

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Danida

Strategic Priorities in Danish Humanitarian Assistance



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1. Current trends in international humanitarian assistance

1.1 Introduction

During the past decade the world has witnessed a great number of crises, violent conflicts and natural disasters, and the will and ability of the global community to come to the assistance of people in need has been severely put to the test on several occasions. A number of internal conflicts have been characterised by a growing tendency for armed groups to direct their violence directly against the civilian population.

Humanitarian assistance is in essence aimed at meeting the requirements of those in need of help and protection. The „humanitarian imperative“ spells out that it is the duty of the international community to seek to prevent or mitigate human suffering that results from conflict or disaster.

Today humanitarian issues are very high on the international agenda. There is every reason to believe that in the future humanitarian relief work will be even more centrally placed in the endeavours of the international community to contain conflicts and ensure regional and international stability.

1.2 Human safety and security

Since the end of the Cold War, ethnic cleansing, violation of human rights on a massive scale, and a marked lack of respect for fundamental humanitarian principles have forced millions of people to flee, presenting the international community with enormous tasks. The extensive humanitarian operations in the wake of genocide in Rwanda in 1994, in connection with the Kosovo crisis in 1999, and most recently in the worsening Afghanistan crisis following 11 September, though wellknown are not unique examples.

While refugees have crossed an international border and live outside of their own country, the internally displaced are fleeing within their own country. At present approximately 12 million people are living as *refugees* while between 20 and 25 million are *internally displaced*. The number of refugees in the world has been falling steadily since the beginning of the 1990s when it was about 18 million, but the number of internally displaced

people has exploded. The reason for this is to be found in the many local armed conflicts, internal conflicts and more or less systematic attempts at ethnic cleansing. In a number of cases closed borders have made it difficult to flee from a country. If the many people who are internally displaced following natural disasters such as flooding or earthquakes are included in the total figure, the estimated number of internally displaced people is far higher.

The two groups share many similarities. Both have been forced to leave their homes, and their welfare depends to a high degree on assistance from the international community. But while well-established frameworks exist for international protection and assistance in the case of refugees, the internally displaced are in principle dependent on the will and ability of their own governments to respect and enforce their rights.

The dramatic growth in the numbers of the internally displaced has made clear the need for an international position on this problem. The options open to the international community to protect and assist the internally displaced are limited if the state concerned refuses to accept external help. Simultaneously, the internally displaced often find themselves in battle areas into which – despite the agreement of the authorities – it is too dangerous to send relief workers. As a result the large groups of internally displaced people do not receive the necessary help.

There are groups among the needy who are especially vulnerable and who have special needs, among others single and especially single female providers, children, older people and the handicapped. Women and children comprise about 80 per cent of the refugees and internally displaced in the world, and in recent years there has been increased focus on gender-determined conditions and needs in humanitarian crises. Women are particularly vulnerable in these situations while at the same time constituting an important resource in relation to the survival of the family and, in the longer term, in relation to reconciliation and reconstruction in local communities.

1.3 Advocacy and international coordination

To a high degree, public engagement is determined by the media coverage of a given disaster. However, far from all crises receive media attention, and among those which do, very few maintain the interest of the general public for any length of time.

The needy, whether these are refugees, internally displaced persons or victims of natural disaster, are dependent on good advocates who can ensure that consideration for their interests and problems are centrally placed on the international agenda. More and more humanitarian actors – from UN organisations to international and national NGOs – emphasise strengthening the part of their activity aimed at ensuring that humanitarian

needs receive the required attention and are taken into consideration to the maximum extent in the context of overall international efforts.

Against the background of the many new conflicts and growing humanitarian needs, the necessity of respect for humanitarian principles in connection with assistance activities has been increasingly emphasised in recent years. Attempts have also been made to establish a link between humanitarian assistance activities and general human rights considerations as well as specific human rights instruments.

The number of organisations involved in relief work has grown significantly in recent years, and new actors have also entered the field. There is, *inter alia*, a growing tendency to look at possibilities to use the military as a contributor of personnel and material in the context of humanitarian relief activities.

The UN is the central humanitarian actor. The humanitarian UN organisations – most importantly UNCHR, WFP and UNICEF – by virtue of their special mandates, have worldwide responsibility and possess extraordinary knowledge and capacity within their respective areas of operation. In addition, international and national NGOs are playing an increasingly more important role in international humanitarian work.

The wider range of humanitarian actors has created a need for coordination on both strategic and operational levels. Successful humanitarian intervention depends on the establishment of an overall framework for the operation and efficient cooperation at headquarters and in the field. This can be problematic, and experience shows that the difficulties increase, the more actors that enter the picture.

While many NGOs have joined forces in international networks, in recent years in particular steps have been taken to strengthen the capacity of the UN to undertake the overall responsibility for coordinating international relief work, *inter alia* by the establishment of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA).

1.4 Humanitarian assistance, longterm development and prevention

Consideration for the transition from emergency aid to more longterm development assistance has become increasingly more predominant in international relief work. Both donors and international organisations are in broad agreement that acute emergency aid and the activities that immediately follow should be conducted so as to contribute to swift normalisation of conditions. In cases of both manmade crises and natural disasters, successful return to normal conditions requires that humanitarian activities are anchored in the local community from the very beginning.

Civil society will sometimes be able to play a special role, not least in countries experiencing civil war. This applies both to the implementation of basic emergency aid measures and also in relation to the maintenance of vital functions of society in the areas of health and education. When used in the proper manner – as a partner in relation to international assistance activities civil society can, moreover, function as a bridgebuilder for subsequent development activities.

Even in countries where there is no immediate prospect of stopping the violent conflict, it is important to take advantage of the existing possibilities for promoting the perspective of development. A broad, holistic approach and integrated coordination of different development activities from the earlier stages of the conflict are necessary.

The presence of mines and unexploded ordnance often presents a significant obstacle to the resumption of productive activities following a violent conflict. Roads, wells, schools and agricultural areas are blocked, in addition to destruction in the form of death and mutilation suffered by the population. Targeted clearing operations are not only important from a humanitarian point of view but are indeed an important precondition for normalisation and reconstruction.

Unrestricted access to the victims of a disaster is a decisive precondition for the success of international humanitarian action. The most serious obstacle to relief work in situations of violent conflict is often found in the poor conditions for the security and safety of relief workers. In recent years there have been all too many examples of the opposing parties in a conflict, deliberately and frequently, seeking to place obstacles in the way of international relief activities by killing relief workers and perpetrating other violent attacks.

Natural disasters most often have a particularly grave impact on the poorest population groups, who usually do not have the resources necessary to safeguard their homes and property or are forced to live in risk zones. As natural disasters are temporally and geographically limited in nature, it is often possible to resume development assistance activities more quickly.

Preventing natural disasters constitutes an increasingly more important element in international development assistance and is increasingly included as an active instrument in the planning of the developing countries themselves. Danish experience in this area relates in particular to flood warnings.

The promotion of longterm, sustainable development requires that emergency aid becomes part of a broader framework which, inter alia, incorporates peacekeeping, humanitarian and development activities. It is difficult to bring humanitarian assistance to a natural conclusion without a broad, dynamic perspective and the necessary openness with respect to the need to include all relevant instruments.

On the basis of the wish to live up to all these challenges, Denmark will prioritise the following considerations when organising its humanitarian assistance:

2. Strategic priorities for Danish humanitarian assistance

2.1 Humanitarian principles – advocacy

- Denmark works actively to promote respect for fundamental humanitarian principles in connection with international humanitarian work.
- There will be special emphasis on international work including advocacy – to promote respect for humanitarian law and the rights of those in need. Organisations that coordinate and implement should place high priority on dialogue with international actors, governments, authorities and other parties.
- Assistance to the victims of armed conflicts will be highly prioritised in Danish humanitarian assistance. Where circumstances so indicate, the aim will be to grant assistance within the terms of an overall coordinated framework containing political, conflictresolving, developmental and humanitarian elements. It is also clear that adopting a broader framework must in no way weaken respect for the neutrality and impartiality of assistance efforts.
- Improving the safety and security of relief workers is a matter of priority for UN organisations and NGOs active in areas of violent conflict. This objective will be promoted by means of economic support to relevant activities which appear especially deserving of Danish support.
- In situations of natural disaster, Denmark will focus on interventions during the first and most acute phase. In special cases, humanitarian assistance can encompass actual physical reconstruction, which will mainly apply to countries with a special connection with Denmark. If Danish programme countries are afflicted by largescale humanitarian crises, rehabilitation and reconstruction should if possible be incorporated in the bilateral country strategy.
- Assistance to and protection of refugees and the internally displaced will receive high priority. When Danish activities are being organised, attention will be paid to the need to ensure that as far as possible refugees can receive protection close to their

own countries. This applies both to assistance channelled through multilateral organisations and assistance channelled through Danish NGOs.

- In many cases, the internally displaced constitute a particularly vulnerable group. Denmark will work for the improvement of the international guidelines for the internally displaced as well as improved assistance for this group.
- When relief efforts are being planned, there will be emphasis on consideration for the special needs of vulnerable groups, including the large group of women and children. There will also be emphasis on both women and men being involved in important decisionmaking processes concerning, inter alia, the organisation of emergency aid, peace initiatives, reconstruction and other important issues.
- The problem of AIDS in crisis situations, and not least in refugee camps in the Third World, will receive special attention.
- Denmark is prepared to do its best to ensure that continued humanitarian needs in situations of protracted conflict are not overlooked.

2.2 Humanitarian actors

- When Danish humanitarian assistance is provided, efforts will be made to identify the channel which may be supposed to produce the best results. In addition to mandate and general competence, emphasis will be laid on knowledge of local conditions, inter alia through local partners, or other relevant experience. Thus there may be fluctuations in the relative share of the Danish humanitarian budget for the UN system and the Danish relief organisations – and that of the individual relief organisations – from one year to the other.
- The humanitarian UN organisations have a central position in Danish humanitarian assistance. The background for this is among other things the special position of the organisations in the UN system by virtue of their global mandates and the special degree of legitimacy and authority thus associated with their activities.
- The overall coordinating responsibility of the UN is accorded crucial importance. Denmark supports endeavours to strengthen the general coordinating capacity of the UN in the humanitarian field, including through developing the emergency response capacity of the humanitarian UN organisations. The importance of the tasks which OCHA in particular is charged with performing is recognised, not least the organisation's work with UN consolidated appeals during largescale, complex crises.

- Denmark places great emphasis on the mandated activities of the UNHCR in assisting and protecting refugees, and acknowledges the importance of the role that the organisation more generally plays in international relief work. It is important that efforts continue to improve the emergency response and coordination capacity of the UNHCR. The organisation should concentrate its activities on the core areas of its mandate. Protecting refugees close to their own country, in the region, is a central task. Denmark finds this essential.
- Denmark will work for closer cooperation and a strengthening of the policyoriented dialogue between the EU's humanitarian office (ECHO) and the humanitarian UN agencies. ECHO should display greater flexibility in granting financial contributions to the activities of the humanitarian organisations and take steps to make it possible to open up programme (rather than project) support. In principle ECHO should not undertake an operational role in situations of acute humanitarian crisis.
- Pursuant to the Geneva conventions, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has a special mandate to monitor respect for international humanitarian law. Its mandate gives the ICRC a special role in connection with protection of civilian victims of armed conflicts. Close dialogue with ICRC is stressed, both directly through annual consultations and indirectly by means of cooperation with the Danish Red Cross.
- Over the years, the Danish relief organisations have achieved special status as important and competent partners for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in implementing Danish humanitarian assistance. A relationship of confidence has thus been developed that makes it possible to ensure that relief activities can be launched at very short notice. The Ministry grants humanitarian assistance through nonDanish NGOs in exceptional circumstances only.
- The Humanitarian Contact Group, in which Danish public and private organisations participate, will continue to be the central body for planning and coordinating Danish humanitarian assistance.
- Resources from the armed forces and the civil defence are expected to be increasingly involved in implementing humanitarian assistance. Clarification of the framework for utilising these resources will continue in the Humanitarian Contact Group. Work will moreover, take place at international level to create wellfunctioning patterns of cooperation between civilian and military actors.
- The International Humanitarian Service (IHB) is an important facility for the delivery of Danish humanitarian assistance as a part of international emergency prepared-

ness efforts. Additionally, emergency response mechanisms established by Danish NGOs – receive financial support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Denmark contributes personnel to a number of humanitarian assistance activities through the IHB. The focus will remain on seconding personnel in connection with monitoring of conflict situations, election observation, democratisation, strengthening the international rule of law, and the improvement of human rights.

2.3 Quality and efficiency

- With a view to improving efforts to benefit the recipients, ensuring better knowledge of the individual crisis areas and strengthening dialogue with cooperation partners, Danish humanitarian assistance in connection with violent conflicts will be concentrated on selected countries and areas.
- With a view to strengthening Danish efforts in selected areas of humanitarian crisis, general guidelines in the form of working papers will be prepared. These papers will enhance the basis of dialogue with Danish and international partners and make Denmark a more valuable cooperation partner.
- The provision of untied core funding to the humanitarian UN organisations helps to ensure that these organisations can operate over a broad range to fulfil their global mandates while simultaneously enabling the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the safeguarding of humanitarian needs outside of the concentration areas selected.
- In relation to the UN organisations, there will be emphasis on swift, efficient reaction to natural disasters and complex crises. Denmark will actively participate in discussions in the governing bodies of the organisations and in the overall consideration of humanitarian issues under the auspices of the UN. It is a basic Danish viewpoint that the central UN organisations should focus their efforts and concentrate on their core areas of activity.
- A central point is the necessity of regular monitoring and evaluation of the activity of the organisations in the field.
- Denmark will continue to support efforts to improve the UN's consolidated appeals and to ensure that these appeals constitute a common point of departure for donors, international organisations and NGOs in relation to overall strategy and coordination in humanitarian crisis areas.
- In cooperation with the Danish NGOs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasises the importance of a well-documented basis for evaluating the capacity of the organi-

sations to perform humanitarian tasks. In this context, capacity studies, evaluations, annual financial accounts and relevant experience in connection with the daytoday administration of grants – including the examination of project financial accounts – are important. In the case of the larger organisations, the dialogue is formalised to a certain extent in connection with annual meetings and sixmonthly followup meetings.

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs encourages NGOs to adapt the geographical scope of their activities to their own capacity, to develop their strategic planning and internal disaster preparedness, and to strengthen their professional competence in areas that complement the other NGOs as far as possible.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work to ensure that to the greatest possible extent Danish relief organisations relate their relief activities to the priorities and guidelines of the UN's consolidated appeals, and that they during project implementation actively seek to ensure that activities respect the overall coordinating role of the UN. In accordance with this, an effort will be made to strengthen the dialogue between the Danish organisations and the UN system.
- Where Danish NGOs forward funds granted to implementing partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requires that the Danish organisations are involved in drawing up the programmes of these organisations and contribute to ensuring the focus, efficiency and impact of the work. In these cases the Danish organisations act as guarantors for the quality and implementation of the activities in accordance with current guidelines.
- For several years Denmark has supported the development of standards of quality in humanitarian assistance. The SPHERE project has resulted in guidelines for good humanitarian assistance. When evaluating requests for humanitarian assistance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will inter alia view these in relation to the SPHERE standards.
- Funds, competence and systems enabling swift response are necessary in crisis situations. Therefore the Danish organisations can receive non earmarked grants for fielding or seconding personnel and for procuring and shipping of relief supplies.

2.4 Prevention and sustainability

- In analysing the humanitarian situation in specific countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will ensure that an evaluation is made of the conflict and potential for conflict and of political efforts to end the conflict. It is decisive in this context that

humanitarian assistance is seen as one element in broader efforts encompassing both project activities and political initiatives.

- In several countries undergoing protracted conflicts, pockets exist which are not directly affected by the violent conflict. In these cases it is important to assess the possibilities of supporting efforts of a more longterm nature.
- In view of the importance of concrete progress, Denmark is prepared to enhance its efforts to ensure the smoothest possible transition from emergency aid to more longterm development assistance. Financing will be possible in the form of emergency aid and development funding. There is particular focus on the possibility of implementing suitable projects of a transitional nature in connection with complex crisis situations.
- Education plays a central role for people living as refugees or internally displaced persons. It is at the same time an element that is often overlooked in humanitarian work in the context of lengthy, violent conflicts. Denmark will seek to promote support to education.
- Denmark will work to anchor humanitarian assistance to a higher degree in the local community, whether it is channelled through multilateral or Danish organisations. In certain situations this may clash with the desire for impartiality. An assessment of the consequences of the assistance should not be limited to the question of ensuring that basic needs are covered. The consequences of assistance for internal stability and the possibility of ensuring respect for human rights and democratic processes must be included in the analysis.
- Denmark is aware of the importance of strengthening the emergency response capacity of the developing countries in relation to sudden natural disasters and of the need for preventive efforts in relation to marginalised and vulnerable groups. Denmark is prepared to grant financial support to the work performed by relevant UN organisations. Disaster and crisis prevention will also constitute a strategic priority in the programming of Danish development assistance to programme countries.
- Danish efforts to combat mines and unexploded ordnance will be intensified in connection with work in the transitional area from emergency aid to development. Efforts will encompass all aspects of humanitarian mine action, including education and information campaigns, support to mine victims, marking and fencing of mined areas, and physical clearance of mines and unexploded ordnance. To ensure a coordinated approach to the supported activities, a substrategy has been drawn up for Danish support to humanitarian mine action.

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Design and press:
Schultz Grafisk

Production:

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ISBN:87-7964-374-4

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