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# REBUILDING RESISTANCE

Effective Giving to Disaster-Afflicted  
Communities

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In Sanskrit, Dasra means “Enlightened Giving”.

Dasra enables non-profit organizations, who change the lives of marginalized communities, to scale. We provide organizations with growth capital and management expertise, maximizing charitable investments for philanthropists.

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# Introduction

## Summary

Recently there have been several notable disasters of global magnitude and high visibility that have shed light on disaster management and assistance, and on the critical role of community-based organizations (CBOs) in this area, and have served as an opportunity to consider better practices for support. In the past two years, a number of natural disasters spanning the globe have created significant destruction and havoc in the lives of millions of people – Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (2008); the earthquakes in Peru (2007) and Sichuan, China (2008); the floods in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the UK (2007); the wildfires in California (2007); and the devastating flood in the State of Bihar, India (2008). These increasingly frequent occurrences have led to recognition of the necessity to better understand the needs of affected populations during these periods of crisis; to increase the effectiveness and quality of relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts; and to incorporate disaster-specific strategies and policies within already existing programs<sup>1</sup>.

The field of disaster management is unique in several ways. While other public health concerns, focus on prevention, this field's community-based

work lies primarily in preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation, as the onset, nature and impact of disaster are fairly unpredictable<sup>2</sup>. Another distinctive aspect of disaster management is the sense of emergency and the urgency to distribute aid and relief supplies immediately. There is an immense amount of pressure on donors to make funding decisions quickly and on community-based organizations to provide life-saving interventions. These characteristics are inherent to natural disasters and result in an approach that is reactive rather than predetermined. Although immediate action is a requirement of disasters, a focus beyond the immediate aftermath can ensure a speedy, sustainable and equitable recovery.

Natural disasters also highlight and bring to the fore issues and conditions that existed prior to the crisis – issues that are directly linked to poverty, social inequity, violence or conflict, and lack of access to resources among marginalized groups. In this context relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts provide opportunities to progress on a larger, structural level and to strive for more equitable societies.

<sup>1</sup> *Relief, recovery and rehabilitation* are the standard phases defined for the various processes that a community goes through following a natural disaster or crisis, and these will be used consistently throughout the report. Other terms, such as *renewal* and *reconstruction*, are also used to categorize some of these overlapping processes.

<sup>2</sup> While it can be argued that many natural disasters are preventable and predictable – due to relationships between their occurrence and environmental degradation, as well as our growing knowledge of the causes and consequences of climate change – the fact remains that the communities most impacted by natural disasters cannot be held accountable for the large socio-structural factors that contribute to the incidence of disaster.

## Background

The five-day “Crisis Recovery and Renewal” Knowledge Exchange workshop<sup>3</sup> convened by The Global Fund for Children (GFC) in Mamallapuram, India, in 2007 brought together representatives of GFC’s CBO grantee partners involved in reconstruction and rehabilitation work following the Indian Ocean tsunami (2004), the Pakistan earthquake (2005) and the US Gulf Coast hurricanes Katrina and Rita (2005). These were disasters of global magnitude and visibility, and workshop participants represented six affected countries – India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the United States. The Knowledge Exchange provided an opportunity for grantee partners to share experiences and information with each other, develop ideas for improving and initiating new program models in disaster response and

examine the role and value of CBOs in post-disaster community recovery and rebuilding. The workshop supplied the main inspiration and knowledge base for this report and served as a platform for the gathering of relevant information in a participatory manner.

Dasra’s unique position within the field – its role as the facilitator and organizer of this Knowledge Exchange, its ongoing work with community-based organizations in Tamil Nadu, its extensive experience in providing on-the-ground assistance to various donor agencies, as well as its contribution and commitment to post-disaster community rebuilding efforts in South Asia – helped create a methodology for this report, taking into account a variety of perspectives and building upon already existing relationships.



Session at the 2007 Knowledge Exchange (Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu)

<sup>3</sup> Dasra facilitated the process and interacted with 22 grantee partners from six different countries, as well as with The Global Fund for Children program officers and consultants.

“Dasra has synthesized the wisdom and experience of community-based organizations, providing critical new perspectives to stakeholders who wish to support holistic, lasting, and socially sound recovery and renewal of communities in post-disaster settings.”

Victoria Dunning  
Vice President, Programs  
The Global Fund for Children

## Objectives

By summarizing and sharing findings from interviews conducted both with funding agencies and with implementing community-based organizations, Dasra aims to positively influence the effectiveness, appropriateness and impact of giving among donors following the devastation that accompanies any natural disaster. This report builds upon earlier research (Institute for the Study of International Migration, 2006; Grantmakers Without Borders, 2006; Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, 2005) conducted to explore similar themes and highlights the fact that many of the earlier-documented barriers and challenges remain relevant.

The principles that guide the data collection and analysis of this report contribute to the knowledge base by providing guidelines for funders:

- ▲ Gaining a better understanding of the on-the-ground challenges of dispensing emergency aid and providing services, through the lens of three recent disasters – the Asian tsunami (2004), the Pakistan earthquake (2005) and Hurricanes Katrina and Rita of the U.S. Gulf Coast (2005) – from the perspectives of both the funding/donor agencies and the community-based non-profit organizations that utilize these funds
- ▲ Gathering lessons learned from the field, as well as useful strategies for coping with challenges and barriers
- ▲ Developing and presenting recommendations to donors with an interest in investing in the field of disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation

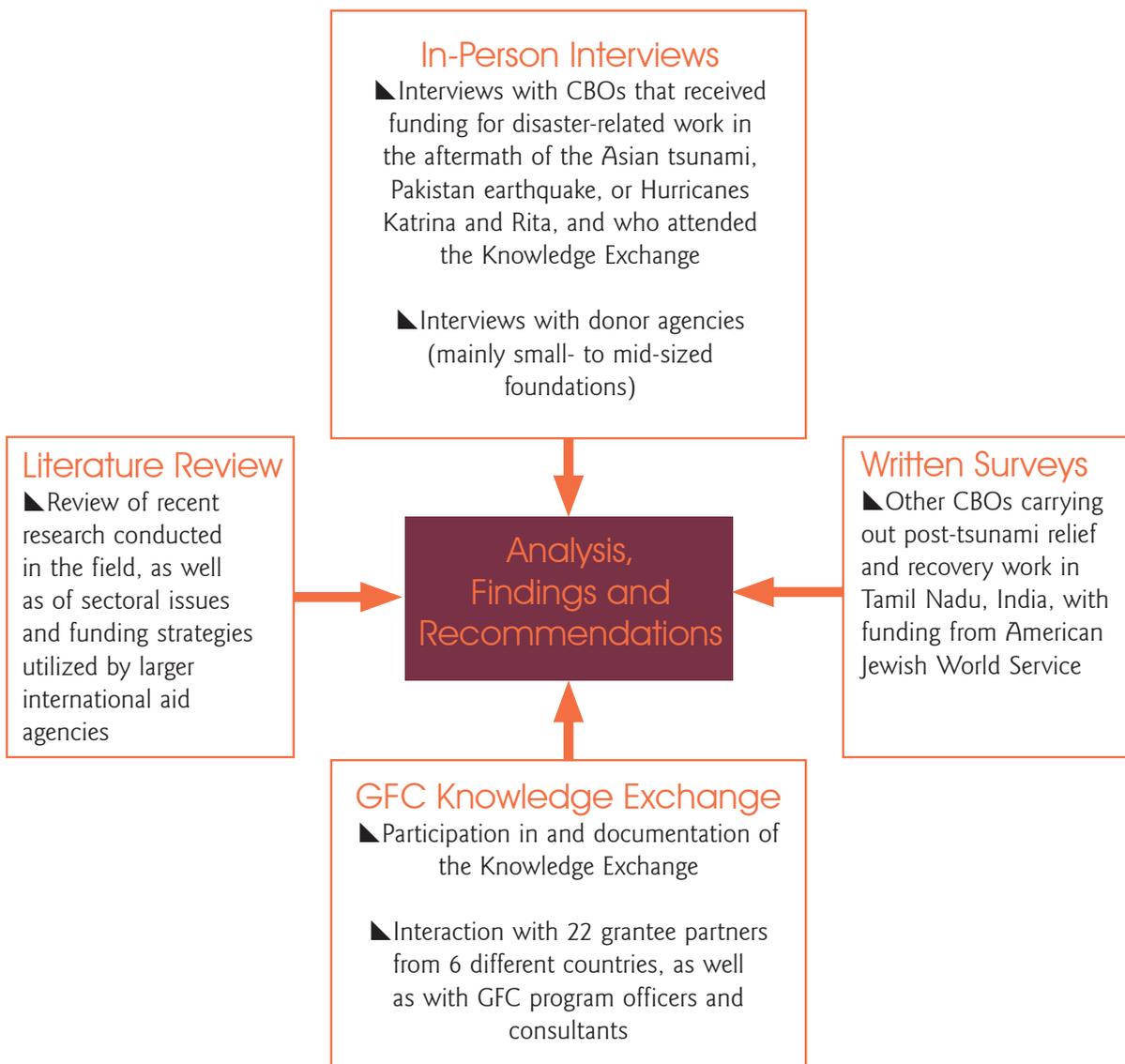
This report will serve as a guide to investors and practitioners in their efforts to restore and enhance the well-being of communities affected by disaster. It provides an opportunity for donors to review current paradigms and strategies in the field with a critical eye and with a commitment to improve upon current methods and to address the gap in humanitarian systems that continues to be of great concern to local communities and the organizations that serve them. More specifically, Dasra hopes to provide donors and practitioners with tools and information that can achieve a more collaborative and productive response.

## Outline

The report begins with an overview of Dasra’s methodology for collecting and synthesizing information and key insights related to disaster management. The impact of disasters on communities is then delineated, followed by the role of the community, CBOs and donors in disaster management and community rebuilding. Community concerns, organizational needs and funding priorities that have emerged from the analysis are described in depth. Representatives from community-based organizations and grant-making agencies offered learning and recommendations from their first-hand experience of working in disaster-affected regions, as well as acknowledged the complexity of disaster situations. Quotations and excerpts from interviews with all players are woven into the report.

# Methodology

The perspectives presented here are primarily of small and medium grant makers and of CBOs that have received funding for disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation work. Dasra's analysis and insights are based on in-depth interviews and surveys conducted with CBO and donor representatives, as well as Dasra's documentation of The Global Fund for Children's Knowledge Exchange. The following research methods were used to gather the relevant information:



The broad research questions explored via the above methods are summarized in Table 1

### Table 1: Research Questions

- ▲ What are the different needs of a community over time during the various phases of rebuilding? How do these various needs relate to different methods of funding? Do long-term giving and short-term giving differ in their impact?
- ▲ How can funders increase the effectiveness and appropriateness of their giving? What are the best mechanisms of giving following a natural disaster? How can funders help to ensure that relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts are equitable and do not reinforce pre-existing social inequalities?
- ▲ What are the main challenges faced by funders during the period immediately following a disaster? What strategies are effective in dealing with these challenges and in determining appropriate programs or appropriate implementing partners following a crisis?

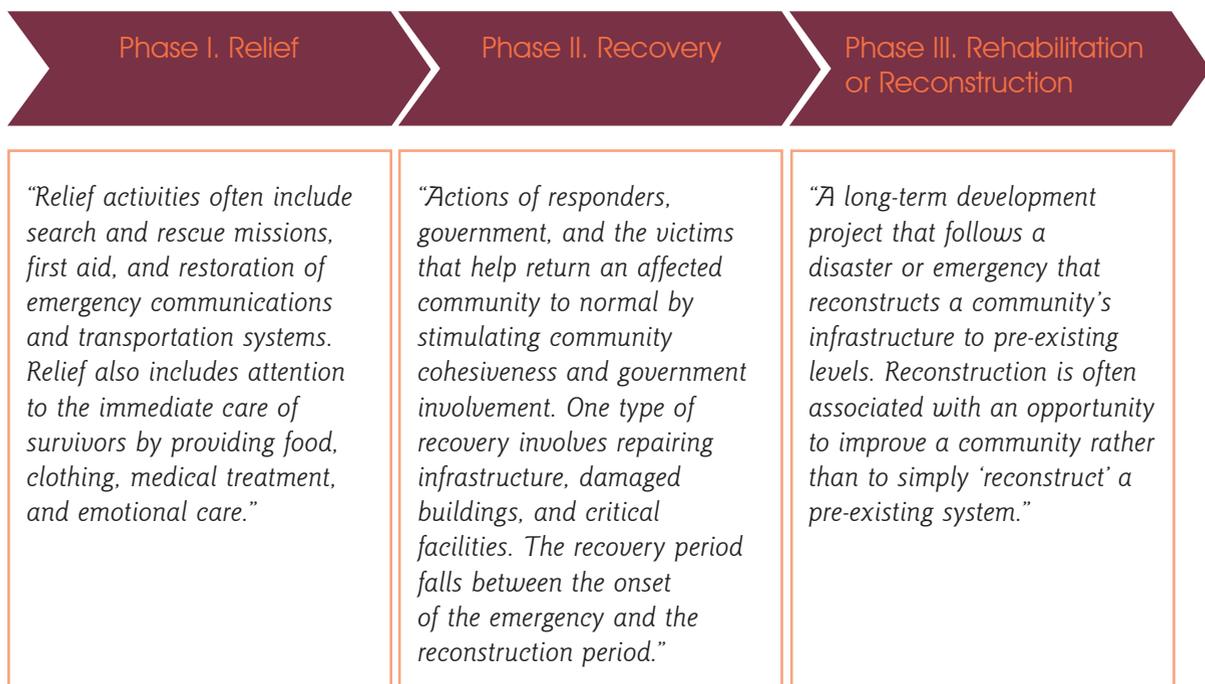


A community member contemplating the aftermath of disaster (Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu)

# Impact of Disasters

## Impact of Disasters on Communities: Different Phases, Different Needs

According to members of several community-based organizations, the needs of communities affected by disaster change dramatically over time, requiring different funding and intervention strategies at each stage.

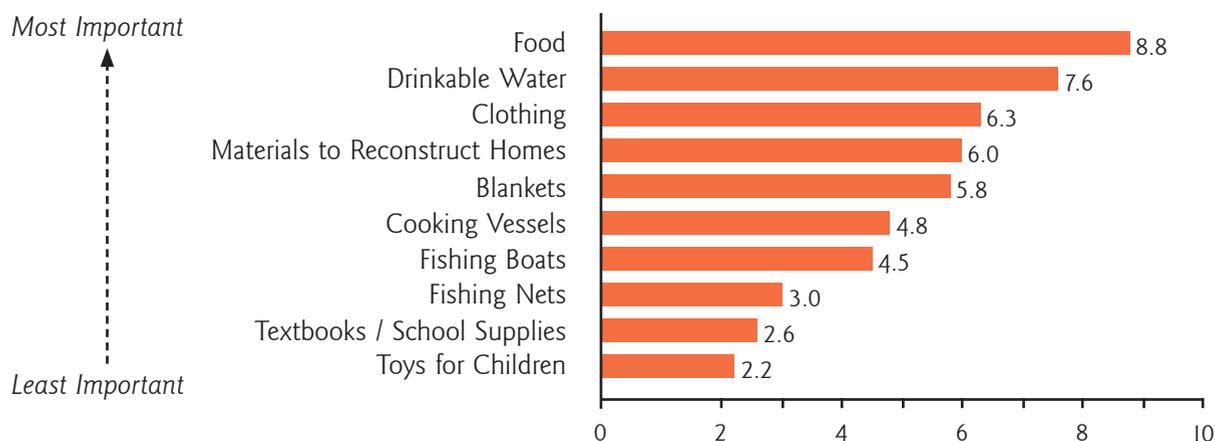


Source: MERREA (Managing Effective Risk Response: an Ecological Approach)

### *In the initial period following a disaster, needs are primarily related to survival and the saving of human lives*

These needs include safe shelter, access to drinking water and food, provision of emergency medical care and counseling, clothing, reunification of families, support of displaced children, identifying and protecting the rights of children and preventing the exploitation of youth orphaned by the disaster. Psychosocial and emotional needs of survivors in the aftermath of trauma – particularly of children – are as important as other life-saving care provided during the relief phase and must be defined as a basic human necessity. Results from the written survey, administered to a small sample of CBOs in Tamil Nadu, demonstrate that food and drinkable water are the most important supplies during this phase, followed by clothing and materials to reconstruct homes, materials for living and livelihood, then finally educational and other youth-specific supplies.

Figure 1: Donations and Supplies Ranked by Degree of Importance

*(10 = most important, 1 = least important)*

*The three phases following a disaster, although defined separately, are not sequential in practice and necessitate long-term planning from the onset*

While the terms *relief* and *recovery* are widely used in the field to make sense of a wide array of efforts needed to rebuild a community over time, they should not be viewed as discrete or fixed categories. The recovery phase, which includes long-term activities beyond the emergency response phase of disaster operations, focuses on returning all systems in the community to a normal status (or to a condition that is less vulnerable). This often overlaps with relief efforts. In general, long-term planning tends to begin immediately following the initial emergency period.

Through interviews and focus groups, many CBOs and relief workers brought out the need for a longer-term and more holistic look at a community's comprehensive post-disaster recovery. Typically, there is a surge of funds available to assist humanitarian aid efforts during the period

immediately following a disaster. Emergencies necessitate an urgent response, but full and comprehensive recovery requires long-term planning, coordination and strategy. As a result, the long-term needs of community members are a low priority in emergency assistance, if addressed at all. Disasters have enduring impacts, such as environmental damage from the release of hazardous materials, dramatic alteration of livelihoods, exacerbation of civil conflict, permanent dislocation of communities and a decrease in psychosocial well-being due to the trauma of loss of life and normalcy. Addressing these issues is equally important to the development and healing of affected communities.

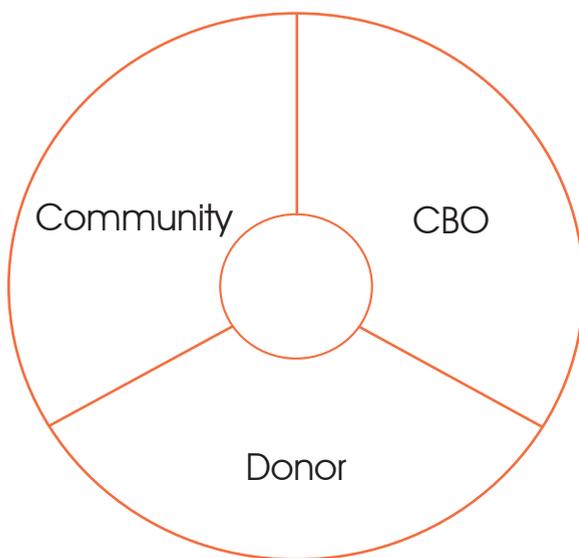
“Disaster relief and recovery are not sequential, but overlapping processes, so the provision of relief goods must be done in tandem with early efforts to develop livelihoods and transitional housing.”

Ibrahim Osman  
Deputy Secretary General  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red  
Crescent Societies

# Key Players

## Key Players in Disaster Response and Community Rebuilding: Local Communities, CBOs and Donors<sup>4</sup>

*The success of any effort to help a community heal and restore livelihoods requires coordination and cooperation between these three constituents*



*Local communities affected by the crisis are central to the humanitarian response*

While international aid agencies, private and public foundations, local governments and community-based organizations are the first responders during

crises, disaster response is often conducted by the affected people themselves. With specific reference to the tsunami, practically all immediate life-saving actions and initial emergency support in the first few days (and weeks, in some cases) were provided by local people, often assisted by the wider public and national institutions.

*“To help a community recover and regenerate, I think there are genuine partnerships that you’re engaged in. You are bringing in a certain level of resources, which are financial, and those who are working are bringing in other skills. True regeneration of a community can only happen in a healthy partnership of all three – the community, the CBO and the funder. And in which each one knows their place and space.”*

*CBO Representative, Interview*

*“It is a common finding of evaluations of earthquakes and other natural disasters that the vast majority of those rescued are saved by their own actions or the actions of their families, neighbors, or officials. By the time the international rescue teams arrive the vast majority of the survivors have already been saved.”*

*Tsunami Evaluation Committee  
Initial Findings Report*

<sup>4</sup>This paper does not address the critical support and coordinating role of local government.

“On the first three days [following the tsunami] the NGOs did not respond to the situation. We did not know from where to mobilize funds for the relief work. No one [knew] what to do. It was the community people themselves who were involved in the initial relief work. The community people themselves tried to rescue people hit by the disaster and move them to a safer place. The NGOs started to support the community in saving lives initially and then moved to the relief mode.”

CBO Member  
Working with Coastal Communities in the  
Kanchipuram District of Tamil Nadu

### Community-based organizations fill a unique role as catalysts in their communities and intermediaries between all stakeholders

CBOs are often in the most advantageous and appropriate position to provide and deliver necessities and services to communities affected by disaster. Typically, they have already established a rapport and built relationships and partnerships with communities. They have been implementing programs aimed at improving lives and are generally in the best position to continue to build lasting programs in partnership and consultation with communities. While many of these organizations may not have had prior experience specifically in disaster relief and recovery, they have knowledge of local issues, cultural contexts, community resources and pre-existing conditions.

“CBOs have the best understanding of the full life of the community, their psychosocial needs, and the realm of culturally appropriate responses.”

CBO Representative, Interview

CBOs also have access to resources that may not be available to local communities. In relation to the Asian earthquake and resulting tsunami of 2004, while the relief efforts by family and neighbors had an immediate life-saving effect,

the international relief effort prevented suffering through the provision of food, water and shelter on a greater scale than would have been possible with local resources alone. In addition, international aid organizations often have greater access to hard-to-reach or restricted areas.

### Donors play an equally critical role in the rebuilding of communities affected by disaster through provision of funds and resources

While several CBO representatives encouraged non-traditional and non-monetary methods of investment in affected regions, there was widespread recognition of the necessity of financial investment. Donors' primary role lies in the provision of funds and resources to carry out relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts, and donors should therefore have a broad understanding of the community response. Donor effectiveness lies in strategizing in coordination with community groups and local actors, as well as supporting their work.

# Funding Priorities and Shifting Paradigms

Dasra's analysis reveals a number of community concerns, organizational needs and funding priorities. Data strongly suggests that constituencies responsible for protecting and assisting those affected by natural calamity should make efforts to prioritize community participation and rethink dominant donor-grantee relationships, and to refine strategies accordingly. These concerns, needs and priorities are summarized below, according to the various themes that emerged predominantly from the qualitative data.



# 1 | Employ a Human Rights-Based Framework

## *Commitment to the protection of human rights should be incorporated into disaster relief work*

Dialogue among CBOs and donors working in disaster-affected regions highlights the need to adopt a human rights-based approach to disaster preparedness, mitigation, relief and renewal efforts. A review of current literature from the field reveals a number of international conventions, standards and instruments that have been developed to protect the rights of those affected by disaster. This literature also highlights the tendency of response systems to overlook the fundamental rights of people affected by disaster and strongly advocates for the prioritization of human rights and incorporation of rights-based strategies at all levels of disaster response.

“Human rights are as much a part of the lives of the people we are called upon to assist and to protect as are their needs for food and shelter.”

*Jan Egeland and Walter Kälin, Forward to Protecting Persons Affected by Natural Disasters: IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters*

In addition to the World Health Organization guidelines, there are two other documents that are noteworthy: The Sphere Project's *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response* and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief, developed jointly by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Together, these international standards affirm the following principles and rights of those affected by natural or man-made disasters:

- ▲ That all possible steps will be taken to alleviate human suffering arising out of calamity and conflict
- ▲ That those affected by disaster have a right to life with dignity and therefore a right to assistance
- ▲ That all those affected by disaster will have equal access to relief and alleviation of suffering
- ▲ That the distribution of assistance will be distributed without any preference with regard to gender, nationality, ethnic or religious background, caste, class, age, disability, political affiliation, or sexual orientation and will not marginalize any particular groups of people
- ▲ That the provision of aid will not serve to advance any non-humanitarian or political purpose
- ▲ That local capacities and strengths will be built upon and fortified through the humanitarian response to disaster
- ▲ That the design and implementation of relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts will be done in partnership with the communities affected by disaster
- ▲ That people displaced by natural disaster have the right of choice to return to their original homes (given that returning would not severely compromise the health and safety of those populations), remain in the area in which they have been displaced, or move to another location

Qualitative analysis of the data collected demonstrates a strong overlap between the themes that have emerged and the principles guiding these international conventions, standards and documents. These points of congruence are highlighted throughout the following sections. In addition to adequate food, drinking water, sanitation, shelter, clothing and health care,

those affected by disaster have the right to protection from sexual and gender-based violence, forced labor, trafficking and other modern forms of slavery; access to education that respects their cultural and linguistic heritage; and restitution for loss of property, etc. It is here that conscious attention to gender, age, socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity is important in ensuring that all community voices and priorities are expressed and represented. With an increase in the risk of exploitation of people's vulnerability following a disaster, a focus on vulnerability factors can help bring about equity in response.

## 2 | Invest in Long-Term Recovery and Development

*Funding provided for a longer duration and based on real community needs is likely to have the highest efficacy*

Sustainability of programs and their impact on communities was a major focus of the dialogue that took place during the Knowledge Exchange and during the interviews. Several of the CBO representatives emphasized the need for social investors to focus more attention on the long-term development and rehabilitation needs of communities. While the human spirit and desire to give is overwhelming during the immediate aftermath of a crisis, that emotion and sense of urgency is often not sustained over a long period of time, despite the fact that the impact of disaster is long lasting and requires multifaceted approaches. All three phases are important, and long-term investment leads to lasting impact. Long-term recovery work in particular is often ignored, and projects wind up without appropriate work being completed.

Funding relief efforts alone can have negative consequences, such as limited impact on the

health and well-being of communities and strained relationships with community members once programs are forced to cease services following the funding period. Funders and social investors may need to give more thought to the long-term needs of communities recovering from the health, economic and social impacts of disaster. Indeed, CBOs are often best positioned to play an active role in reweaving the fabric of community life in the years following a disaster. Members of community-based organizations expressed the feeling that donors and the general public around the world quickly forget the disaster after a short period of time, once the immense media coverage of the tragedy diminishes. There is also an issue of donor fatigue stemming from highly visible, frequent and high-magnitude disasters in recent times (see Box 1).

“The funders must provide for funds at a large scale for the programs that would bring sustainable changes in the community.”

*Disaster-Affected NGO*

### Box 1: Emerging Issue of Donor Fatigue

The rapid and sequential occurrence of disasters has perhaps made people with the capacity to give partially desensitized by the amount of human suffering that has been occurring around the world, making donor fatigue a reality. In discussing the lower donor response following the earthquake in Pakistan, a member of a donor agency that had responded to three recent disasters pointed to the possibility of disaster burnout.

“The disaster not being headline news should not make donors complacent or forgetful.”

*Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange*

*Funds administered over a longer period of time, at regular intervals and in amounts that can realistically be absorbed by the receiving CBOs, can create sustainable programs*

Greater consistency and length of funding can allow CBOs to utilize the resources more effectively, as well as provide meaningful tools to local communities across various phases of rebuilding following a disaster. Facilitating a community-based process of long-term and sustainable recovery and renewal generally requires between two and four years, depending upon the magnitude of devastation. If a funder is unable to commit to funding for this length of time, the funder should fund processes that do not require participation of local actors and can still demonstrate measurable impact within a short period.

“Is your [the funder’s] responsibility simply to raise money to find grassroots-based NQOs, give it to them [NQOs] and that’s the end of it? Or is it to recognize that if you are going to be there [in a disaster-affected area], then what is the kind of universe you’re going to create in those communities?”

*Community-Based Organization Working in  
Tsunami-Affected Areas*

*An immediate and drastic surge of funds can sometimes strain organizational capacity to manage and implement the funds...*

It is important to note that the administration of large grants can result in stretching organizational capacity, particularly with regard to CBOs that

have historically had very small budgets and part-time or voluntary staff members. Several small organizations admitted to receiving disaster-relief grants that were twice their organizational budget. Some CBOs declined additional funding because of their inability to properly utilize such funding within the specified time period due to limited staff capacity. However, a more parceled approach to the same amount of total funding for disaster-related work can contribute to a more sustained response and sustainable outcome.

*...as well as deteriorate relationships between CBOs and the local communities in which they work*

Tensions can arise between CBOs and the local communities with which they work due to disappointment when programs end or promises are left unfulfilled because of diminishing funds in the later stages of community rebuilding. Funders often do not realize the amount of time required to develop and implement programs and processes that are truly created in partnership with communities. Many members of CBOs felt that once they had finally made some progress in their respective communities, the funding period was coming to an end. This puts the CBO members in a difficult position in which their intentions and professionalism can be questioned by members of the community. This is particularly damaging because building trusting relationships with community members is a prerequisite for any truly community-based process.

“Funders should make concerted efforts to understand the administrative costs required by an organization to use funds and implement programs.”

*Community-Based Organization  
Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange*

“ We’ve known people who are running organizations, who after two years of doing everyday community work—hiring community members, working in these communities—because their grants have run out did not return to those communities because they feel ashamed.”

CBO Representative, Interview

### Organizations face significant pressure from donors to release and spend the money within a short time frame

Grant-making organizations are often flooded with funds from individual or corporate donors who want the money disbursed to the affected populations immediately. Working with limited resources in general, most CBOs manage their money carefully and spend funds based on need. Some described how wasteful and impractical it is when organizations are forced to spend huge amounts of money within short time spans in order to disburse all grant money before the grant period comes to a close (see *Need for Flexibility section*).

“ In some senses, there’s a system that perpetuates a culture that doesn’t value resources to the best way that they could be valued. Just because you’re a non-profit and you’ve extra money doesn’t mean that all of it needs to be spent. ‘The budget year’s ending. We’ve got three lakhs of rupees to buy children’s materials. Let’s go and shop!’ What kind of absurdity is that?”

Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange

### Rehabilitation requires a greater amount and diversity of resources, as well as a more sustained commitment from funders

The later process of rehabilitation requires much more complex approaches and programmatic strategies than the initial life-saving services provided during the emergency relief phase. Shelter reconstruction, poverty alleviation, risk reduction and livelihood recovery are slow, highly complex undertakings that frequently involve factors outside the control, and competence, of international humanitarian relief agencies. Defining an appropriate exit strategy is difficult for donors (see *Box 2*).

## Box 2: Fair and Transparent Exit Strategy by Donors

“ After withdrawal, in a sustained manner and at a planned frequency, revisiting the communities by donor/facilitator groups should be planned to see if communities are confronting any emerging issues/problems that arise because of flawed plans.”

Donor Representative

From the data gathered, donors seem completely aware of the long time it takes to rebuild communities after a natural disaster, but they also assert that they cannot realistically stay with the same grantee for extended periods of time. Maintaining other non-financial relationships with previous grantee partners is a novel approach in grant-making strategy. Grantees maintain that long-term investment is necessary and that funding often ends abruptly or too quickly. Donors maintain that they want to contribute as much as possible but that an exit strategy is always on the horizon. Therefore it is imperative to plan and manage funding exits that recognize mutual goals and aims.

## 3 | Engage Community Participation and Utilize and Respect Local Systems

While the critical life-saving role of local communities is well documented, previous research has also revealed the tendency of international humanitarian response systems to overlook or discount the knowledge and expertise of local actors. Many of the CBO members working in disaster-afflicted regions strongly urged funders to take into account local culture, sensibilities and customs, as well as local resources, strengths and efforts already under way. Not approaching the humanitarian effort in partnership with communities or with regard to local contexts, they concluded, only further compounds the crisis and devastation.

### Sensitivity to and Awareness of Cultural and Local Contexts

*Local context must be considered prior to disbursing aid in order to guard against potentially damaging donations and interventions*

A unique aspect of disaster response and emergency aid efforts is that they involve a number of international players – both as donors and as providers of relief services. Following any disaster, there is usually an increase in the number of aid workers, volunteers and newly formed organizations. Due to the influx of outside agencies and individual volunteers, cultural differences between the local communities and these outsiders become apparent and can create conflict.

*Programs and interventions should not disturb the local social, political, cultural and economic setup of the affected area*

Among the community-based organizations responding in the aftermath of the tsunami, earthquake and hurricanes, there was overwhelming agreement that well-meaning intentions do have the ability to create further problems, and to do more harm than good, when services or supplies/materials are inappropriate to the local or cultural context. Newly formed groups often lack experience with local communities, which can lead to ill-informed strategies such as the direct distribution of money.

“Donations that are inappropriate actually create more administrative work for us...some donors basically sent trash and then expected great recognition for their ‘charitable’ contributions.”

*CBO Representative*

For example, a CBO representative pointed out that some newly-formed NGOs employed strategies that negatively impacted the relationship between community members and members of CBOs that had been working in those areas for a long time before the tsunami disaster. This observation not only was made by community-based organizations receiving funds but was acknowledged by donor representatives as well.

One individual shared the challenges his own organization faced in regard to the local cultural context and described the ways in which the members were able to overcome these challenges by working in partnership with the community and with respect towards local culture and belief systems. Working in areas of Pakistan where there is sometimes a strong and radical religious presence, this CBO’s workers have been accused of being agents of the West and of being threats to Muslim culture and communities. In their work on gender equality, CBO workers have approached the situation carefully and in an indirect way, and they have thus been able to achieve their goals of gender sensitization without offending local sensibilities. Similarly, while they have demonstrated to their funders a commitment

to addressing issues of gender equality, they have maintained that the strategies must be developed and determined by members of the local CBO.



Community participation in implementation (Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu)

## Participatory Approaches

*Funders should ensure community participation in the planning and implementation of various stages of the disaster response to create a sense of ownership among the communities*

The fifth general principle of the *IASC Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters* recommends that communities affected by a natural disaster should be meaningfully consulted and given the opportunity to take charge of their own affairs to the maximum extent possible. Interviews and discussions among members of CBOs who participated in the Knowledge Exchange maintained that funders should prioritize those

programs that encourage communities to determine their own needs and solutions. Design and implementation of relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts must be done in partnership with the communities affected by disaster.

“Disaster response assistance should never be imposed upon the beneficiaries. Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance program.”

*The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*

## *Participation of genuine representatives of communities is critical to planning sensitively and responsibly as well as to ensuring sustainability of the program*

Participatory approaches help to ensure that programs are culturally appropriate and community driven, as well as sustainable. Members of CBOs declared that without the involvement of local actors and the planning of appropriate programs and services, it is highly unlikely that interventions will result in the intended impact. This is a finding that is neither new nor groundbreaking; however, it is clear that this is an issue that remains very pertinent, as its appearance recurs time and again and is documented in various publications and reports (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, Grantmakers Without Borders, Praxis). This finding deserves serious attention by donor agencies and international aid agencies and warrants a re-evaluation of current strategies being used to involve local actors and ensure that interventions are developed in partnership with them. Organizations should also focus on their own priorities and align with donors that share a similar philosophy (see Box 3).

### Box 3: CBOs and Donor Alignment

One CBO member noted that his organization's commitment to the principles of community engagement and participation has meant that their funding portfolio is very limited, as they do not work with donor agencies that do not share this point of view and approach to community-based work. They do not accept funds that could steer them towards activities not completely endorsed or aligned with the wishes of the community. Some of the CBO members seemed highly aware of the conditions attached to certain funding. One respondent noted the need for donors to align themselves with organizations sharing similar guiding principles and philosophies.

## 4 | Invest in Assessment

*The importance of community needs assessments in affected areas cannot be overemphasized; failure to assess needs can lead to reduced impact, misuse of resources and/or the delivery of inappropriate resources or programs*

There was widespread agreement among CBOs that completing this task is absolutely necessary and that findings must guide the disbursement of funds and other resources. The provision of relief aid should be based on a thorough assessment of the needs of the disaster victims and the local capacities already in place to meet those needs. Funds needed for different phases must be decided by the NGO after doing a needs assessment

among the community members for whom the organization is working.

Although donors are working under time constraints and demanding pressures in the wake of a disaster, CBOs stressed that conducting a needs assessment (whether by the donor agency, aid agency or CBO) is a critical measure. All CBO representatives agreed that the time and resources invested in the needs assessment process are well worth the effort and that site visits by donor agencies are absolutely necessary to truly understand the ground reality of any disaster-affected region. Investing in this process helps to prevent the possibility of funds not reaching the communities or regions most in need, or of funding being routed to opportunistic agencies.

“The funding agencies and donors must do a needs analysis at the grass-roots level and then fund organizations based on these needs.”

CBO Representative

*Funders, however, face constraints, uncertainty and challenges unique to their roles in disaster response, particularly with regard to their capacity for assessing humanitarian crises*

While the donor representatives interviewed acknowledged that this task of assessment does fall within the purview of their duty, they described the difficult process of deciding where funding goes and the size of grants. They discussed how emotionally taxing this determination process is, how perplexing it is to measure and assign value to misery and how, whatever a donor's decision about funding may be, there will always be human needs that are unmet. Representatives of donor agencies acknowledged that current human development and social needs are so great, and yet there are limited amounts of funds with which they must work. They also discussed how they are required to act quickly in a time of urgency and they often have to make decisions with limited information.



Community participation in assessment and planning (Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu)

Table 2: Donors Face Critical Questions

- ▶ When do you decide when a disaster is big enough for long-term funding?
- ▶ What is an appropriate amount for an emergency grant?
- ▶ The amount of emergency grants varies tremendously, so how do you try to quantify these things in major disasters?
- ▶ How do you quantify human suffering from one disaster or region to another?
- ▶ How do you ensure that these regions are covered, that you are proactive and not reactive?

## 5 | Mobilize Local Informants and Resource Persons

*There is consensus among CBOs and donors regarding the utility of local informants or resource persons who can help shape informed decision-making at the donor level*

Throughout conversations about the importance of understanding local contexts, developing truly participatory community programs and conducting needs assessments, there was also discussion about the utility of local informants. CBO representatives noted that donor agencies could send a locally based consultant to conduct site visits if a member of the donor agency could not travel to the region and donor representatives agreed that it is probably more cost effective to send someone locally. Members of donor agencies also acknowledged the value of local resource persons who could serve as transmitters of important information, such as assessment of community and organizational needs. An effective strategy is to send someone who is already tapped into the professional networks. Local resource persons are also more likely to approach the situation in a way that is culturally informed.

“There should be someone guiding you [in your giving], someone who has their ear to the ground and really knows the local situation. As an outsider, especially if you come from outside the crisis country, you do not know the local civil society and needs. You need to have informants that guide you or help you.”

*Excerpt from Interview with Donor*

*Such persons are best utilized if they understand donor expectations and are also completely immersed at the ground level*

One of the donor representatives surveyed expressed that external experts should not necessarily be banked on for base planning but should add value to the process at the peripheral level. Another donor representative interviewed stated that it can be difficult to clearly communicate preferences and organizational approaches to a local resource person because that person is essentially external to the donor organization and therefore may not be able to imbibe the culture of that organization. This is a challenge specifically with regard to scouting for new grantees, as an external representative is not as closely associated with the organization as a staff member is.

The founding member of a CBO working in the Andaman Islands and Tamil Nadu shared a positive experience, describing how the presence of locally based consultants (hired by one of her U.S.-based funders) served to benefit her organization. Due to the close geographical proximity of these consultants, staff of her organization have benefited immensely from ongoing technical support, trainings and guidance during their program development phase.

## 6 | Prioritize Programs with True Community Involvement

*Disasters create opportunities for exploitation of relief funds and vulnerable local populations through the formation of phony entities and organizations*

Several of the CBOs working in the regions affected by the tsunami, the earthquake in Pakistan and Hurricane Katrina argued that site visits, on-the-ground informants, and needs assessments help to guard against exploitation. One member of a Sri Lankan CBO, whose goal is to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children, described other problems created by the tsunami such as the trafficking and exploitation of displaced and/or orphaned children. He spoke of how many of the legal and bureaucratic procedures normally required to establish non-profit organizations in his country were significantly relaxed during this time of crisis, allowing exploitation of the region's vulnerability.

“One of the strategies [our foundation] had created was that we were going to work with organizations that existed before the hurricane and who showed commitment to these communities and regions, instead of those new ones grabbing for money. Most of those new organizations were started by outsiders. It takes times to find those truly community-based organizations.”

*Donor Representative*

*CBOs, long-standing organizations and local and national governments, as well as donor agencies, can assist in the protection of communities from inexperienced or ill-meaning groups*

Some of the donor representatives interviewed spoke of their organization's efforts to locate CBOs that have a history of service in their communities and that have demonstrated a commitment to continue with their work long after the disaster relief phase. They noted that such scouting efforts are time consuming but are definitely necessary to find organizations that are truly community based and dedicated to long-term development. One donor described her organization's commitment to funding such grantee partners after the hurricanes wreaked havoc on the U.S. Gulf Coast. As the public foundation for which she works focuses on long-term funding and development work following the initial emergency phase, the foundation was able to take the time necessary for this survey process.

## 7 | Practice Flexibility

### *Funding agencies working in disaster-afflicted regions must be flexible in their partnerships with grantee organizations*

CBO members are located in the field during times of crisis and are privy to situations that a grant-making program officer sitting in an office on another continent does not necessarily have the ability to grasp. Members of these CBOs are often faced with circumstances that require them to act and respond immediately, and they maintain that it is necessary for funders to defer to their expertise and trust their judgment during these times. *Effective risk taking* and *communication* were terms used by CBO members to describe the characteristics that define a healthy and flexible grantee-donor relationship.

Data based on excerpts from interviews, surveys and the workshop sessions demonstrate the following findings:

Need for Flexibility – Key Issues	Desire to have more decision-making power during times of crisis and emergencies
	Greater authority to make these decisions in response to new, emerging and usually unpredictable/unanticipated community needs or a rapidly changing environment
	Flexibility with regard to the utilization of funds
	Temporary relief of administrative requirements and duties of grantees during times of emergency
	Need for a general openness to different or new intervention methods and systems of operating

“Functional flexibility that enables the field-based decision makers to respond to situations in fast-changing scenarios in disaster situations [is needed].”

*Donor Survey Respondent*

### *The uncertainty associated with a crisis situation – and with appropriate use of donor funds – creates needs that require rapid, fluid and compassionate responses*

Members of CBOs noted that particularly during a time of disaster, situations and needs are completely unpredictable, and programs do not always go according to the proposal or grant application, due to forces that are beyond the organization’s control. At the same time, needs of these organizations are many – if they unexpectedly receive donations for something that they had budgeted for, there are always other

items, resources or delivery of services for which the money can be used. For example, a member of a Sri Lanka-based CBO pointed out that a general budget, rather than strict financial allocations, makes it easier for an organization to spend based on needs. Often the required paperwork and documentation needed to sustain a grant and to stick strictly to the funder's agenda overwhelms small organizations, and their interest in pursuing further funding is then diminished.

*The ability of a CBO to respond to changing demands is critical to the success of any intervention; donor agencies have also acknowledged this need for flexibility*

In moments of disaster, organizations must be flexible and adaptable and be able to respond to different needs as they emerge. CBO representatives acknowledged that the process of reanalyzing and reassessing community needs, and altering programs accordingly, does not end – it is an ongoing and circular process. Increased flexibility within the donor-grantee relationship can encourage and facilitate these processes. Additionally, some donors have recognized the burden of filling out proposals and paperwork by organizations that have faced a crisis.

“ We recognize that donors are issue-specific; however, in times of disaster, we strongly urge that funders allow the local groups on the ground to make qualified critical-need decisions.”

CBO Representative

*Funding agencies often only approve grants for intervention strategies that have been formally documented as having an impact*

Many organizations working in the field develop, implement and constantly refine strategies based on changes they are observing first-hand within the communities in which they work. Oftentimes, they do not have the required resources to conduct full-scale research to 'prove' that their methodologies are effective. In these cases, the funding agencies should defer to the expertise of those working in the field and trust that their new or innovative strategies are genuinely based on adequate experience. One CBO member described her organization's commitment to psychosocial therapy before it was considered legitimate by mainstream donor agencies; this resulted in her organization not applying for funding and relying on small donations and volunteers instead.

## 8 | Focus on Equity in Giving

*There is an urgent need to ensure equity within the humanitarian response systems and in all facets and phases of community development*

The principle of equity is essential to the human rights framework. Dialogue around equity in disaster response is centered on the recognition that disaster often highlights and exacerbates already existing social inequities. Peer-to-peer conversations at the Knowledge Exchange, as well as the interviews and surveys, discussed the significance of addressing pre-existing social inequalities and building the capacity of marginalized groups to better equip them with the tools and resources they will need if a disaster or crisis occurs. It is noteworthy that CBO members viewed disaster response and social justice as connected parts within a larger movement to end human suffering and injustice. The following needs

were revealed:

- ▶ That these patterns of inequity are not repeated, reflected or augmented in the distribution of aid and processes of rehabilitation
- ▶ That access to basic rights and services is equal and fair
- ▶ That donors and community-based organizations responding to disaster also carry out work at the macro level to positively impact broader systems and institutions that perpetuate inequalities

“Even though disaster affects people in many ways, development practitioners like us should encourage innovative ideas to restore the lives of the affected communities by concentrating on gender equality, social equity and self-sustained community.”

*Donor, Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange*

## 9 | Coordinate Donor Support

*Coordination among grant-making entities can prevent the duplication of services and increase their impact, effectiveness and reach*

Although difficult to do, donor coordination is important to establish linkages in advance for a more effective response. During times of disaster, the strengths, resources and efforts of local communities are often overlooked. Knowledge Exchange participants noted that in addition to donors coordinating with each other, donors and other external agencies must also coordinate with and strengthen local endeavors already underway. The funding agency can consult with networks of NGOs (if they exist) and with the existing in-country response to determine needs and avoid duplication.

“You [as a donor] may have the money and you may want to help and reach out to local NGOs in this time of crisis, but you do not know which organizations to go to and reach out to, how to get the money out there. Also, as a donor from outside [the country or region], linking and coordinating with the in-country response through the larger relief organizations and other NGOs is imperative.”

*CBO Representative  
Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange*

It was noted that many of the disaster-affected regions received an excess of supplies, while other devastated regions did not receive any at all. For example, in the case of tsunami-hit Tamil Nadu, surplus supplies of fishing boats and tents led to elevated consumption of alcohol among some of the menfolk. They were able to sell these and then purchase liquor, the consumption of which was a likely response to emotional trauma due to the disaster. Such negative outcomes must be avoided at all costs.

## 10 | Encourage Sustainability and Independence – Moving Beyond Monetary Benefits

“*Apart from just supporting the material needs and monetary needs, the funding agency must support programs that build the psychosocial components and motivational training programs for adults and children.*”

CBO Member

*Monetary aid should be coupled with tools for self-sustainability, particularly following the initial emergency phase to reduce dependence*

While grantee representatives in no way derogated the significance of monetary and material aid, there was overwhelming agreement that disaster work must go beyond these forms of aid. CBO representatives described the need to provide encouragement and tools for self-sustainability and expressed concern over creating dependency among local actors within the community and organizations serving the community. These sentiments were echoed by representatives of donor agencies. Material help in the relief phase should be followed by capacity building (e.g., mentoring and guidance in programmatic and technical issues).

“*The funding agencies must fund programs that would bring people together and make them share their experiences regarding the disaster and support each other.*”

CBO Member

*Donors and recipients must form strong partnerships to address the need for long-term support and should focus on concrete capacity-building plans based on a common community platform*

While the CBO representatives emphasized the need to avoid overreliance on monetary and material aid, they did not waver on their advocacy for long-term social investment in disaster-affected regions. One of the grantee partners from New Orleans, United States, discussed the importance of going forward and progressing from one stage of rebuilding to the next in a timely fashion. In his view, advancing to the next phase and not getting ‘stuck’ in one is critical to avoiding dependency and becoming truly rehabilitated. The time periods determined for different types of support were also a concern raised by representatives of donor agencies. At the same time, local capacity should be built to offset any potentially negative consequences.

“*I think we need to make sure that our funding is addressing some of these long-term needs and that it is building the capacity of these organizations to be self-sustaining.*”

Donor Representative

“*In Aceh, all these big, big agencies came in. There was so much coming into these areas and so much was being given. Giving should not cripple the economy. The funders will exit eventually, so the focus should be on building local capacity to continue with the work.*”

Donor Representative

# Conclusions

Based on the findings presented above – garnered from participation in and observation of the 2007 Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchange in Mamallapuram, India, and in-depth dialogue with representatives of both CBOs and funding agencies, as well as the administration of brief surveys to the same constituents – a number of conclusions and specific recommendations for grant makers with a growing interest in disaster response can be summarized here:

## Support local initiatives

International agencies should aim to support local initiatives, rather than attempt to lead and determine the provision of relevant services. Efforts should respect and build upon the strengths and momentum of local efforts. Local assets cannot be ignored. Despite best intentions, cultural conflict and ill-informed methods of giving can do more harm than good. The community must be involved in the planning and implementation of disaster-management and preparedness programs. This will ensure that programs are culturally and contextually appropriate and respectful of local sensibilities. Community input, involvement and leadership are crucial for program success, longevity and the development of local capacity to carry out programs once the funding period comes to an end.

## Seek local knowledge and assessment

In order to truly understand the situation of any disaster, representatives from funding agencies should make visits to the affected regions prior to

building partnerships and providing aid. If that is not possible, a locally based consultant or on-the-ground informant can provide information about the situation. It is not feasible to rely on media reports. Nothing can have the same impact or result in the same level of understanding as actually being on the ground.

## Flexibility is critical

Donors should be flexible – not only in terms of monetary issues but also in terms of allowing organizations to take authority about certain programmatic issues, being open to new and innovative intervention strategies and supporting partners that are pushing traditional definitions or models of care. Donors themselves should constantly question, critique and remain open to changing the standard paradigms used in grant making. Duplication of services must be avoided.

## Invest towards long-term social needs of affected communities

Funding agencies must invest socially towards the long-term needs of affected communities and work towards developing long-term relationships with their grantee partners. Programs must focus on building the capacity, skills and resources of communities to enable them to better respond themselves in the event of a natural disaster or humanitarian crisis (i.e., increased preparedness). In post-disaster development work, it is essential to support local efforts that work towards attaining social justice and eliminating inequalities. All affected communities should have equal access to aid, despite some regions being more difficult to reach.

It is noteworthy that donor agencies also face serious challenges and issues of capacity of their own. They also appear to be quite aware of many of the challenges faced by community-based organizations and workers. While these agencies work under different stressors than the affected communities themselves and the CBOs that serve them, the data revealed that the goals and objectives of all constituents are highly congruent.

More tools – such as additional Global Fund for Children Knowledge Exchanges, exploratory research, and summaries of lessons learned and recommendations – are needed to further align these goals and create greater understanding and fluidity among the players. This will help to improve our response systems to the natural devastation that is increasingly ravaging and further marginalizing communities around the world.

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