

Oxfam Response to the UNISDR Mid-term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action

December 2010

Oxfam International is an international confederation of 14 organisations¹ working together in more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice. This response to the HFA Mid-term review process is a joint Oxfam International response but it should be noted that Oxfam's work implementing the HFA and DRR varies significantly across the different contexts in which we work. It has not been possible to reflect all the richness and diversity of Oxfam's experience in this document.

This response seeks to outline Oxfam's current and future approach to disaster risk reduction, address how Oxfam is currently applying the HFA to its work, Oxfam's perception on the impacts of the HFA to date, and some challenges related to the HFA and some recommendations on how to reorient the HFA in the final stages of its implementation to 2015.

1. Disaster Risk Reduction at Oxfam

1.1 Oxfam's Mandate and Approach

The international Oxfam confederation was established in the late nineties with a mandate to relieve poverty, combat distress and alleviate suffering in any part of the world². In order to do so, its affiliates seek to address both the effects and underlying causes of poverty, injustice, and vulnerability to disasters through long-term development interventions, campaigning, and humanitarian action. Promoting gender equity is fundamental to all areas of Oxfam's work.

In the Strategic Plan 2007-2012, Oxfam's affiliates state their intention to scale-up their efforts to reduce disaster risk and empower poor men and women to adapt to the changing climate. As with all of Oxfam's work, this intention is framed within a **rights-based approach**, based on the belief that poverty and suffering need to be addressed through the exercise of basic human rights: the right to sustainable livelihood; the right to basic services; the right to life and security;

¹ Oxfam America, Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam France, Oxfam Germany, Oxfam Great Britain, Oxfam Hong Kong, Oxfam India, Intermón-Oxfam, Oxfam México, Oxfam New Zealand, Oxfam Novib, Oxfam Québec, Oxfam Solidarité, Oxfam Ireland. Organisations seeking to join the confederation include Oxfam Japan and Oxfam Italy

² Article 2 of the OI Constitution, 2005

the right to be heard; and the right to gender equity. In Oxfam's current Strategic Plan, the fulfilment of these rights is expressed as Aims, to which the affiliates seek to contribute through programmes and campaigns.

Oxfam works with others to achieve 4 major Change Goals in order to reduce poverty and injustice. It is clear that disasters reduce Oxfam's ability to achieve these goals, and thus DRR is critical to our work. The change goals are as follows:

- *Economic Justice*: more women and men will realize their right to secure and sustainable livelihoods
- *Essential Services*: The MDGs for essential services will be achieved and people living in poverty, especially women and girls will realize their rights to accessible and affordable health, education, water and sanitation.
- *Rights in Crisis*: All women and men in humanitarian crises will be assured both the protection and the assistance they require, regardless of who or where they are or how they are affected, in a manner consistent with their human rights.
- *Gender Justice*: Many more women will gain power over their lives and live free from violence through changes in attitudes, ideas and beliefs about gender relations, and through increased levels of women's active engagement and critical leadership in institutions, decision-making and change processes.

Commitment to DRR through humanitarian action

As signatories to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief, all Oxfam affiliates agree to be held accountable to Principle 8 which states that 'relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs'.

This commitment is also reflected in the following statement in the *Oxfam Contract for Humanitarian Action*: 'Within the framework of a rights-based approach which guides all our work, in situations of extreme humanitarian crisis we will prioritize the right to life with dignity (as defined in the Sphere Standards). At the same time we will actively strive to reduce beneficiary vulnerability to future disasters, to help men, women and children to again become active agents in their own lives, and help create sustainable livelihoods.'³

1.2 Institutional Mainstreaming

The growing risk of disasters on a global scale is acknowledged in all of the affiliates' current strategic plans⁴, and Disaster Risk Reduction now figures explicitly and prominently as a priority objective in all of these. This reflects a dramatic rise in awareness of the need to act upon disaster risk before disasters

³ The Oxfam Humanitarian Dossier, Version 3 January 2008

⁴ For example, OGB's *Humanitarian Vision 2010*, and Oxfam Australia's *For a Just World without Poverty* strategic plan 2007-2013

occur since the previous set of strategic plans was in place. The majority of Oxfam's programmes reflect an integrated DRR approach.

DRR is presented by the majority of affiliates as a humanitarian concern, to be addressed primarily through their programming around Rights in Crisis. Consequently, almost all of the affiliates currently situate their disaster risk reduction staff within their humanitarian unit. At the same time, however, all of the affiliates' plans to promote sustainable livelihoods prioritise supporting climate change adaptation, of which DRR is an established mode of intervention

All of the current DRR policies and strategies focus on improving the quality and impact of programmes, although particular affiliates also articulate commitments to advocate for the prioritization of DRR within governmental development plans, to influence the policies of donors and IFIs, and to provide leadership and learning for the wider sector. All of the strategies and policies are all relatively recent⁵ and are at the early stages of implementation.

2. Future developments at Oxfam

To date, each Oxfam affiliate has developed its own approach to DRR although the active exchange of information in the process has resulted in many similarities between approaches. This has largely depended on its institutional and partners' competences, the approach to disaster risk in its regions of geographical engagement, and its organizational development strategy over the past decade. However, Oxfam is now working towards a common approach across the affiliates, to strengthen action and ensure coherence across the confederation.

Oxfam recently carried out an external review across all affiliates, to support the process of agreeing a Common Approach to DRR across Oxfam. The draft commitments suggested include:

- Institutional mainstreaming of disaster risk analysis and risk reduction into programmes in contexts of high and chronic vulnerability to natural hazards and epidemical outbreaks. This should be made explicit in strategic plans, programme cycle management processes, individual programme objectives, relevant staff performance objectives and contracts with partners.
- Staff with DRR-related responsibilities should be able to work across humanitarian, development and campaigns departments.
- Aiming to allocate at least 10% of their funding on identifiable DRR measures and should seek to increase sustainable sources of funding.
- Working towards an integrated rather than stand-alone approach to DRR – adopting frameworks to promote understanding and application of DRR within sectoral or thematic programmes.
- Ensuring that political and social conflict is included in risk analysis as a potential factor of vulnerability.

⁵ The oldest dates back to 2007

- Regarding DRR as central to climate change adaptation (and vice versa), and put in place internal mechanisms and/or structures to ensure coherence between CCA and DRR programming and advocacy. Programme analysis and design should include consideration of the predicted, long-term effects and impacts of climate change and adopt a no-regrets approach.
- Ensuring that linkages exist between local-level programmes and engagement at other levels, to maximize impact,
- Conceptualising and presenting work according to the HFA Priorities for Action, in particular to frame their advocacy.
- Using a participatory tool for analysing risk, vulnerability and capacity at community-level as standard practice in programmes seeking to contribute to work in contexts of high and chronic disaster risk.
- Ensuring that impact indicators for programming in contexts of high and chronic vulnerability to natural hazards and epidemical outbreaks include indicators of resilience and risk reduction. Monitoring systems/tools will need to be designed or adjusted.
- Ensuring that DRR work promotes and protects gender equity. Concretely this means undertaking a rigorous and context-specific gender analysis, creating an enabling environment for women to define and express their risk reduction priorities, ensuring that impact is measured in a gender sensitive way.
- Reducing future vulnerability through humanitarian action – through analysis of disaster risks, vulnerabilities and capacities, appropriate design of sectoral interventions and technical inputs, fostering of partnerships and alliances, applying learning generated by the disaster and the response to inform the design of preparedness planning and longer-term programming.

3. The HFA and Oxfam

The HFA is recognised by Oxfam to be the key global instrument for the implementation of DRR. Oxfam uses the HFA as a practical way of globally communicating the responsibility and contribution that all our work across Oxfam has on DRR.

At country level, many Oxfam teams are involved in directly supporting the local and national government platforms for DRR/HFA implementation. Oxfam has developed guidance on Monitoring and Evaluation for DRR based on the HFA (e.g the Characteristics of a Disaster Resilient Community).

At the international level, Oxfam works to influence donor policy and practice to strengthen DRR and integrate DRR into climate change adaptation. In the majority of cases, the affiliates are using the Hyogo Framework for Action to frame or inform their advocacy strategy.

2.1 The five priority areas of the HFA

It is clear that each of the HFA 5 priority areas for action relate to one or more of Oxfam's change goals, with particular dovetailing with our Economic Justice and

Rights in Crisis aims. Oxfam considers the HFA as a useful reference for our interventions, and works to reflect the 5 dimensions of the priorities.

HFA 1: Making Disaster Risk Reduction a Priority

Much of our DRR work addresses policy, planning, community participation and voice. Oxfam places a particular emphasis on the participation of women, men and all vulnerable groups in risk reduction, and promotes community based disaster risk reduction. Oxfam also engages in DRR Regional initiatives such as leading the ASEAN Partnership group and development of the Asian Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergencies Response (AADMER) and in support to governments and National Platforms in all areas of the world towards developing the institutional basis for the implementation of the HFA.

All Oxfam affiliates are already linking disaster risk reduction action at the community level with advocacy at one or more other levels. At national level, we advocate for stronger policy and action,⁶ and seek to link programme evidence and experience with the development and implementation of DRR legislation. At the local level, affiliates and partners are advocating for integration of DRR into decentralised development plans

HFA 2: Improving Risk Information and Early Warning

Risk analysis is key to Oxfam processes at country-level, including the development of JCAS (Joint Country Analysis and Strategy) and Contingency Plans. As an example, Oxfam GB's DRR policy *requires* analysis, integration, co-ordination and growth of DRR for all countries and programmes where disasters threaten development and drive poverty. Oxfam has developed tools and conducted training to support its staff and partners on risk assessment in disaster-prone areas, and more could be done to implement this in contexts where high vulnerability to disasters threatens longer-term development efforts.

For many years Oxfam has supported communities and governments in establishing end-to-end early warning systems all over the world, from Bangladesh, to Zambia and Tajikistan to Peru. Most recently our work with communities on early warning and preparedness has proven to be highly effective in Pakistan where many people avoided the worst of the floods in Muzafargarh District in South Punjab.

HFA 3: Building a Culture of Safety and Resilience

Information, Education and Communication around hazards and safe behaviour have long been a core part of our community development work – particularly in post-disaster response and recovery programming. One of our core competencies globally is in Public Health education and hygiene promotion to reduce health

⁶ We have advocated for stronger policy and action in a wide range of contexts, including Australia, Zambia, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Phillipines, Kenya, Uganda, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Pakistan.

risks e.g of water borne disease. We support innovative approaches to DRR awareness raising all over the world – such as street theatre, photo exhibitions, football tournaments, film, games for children. Apart from these specific DRR activities our work under the aim “access to essential services and education” has not been consciously conceived of under HFPFA3 - our approach under this strategic aim has further to go in highlighting the links between lack of access to essential services and education and increased risk of disaster, particularly for women and girls. Oxfam is working with people around the world who are showing leadership on HIV and AIDS. Oxfam supports partner organizations in Africa and elsewhere working in the prevention of HIV and AIDS, education and caring for those who are ill. We also support local groups to lobby for the rights of those infected and affected by the disease.

HFA 4: Reducing the underlying risk factors

This priority area is fundamental in reducing poverty and inequality and thus is central to Oxfam’s Economic Justice strategy.

For many years Oxfam's DRR work has sought to address vulnerable livelihoods in situations of chronic risk, such as our pioneering work on Drought Cycle Management in the Horn of Africa. Also in the Horn, we are exploring micro-insurance projects to decrease risk. Food security and livelihoods is a key focus of Oxfam’s work, and we have developed expertise in social protection, in both rural (eg northern provinces in Kenya) and urban (eg Gaza, Nairobi) situations.

There is now explicit commitment in some affiliates⁷ to fully integrate DRR and CCA into all livelihoods promotion work as we seek to achieve transformation in poverty and risk reduction/adaptation at scale – we are looking to expand this across the affiliates.

HFA 5: Strengthen Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response

Disaster preparedness is central to our humanitarian work under Rights in Crisis. Oxfam has common principles on our approach to institutional preparedness, response and recovery programming. Support is given through the Oxfam International Secretariat and the Emergency Managers Network to the contingency planning process at the country level to anticipate and plan for risks in a timely way. A key part of this approach is to invest in developing local capacities of our staff, partners and beneficiaries on preparedness and response. Many Oxfam affiliates have supported community based disaster risk management globally for many years, such as with our River Basin Programme in Bangladesh.

And where appropriate, we work at regional level – for example, in West Africa Oxfam is working with the CILSS⁸ to influence the revision of the Food Aid Charter to include other types of response other than food aid, and to create political space for consideration of DRR and crisis management issues.

⁷ For example Oxfam GB and Oxfam Hong Kong

⁸ Comité Inter-etats de lutte contre la sécheresse au Sahel

At the international level, Oxfam is very active in promoting and developing coordination and dialogue - working within the clusters system and contributing to IASC task forces

Gender as a cross-cutting theme

Gender and diversity are critical factors determining poverty levels and the risks that people face. Oxfam's community-based DRR and Adaptation work emphasises disaggregated analysis and the active promotion of the roles and voices of vulnerable groups. This strategy has shown to be highly effective in transforming gender relations and finding appropriate and sustainable solutions to risk reduction. Oxfam has produced cutting-edge guidance on addressing gender through DRR and adaptation work (e.g Oxfam GB's learning companions and gender and DRR toolkit).

Oxfam aspires to lead advocacy on specific aspects of gender equality and the protection of womens' rights through processes such as national coordination and advocacy forums such as national platforms for the HFA, and to make alliances with womens' rights networks which are working to ensure that DRR policy making is gender-responsive.

4. Positive impact of the HFA to date

As a framework adopted by 168 governments, the scale of the HFA initiative has signified a major shift in how the international community and we as Oxfam view and approach disasters. The adoption of the HFA is an acceptance that disasters losses are not inevitable and that they can be reduced. The fundamental basis of the HFA is that disasters are caused by the interaction of (often predictable) hazards, with existing conditions of social, political and economic vulnerability of populations, and it is possible and imperative to reduce people's vulnerabilities.

The creation of the HFA can also be seen as an acknowledgement that poor people are most at risk of disaster, and that disasters worsen poverty; thus disasters are not only relevant for humanitarian response, but for all areas of development, attainment of the Millenium Development Goals and breaking down the development/humanitarian division of responsibility to a more holistic approach.

Huge reductions have been seen in the numbers of people dying as a result of disaster hazards globally. This shows the good progress made in preparedness and response globally. However since the 1970's the global number of people *affected* by disasters is rapidly increasing, outstripping the capacity of the humanitarian system to respond and highlighting the urgent need to increase investment in reducing risk as well as dealing with it's consequences

The HFA has inspired greater commitment to DRR among many of the signatory countries, with movement around the development of national DRR frameworks, policies, and legislation In Oxfam's experience at the country level, most governments and UN agencies have assigned DRR focal points.

It is difficult to generalise about the influence of the HFA, but these are some of the impacts that Oxfam staff have seen in particular countries:

- The HFA has been used as a key tool to develop national disaster management plans;
- The development of *some* national and regional DRR platforms, though not always genuine multi-stakeholder participatory forums.
- A shift in focus from emergency response only, to a broader risk reduction approach;
- A strengthening of national actions on preparedness;
- Development of community alert systems that involve a variety of mass media and strengthening existing early warning mechanisms, including institutions and networks;
- Organizing around Disaster Preparedness and response has engaged local mayors, police, etc to be part of the effort to respond to and to prevent (to a lesser degree) disasters in conjunction with the local communities.

5. Recommendations for greater implementation of the HFA

5.1. More community action and meaningful participation

Risk is locally specific and should be addressed in a locally specific way. This involves encouraging participation of local communities, adapting approaches to DRR to fit local risk contexts, and to scale this out to a far greater extent than is currently the case. As poor people are most at risk, their views and priorities *must* be central to DRR decisions.

The first five years of the HFA broadly has achieved improved DRR policy formulation, albeit primarily at global and national levels. In the remaining years up until 2015, the focus should be on action at national and local levels. Achieving action at the scale and speed required to keep pace with exposure requires leadership by governments, supported by partnerships with civil society and others at all levels.

It is important that the participation of civil society, vulnerable communities and NGOs is assured in the bi-annual HFA evaluation of progress in countries. For this to become a reality participatory consultation process at national level should be the norm, not the exception.

And whilst local governments are increasingly being given autonomy to make an impact in DRR programming through decentralised processes, sufficient budget allocations do not always follow.

Recommendations:

- DRR initiatives must encourage the participation of local people and particularly the most vulnerable people.
- Governments should be supporting, investing in and participating in participative risk analysis and planning. This should involve actively stimulating genuine multi-stakeholder partnerships.
- Ensure that the views of civil society and vulnerable communities are incorporated into national reporting and evaluation, and also this mid-term review.
- National governments should devolve sufficient resources to local level to engage in meaningful DRR work at the local level.

5.2 More focus on underlying risk factors and linkages across different sectors

It is acknowledged by Oxfam as by other actors that much more attention needs to be placed on improving governance and accountability for DRR (HFA1) and on , addressing root causes of risk (HFA4). Governments, supported by others, must place greater priority on having coherent and coordinated approaches across sectors backed up by significant increases in investment and action to critical vulnerability issues as well as hazards, including poverty reduction, environmental management, social protection (HFA4) and improving governance with accountability (HFA1).

External to the DRR community, there is much confusion as to the remit of the HFA, and therefore DRR by default – with relation to longer-term insidious risks and trends associated with climate change, and with other ‘anthropomorphic’ shocks or pressures such as financial crisis, conflict or population growth. The HFA has not been fully successful in realising and articulating links with actors from these other communities such as ecology, urbanisation and climate change adaptation, nor at engaging with sustainable livelihoods disciplines. Combined approaches across these sectors are required to address root causes and avoid future risk.

Recommendation:

- Priority should be placed on making further gains towards HFA priorities 1 and 4, to achieve systemic longer-term and more wide-reaching changes.
- Local and international NGOs, the UN and other relevant actors should recognise the importance of poverty as an underlying risk factor and concentrate sufficient resources on livelihood programming, which must be based on sound risk analysis and robust decision making.

The ISDR should do more to support dialogue and engage actors at both policy and implementation levels in the fields of sustainable livelihoods, climate change, urbanisation and the environment to achieve shared ownership and combined efforts towards attainment of common goals. Greater communication and collaboration between these areas is important in order to achieve more effective and efficient approaches and planning to

deal with known and unknown risks, to promote more robust risk reduction decision-making, and to better take account of future changes. Only with a more integrated approach to climate change adaptation that promotes environmental sustainability can we make ensure we are not worsening future risk or worsening inequality.

5.3 Greater recognition of the impact of disasters on women and women as key drivers of DRR

It is generally accepted that the effects of disasters are felt disproportionately by women, and that the impact of disasters magnify existing inequalities between men and women. It is reported that women are more likely than men to be killed or injured as a direct result of disasters and are often less equipped to cope. However, disaster statistics such as EM-DAT, produced by CRED, are not disaggregated by sex, therefore inhibiting measurement of the specific impact of disasters on women and limiting gender-sensitive targeting in disaster response and risk reduction.

Not enough attention has been paid to the specific impact of disasters on women, on tailoring DRR programmes to address gender inequalities and the differential needs of women and men, and on capitalizing on the capacity of women to lead in reducing disaster risks.

Equally, whilst gender is considered to increase vulnerability, insufficient emphasis has been placed on the unique position and capacities of women to lead disaster risk reduction efforts in their communities. Women often demonstrate considerable resilience during disasters and can be powerful forces of change for their communities.

Recommendations:

- Disaster statistics such as those of EM-DAT should be disaggregated by gender as this would surely raise the priority of addressing gender inequality as crucial to reducing disaster losses.
- More resources should be placed in programmes to support women in leading disaster risk reduction efforts within their communities.

5.4 Clarification of implications for fragile or failed states

HFA appears to give lower priority to conflict as a disaster hazard, or of the potential for DRR approaches to contribute to conflict reduction. In cases where hazard assessment reveals conflict as a primary hazard, Oxfam promotes engaging in vulnerability reduction measures related to conflict and believes that local DRR practice can contribute to small-scale conflict resolution.

Similarly the HFA says little about disaster risk in fragile states. Yet fragile states and conflict-affected communities cannot be left aside in the drive to embed DRR; people affected by disasters often feel the effects in similar ways regardless of whether there is conflict.

Recommendation: Whilst recognizing that the HFA cannot itself seek to address conflict resolution, Oxfam suggests that the HFA clarifies its position on how opportunities can be maximised to initiate DRR measures in the contexts of conflict-affected societies and fragile states.

5.5 Greater accountability through a stronger focus on targets and achievements

Whilst the voluntary nature of the HFA has its critics, it also has advantages which should be maximised as far as possible. Whilst a shift to mandatory targets for the HFA seems problematic, at least in the medium term, a system of voluntary targets working on a kind of 'peer pressure' basis of national states should be considered as a way to potentially generate more momentum behind the process. The first step towards any kind of targets would be the establishment of a baseline, as currently no baseline data is available on which to base indicators.

Recommendation: The ISDR should look to build on the success of the 'Views from the Frontline' initiative of the GNDR and implement a baseline survey in order to facilitate an informed discussion to identify potential indicators and the appropriateness of voluntary targets.