



It's the thought that counts
Humanitarian principles and
practice in Pakistan

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At the time of writing this report, North West Frontier Province (NWFP) was the name used for what is now called Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The cut out on the front of this report is the outline of the Buner and Swat districts in NWFP.



12 year old Gul Bibi (in blue) and her cousin Sameena in Swabi IDP camp, May 2009.

Photo: ActionAid



Contents

Acronyms	3
Foreword	4
Executive summary	6
1. Introduction	9
1.1 Methodology and research themes	10
1.2 Background to the humanitarian crisis and response in Pakistan's NWFP	12
2. Humanitarian principles	15
2.1 Exploring the universality of humanitarianism	16
2.2 Achieving operational independence of humanitarian action	17
2.3 The challenge of impartiality	19
2.4 The threat posed by the international stabilisation agenda	20
2.5 The dangers of 'principled pragmatism'	23
2.6 Recommendations for strengthening principled programming in Pakistan	25
3. Humanitarian practice	27
3.1 Identifying and meeting the needs of affected communities	28
3.2 Accountability to affected communities	31
3.3 Partnership	36
3.4 Towards a more inclusive approach to humanitarianism	39
3.5 Recommendations for strengthening humanitarian practice in Pakistan	41
Annexes	42
Annex 1: List of community discussions and agency interviews	42
Annex 2: Expanded bibliography	43
Annex 3: Methodology matrix	49



Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organisation
CERINA	Conflict Early Recovery Initial Needs Assessment
DCO	District Coordination Officer
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
EDO	Executive District Officer
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GoP	Government of Pakistan
HAP	Humanitarian Accountability Partnership
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCSS	Humanitarian Coordination Support Section (of OCHA)
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IECT	International Emergencies and Conflict Team, ActionAid
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières
NADRA	National Database Registration Authority
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIC	National Identity Card
NNGO	National Non-Governmental Organisation
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PARRSA	Provincial Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Authority
PDMA	Provincial Disaster Management Authority
PHF	Pakistan Humanitarian Forum
PoP	Principles of Partnership
RC	Resident Coordinator
RTE	Real Time Evaluation
SSG	Special Support Group
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme
WVI	World Vision International



Foreword

Humanitarianism and humanitarian practice are both facing unprecedented challenges. With the increasingly complex nature of conflicts; the plethora of stakeholders in humanitarian delivery; the increasingly blurred lines between humanitarian assistance, development and state-building agendas; and the politicisation of aid, the very validity, relevance and credibility of the 'humanitarian project' are being questioned and challenged.

Since 2003, the UN humanitarian reform mechanisms have increasingly become the 'way we do business'. There have been several evaluations, assessments and critiques of these mechanisms. In 2006, ActionAid published *The Evolving UN Cluster Approach in the Aftermath of the Pakistan Earthquake: An NGO Perspective* (ActionAid, 2006). This research looked at the then newly introduced UN reform mechanisms and analysed the gaps and challenges. The resulting report came up with recommendations for strengthening these mechanisms and increasing their effectiveness. Three years later, in 2009, ActionAid became part of a consortium of 7 organisations taking part in a multi-country project aiming to strengthen the effectiveness of NGOs to engage with the UN reform mechanisms in four focus countries.¹

This research is a follow up to the evaluation of the UN humanitarian reforms in Pakistan after the May-July 2009 insurgency operations and the resulting humanitarian crisis. At the heart of it emerged an exploration of the perceptions of humanitarian assistance, 'international' and 'universal' human rights, NGOs and the humanitarian principles.

From the start, the research aimed to explore issues of downward accountability to affected communities – putting the people affected by the crisis at the very heart of each humanitarian

response. The research not only looked at how/if to affected communities was practised during the response and the best ways of making sure it happened, but equally importantly at the perceptions, understandings and interpretation of humanitarianism and the humanitarian project by the affected communities. The rich insights and encounters with the research participants emphasised the need to place accountability to affected communities at the centre of humanitarian assistance. It emphasised that, for accountability to be meaningful, it needs to be an approach - a guiding framework - and not simply a set of mechanisms, forms and statistics, no matter how efficient these may be.

Partnership and the role of national NGOs have been another axis of the research. The research team started with the aim of assessing the extent of participation of national and local NGOs in the reform mechanisms. The research explores and challenges the different meanings and modalities of participation and questions whether merely participating in meetings is the best and only way to facilitate effective partnership with national and local organisations.

The research team and ActionAid remain forever grateful for the participants in Pakistan for their insights, honesty and time. The report attempts to capture the 'voices' of the participants, in as far as this is possible. Obviously we are aware that any writing, no matter how accurate or eloquent, can only be an approximation of 'voice', feeling and even meaning. Therefore, we are not claiming that this report represents the only 'truth' or the only 'voice' of the affected communities, national and international NGOs, governments or other participants. What this report hopes to do is to capture an exchange between the research

¹ Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe.



team and a spectrum of actors through which some pertinent questions about the nature, relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance in Pakistan during May-July 2009 as well as the 'humanitarian project' are raised. The analysis of the encounters with research participants also enabled us to come up with recommendations that we hope will be useful, applicable and relevant.

Whilst conducting this research, participants were consulted about how best to share the findings of this research with them. With this aim, the research summary and findings will be translated into Urdu (the commonly used written language in Swat District, Buner and Dir, even though the spoken language is Pashtu). In addition, a blog will be open on the ActionAid website where comments, input and discussion around the research findings and recommendations can be posted. The report will also be launched in Pakistan, where research participants will be invited to comment and contribute. We are aware that this is far from ideal, nor indeed will it be accessible to a large majority of research participants. However, a large proportion of these expressed their interest and support. We hope that readers will find this report as enriching and useful as the process of its research and production has been for us.

Richard Miller
International Director, Human Security
in Emergencies and Conflict Theme,
ActionAid



Executive summary

Introduction

The complex operational environment in Pakistan has challenged the ability of the humanitarian system to provide effective, predictable and timely assistance to civilians affected by the conflict in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). However, the huge needs of people affected by the disaster remain a constant. This research attempts to view the effectiveness of humanitarian reform processes and humanitarianism more broadly by looking through the eyes of those who have been uprooted in the Swat and Buner Districts.

Background to the humanitarian crisis in NWFP and humanitarian response

In April 2009, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) started military operations against the Taliban, causing the displacement of an estimated 1.9 million² people by the end of May. These people joined an estimated 500,000 people who had been displaced as a result of earlier military operations, bringing the total number of displaced people to 2.4 million. On 13 July 2009, the authorities officially declared major combat operations over and announced that internally displaced persons (IDPs) would be allowed to return back to cleared areas. In the first week alone, more than 400,000 people returned home.

Throughout the crisis, the humanitarian community has faced significant challenges in providing adequate and appropriate assistance of the right quality and at the right time to those affected by the conflict. In the first months, there were considerable funding constraints, which limited the ability of humanitarian organisations to adequately scale up their programmes. Operations have also been affected by gross insecurity, which has resulted in many humanitarian

organisations choosing to work remotely through national or local NGOs, or adopting a policy of using local staff.

Methodology and research themes

A preliminary literature review assisted in determining the focus of the study and highlighted gaps in research and practice in the areas of civil society voice, accountability and partnership. The methodology was developed to address these three themes explicitly and a matrix was prepared that outlined research questions and techniques (see Annex 3).

Humanitarian principles

The foundations of humanitarian assistance rest on the fundamental principles that are designed to help uphold the rights of people in need of assistance and protection. The research highlighted the existence of a common language in the principles which provides the foundation for humanitarian action. However, it also revealed considerable compromises that have been made to the independence and impartiality of the humanitarian response.

While the fundamental humanitarian principles continue to bridge barriers of language and culture, the politics of identity and rejection pedalled by negative forces in Pakistan and the failure of the humanitarian community to adequately defend their values risk destroying the fragile trust that exists between those providing and those receiving assistance. The key message from the research is this: while humanitarian values are complex to operationalise, it is fundamental that the humanitarian system continues to defend, uphold and be guided by them.

² This is the number who were registered by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA): www.unhcr.org.pk



Humanitarian practice

While humanitarian principles must be defended, humanitarian practice needs to change and evolve if it is to remain relevant. The research highlighted a significant gap between assistance that was required and that which was provided. The negative impact of this has been exacerbated by an accountability and transparency deficit between aid receiver and provider. A far more inclusive process of assistance that emphasises high quality, needs-based practice is needed to make up for lost ground. This will give the humanitarian project the best chance of surviving the challenges of responding to conflict in Pakistan. In order to achieve this, more needs to be done to challenge the Western look and feel of the humanitarian assistance.

The international bias of humanitarianism in Pakistan is replicated throughout its structures, partnerships and accountabilities. Only through comprehensively addressing this bias and seeking to become more locally owned will there be a chance of effective collective action. Throughout the research, participants' understanding of 'international' was synonymous with 'Western'. Interestingly, this has also been the view and perceptions of staff members of international organisations, whether the interviewees were national or expatriate. Several organisations recognised this bias and have been trying to address it by appointing "more national looking staff" in Pakistan. Examples of the "national looking staff" included Iraqis, Syrians, Saudis, and even Iranians.

These very attempts, whilst commendable in principle, exemplify a particular world view and bias that still maintains 'international' as meaning necessarily 'Western' and a mode of operation that sustains the 'us/them' dichotomy. 'International humanitarian

principles' should mean exactly that: the distillation of the humanitarian ethos of all people, countries and regions, and this includes Pakistan and Pakistanis. As international organisations, we need to challenge our own interpretation of what 'international' means. This strategy requires a genuine willingness to question some of the strongest implicit assumptions of the nature and 'origins' of humanitarianism. It requires that traditional concepts of partnership and accountability are stretched at the levels of discourse and practice. Rather than national NGOs being on the edges of coordination fora and absent from humanitarian strategy formulation as the research suggests, they need to play a central and equal role in them. Rather than accountabilities having a bias towards donors, governments and peer agencies, as they currently do, local accountabilities and transparency should be given equal weight. This needs to be more than a set of tools and mechanisms. They should mean accountability for and true sharing of the humanitarian principles that bind the humanitarian project - a sense of true partnership with the affected communities (and not only national or local NGOs), where these communities are not only included in humanitarian assistance but also take responsibility for the decision-making process. The UN leadership of the humanitarian effort and the processes of humanitarian reform, particularly coordination, have an important role to play in this.

Making progress in this will not be easy and will require an unprecedented level of transparency, engagement and partnership between humanitarian organisations, but it will be worth the effort. Success or failure will likely dictate the future of the humanitarian system in Pakistan and a positive outcome will make an important contribution to responses in other complex and politicised aid environments.



Muslim Ghani holds one of his five children at an IDP camp. The family was forced to flee the fighting in Swat in May 2009, leaving Muslim, a labourer, unemployed.

Photo: Adam Ferguson/ActionAid

1. Introduction

“The art of humanitarian practice remains a fragile construct and the challenges that it faces daily in Pakistan will require it to continue to evolve.”



The humanitarian system is no stranger to forces seeking to limit its reach and control its activities. From negotiating aid for those affected by the civil war in Biafra in the 1970s, to navigating the politics of conflict and famine in Ethiopia in the 1980s, to accessing survivors (and perpetrators) of the genocide in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) in the 1990s, the humanitarian system has often been subject to interference and manipulation from governments and non-state armed actors. Without doubt, the humanitarian system of today faces a very number of very real stresses and strains. However, what is different today is the cocktail of challenges that have the potential to poison the construct of humanitarianism. The politicisation of aid, the proliferation of traditional and non-traditional humanitarian actors and the limits to humanitarian leadership all play an important part in constraining the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

The complex operational environment in Pakistan has challenged the ability of the humanitarian system to provide effective, predictable and timely assistance to civilians affected by the conflict in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). The scale of the displacement, the dynamic security environment, the politicisation of aid and an initial lack of funds all hampered early efforts to scale up the response. However, the humanitarian system has also been the architect of some of its own problems. The failure of aid to meet the needs of affected communities adequately and the weaknesses developing a relationship based on trust, understanding and shared principles with affected communities and civil society organisations have led to a growing dissonance between 'aid givers' and 'receivers'. While there have been some important changes prompted by the roll-out of humanitarian reform across the global humanitarian landscape, there is much that still needs to change if humanitarianism is to lead to improved services for affected populations.

ActionAid and humanitarian reform

ActionAid has been following, and participating in, the cluster approach roll-out since it was first set out in the Humanitarian Response Review paper in August 2005. In its Country Programmes, ActionAid seeks to work in partnership with other humanitarian actors to improve emergency response for the benefit of affected people. ActionAid has conducted several reviews of cluster operations (in Pakistan and Mozambique) and is the lead agency in the 'NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project'.³

The findings of this study strongly suggest that the main challenge facing the humanitarian community – in this case in Pakistan – is that it may have become too bogged down with the details of humanitarian assistance delivery. If the principles that underpin humanitarian assistance are to continue to have universal relevance, then far greater emphasis needs to be placed on upholding and disseminating these principles. This study points to the need to go beyond traditional definitions of partnership and accountability and root these more firmly in the local context. Only by moving from an exclusive international concept of humanitarianism – one that is perceived understood and practised as necessarily Western – to a more local version where shared universal values are identified, can the humanitarian community deliver genuinely needs-based and accountable humanitarian response.

1.1 Methodology and research themes

The research addressed the twin themes of humanitarian principles and practice. Rather than focus on specific outcomes of the humanitarian reform process, the study sought to ask the broader question of whether humanitarian reform is changing the system in

³The NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project is consortium project, funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), which aims to strengthen the effective engagement of local, national and international NGOs in reformed humanitarian financing and coordination mechanisms at global and country levels. The project runs for three years until October 2011.



key areas and if these changes are leading to improved services for affected populations.

A preliminary literature review assisted in determining the focus of the study and highlighted gaps in research and practice in the areas of civil society voice, accountability and partnership. The methodology was developed to address these three themes explicitly and a matrix was prepared that outlined research questions and techniques (see Annex 3).

Civil society voice

Civil society provided the lens through which the effectiveness of the humanitarian system was viewed. During the research, strong emphasis was placed on understanding perceptions of humanitarian relief, humanitarian organisations and the humanitarian system more broadly. The study sought to target a wide cross-section of civil society stakeholders in the Swat and Buner Districts of NWFP and in Islamabad over a three-week period. Interviews were conducted with men, women and youth at household-level; focus group discussions were held with activists, social sector workers, religious leaders, local businesses and community leaders; and key informant interviews were conducted with local authorities, government representatives, NGOs and international organisations.

Accountability

The study explored issues of accountability between those providing and receiving aid and assessed the extent to which people felt they had been informed, participated in, and had been able to complain about the assistance they had received. Individual agency commitment to beneficiary accountability and collective cluster efforts to focus on performance and accountability was assessed with a view to understanding current practice and the potential role for clusters to strengthen accountable humanitarian action in the future.

Partnership

The Principles of Partnership (PoP) were used as a benchmark to explore attitudes and approaches to working with others. The research sought to assess how the PoP had been operationalised within the clusters and individual organisations' knowledge of the PoP document with a view to capturing good practice and making recommendations for how partnership could be strengthened across the diverse members of the humanitarian system.

Humanitarian principles

Rather than focus solely on delivery mechanisms, the research sought to locate these as part of the broader humanitarian system. Interviews with aid providers and receivers focused on their perceptions of humanitarianism and on establishing whether there was a shared understanding of humanitarian principles and, if so, to what extent the humanitarian community had been successful in upholding these principles in NWFP.



Inzer Gul, aged 7, faces an uncertain future as he stands outside his temporary shelter in the Swabi camp.

Photo: ActionAid



1.2 Background to the humanitarian crisis and response in Pakistan's NWFP

In April 2009, after a failed period of appeasement and coexistence, the Government of Pakistan (GoP) started military operations against the Taliban, causing the displacement of an estimated 1.9 million⁴ people by the end of May. Many of these people took refuge as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Malakand Agency and districts of Peshawar, Nowshera and Swabi in what is considered to be the largest displacement in the history of Pakistan. These people joined an estimated 500,000 people displaced as a result of earlier military operations in Bajaur Agency, bringing the total number of displaced people to 2.4 million.

The initial displacement of communities from conflict areas was typified by a chaotic struggle to gather family members and leave with the few belongings that could be carried or transported out of harm's way. In Swat District, the Pakistan army gave a series of four-hour windows for civilians to leave. This was considered by many to be too short a time. With limited means of transport out of the affected area, people often ended up paying huge sums any available method of evacuating. Flight was characterised by family separation, as some made their way to the IDP camps or host communities, while others remained behind to care for elderly relatives or protect valuable assets.

“We were given four hours to leave our house, which was too short. We wanted to collect our valuables and belongings but this would have taken three days and so my father stayed behind. He was killed three days later when the house was bombed and destroyed.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

“I was in the mosque when it was bombed and had to return to my house to collect my mother. It was extremely difficult to find transportation to get out of the area; it cost me Rs 7,000 [USD 88] to take my family and belongings to safety, but friends of ours had to walk 10 kilometres to escape.”

Business community focus group, Mingora town

Humanitarian organisations were faced with an extremely complex challenge in trying to meet adequately the needs of those affected by the conflict. At the onset of the crisis, there were three groups of affected people, each with a distinct set of needs. The first group comprised the civilian populations that were caught up in the conflict areas of Swat, Buner and Dir. They received very little assistance due to insecurity and a lack of access, which precluded humanitarian assistance from all but a small group of NGOs and international organisations. The second group comprised those people who managed to escape the fighting and stay with host families, in rented accommodation, or in unofficial accommodation such as schools or mosques. These people received little more than basic support and in many cases missed out on receiving any support at all. The third group sought refuge in IDP camps and, as the most visible and easily accessible group, they tended to receive much more support from humanitarian organisations and the government.

On 13 July 2009, the authorities officially declared that major combat operations were over and announced that IDPs would be allowed to return back to cleared areas in a phased approach that sought to ensure the safe, voluntary and dignified return of IDPs. For Swat District this meant that IDPs would be able to return to a limited number of Union Councils in southern Swat. In the first week alone, the Emergency Response Unit estimated that over 400,000 people returned to their homes. While there was considerable

This is the number who were registered by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA), www.unhcr.org.pk/basic_facts



concern voiced by the humanitarian community about the risks of forced return, the research showed considerable support for this, largely due to the difficult conditions in which IDPs were living.

“We were very happy to return despite our house being destroyed. We were grateful for the assistance we received but the tents were far too hot and my mother couldn't use the toilets.”

Family in Swat

“People were happy to return home as the conditions in the camps were so bad because it was so hot; those who stayed with friends and families had to leave after two months as their hosts were exhausted financially and there was too little space; and for renters it became just too expensive. We were in a camp but decided to come back despite the insecurity.”

Social sector focus group, Mingora town

Throughout the crisis the humanitarian community has faced significant challenges in providing adequate assistance of the right quality and at the right time to those affected by the conflict. In the first months of the response, there were considerable funding constraints, which limited the ability of humanitarian organisations to scale up their programmes adequately. Operations have also been affected by gross insecurity, which has seen targeted attacks against UN agencies and NGOs. This has resulted in humanitarian organisations taking an extremely cautious approach to working in conflict areas. Many international organisations have chosen to work remotely, through national or local NGOs, or they have adopted a policy of using local staff. Threats against those receiving aid has led many organisations to remove branding and to adopt a low profile in the areas affected by the conflict.



Children gather at PunjaSahab Sikh (religious minority) IDP camp at Hasan Abdal, May 2009.

Photo: ActionAid



Children displaced by fighting wait in line for food at an IDP camp, June 2009

Photo: ActionAid

2. Humanitarian principles

“This section focuses on humanitarian principles and seeks to draw recommendations from the successes and challenges the humanitarian community has faced in upholding these principles in NWFP.”



2.1 Exploring the universality of humanitarianism

When asked about humanitarian assistance, the perceptions of research participants ranged from charity at best, to supporting a hidden, mostly Western agenda, at worst. This sentiment did not vary by class, educational standard, occupation or gender. It was articulated differently, but the sentiment remained the same.

There was also no clarity whatsoever regarding the source of this assistance. Almost all research participants said that “aid came from America” when asked about the source. When asked why America provided assistance, few people gave ‘charity’ as a reason. Many people gave answers that reflected a hidden agenda such as: “Because they are rich” and “to rule and control us”. Most research participants also expressed preference to receiving aid from ‘other Muslims’ rather than from ‘non Muslims’; some actually used the word ‘Kafir’ (infidel). However, when probed further, all research participants expressed genuine willingness to help out if “America faced the same situation”, and that they would be offering this help based on humanitarian grounds: “One human being to one human

being” is what was repeated over and over again by all research participants.

The research revealed a strong belief in the humanitarian imperative; first phase humanitarian assistance was generally considered welcome, regardless of where it came from or who provided it.

“We were in intense need and so it didn't matter to us who was providing assistance. It was good that people from around the world were helping us.”

Family in Swat District

“It is 'human' to provide assistance to those in need whoever they are, whether they are Muslim or Christian. Education is the key to understanding morals and human principles.” Family in Swat District

Where there is greater suspicion, however, is in perceptions about the longer-term agenda, particularly of Western agencies. Issues of human rights and gender empowerment were considered as ‘red lines’ by many in the community, whose fears have been heightened by the low-profile approach adopted by many humanitarian organisations in Swat District.

“NGOs are considered as a blessing at the moment but this is temporary and will change as things get better.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

Why are humanitarian principles important?

The foundations of humanitarian assistance rest on the fundamental principles codified in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and other international law, and further defined in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief in the mid-1990s. In 1998, the Sphere Humanitarian Charter developed these principles and set down Sphere standards and accompanying indicators, updated in 2004 (Oxfam, 2006). All these have been designed to help uphold

the rights of people in need of assistance and protection and speak directly to ActionAid's rights-based approach.

The concept of humanitarian principles and access in particular are too often perceived as lofty theoretical undertakings. However, particularly in contexts that are highly complex, politicised and extremely dangerous, humanitarian space that grows from a humanitarian identity is one of the only factors that allows aid agencies to continue operating. For operational agencies, humanitarian space is an extremely practical and life-saving issue.



“When NGOs come they often don't talk to people, raising suspicions and fear that they are interfering with our traditions.” Business community focus group, Mingora town

“Still people are afraid of NGOs. We are conservative and are suspicious that NGOs are using our women as a showpiece... talking of women and women's rights. For this reason some are perceived as purveyors of immorality. NGOs should not focus on women.” Business community focus group, Mingora town

Throughout the field work and interviews it was rare for community members to be able to name or identify which agencies had provided what assistance. At the time the research took place, most of those interviewed had been back in their homes for at least six months but still had a very limited knowledge of the work of NGOs, which had caused significant mistrust.

“NGOs come and give us packages but we don't know who they are...”
Civil society focus group, Buner town

In a world that is increasingly being defined by who is 'for' and who is 'against', the research suggests that there is both an understanding of and respect for the humanitarian imperative and higher order principles in Pakistan, albeit only in the relief phase. It is of concern that by maintaining a low profile the humanitarian community is failing to capitalise on the opportunities afforded by this and risks ostracising itself from communities it works with. Addressing the information deficit could go a considerable way to promoting greater understanding of and respect for the work of humanitarian organisations. Efforts to build trust now could pay dividends later as normalcy returns and working with communities to rebuild livelihoods becomes the greater priority. Getting the message across should be the priority of everyone connected to the humanitarian endeavour – if humanitarianism is to continue to live and

breathe, it will be increasingly important for its agents to both defend and advocate for it at all levels rather than seek to hide from it.

2.2 Achieving operational independence of humanitarian action

Historically, the Pakistan army has played a very important role in responding to natural disasters. For example, it was particularly instrumental in supporting humanitarian logistics in areas that were inaccessible to the humanitarian community following the 2005 earthquake in the Jammu and Kashmir Region. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Real Time Evaluation (De Silva et al, 2006) was effusive in its praise for what it described as the:

“...competence and adept performance of the government of Pakistan and its Military institutions, which was testament to its success in saving lives and supporting humanitarian logistics.”

The conflict and displacement from NWFP led to a change in the national coordination structure. While the presence of a civilian body for operational coordination of assistance to the people who had been displaced was welcomed, the role of the Special Support Group (SSG) with a serving army commander placed at its head raised concerns about the blurring of humanitarian space. With operational coordination at district level also being led by military, and with coordination meetings often held in militarised areas,⁵ there were widespread concerns amongst humanitarian staff that there was insufficient separation between the provision of security and humanitarian assistance.

Efforts were made to address this soon after the initial displacement by establishing a common set of 'Basic Operating Rules'⁶, which reasserted key humanitarian principles.

⁵ General Coordination meetings in Mingora are chaired by Colonel Aftab in the District Circuit House, which is heavily fortified.

⁶ Basic Operating Rules for Humanitarian Organisations, Islamabad, April 2009.



However, this was unsuccessful largely as a result of coordination failures within the humanitarian community itself. The issue was subsequently raised by the OCHA Humanitarian Coordination Support Section (HCSS) mission to Pakistan, which reiterated the importance of defining and defending humanitarian space and clearly articulated the necessary steps to achieve this (OCHA, 2009).

“... the United Nations and the wider humanitarian community needs to enact and implement the basic principles of engagement in armed conflict while reconfiguring some of the relations with the government in order to demonstrate the independence of humanitarian aid since the government is party to the conflict, while also quickly agreeing on a modus operandi for engagement with the armed opposition in order to access civilians in need outside government controlled areas. The latter is of particular importance, as humanitarian aid should not only be available to those with the means to flee the areas of conflict.”

In the context of providing assistance in the Swat District, independence from government and military is of critical importance if humanitarian assistance is to be considered distinct from parties to the conflict. The failure to achieve this has significant implications for the impartiality of the aid effort and the way in which the humanitarian system is viewed by those outside it. The research suggests that some have already made up their minds and perceptions of partiality have already been formed that will be difficult to change.

“The NGOs working here are mainly political, which is a problem.”

Civil society focus group, Buner town

“NGOs are run by local people who can be influenced politically. Relief provision is perceived by many to be influenced by political allegiances and interests.”

NGO Manager, Buner District

Given the role of the military in the conflict, the lack of independence presents a very real security threat. Interviews with NGO and UN staff highlighted the problems they faced in ensuring their assistance programmes did not expose their own staff to risk, along with the communities they were seeking to assist. Taliban threats against aid staff and recipients of assistance have led to the adoption of a low-profile approach. This has resulted in many organisations relying on national staff to carry out frontline aid operations, or working through national NGOs, which are considered to be at less risk from Taliban reprisals. Having had attacks directed against it, the UN is even more constrained in its ability to provide assistance, although it does deploy national staff in the conflict-affected parts of NWFP. There is no doubt that such strategies serve to reinforce the separation between aid receiver and giver. In highly political and highly unstable environments such as NWFP, this can breed “suspicion, misunderstanding and mistrust of aid programming in general” (Karim, 2006).

“If we knew what they were doing then there would no secret. If they had a signboard explaining their activities this would make a difference and we would be able to trust them.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

“People consider 'NGO' a sinful word. They have acronyms that no one knows and which mean nothing to people. If these names were clearer it would be helpful. Using the local language is also very important.”

Business community focus group, Mingora town

Many NGO staff still consider that acceptance strategies provide the best protection and are seeking to address the 'acceptance deficit'. Furthermore, as Benson (2007) notes, such a strategy should not be considered a panacea:

“While remote management allows for continued service provision, the ability to remain accountable to intended beneficiaries and donors is in many instances compromised.



Dangers for national staff and local partners are great and they are exposed to greater risk than their international counterparts.”

The inability of the humanitarian system to exist independently of the government and Pakistan military represents a considerable failure of humanitarian leadership. In such a politicised context, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) must be more responsive to requests of the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and more transparent in feeding back the limits of his influence. Where there is latitude to develop and implement co-existence strategies, then these need to be defined in a timely manner.⁷ There is an important need in Pakistan for the HCT to monitor and defend humanitarian space proactively and for systems to be established to ensure that it is a regular agenda item. There is also a need to monitor progress made in escalating concerns through the HC and providing timely feedback to the members of the humanitarian community.

2.3 The challenge of impartiality

In the context of NWFP, decisions about who qualifies for assistance have for the most part been determined by the government registration process. While the timeliness of this process has been praised, the process of identifying beneficiaries was deeply flawed, with large numbers of IDPs not qualifying for assistance due to a range of reasons, including their area of origin, the location of flight and the type of national identity card (NIC) held. Female interviewees spoke of being excluded due to not having NICs in the first place or because they were unable to travel to areas where registration was being conducted. Women-headed households were particularly affected, as their ability to move freely was considerably constrained.

Registration was highly dependent on people being 'visible' to those conducting the exercise. People displaced into camps fared the best. Most of those interviewed had been

successfully registered. Those who were displaced to schools and community buildings were more dependent on informal go-betweens or responsible community members to help facilitate their registration. The majority of the displaced who sought refuge with friends, families or who rented their own accommodation, fared worst. Numerous accounts were received of families who were not registered and who, since returning to their homes, still receive little or no assistance as a result.⁸ Of all the groups affected by the conflict, those most adversely affected were the people who either chose to stay in their homes or who were unable to leave the conflict area. Whole villages were effectively cut off either because the cost of transport to safety was prohibitively expensive or because the pattern of conflict meant that they were unable to leave their homes. In a village only a short distance outside of Mingora town, not a single resident was registered as they had been unable to flee the fighting. In November, six months after the fighting had ended, there was still only a single humanitarian organisation providing assistance.

Understandably, many of the community members interviewed spoke of the shortcomings of the registration 'lottery' and had first- or second-hand accounts of people who had been passed over by the process. Their comments serve to underline the failure of the humanitarian community to provide impartial assistance:

“We received information about rations through our relatives but none of us were able to register as we didn't have National Identity Cards.”

Female focus group discussion, Buner District

“I was unable to register as I was in the fields when we were told to leave and had left my Identity Card in the house. It was destroyed when my house was bombed. The only assistance we received was from our hosts.”

Family in Swat District

⁷ At the time the research was being undertaken, OCHA had renewed its efforts to address issues of humanitarian space by producing Civil-Military Guidelines for NWFP and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

⁸ This is particularly significant as the UN estimates that 81% of people displaced by the conflict sought refuge with host families.



“We spent 3.5 months in Jalozi camp where we received food and assistance but since we've returned home we've received nothing as my identity card is not computerised and so I couldn't be registered.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

The damage this does to people's belief in the impartiality of the humanitarian system is considerable. Furthermore, in such a politicised environment as NWFP, there is a serious risk of it fanning the considerable flames of mistrust and unwarranted claims of political manipulation of aid.

While registration processes in such dynamic environments are complex and are often not truly inclusive, the real failure of the humanitarian community has been in not addressing this in a timely way. NGOs and international organisations were united in their condemnation of the lack of progress made in resolving the issue and there was a pervasive feeling of powerlessness expressed. In seeking to address this, NGOs have developed their own community-driven processes of targeting those who had not been formally registered. However, these existed only at programme level and tended to attract as much criticism as they did praise during the research. They were often passed off by those who had been registered as political stunts.

There is an urgent need for the HC, with the support of the HCT, to play a more proactive role in monitoring and defending the impartiality of humanitarian assistance. For existing caseloads, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must robustly engage with relevant government bodies to ensure that those requiring assistance are able to register for and receive it. For new displacements in Pakistan, the HCT should maintain an overview and the HC (and mandated agency) should engage with the government to ensure that future registrations respect the principle of impartiality.

2.4 The threat posed by the international stabilisation agenda

Concerns were raised by senior humanitarian staff about the threat posed by the international stabilisation agenda for Pakistan. Chief among these was the ability of the UN to balance the conflicting agendas of political engagement, security management and humanitarian coordination. The history of the humanitarian response to the displacement in NWFP tends to bear this out. For example, the failure of the RC/HC to address key issues such as humanitarian space and deal adequately with the flawed IDP registration process caused widespread anxiety about the willingness of the UN to take on its humanitarian leadership role and to act as a role model for the promotion of humanitarian principles. Despite the strengthened OCHA presence and appointment of the HC, which has helped raise the profile of the humanitarian situation, these issues remain unresolved. Feedback from humanitarian organisations tended to echo that of OCHA's HCSS, whose April Mission Report noted:

“...the Humanitarian Coordinator must provide the leadership which is required as per his appointment and Terms of Reference, for the entire humanitarian community. If this does not take place, and important humanitarian decisions are de facto left to the key UN humanitarian agencies, NGOs will opt out of the coordination framework altogether and use their resources elsewhere.”⁹

While there has only been one agency to date that has taken steps towards opting out, a number of others expressed considerable concern at the inadequacy of the UN's humanitarian leadership to address the erosion of principles. There was a broad perception that structural issues relating to the UN's mandate were contributing to the lack of progress:

⁹ Humanitarian Coordination Support Section Mission to Pakistan, 20-29 April, 2009.



An IDP talks to registration staff on arrival at Jalala camp, May 2009. Problems with registration requirements and systems meant many people, particularly women, were unable to access vital humanitarian supplies.

Photo: ActionAid



Taking a principled approach – the example of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF)

MSF have taken an approach that is contrary to many agencies operating in NWFP and other conflict areas in Pakistan. Rather than maintain a low profile, MSF proactively seek to distinguish themselves as an independent and impartial medical organisation and strive to foster acceptance and understanding of their work from all those who are involved in it – from government departments to patients at the hospitals they support. This strategy has seen them distance themselves from inter-agency coordination mechanisms and international donors in an effort to maintain a separation from those who, through their actions or associations, may be perceived as

partial or tainted by politics. In order to communicate their values, they have published a clearly branded booklet, translated into Urdu, which explains the mandate of MSF and the principles they seek to uphold through their humanitarian work.

The strategy adopted by the MSF team in Pakistan reflects a broader organisational position on the loss of humanitarian space and UN policies of mission integration and coherence. MSF's approach in Pakistan affirms that humanitarianism must maintain a clear independence from political actors and the military, as well as the UN. Rather than being perceived as working in isolation, this independent approach is perceived as a process of collaboration within clear parameters defined primarily by the humanitarian imperative and the need to preserve humanitarian space.

“There is not a shared understanding of the importance of principles, which makes it difficult to build momentum within the humanitarian community. The UN agencies often have a different view.”

INGO Director, Islamabad

The role of Western donors has similarly challenged principled programming, as a number have explicitly linked the conflict to wider geopolitical issues, including stability in Afghanistan, global counter-terrorism and security in South Asia (HPG, 2009). The lack of a coordinated approach by the humanitarian community in Pakistan to address this has led to a fractured response. At least one agency has taken a principled stance by not accepting funding from any governments and uses only public donations to support its programme; others have cherry-picked the funding they accept with US-funding most often being forfeited in the pursuit of upholding some semblance of principled programming.

“The provision of humanitarian assistance is a secondary issue for the donors whose interest has been on promoting their counter-insurgency and stabilisation agendas.”

INGO Director, Islamabad

While this may be an important issue within the humanitarian community, the vagaries of agency policy on funding are lost on many of those receiving assistance. As mentioned earlier, all of those interviewed in Swat and Buner acknowledged that most of the humanitarian funding and assistance came from abroad, and pinpointed America as the source of funds and goods in-kind. Perceptions that people had about America (which were both positive and negative) tended to be applied to NGOs providing relief, which were broadly considered to be an extension of American foreign policy.



Aid comes from America. We are happy with the rations they provide but we don't like the country."

Female focus group discussion, Swat District

"Aid comes from abroad – from America. It's their war not ours so it's alright to accept their rations."

Female focus group discussion, Buner District

If community perceptions and shared understanding of the humanitarian project are important, and we believe they are, it is not enough for humanitarian organisations to simply be selective about which donor funds they choose to accept; they must make concerted efforts to proactively assert their political independence and impartiality.

2.5 The dangers of 'principled pragmatism'

When discussing issues of independence and impartiality with humanitarian organisations, the phrase 'principled pragmatism' was used to describe the situation where principles had been compromised in order to meet the humanitarian imperative. It provided a signpost to the concessions that had been made to allow operations, in some form, to continue. While innovation and flexibility are valuable skills for organisations working in complex and insecure environments, there is an important need to maintain sight of the broader humanitarian context and to develop humanitarian 'bottom-lines'. By dealing with issues on a case-by-case basis, there is a risk that the humanitarian community loses sight of the wider 'landscape' of principles.

The humanitarian response in Pakistan suggests that more needs to be done to uphold principles rather than seek compromises. The research suggests that senior relief staff have an understanding of what is at stake, but are struggling to find the necessary solidarity from within the



IDPs cook in a communal kitchen at the Jalala IDP camp. Inadequate facilities meant that many of the displaced faced hot and crowded conditions in the camps, with services often failing to meet their basic needs.

Photo: ActionAid

humanitarian community in Pakistan and the tools and support necessary to promote and uphold principled programming.

"Taking a principled approach to humanitarianism would limit our ability to access people in need due to insecurity. However, pragmatism sees us in too close proximity to the military."

NGO Director, Islamabad

Donino et al (2008) provide a cogent summary of the predicament facing humanitarianism, which is very relevant to the situation faced in Pakistan:

"Though the traditional values of humanitarianism still resonate among affected communities in all of the settings studied, the humanitarian enterprise is itself divided on the extent to which core principles should be respected, particularly in the more asymmetrical and intractable crises they have



Men queue in scorching heat to receive supplies of wheat at a food distribution point.

Photo: ActionAid

to confront. This disquiet affects the quality and coherence of the assistance and protection provided.”

While the research highlighted the operational complexities of providing assistance in NWFP, and would in no way seek to diminish the important contribution made by organisations seeking to provide relief to those affected by the conflict, there is a critical lack of agreement between different parts of the humanitarian system about how to deliver principled programming in NWFP. There is no doubt that more needs to be done to uphold humanitarian principles and reach out to those in need. There is less agreement about what collective action should look like.

Tools to assist humanitarian agencies in taking principled choices do exist - World Vision's HISS-CAM¹⁰ is a case in point. In addition, there are complementary processes such as the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) Principles of Humanitarian Action in Practice project,¹¹ the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) initiative on strengthening the relevance of humanitarian principles, and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC) working group on humanitarian space. All these offer further support, however at a country level there is a need for humanitarian coordination mechanisms to offer greater leadership and guidance in upholding, promoting and defending the principles when they are under threat. The HC and HCT have an essential role to play in this.

¹⁰ HISS-CAM is a tool to assist humanitarian organisations working in complex emergencies to make principled decisions about the nature of their engagement.

¹¹ The ODI project aims to inform and support strategic analysis, decision making and operational practices of humanitarian actors by developing and disseminating a guidance mechanism suitable for providing direct support to principled humanitarian decision making at different levels in different contexts (strategic policy level down to field level).



2.6 Recommendations for strengthening principled programming in Pakistan

- The proactive dissemination of humanitarian principles should be part of an inter-agency communication strategy designed to make stronger links between the humanitarian project and those receiving its services. These should be translated into Urdu and disseminated through appropriate media.

- The HCT has an explicit mandate given to it to promote and defend humanitarian principles, which includes providing guidance in key areas of concern and seeking to promote a unified approach within the humanitarian community. In the event of future attacks on humanitarian principles, particularly humanitarian space, the HCT should seek to build a unified position across humanitarian actors and agree a transparent approach to addressing the issue.

- The HCT maintains an overview of new and existing displacements in Pakistan and the HC (and mandated agency) engages with the government on ensuring that future registrations respect the principle of impartiality. The limitations of the current registration process urgently need to be raised and a process agreed for addressing errors of omission.

At the global level, it is recommended that:

- There needs to be a stronger link made between humanitarian reform processes and the principles that guide and govern humanitarian action. The dissemination of principles and review of their application in complex emergencies should be considered a core part of the HCT's and HC's ToRs.
- A clear and independent role of the HC (rather than HC/RC or any other double-hatted role) in conflict and highly politicised situations is even more critical to maintain and uphold.



89 year old Inzar Gul fled his home in Buner District to escape fighting in May 2009. Although most IDPs have now returned home, access to humanitarian goods and services remains patchy

Photo: ActionAid

3. Humanitarian practice

“This section seeks to assess community perceptions of humanitarian delivery mechanisms and explores issues of accountability and partnership in the context of the humanitarian response in NWFP.”



3.1 Identifying and meeting the needs of affected communities

Meeting the basic needs of IDPs
Over the last 15 years, significant progress has been made in establishing minimum standards for humanitarian service provision. There are a number of guidelines to help decision making about the 'what' and 'how' of delivering emergency assistance to people affected by crisis. Despite the existence of these guidelines, huge numbers of people in NWFP have not received any assistance at all from the relief effort. While there was an acknowledged lack of donor funds at the early stages of displacement, this does not provide sufficient justification for the number of people who continue to be overlooked by the humanitarian system.

“Most people who stayed with host families weren't even considered as IDPs and so received nothing. Because we weren't able to provide any support to our hosts, we were ashamed and so had to leave.”

Civil society focus group discussion, Mingora

“We stayed in a school in Mardan which we shared with five families. There were no toilets or bathrooms and no clean drinking water, and we had to share a single room with no privacy for the women. We didn't know where to get help and relied on the headmaster who we thought was connected to 'high-ups'.” Family in Swat District

“We moved from Mingora on 14th May and went to Peshawar first. We weren't allowed to stay in a camp as we had cattle and there was no space for them so we stayed in a house. We received no assistance and had to rely on the family living there to help us. We weren't registered and didn't receive the Rs 25,000 [USD 31.25] from the government.” Head of family, Mingora

Throughout the research, people were angry about the perceived failure of the humanitarian system to meet their basic needs. Many people said that one of the push-factors for them returning home was that they had exhausted their resources and had little hope of assistance while they were displaced. Interviews with returned communities showed that there continued to be significant gaps in the recovery effort, particularly for those people who had chosen, or were forced, to stay throughout the conflict. Where needs were met, people often complained about the lack of dignity in the way they were treated. While there was social stigma attached to being displaced and living on handouts from the aid community, the manner in which assistance has been provided has probably not helped the image of humanitarian assistance.

“We felt like professional beggars when we were in the camps. To me, the letters IDP stand for internally destroyed people.”

Social sector focus group, Mingora town

Interviewees talked of chaotic scenes, of people fighting each other for aid goods and a lack of respect for the needs of women in the early days of the IDP camps. People complained of intolerable heat and a lack of access to sanitation facilities – although this was rectified as the camps became better established. Since returning home, while people appreciated the free food provided in the general rations, they were concerned about having to travel to hubs and the need to queue for long periods waiting for the distribution. An elderly gentleman talked of the journey that he made, the time it took him and the cost he incurred to transport his ration from the distribution point to the road (Rs 30 or USD 0.40) and then from the road to his house (Rs 100 or USD 1.25). Such experiences of indignity only serve to create greater distance between aid provider and receiver.



Providing needs-based assistance to IDPs and returned communities

While there was a failure to meet the basic needs of displaced and returned communities adequately and in an appropriate or timely way, the research also suggests a broader failure to identify appropriate or needs-based responses. Most humanitarian organisations consider that they have a particular humanitarian competence or set of competencies that have been developed to provide timely assistance to people affected by disaster; from hygiene promotion messages and materials through to shelter-building kits, the humanitarian community has shown significant innovation in preparing itself for crisis. However, there is a risk that response starts to become driven by resources and availability of skills set rather than needs and that prescriptive response types are prioritised over needs assessment. This was keenly felt by many people who had returned home after being displaced in NWFP.

Feedback from IDPs was damning in its criticism of the accommodation that was available and the relief goods that were received. People who were displaced to camps were extremely critical of the high temperatures they had to endure and raised concerns about the limited facilities and their appropriateness for women. While many of these anxieties were addressed with time, the research highlighted numerous cases of families choosing not to stay in camps because they were considered inhospitable, lacking in amenities or undignified.

As people were forced to leave their homes, those who were able to sought to take their belongings, including livestock. This was also a barrier to gaining access to the camps, as there was nowhere for animals to graze. While livestock would have added to the significant burden of accommodating the IDPs, there is a real risk that the bar to accessing camps becomes so high that people are forced to look elsewhere - a trend that played a part in people choosing to find alternative options for

accommodation. This placed a huge and largely unsupported burden on host communities.

Many of those living in public buildings or with host families were denied even the most basic forms of assistance and those who did receive support were highly critical of the manner in which it was distributed. In many areas of displacement there were well-stocked shops and functioning markets. The greatest impediment to meeting basic needs was access to cash rather than the standard package of in-kind relief goods that constitute the basis of most relief responses. The strategy of many IDPs for resolving this mismatch was to sell items considered unnecessary or superfluous.

“Something is better than nothing. If the NGO doesn't have the item that is needed or can't fill the gap that is required, it's better to take the item even if it's not useful.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

Since the return of IDPs to Swat and Buner Districts, there has been growing frustration about the limited assistance that has been provided and the perceived lack of targeting or needs-base of the assistance provided. There are also growing concerns being voiced that the continued focus on handouts could create dependency. While the food rations were appreciated, at the time of the research, rumours were rife that the distributions were going to continue for another twelve months. There was real concern that this would make 'beggars' of the people of Swat.

“When organisations give help they give a uniform package. They should consider those in most need and provide more assistance to them.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

“We don't want food but we want sewing machines and livelihood opportunities for our men.”

Focus group discussion, Swat District



“There's been too many non food items distributed which are no longer useful to people and risk promoting dependency.”

INGO manager, Swat District

“You spend Rs 3,000 [USD 37.50] to distribute a bag of flour that would only cost Rs 1,000 [USD 12.50] at the most – flour that we don't always want or need. We're far better off getting cash and making our own decisions.”

Research participant, business community, Swat District

“It takes a whole day to queue for rations and it has become a vocation for many. They get paid Rs 300 [USD 3.75] for queuing the whole day for rations and another sum to carry the rations to the recipient's home. This is more than they would do from an honest day's work.” Family interview, Swat District

Another issue that emerged strongly from the research was the failure of the humanitarian community to meet the needs of urban or middle-income communities adequately. This suggests that the humanitarian sector seems most adept at responding to the needs of the rural poor. The looting of many towns and villages that followed displacement and the stripping away of capital through payment of rents meant that most people who returned to their homes were equally poor. However, people had very different capacities and there was significant social capital that could have been harnessed through well-targeted programmes. The joint UN/GoP early recovery plan (CERINA, 2009) highlights the importance of non-agricultural employment to Swat, Buner and Dir districts:

“83% of respondents from Buner, 83% from Swat, and 80% from Bajaur indicated that their households were dependent on money from non-farm activities. These activities include tourism, manufacturing, trading, mining/quarrying, construction, handicrafts, forest harvesting, shop keeping, blacksmith, carpentry and daily labour.”

The failure of the humanitarian system to provide support in these areas served to disenfranchise large sections of the urban community. Interviews in Mingora and Buner town showed that many people could see opportunities where a small investment or grant could have allowed businesses to re-establish themselves. This would have generated employment and income for a much larger group of people and would have reduced the dependency on handouts that was so profoundly resented.

“International organisations are roaming around raising expectations but they have very little to offer us.”

Business community focus group, Mingora town

While there are clear limitations to the breadth and depth of humanitarian assistance, there is both a need for and potential for a more inclusive approach that seeks to understand needs across a far broader section of the community and targets programmes to meet the basic needs of the poor while using the latent capacity of more highly educated business communities to stimulate broader economic growth. This also adds weight to the important need for recovery activities to start at the earliest opportunity and for them to build on people's desire to be the architects of their own recovery.

It is important to note that the Conflict Early Recovery Initial Needs Assessment (CERINA) produced in September 2009, only two months after people returned to NWFP, represents a useful summary of needs and identifies a number of schemes targeted at generating non-rural employment, such as the creation of employment information centres, employment guarantee schemes and skills training for 'disenfranchised' youth. However, there was no evidence that these had funds attached to them or that implementing agencies had been identified. At the time the research was being conducted, interviews with UN coordination staff suggested that there was limited engagement with the plan and that recovery was only 26% funded.



That is not to say that there was a complete absence of community-based assistance being provided, but the feedback received from those interviewed during the research was extremely negative. If the humanitarian system is to be relevant, it needs to do more to serve its clients. A senior aid official accurately summarised the issue:

“40% of the needs are not met. Donors have specific projects and interests and these don't always match with peoples' needs. There is often a mismatch between what is provided and what is needed.”

Local NGO, Swat District

If one of the anticipated outcomes of humanitarian reform is to reach more beneficiaries with more comprehensive needs-based relief and protection, then there is an urgent need for the humanitarian system to find more effective ways to assess needs and to establish methodologies to ensure greater participation in programme design and delivery. This will doubtless require stronger and more localised coordination mechanisms in addition to a stronger accountability contract, both vertically between affected communities and humanitarian organisations and horizontally between the partners involved in the provision of relief. If the humanitarian system is to raise its game collectively, then it is absolutely essential that the clusters play a leadership role in providing greater direction about minimum standards for relief provision and in seeking to engender stronger accountability within members and between members and those they work with.

3.2 Accountability to affected communities

For the purposes of this research, accountability is defined as “the means by which power is used responsibly. Humanitarian accountability involves taking account of, and accounting to, disaster survivors” (HAP 2007 Standard). Key elements of accountability include the provision of information about programmes and entitlements, the participation of affected communities in all aspects of humanitarian work and the access of the same to complaints-handling procedures. Despite a growing body of literature and a growing number of initiatives in the humanitarian sector to guide and strengthen beneficiary accountability to affected populations, practical uptake has been slow. Efforts have been made by organisations to trial new techniques, but these have often been applied on an ad hoc basis and few organisations have sought to apply these rigorously across their programmes.

This is also an area where humanitarian reform has been oddly silent. Explicit efforts have been made to improve peer accountability by designating a provider of last resort that has clear responsibilities for responding to unmet needs, and upward accountability is potentially strengthened by providing government with a key counterpart in the international community for each of the main sectors of humanitarian response. However, what is less clear is the extent to which the reform package improves accountability to affected communities.

The lack of methodological clarity prompted the Synthesis Report: Review of the engagement of NGOs with the humanitarian reform process (2009) of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project to conclude:

“Interviewees in all the mapping studies generally believed that it is simply not possible to assess the impact of humanitarian reforms on services to affected communities, or in terms of increasing participation in humanitarian response – in part because no



Displaced Children stand in front of their temporary home at an IDP camp near Mardan, May 2009.

Photo: ActionAid

processes have been established for measuring the impact of clusters or financing mechanisms.”

Given the politicisation of aid in Pakistan and the well-documented failures of the sector to meet people's basic needs, the potential gap in accountabilities is of considerable concern. In seeking to understand the implications of this, the research focused attention on people's experience of aid and the extent to which they had access to information about their entitlements, participated in programme decision making and had access to complaints procedures.

Transparency and information provision

The gap between humanitarian aid provider and recipient and the implications this has on trust and understanding has been discussed earlier in this report. With few exceptions, the research found that many people's experience of humanitarian assistance was one of interacting with a faceless entity.

“I have no idea who provided the aid... The literate amongst us say that NGOs were responsible but I have no knowledge of this.”

Household interview, Mingora town

“I know that WFP [World Food Programme] provides the food but I don't know what this is. Perhaps it's a government department?”

Household interview, Swat District

The poorest sections of the community tended to appreciate what they received, irrespective of the utility of the items. However, the lack of information about entitlements and the absence of interlocutors with whom to raise complaints and issues of concern heightened suspicion about the assistance and was extremely divisive, increasing mistrust within and between communities.



Accountability and Partnership

Humanitarian actors are first and foremost accountable for the humanitarian principles underpinning the Humanitarian Project. It is the extent of adherence to, upholding and practice of these principles that should mark the 'success' of humanitarian assistance.

Affected communities have a fundamental human right to receive aid, which makes accountability to affected populations a central tenet of the Humanitarian Project.

Accountability should mean more than a set of mechanisms, practices, tools and mechanical information sharing with affected groups. It is an approach, a conviction and an overarching framework that needs to permeate all aspects of humanitarian discourse and practice.

Affected communities need to be equal partners in humanitarian efforts. True partnership denotes equality, reciprocity and responsibility. This will not only ensure more effective assistance but also minimise the risk of dependency, apathy and outright antagonism to humanitarian assistance.

“We aren't registered and didn't receive the Rs 25,000 [USD 312.50] from the government. We don't have any idea about who is donating the food or how to influence decisions.”

Family in Swat District

“Some people got Rs 7,000, [USD 87.50] some received Rs 11,000, [USD 137.50], others received Rs 18,000 [USD 225]. We don't know what amount they should have received and why. We don't know if they received what they should have done.”

Civil society focus group, Buner town

For those who were more educated, particularly those living in urban areas, mistrust was replaced with anger and far deeper suspicion about the partiality of aid.

“20% of people got 80% of the items. The distributions were not uniform and those [people] that were favoured received high-value items.”

Activist focus group, Mingora town

While the research did identify some good practice, and the establishment of four information centres by an NGO in Buner District potentially filled an information deficit, the findings from community-level interviews suggest that these were the exception rather than the norm. They were also individual efforts by NGOs rather than a unified strategy led by the clusters. It cannot be over emphasised that the failure to provide information to communities about programmes and entitlements not only represents a significant failure of the humanitarian community but risks further eroding the already shaky support base for the work of humanitarian organisations working in NWFP.



Participation, complaints and redress

In a humanitarian context where communities considered even the fundamental building block of information provision to be absent, it was far more difficult to find examples of participatory programme planning or methods for raising complaints and seeking redress.

The example provided by a family in a village just outside Mingora town is typical of much of the feedback received:

“My house was destroyed in the fighting between the army and the extremists. There is an organisation who is building a latrine in the compound. I'm not happy with it as it's different to what I'm used to. I have no idea who's building it although I think it's a Pakistani organisation. They have a contract with a mason so I see only him. At first he promised he would construct the whole toilet then he came back and said I had to dig the pit. It's still not finished and I don't know when he'll return.”

In a village just outside Buner town which was attacked by the Taliban and still fears reprisals, there was a level of hostility to humanitarian organisations. The community recounted that successive organisations that had come to assess and take photos on account of the destruction in the town, but that very limited assistance had been provided.

“Agency 'x' carried out some food distributions; other NGOs visited to take photos but they didn't provide any assistance. Agency 'y' has used the pictures of the destroyed houses for their fundraising but they are distributing to other areas.”

Community meeting, Buner District

Where assistance had been provided, the same community was often disappointed. Programmes had either been unsatisfactory; had not met needs; or changes had been made midway through implementation, which meant that entitlements or beneficiary numbers were reduced.

“Agency 'w' built these shelters a month ago but they're not useful, they're too cold. They cost Rs 50,000 [USD 625] each; it would have been far better if they had given us the money.”
Community meeting, Buner District

“Agency 'v' discussed a cash distribution programme with us which they told us would target 600 families but when they came to implement only 250 families received the money. We contacted the organisation to complain but did not receive a satisfactory response. We think there was favouritism or perhaps the money was distributed elsewhere.”

Community meeting, Buner District

Even in the camps, which were generally considered to have benefited from better coordinated distributions, there were complaints of partiality and corruption.

“The early arrivals [to the camps] had contact with NGOs and received more as a result. Many NGOs didn't distribute fairly.”

Activist focus group member, Swat District

“The people who arrived at the end didn't get assistance erecting their tents unless they paid for it. Some complained about this to government officials but they were uncooperative. I complained to a monitor but was told that if he was too demanding they would replace him with someone else.”

Activist focus group member, Swat District

Aid staff talked of community-driven processes and some outlined some fairly rudimentary complaints procedures, but the perceptions of the community were that there was a significant deficit in the area of accountability. Interviews with NGO staff highlighted commitments to a range of initiatives designed to strengthen performance and accountability to affected communities (which included HAP, Sphere and peer review processes). However, their application seemed extremely patchy and



even when agencies had systems in place, their ability to allow for meaningful participation appeared to be limited, particularly where organisations worked through implementing partners and were another step removed from aid recipients:

“We're a member of HAP and have tried to introduce a complaints mechanism but this hasn't always worked as well as it might. We encourage our implementing partners to address downward accountability but it's difficult to monitor this.”

INGO Director, Islamabad

While it is very possible that negative perceptions filled the space due to reasons explained above, the fact remains that there is a significant gap in information about what decisions were made, who was selected and why, and the entitlements they were due. This lack of clarity has a very real risk of undermining the good will that currently exists for the broader humanitarian community, which is of particular concern in an environment that harbours a latent mistrust of NGOs. Accounts and rumours of the political manipulation of aid and stories of corrupt aid officials were rife. While these may have been embellished, the fact that they have significant currency across such a wide cross-section of civil society in Swat and Buner should be cause for collective concern within the humanitarian community in Pakistan.

When the issue of accountability to affected communities was raised with cluster coordinators and participating agencies, the general response received was that the clusters (in Islamabad) were too far removed from operations to be able to achieve this. An example was only offered in one of the interviews of efforts to engage with civil society through consultations with IDP camp leaders. On several occasions cluster members expressed a degree of frustration that accountability was not on the agenda. There was considerable interest and appetite for issues of impact and quality to play a greater

role in the work of clusters but there was little optimism that this would happen.

“Cluster meetings are mainly used for information sharing... there are no discussions about standards or impact on affected communities.”

INGO cluster member, Islamabad

“Issues of accountability are raised [at cluster level] but not debated much and no action is taken.”

INGO cluster member, Islamabad

There was a general view that accountability between cluster members was important and mechanisms existed in many of the clusters to achieve this, but that accountability to affected communities remained the responsibility of individual cluster members. While there is certainly truth in this - given that the humanitarian community is bound together by a common set of principles that bestows a common set of rights on those it seeks to serve - it would seem a serious omission if accountability to affected communities were not an integral part of the common coordination mechanism. It is important to stress that there is nothing new in saying this. The Synthesis Report of the NGOs and Humanitarian Reform Project (2008) makes a similar conclusion, as does the IASC Cluster Evaluation Phase 1 (2007):

“The overriding goal of the cluster approach, and for that matter any other systemic improvement measure, is not to strengthen coordination for its own sake, but rather to improve outcomes for individuals and communities receiving humanitarian assistance. Some have argued that the approach risks creating a structure that is too inwardly focused and concerned with serving its own internal requirements, potentially stifling programme innovations and losing focus on how to better meet the needs of beneficiaries. To prevent this, more emphasis is needed within and between clusters to develop indicators to measure real performance in the field.”



Performance may be measured in many different ways, and the IASC Interim Self-Assessment of the Implementation of the Cluster Approach (2006) goes further in recommending practical ways in which accountability to affected communities could be significantly strengthened.

“...there is concern among field staff that more needs to be done to ensure greater accountability to recipients of assistance and that this has not been adequately addressed within the cluster approach, to date. In many respects, the issue of ensuring greater accountability to recipients of aid is tied to improving a collective approach to needs assessment and analysis, establishing agreed objectives, identifying benchmarks and indicators of success, and effective monitoring of programme implementation and impact...Based on field inputs to this Self Assessment, it is not yet evident that these efforts and tools are being harnessed consistently to advance the aim of greater accountability to aid recipients.”

Four years on from the Interim Self-Assessment process, evidence from Pakistan suggests that the cluster system (and perhaps the humanitarian community as a whole) has made little or no progress towards realising this goal. Given that the rights of disaster-affected communities and the broader goal of humanitarian reform are both unchanged, and given the aid failures identified by the research and the increasing ambivalence and disenfranchisement of many recipients to humanitarian aid, the humanitarian system can ill afford to make slow progress in such an important aspect of its work. Strengthening accountability to affected populations at the cluster-level will be a significant undertaking, but collective action unified by a commitment to standards of performance and accountability offers one of the best chances of the sector as a whole reclaiming lost ground and confidence. If the link between rights, recipients and humanitarian assistance is stronger, there is a greater chance that the humanitarian system will continue to be considered a truly universal and relevant project.



Villagers receive vital supplies at Palodand Village, Swabi District in May 2009. Most people fleeing the May-July 2009 fighting did not have time to gather their belongings

Photo: Adam Ferguson/ActionAid

3.3 Partnership

Partnership was absent from the original humanitarian reform package and the word itself did not appear in the main text of the Humanitarian Response Review. This was addressed through the establishment of the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP) and subsequent PoP which now theoretically form the basis for collaboration and coordination across clusters. However, progress has been slow, prompting a scathing criticism from the 2007 IASC Cluster Evaluation, which considered it to be:

“...among the most disappointing findings... with the cluster approach showing no added value in terms of identifying and engaging more of these partners, or providing significant opportunities for mentoring, partnership and direct funding.”



Promise and practice in partnership

While the research identified some good practice in engendering a spirit of participation within several of the clusters, it found a lack of knowledge of the PoP at all levels. As a result, partnership has been addressed from a mechanistic perspective and attention has tended to focus much more on joint planning and joint decision making, rather than on the more fundamental issues of attitudes and power.

“I'm vaguely aware of the PoP document. It's not been circulated but the cluster does reflect the principles.”

Cluster Coordinator, Islamabad

“The PoP has not been shared or looked at closely although the time is now right for it to be introduced. There is still a concern that national NGOs tend to be left out.”

Senior UN staff member

When the PoP document was discussed there was considerable interest from cluster members about the principles. However, people had difficulty in translating them into tangible actions, and it is this that presents the bigger challenge. There were also structural factors that limited the formation of effective partnerships within the clusters in Pakistan. One particular example is the use of the clusters as funding mechanisms. Interviews with agencies applying for funds revealed concerns about favouritism, self-interest and competition. If partnership is to go beyond lip-service then experience would suggest that funding decisions are best left outside the clusters. A second issue is the limited capacity many agencies have to participate meaningfully in the clusters. Most cluster coordinators themselves wear two hats: they have a role to play for their respective organisations in addition to their coordination duties. A third impediment is the 'revolving door' of staff turnover, which makes it difficult to maintain continuity and to build trust effectively. It is in this area that national NGOs

offer far more than their international counterparts, as they can potentially have long-term engagement in the clusters, which would be of significant benefit.

Interviews with cluster coordinators highlighted some very practical solutions to supporting cluster participation and continuity. A cluster orientation and induction pack is being used in one of the Islamabad clusters. In addition, a revolving chair for cluster meetings has helped build group ownership and break down barriers between different agencies.

“The rapid turnover of cluster members is a key issue for institutional memory. We're trying to find a way to better induct new staff to address knowledge gaps but members often know very little about cluster working.”

Cluster Coordinator, Islamabad

“We've instituted a revolving chair position to encourage participation and... break down barriers.”

Cluster Coordinator, Islamabad

Ferris (2007) suggests that local NGO coordination mechanisms could be supported and representatives from national NGOs could receive dedicated assistance to participate in cluster meetings. These all have cost implications but the experience of Pakistan suggests that, if the principles outlined in the PoP are to be attained, then there will be a cost attached. There is a need for donors to recognise that this is the price of doing humanitarian business. Of primary importance in Pakistan is for the HCT to be diversified further to include a national NGO representative.

Clearly, if the PoP is to provide the ethos of cluster functioning, as the OCHA HCSS Pakistan Mission Report (2009) recommends, then there is much work still to be done. The divisions that separate international organisations from their national counterparts need to be broken down further. It will be important to create a forum for representation



of national NGOs – be it the Pakistan Humanitarian Forum or a similar national coordination entity. In Pakistan, more so than in many other contexts, national NGOs are relied upon to deliver assistance in areas that are less accessible and more insecure. Hence their position as an equal partner with other members of the humanitarian community is essential.

If there is to be progress in this, clusters will need to be far more proactive in disseminating the PoP and in leading debate within all parts of the humanitarian community about the implications of the principles on ways of working, attitudes and power. It is difficult to prescribe a process to achieve this. Progress will undoubtedly rest to a large extent on the ability and commitment of the cluster coordinators to build strong teams that cross traditional boundaries.

Partnership: Beyond participation

NGOs in Pakistan did not perceive participation in cluster meetings as necessarily reflective of the spirit of partnership. Attitudes varied from being outright critical of the clusters as a drain on already stretched time and resources to perceiving clusters as a space for useful coordination but nothing else. Thus, national NGOs either shunned cluster meetings and saw them as irrelevant or participated in them for the sake of information-gathering and some networking. Both attitudes reflect that national NGOs do not see themselves as equal partners of a common project, a common objective and a common set of principles that the clusters represent. In addition, the majority of national NGOs are focused on development with an agenda that prioritises democracy, governance, poverty alleviation and social change. Humanitarian assistance is perceived mostly by national NGOs as a mechanical operation that aims to address immediate needs rather than a comprehensive project that encapsulates a set of humanitarian principles that they subscribe to. In fact, some national NGOs were very critical of the mechanical way humanitarian assistance is

being delivered. They perceive it as undermining their agenda for social change and social reform by creating dependency among affected communities and inadvertently maintaining a discourse where democracy, social mobility and rights are perceived as Western intervention.

The importance of partnership at the local level

Clusters are based in both Islamabad and Peshawar with the focus of the former being on strategic humanitarian issues and the latter being more operational. Due to insecurity the Peshawar clusters have relocated to Islamabad at times, a change that is now beginning to take on a greater degree of permanence.

In the early stages of the IDP response, local coordination mechanisms were established in locations where displaced people were more visible such as in the IDP camps. Since the majority of the IDPs have returned home, the establishment of coordination mechanisms has been slow. Both the districts visited during the research have significant relief and recovery operations and a large number of humanitarian organisations are based in each. However, the formal cluster architecture is almost completely absent. Instead, district authorities have taken on the complex task of coordinating the work of the NGOs. While a number of general and sectoral coordination meetings have been established, there are significant gaps and inter-sectoral coordination is almost completely absent. Interviews with District Coordination Officers (DCOs) and Executive District Officers (EDOs) tasked with coordination duties in Mingora and Buner showed a strong commitment to leading and coordinating the response, which is much to their credit. However, apart from a few notable exceptions,¹² it has also been achieved in the absence of support from (or reference to) the processes associated with humanitarian reform. Given the size of the task, this would appear to be a serious omission. It is only in recent weeks that OCHA has begun to deploy staff to support district-level coordination structures.

¹² WHO had deployed national staff in several locations and UNDP had provided a counterpart to the DCO in Buner charged with supporting inter-agency coordination, amongst other duties.



The primary responsibility for humanitarian response lies with the state and the complexities of insecurity have precluded travel by many UN staff who would otherwise have been tasked with supporting the coordination of humanitarian assistance. However, it is precisely these types of challenges that humanitarian coordination structures must be able to negotiate successfully if the humanitarian community is to meet the ambitions of humanitarian reform and be successful in improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response.

In order for coordination to be contextually relevant in a world where humanitarian space is shrinking and in the spirit of partnership outlined in the PoP, there is a strong case to be made for a focus to be placed on how to support decentralised cluster coordination mechanisms. An important recommendation here is that appropriate training materials and information resources should be developed to permit such coordination not only to exist but to flourish and deliver the core functions of cluster coordination. The success of the humanitarian and recovery efforts in NWFP and many other conflict areas globally depends increasingly on the ability of national actors and local authorities to lead them in the absence of support from the UN. If this is considered to be beyond the reach of clusters or if agencies have to travel to Islamabad to report and coordinate their operations, then there is a risk that coordination will fail the humanitarian community.

3.4 Towards a more inclusive approach to humanitarianism

This research shows that, for humanitarianism to be effective in meeting the needs of affected communities, it needs to: better understand local priorities; more closely identify with local people and structures of coordination; and be far better at holding itself accountable to those it works with and for the principles it embodies. The context of humanitarian assistance in Pakistan and the significant challenges faced by the humanitarian community in parts of the country suggest that there is a need to take stock and reorientate the face of humanitarianism away from its predominantly Western feel and character. We need to identify, respect and support the local manifestations, interpretations and ownership of humanitarian principles if the Humanitarian Project is to become truly global, universal and inclusive in nature. Slim (2004) suggests that it is precisely this 'international' character and all that is identified with it that can alienate people from assistance and hinder humanitarian response.

“It is this essentially secular project with its liberal values, powerful Western agencies and particular programming style that is most easily seen and most keenly felt, as intrusive and abrasive when it arrives en masse. This particular version of progress and compassion has always been contentious to some.”

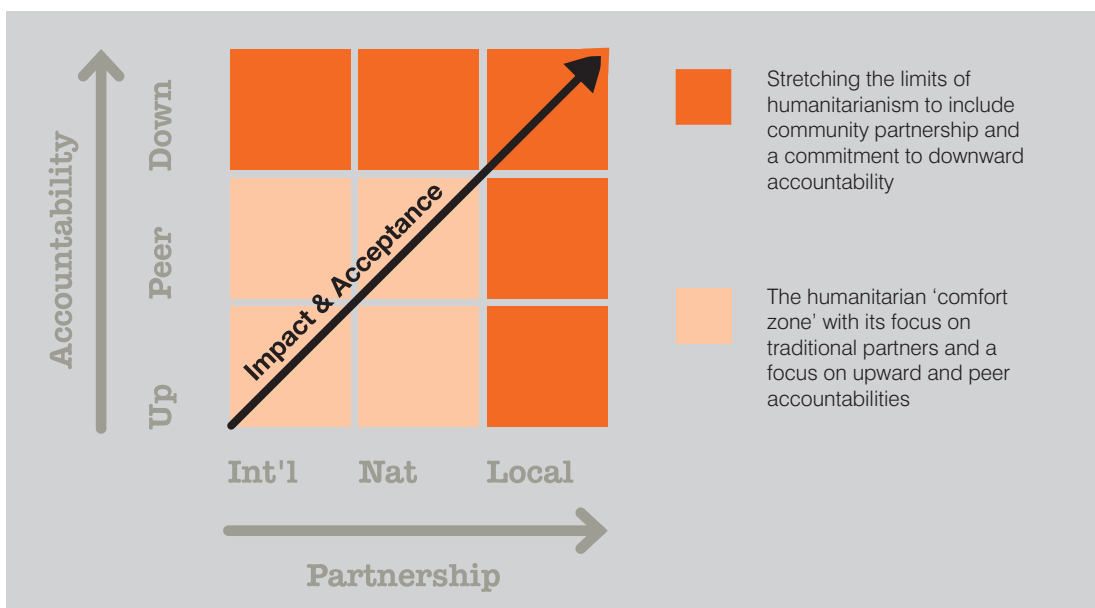
While the humanitarian community in Pakistan does not actively seek to exclude local partners or communities, there needs to be a far greater proactive effort to facilitate their engagement as part of a strategy to broaden understanding of and support for the humanitarian project. The humanitarian system needs to be seen as embodying and encapsulating inclusive and globally shared and owned universal humanitarian principles, rather than an end in itself.



Figure 1 illustrates the traditional comfort zone of humanitarianism with a focus on upward and peer accountability and with an emphasis placed on international partnerships. Successive evaluations of humanitarian reform structures have highlighted a lack of national NGO participation and have noted the failure of clusters to address issues of impact and accountability to affected communities adequately as part of their core business. The research suggests that the current boundaries of humanitarianism need to be stretched and there is a need for humanitarianism to become more local in character by placing a far greater emphasis on local-level partnerships. As the diagram suggests, this needs to go beyond a traditional concept of partnership if community perceptions are to change. Agencies need to understand the needs of those affected by disasters better, and assistance needs to meet these needs more closely, which will require a move away from prescriptive hand outs except in the very early stages after an emergency. The concept of partnership needs to be stretched to encompass the very people humanitarian assistance is seeking to support – those whose rights humanitarian organisations are seeking to uphold.

This is no easy task but the potential benefits far outweigh the costs; humanitarianism is losing ground in Pakistan as it is buffeted by a very complex political context, and the failure to communicate its principles and meet basic needs adequately. Current practice focusing on upward and peer accountability and prioritising international over national and local partners, needs to change. Only by making humanitarianism more relevant locally will it be able to achieve greater impact and acceptance. Humanitarian reform has a key part to play in this, as it is only through strong leadership and coordination that collective humanitarian action can be re-focused and success can be achieved.

Figure 1:¹⁴ Challenging the humanitarian comfort zone



¹⁴ Illustration by Andrew Featherston: 2009.



3.5 Recommendations for strengthening humanitarian practice

- The humanitarian community in Pakistan needs to view disaster-affected communities as partners in the humanitarian endeavour rather than recipients. Participation in project design needs to be strengthened and there needs to be a far greater commitment to providing needs-based assistance over prescriptive responses if acceptance, understanding and ownership are to be achieved. Clear communication and strong mechanisms of accountability to affected communities will be the key to success in this.
- Accountability to disaster-affected communities needs to be a central part of the work of clusters. The opportunities afforded by a central coordination mechanism to raise the collective bar are too good to squander. Success in this will be predicated on improving the collective approach to needs assessment and analysis, identifying benchmarks and indicators of success, and effective monitoring of programme implementation and impact.
- A clear action plan should be developed by OCHA and endorsed by the HCT for establishing and supporting district-level coordination. This needs to explicitly address the important issues of inter-cluster coordination, principles of partnership and accountability. Given the security restrictions imposed on international staff in Pakistan, the focus should be placed on capacity building of national government and NGO staff to allow them to play a leadership role.
- The HC needs to make a greater commitment to disseminating and role-

modelling the PoP and cluster coordinators need to take responsibility for operationalising them such that they become the ethos for cluster functioning. This will necessarily require that greater efforts are made to facilitate the engagement of national NGOs at a strategic level. Solutions need to be found to the current impasse in national NGO representation and targeted capacity building or funding of dedicated representation posts should be considered.

At the global level it is recommended that:

- A more explicit link needs to be made between humanitarian reform processes and accountability to aid recipients. This will require clarification of the role of sector/cluster leads in the generic Terms of Reference. As part of this commitment, practical guidance should be given on performance benchmarks and standards of assistance to guide country-level clusters in strengthening accountability to affected communities.
- While the five principles contained in the PoP provide a sound basis for humanitarian partnership, successful realisation of these will require attitudinal change, which will require support and guidance from the global level. There would be value in Global Cluster Leads disseminating success stories that provide practical examples of how the principles have been operationalised, to act as a guide to country-level cluster coordinators and members.
- Training materials and information resources should be developed to support decentralised coordination that is appropriate for use by non-UN cluster leads (such as NGO staff or government representatives) in circumstances where it is not possible to roll out standard cluster models due to access constraints or insecurity.



Annexes

Annex 1: List of community discussions and agency interviews¹

Islamabad:

World Vision International, Programmes Director
World Vision International, IDP Manager
Oxfam GB, IDP Manager
Oxfam GB, Livelihoods Coordinator
Oxfam GB, WASH Coordinator
Save the Children Alliance, Information and Communications Manager
UN OCHA, Head of OCHA
UN OCHA, National Humanitarian Officer
WHO, Emergency Coordinator and Health Cluster Coordinator
UNICEF, Nutrition Specialist and Cluster Coordinator
UNICEF, Chief of Field Operations
UNHCR, IDP Protection Cluster Coordinator
Médecins Sans Frontières, Brussels Section, Head of Mission
International Rescue Committee, Country Director
Pakistan Humanitarian Forum, Lead Agency Representative
International Organisation for Migration, Emergency Officer
UN Office of the Red Cross, Area Coordination Adviser
CARE International, Operations and Emergency Programme Coordinator
Church World Service, Senior Communications Officer
Church World Service, HAP/Sphere Focal Person
Concern Worldwide, Country Manager
Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, CEO
Khidmet, Director
Ali Asghar Khan

Mingora, Swat District:

EDO Health
EDO Education
HROD (former ACO)
Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development, Liaison Officer
Omar Asghar Khan, Programme Manager Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
Sabawoon Welfare Association, Senior Vice President
Mercy Corps, Programme Coordinator
Mercy Corps, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Malteser International, Project Manager
Lasoona, Executive Director
Environmental Protection Society, Executive Director
Activists' focus group, Mingora
Business community focus group, Mingora
Religious community focus group, Mingora
Household interviews, Piramen village, Takhta Band U/C
Male focus group, Sabone village
Female focus group, Panr U/C
District Nazim
Tehsil Nazim (municipal administration)

Buner, Buner District:

EDO Health
UNDP, Capacity Building Officer
UN OCHA, National Humanitarian Affairs Officer
World Vision International, Project Manager
Islamic Relief Worldwide, Field Project Manager
Relief International, Shelter and Facilitation Coordinator
Research and Awareness for Human Development Benefits and Rights, Financial Administrator
Research and Awareness for Human Development Benefits and Rights, Community Outreach Coordinator

¹ Participant names have not been included for reasons of security.



Initiative for Development and Empowerment
Axis, Buner District Manager
Business community focus group, Buner town
Activists' focus group, Buner town
Community focus group, Sultan Was village,
Sultan Was U/C
Female focus group, Sultan Was village, Sultan
Was U/C
Household interviews, Kawga village, Kawga
U/C
District Nazim
Tehsil Nazim (2 people)

Annex 2: Expanded bibliography

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Annex 3: Methodology

Research themes

Description

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

Partnership was not part of the original humanitarian reform package and the word itself does not appear in the main text of the Humanitarian Response Review. However, partnership is critical to effective action. This was addressed through the establishment of the Global Humanitarian Platform and the Principles of Partnership that followed and that now form the basis for collaboration and coordination across clusters. One of the major flaws is considered to be the 'international' focus of the reform process, which failed to explain and explore its impact at national and local level. Consequently there have been persistent concerns about impediments to the participation of local NGOs (real and perceived).

Impact on affected communities

The reform model did little to challenge the construct of humanitarianism; rather it re-organised it and strengthened the coordination mechanism in order for it to deliver humanitarian services more efficiently by (allegedly) demanding high standards of predictability, accountability and partnership. The IASC Guidance Note on the Cluster Approach (IASC, 2006) states that the success of the cluster approach will be judged in terms of the impact it has on improving the humanitarian response to those affected by crises. However, there has been no process established to assess the contribution made by reformed processes to meeting humanitarian needs of crisis-affected people, a gap that has often been flagged in evaluation reports. It is possible the IASC Phase 2 Cluster Evaluation may begin to fill this gap.

Accountability to affected communities

Strengthening accountability is a key objective of the reform package. Explicit efforts have been made to improve peer accountability through designating a provider of last resort that has clear responsibilities for responding to unmet needs. Upward accountability is potentially strengthened by providing government with a key counterpart in the international community for each of the main sectors of humanitarian response. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which the reform package improves downward accountability. There have been no specific mechanisms established within the clusters to champion or provide guidance on downward accountability and this aspect has generally been outside the remit of evaluations to date (although this may change with the IASC Phase 2 Cluster Evaluation).

Standards, benchmarks & information sources

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

Principles of Partnership (2007): Equality, transparency, result-oriented approach, responsibility, complementarity;

IASC Guidance Note on the Cluster Approach (2006): The cluster approach represents a raising of standards in humanitarian response. This should be based on a clear assessment of needs and gaps, as well as on a mapping of response capacities, including those of the host government, local authorities, local civil society, international humanitarian organisations and other actors, as appropriate.

IASC Cluster Evaluation, Part 1 (2007): National NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs): This was among the most disappointing findings regarding the cluster approach. In rollout countries, national and local NGOs and CBOs were seen to participate at roughly the same rate and extent as previously, with the cluster approach



showing no added value in terms of identifying and engaging more of these partners, or providing significant opportunities for mentoring, partnership and direct funding. In sudden-onset crises, cluster coordinators do not appear to have engaged sufficiently with local capacities, particularly local NGOs, nor did it appear that this was a priority in the process. Local NGOs heard about meetings through word of mouth rather than official invitation, despite the presence of active and capable local NGO communities in a number of settings.

OCHA HCSS Pakistan Mission Report (2009): For national NGOs (NNGOs) the situation is even more problematic. To get NNGOs properly integrated into the operation remains a big challenge. It is incumbent upon the humanitarian community, UN and NGOs alike to support the inclusion of NNGOs, to the extent practicable, and support coordination fora like JACER, which has a vast number of both national and international NGOs in its membership. OCHA could organize a special briefings on its mandate as well as humanitarian reform, targeting particularly national NGOs, in order to reach out more effectively to a part of the community that is often forgotten.

Accountability to affected communities
IASC Guidance Note on the Cluster Approach (2006): As spelt out in the Terms of Reference for Sector Leads at the Country Level (see Annex 1), specific responsibilities of sector leads at the country level include: participatory and community-based approaches: the nature of the relationships established between international humanitarian actors and local civil society, as well as other stakeholders, will depend on the political and security situation and on their capacities and willingness to lead or engage in humanitarian activities.

HAP Accountability Principles: (i) commitment to humanitarian standards and rights (ii) setting standards and building capacity (iii) communication (iv) participation in programme (v) monitoring compliance (vi) addressing complaints (vii) implementing partners.

IASC Interim Self-assessment of the Implementation of the Cluster Approach: there is concern among field staff that more needs to be done to ensure greater accountability to recipients of assistance and that this has not been adequately addressed within the cluster approach, to date. In many respects, the issue of ensuring greater accountability to recipients of aid is tied to improving a collective approach to needs assessment and analysis, establishing agreed objectives, identifying benchmarks and indicators of success, and effective monitoring of programme implementation and impact. These are long-standing concerns of the humanitarian community, and improvements have been attempted through such efforts as Good Humanitarian Donorship, the Sphere Project, CAP and CHAP reform, and the HAP, to name a few. Based on field inputs to this self assessment, it is not yet evident that these efforts and tools are being harnessed consistently to advance the aim of greater accountability to aid recipients.

UN and cluster leads

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

Principles of Partnership (PoP): Is there a strategy within the cluster to implement the PoP? Do key documents (strategy, proposals etc) reflect the PoP? Are the PoP helpful in shaping the relationship between UN and non-UN organisations? Why/why not? Are all partners equal? Do you consider this important? How does this impact on accountabilities between different partners? How could the PoP be better operationalised through the clusters/humanitarian reform mechanisms?

Civil society participation: Do civil society stakeholders (including women) involve themselves in needs assessment, planning and decision making mechanisms? Why/why not? How do you work with local government and civil society groups and what is your reasoning behind this approach? Is there policy guidance within the cluster to involve relevant national and local stakeholders?



Are there standard procedures within the cluster to involve national and local stakeholders? Which factors promote/hinder the involvement of civil society groups? Does the cluster have a specific strategy for strengthening ownership (e.g. capacity building, partnership, use of local language, outreach?) To what extent does the cluster enable/prevent local aid actors from getting access to common funds? Is this an ambition of the cluster which reflects the PoP? Or is the cluster purely for better functioning of UN funding?

Impact on affected communities
Perspectives on Impact/measurement: Do you have a sense of the contribution made by reformed processes to the humanitarian response in the Swat Valley? How have you reached this conclusion? What mechanisms exist to measure the added value of the cluster/reform processes? Specifically, to what extent do you consider that the principles of partnership have been attained? And the extent to which the response has met the ambitions of the IASC on providing assistance that is accountable to crisis-affected people? To what extent does a formal mechanism exist to measure this? Why? Who is/isn't/will/won't be involved in this process? Why? To what extent were/should affected people be involved in measuring the successes and failures of humanitarian reform? What practical steps can be taken to achieve this?

Accountability to affected communities
Perceptions of humanitarian principles and accountability: What do you consider to be the fundamental aims of the humanitarian system? To what extent do the clusters embody humanitarian principles and PoP and accountability to affected communities? Do you believe that there is a shared understanding of humanitarianism across all partners? What are the key weaknesses and can they be addressed through reform processes?

Accountability and participation: How do clusters facilitate accountability across the spectrum of stakeholders in humanitarian response? Do you have a strategy to guide

you on this? How do you deliver against these multiple accountabilities? Is/are the affected populations (and host communities) involved in cluster activities? How did the participation of the affected populations and the accountability towards them affect the strategy and implementation of the cluster? What factors facilitated/hindered meeting accountabilities?

Global humanitarian reform accountability issues: Given the aims of humanitarian reform (to ensure greater accountability to recipients of humanitarian assistance) and the lack of guidance or shared mechanisms for promoting accountability to multiple stakeholders (including NGOs, CBOs, affected communities), what do you consider practical steps to take at a) a global level, b) a cluster level?

Government

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities
Reform processes & PoP: What is your role in the coordination of humanitarian relief? To what extent have government and UN-led mechanisms worked in harmony? And what areas have been more challenging? How have you sought to resolve these? Are you aware of the PoP? Have these been helpful in establishing ways of working? If not, what would you change (add/subtract)? How did the clusters help or hinder the humanitarian response? To what extent do you consider that they reflected the diversity of the humanitarian community? Is it important that they do so? How could they be improved to better meet the needs of a coordinated response?

Accountability to affected communities
Perceptions of humanitarian principles and accountability: What do you consider to be the fundamental aims of the humanitarian system? Do you believe that there is a shared understanding of humanitarianism? What do you consider the role of government in it? Did you play this role in Swat? How has government coordinated internally? Where do different parts fit in the flow chart? What have been the strengths and weaknesses?



Perceptions of reform mechanisms: Can you outline the system for aid provision to affected communities? Do most of those involved in humanitarian delivery understand how the system works? Is it important for all parts to know? What are the most important aspects of aid delivery? (what is delivered, who delivers it, when it is delivered, the quality of the item).

Accountability beliefs and mechanisms: How important is it that there is accountability in the humanitarian assistance from top to bottom? What are your views on accountability successes and failures in the Swat response? How do government/local authorities seek to be accountable to communities? Do you consider it important for affected communities to be involved? In what ways?

NNGOs and INGOs

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

Principles of Partnership (PoP): Does this mean anything to you? If so, how did it impact on your relationships with other NGOs (international and national)? If not, do you think the principles are helpful? What would you change (add/subtract)?

Participation in reform processes: What do you know about UN/NGO coordination processes? What involvement did you have in the clusters (attended meetings, briefed on programmes, participated in assessments, involved in strategic planning)? Why was this (didn't feel welcome, didn't understand the role of clusters, didn't want to participate)? How would you have liked to participate? What factors promote/hinder the involvement of I/NGOs? How did the clusters help or hinder the humanitarian response? How could they be improved/changed to better meet the needs of a coordinated response?

For non-participants: Why didn't you participate? How did you coordinate with other national/international organisations?

Impact on affected communities

Local capacity: What role did your organisation play in the response? How did you organise yourselves? Did you influence what or how assistance was provided? Or did others impose this on you? Do you consider your capacities were used to the extent possible?

Needs-based: What assistance did people require and what assistance did they receive? Was it of sufficient quality and quantity? Did everyone receive the same items? Did some members of community have specific needs? Were these met? Were there members in the community who didn't receive assistance and who should have?

Coordination/Partnership: How well coordinated were the different responses of the different agencies? Were there any gaps or duplications? Was it clear what items people were receiving from which organisation, at what time and in what place?

Timeliness: When did people need the assistance and when did they receive it? Accountability (next section also): Did people know in advance about what they were going to receive? To what extent did they participate in assessments, programme design, evaluation of programmes? Were they able to bring problems to the attention of aid staff? Were these problems satisfactorily dealt with? What could have been done better and how?

Accountability to affected communities

Perceptions of humanitarian principles and accountability: What do you consider to be the fundamental aims of the humanitarian system? Do you believe that there is a shared understanding of humanitarianism? What do you consider the role of NGOs to be in it? Did you play this role in Swat?

Perceptions of reform mechanisms: Can you outline the system for aid provision to affected communities? Do most of those involved in humanitarian delivery understand how the system works? Is it important for all parts to know? What are the most important aspects of aid delivery? (what is delivered, who delivers it,



it, when it is delivered, the quality of the item). Is it important for different organisations to deliver different aspects of humanitarian assistance (education, health, early recovery?)

Accountability beliefs and mechanisms: What is accountability? How important is it in the delivery of humanitarian assistance? How does your organisation seek to be accountable to the people it works with? Is/are the affected populations (and host communities) involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance? How? Why/why not? Do you consider it important for affected communities to be involved? In what ways? On which level were the affected populations involved – information, assessments, decision making, evaluation? Why on those levels (and not others)? How did the participation of the affected populations and the accountability towards them affect the implementation of the work? Which other factors facilitated/hindered the participation and accountability towards the affected population? Is the equal participation of men/women ensured? How? Why/why not?

CBOs

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

Participation in reform processes: What do you know about UN/NGO coordination processes? What involvement did you have in the clusters (attended meetings, briefed on programmes, participated in assessments, involved in strategic planning)? Why was this (didn't feel welcome, didn't understand the role of clusters, didn't want to participate)? How would you have liked to participate? What factors promote/hinder the involvement of civil society groups? How did the clusters help or hinder the humanitarian response? How could they be improved/changed to better meet the needs of a coordinated response?

For non-participants: Why didn't you participate? How did you coordinate with other national/international organisations?

Principles of Partnership: Does this mean anything to you? If so, how did it impact on your relationships with other NGOs (international and national)? If not, do you think the principles are helpful? What would you change (add/subtract)?

Impact on affected communities

Local capacity: What role did your organisation play in the response? How did you organise yourselves? Did you influence what or how assistance was provided? Or did others impose this on you? Do you consider your capacities were used to the extent possible?

Needs-based: What assistance did people require and what assistance did they receive? Was it of sufficient quality and quantity? Did everyone receive the same items? Did some members of community have specific needs? Were these met? Were there members in the community who didn't receive assistance and who should have?

Coordination/Partnership: How well coordinated were the different responses of the different agencies? Were there any gaps or duplications? Was it clear what items people were receiving from which organisation, at what time and in what place?

Timeliness: When did people need the assistance and when did they receive it?

Accountability (next section also): Did people know in advance about what they were going to receive? To what extent did they participate in assessments, programme design, evaluation of programmes? Were they able to bring problems to the attention of aid staff? Were these problems satisfactorily dealt with? What could have been done better and how?



Accountability to affected communities

Perceptions of humanitarian principles and accountability: Which organisations have responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance? What is your view of the UN? What does it do? What is its role in humanitarian response? Does it help or hinder humanitarian response? And what is the role of the government? And INGO/NNGOs/CBOs – are there any differences in these organisations? What are your responsibilities and did you meet these?

Perceptions of reform mechanisms: Can you outline the system for aid provision to affected communities? Is it important for you to know? What are the most important aspects of aid delivery? (what is delivered, who delivers it, when it is delivered, the quality of the item). Is it important for different organisations to deliver different aspects of humanitarian assistance (education, health, early recovery)?

Accountability beliefs and mechanisms: What is accountability? How important is it in the delivery of humanitarian assistance? How does your organisation seek to be accountable to the people it works with? Is/are the affected populations (and host communities) involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance? How? Why/why not? Do you consider it important for affected communities to be involved? In what ways? On which level were the affected populations involved – information, assessments, decision making, evaluation? Why on those levels (and not others)? How did the participation of the affected populations and the accountability towards them affect the implementation of the work? Which other factors facilitated/hindered the participation and accountability towards the affected population? Is the equal participation of men/women ensured? How? Why/why not?

Affected communities

Impact on affected communities

Needs-based: What assistance did you require and what assistance did you receive? Was it of sufficient quality and quantity? Did everyone receive the same items? Did some members of community have specific needs? Were these met? Were there members in the community who didn't receive assistance and who should have?

Coordination/Partnership: How well coordinated were the different responses of the different agencies? Were there any gaps or duplications? Was it clear what items you were receiving from which organisation, at what time and in what place? Timeliness: When did you need the assistance and when did you receive it?

Accountability (next section also): Did you know in advance about what you were going to receive? To what extent did you participate in assessments, programme design, evaluation of programmes? Were you able to bring problems to the attention of aid staff? Were these problems satisfactorily dealt with? What could have been done better and how?

Local capacity: What is your role in emergencies (prevention and response)? How did you organise yourself? Did you influence the organisation? Or did others impose this on you? Do you consider your capacities were used to the extent possible?

Accountability to affected communities

Perceptions of humanitarian principles and accountability: Who is responsible for providing humanitarian assistance? Have you heard of the UN? What does it do? What is its role in humanitarian response? And what is the role of the government? and INGO/NNGOs/CBOs – are there any differences in these organisations? What are your responsibilities and did you meet these?



Humanitarian delivery mechanisms: Do you know how aid gets delivered and who delivers it? Is it important for you to know? What are the most important aspects of aid delivery? (what is delivered, who delivers it, when it is delivered, the quality of the item). Is it important for different organisations to deliver different aspects of humanitarian assistance (education, health, early recovery)?

Accountability and participation of affected communities: What is the perception of community members about their participation in the relief response? How were they involved (decision making, implementation, responsibility, provision of ideas, planning, assist in understanding, consent on decisions, informed only)? What do they feel about their involvement? How did it benefit the project activities? Do you know how aid priorities were decided? Did these reflect your own priorities? How else would they have liked to have been involved (had a say in what agencies did, priorities, process, provided feedback, consulted on effectiveness)? What was the approach of agencies to providing information, consulting and incorporating feedback? Did communities know in advance what agency plans were? How did they find out? Did agencies discuss any changes to these plans? Who was consulted (authorities, men, women, children, all)? Was there any written agreement or documentation about the entitlements? Were communities asked what they wanted and what their priorities were? If there had been a problem, how would it have been dealt with? Did communities have to report any problems? How was this dealt with?

Methodology

Partnership with NGOs/CBOs/local authorities

UN/INGO: Key informant interviews; semi-structured interviews (senior UN staff, cluster leads, INGO head of agency).

NNGO: Key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group with larger groups of NGO staff.

Impact on affected communities

UN/INGO: Key informant interviews; semi-structured interviews (senior UN staff, cluster leads, INGO head of agency)

NNGO: Key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group with larger groups of NGO staff.

Community: Participatory exercises (timeline exercise, quantity/quality matrix, the allocation game); focus group discussions; semi-structured interviews at individual, household, community level.

Accountability to affected communities

UN/INGO: Key informant interviews; semi-structured interviews (senior UN staff, cluster leads, INGO head of agency).

NNGO: Key informant interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus group with larger groups of NGO staff.

Community: Participatory exercises (the participation game); focus group discussions; semi-structured interviews at individual, household, community level.

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