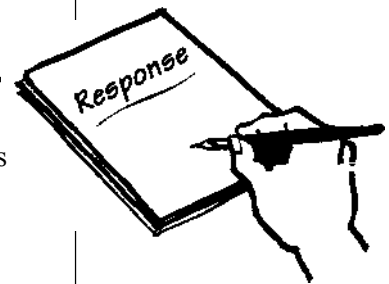
**Response by Bruce Nichols**

Anyone active in disaster response has a wish list of the way things ought to be, and there is no doubt that the list compiled in the preceding essay has its proponents. These concerns are particularly valid with regard to human rights, especially women’s and children’s rights, equity in governance, empowerment of the poor, and others. But questions about rights are an adjunct to the basic issues of disaster relief as to how we are to respond to human suffering at physical and economic levels. Who are the “we” who make the call “the international community?” And what level of suffering is required before we intervene?

The “international community” is nothing if not a mass of individual, corporate and governmental entities who look at the world through a variety of ethical traditions. These traditions help us reason about the nature of human good. We generate solutions consistent with those traditions and the world as we find it.

Some of these traditions are religious; others are philosophical, and others are philosophies of governance or political action such as realism, Marxism, advocacy or international law. The disaster declaration essay has not so much uncovered ethical bedrock as it has identified a specific set of values the author hopes will be embodied in current and future disaster response.

These values represent an ethical response; they are a very specific set of internationalist goals that value an obligation to seek “justice” over personal or group moral goals such as alleviation of suffering. Yet the meaning of “justice” or of “human rights” will inevitably be derived from the various traditions of moral reasoning that practitioners and victims bring to the situation.



*These values represent an ethical response; they are a very specific set of internationalist goals that value an obligation to seek “justice” over personal or group moral goals such as alleviation of suffering*



Many non-governmental organizations resonate strongly with the advocacy role implied in an ethic focused on justice because the organizations themselves grew out of religious or philosophical traditions of ethical reasoning that have answered prior questions about the nature of human good and why, for instance, it makes any sense at all to concern ourselves with human suffering in the first place. This makes them valuable advocates in the process of declaring that a given disaster requires an international response.

Practitioners who enter disaster relief as a means to the “more fundamental” end of promoting justice for disaster victims will encounter frustration; governments or international organizations will never consistently enforce human rights, as other considerations will always intervene. The author makes only slight reference to the reason for the existence or the self-interest of national governments. These are clearly major factors in determining which victims do or do not receive assistance.

From a practical point of view, the international system of disaster assistance is a network of perceived obligations and constraints that will be understood variously by practitioners reasoning within different ethical and judgments on the nature of human good, the existence of political will, the allocation of resources, and the ethical reasoning concerning responsibilities for the persons inside or outside the traditions or communities in question.

Understanding these factors will yield a more valuable grasp of how and when disaster intervention occurs than issuing general calls for justice and human rights, however representative they may be of a given tradition.

**Q.** *Respondent Bruce Nichols identifies four sources which inform ethical deliberations and action. What are those sources?*

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*ANSWER (from page 65)*

1. Empowerment
2. Neutrality
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability