

2005: Year of Disasters

‘We tried to believe in our hearts that we’d harvest something...that the rains would start again, but the dry spell continued and there was no rain.’

Davis Mulomba, Malawian farmer, interview with Oxfam staff, September 05

2005 has been a year of disasters. The international response has been characterized by televised suffering of the survivors of South Asia’s earthquake and the tsunami, driving great generosity. But it has *also* been characterised by the continuing failure of governments to provide timely, sufficient aid to those, largely in Sub Saharan Africa, who suffer equally but less visibly.

1. The scale of the humanitarian challenge

The earthquake that struck South Asia on October 8th may have killed more than 30,000 people. But it was only the latest in a series of natural and man-made catastrophes that have affected tens of millions of people in the last twelve months.

During 2005 the world has experienced some of the worst natural disasters ever.ⁱ The Asian Tsunami killed a staggering 224,495 people. Hurricanes Stan (in Central America) and Katrina killed many fewer people but the resultant floods and mudslides affected around 2 million and 500,000 people respectively.ⁱⁱ

Meanwhile in the Sahel region of western Africa, a terrible and largely avoidable food crisis has unfolded, afflicting around 3.6 million people in Niger alone. A similar food crisis is now emerging in southern Africa, where 10 -12 million people are facing severe food shortages. In the most recent crisis, the South Asia earthquake, around 4 million may have been affected and the aid effort is only just beginning.

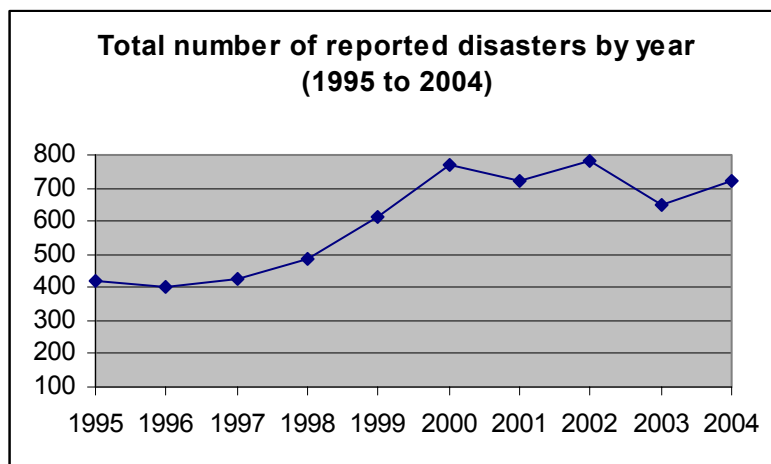
Some of these disasters are more natural than others. In almost all, a natural phenomenon is turned into a disaster by its victims’ deep, entrenched poverty. Meanwhile, wars continue to kill on a massive scale. In Darfur, Sudan, around 200,000 people have died from the violent conflict that erupted in early 2003; and persistent insecurity still displaces 2.3 million people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and up to 2 million in Northern Uganda.

Alongside these high profile crises, 2005 has seen many other natural disasters and conflict-related emergencies that may never reach our television screens despite the terrible suffering they cause.

Over the last decade the numbers of disasters, and the numbers of people affected by disasters, has been climbing:ⁱⁱⁱ

- The average annual number of disasters reported during 2000-04 was 55% higher than during 1995-99. With 719 reported disasters, 2004 was the third worst year of the decade (1994-2004).^{iv}
- During 2000-2004 disasters affected one third more people than during 1995-1999.^v
- Over the same period the numbers of people affected by disasters in countries of low human development doubled, with Africa showing the greatest increase.^{vi}

The international humanitarian response has been inadequate to many of these crises – and others caused by armed conflicts. This briefing surveys some of the major crises in 2005 and the response to them. It describes an uneven, often late and sometimes inefficient international humanitarian performance that has been undermined by inadequate funding for the UN’s vital appeals. It also recommends an important concrete step – the upgrading of the existing UN Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) to a new Central Emergency *Response* Fund - that could help improve the global humanitarian response, and help prevent avoidable suffering and death.



Source: EM-DAT, University of Louvain, Belgium

2. Some of The Disasters

Asian Tsunami

Date: December 26th 2004

Description: A massive tsunami hit the coastlines of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India killing, injuring and displacing hundreds of thousands of people and flattening villages and towns.

Nos killed: 224,495 ^{vii}

Nos affected: 2.4 million people ^{viii}

Funding of UN

2005 appeal: 83 % of the US\$1.3 B requested by the UN was committed as of 11th October 2005. ^{ix} Total donor pledges, including those outside the appeal, totaled an estimated \$3.8 billion by May 2005— equivalent to half the funds for all emergencies, everywhere in 2003. ^x

Funding received in first month of UN Flash appeal: approximately 95% of requirements ^{xi}

Rating

- Total needs: Exceeded
- Speed of response: Fast

Hurricane Stan, Central America

Date: October 4th 2005

Description: Hurricane Stan hit several countries in Central America causing widespread flooding and landslides in Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Belize and Haiti

Nos killed: Guatemala 652 and 557 missing; Mexico 15; Nicaragua 3. ^{xii}

Numbers affected: Guatemala 163,609; Mexico 1.9 million; Nicaragua 1,407 ^{xiii}

Funding of UN 2005 Flash Appeal for Guatemala: 1% of US\$21,670,000 requested as of 11th October 2005 ^{xiv}

Rating

- Total needs: too early to say
- Speed: too early to say

South Asia Earthquake

Date: 8th October 2005

Description: An earthquake measuring at least 7.6 hit South Asia. Worse affected areas are Kashmir and Pakistan, but the quake also hit north India and Afghanistan

Nos killed : Over 22,288 people have lost their lives in Pakistan. ^{xv} Plus 1,280 dead and 14 missing in India, and one dead in Afghanistan. ^{xvi}

Nos affected – 4 million affected and 50,575 reported injured in Pakistan, with numbers expected to rise further. ^{xvii}

Funding of UN 2005 Flash Appeal: 2% of the US\$271,776,000 requested as of October 11th 2005 ^{xviii}

Rating

- Total needs: too early to say
- Speed: too early to say

Niger

Date: first warnings November 2004. Crisis broke in Summer 2005.

Description: Food crisis

Numbers killed: no data, feared to be very high

Numbers affected: up to 3.6 million ^{xix}

Funding of UN 2005 flash appeal: 53% of the US \$ 81,393,876 requested was received by October 2005

Funding received in first month of UN appeal: approximately 25% of requirements^{xx}

Rating:

- Total needs: still unmet
- Speed of response: too slow

Southern Africa

Date: imminent without urgent action, first warning sounded in March 2005

Description: possible food crisis unfolding now

Nos killed: no data

Nos affected: between 10 and 12 million people could face severe food shortages across southern Africa, and signs of increased admissions of children with severe malnutrition. ^{xxi}

Funding of UN 2005 flash appeal for Malawi: 32% of US\$87,760,869 requested by UN flash appeal as of October 2005. ^{xxii}

Funding received in first month of UN appeal for Malawi: 30% of requirements. ^{xxiii}

Rating:

- Total needs: unmet
- Speed of response: too slow

Darfur, Sudan

Date: Since 2003

Description: The conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan has led to the deaths of huge numbers of people, caused many to flee their homes to live in temporary camps, and involved many abuses of human rights

Nos killed: 200,000

Nos affected: 1.8 million displaced

Funding of UN 2005 appeal: 46% of US\$1,866,325,654 requested for Sudan as of October 12th. ^{xxiv}

Rating

Total needs: unmet

Speed of response: slow

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Date: since 1998

Description: The humanitarian crisis in the DRC has been one of the worst in the world. A long term and complex conflict has led to appalling levels of hunger, disease, death, displacement, and countless abuses of human rights.

Nos killed: an estimated 3.8 million people have lost their lives in the since 1997. ^{xxv}

Nos affected: 2.3 million displaced within DRC, plus half a million refugees returning from Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi. ^{xxvi}

Funding of UN 2005 appeal: 53% of US\$194,109,117 requested as of October 2005 ^{xxvii}

Overall rating:

- Total needs: seriously unmet
- Speed of response: slow

3. The Humanitarian Response^{xxviii}

The sheer size and scale of disasters this year demands a commensurate humanitarian response. All donor governments share the responsibility to ensure humanitarian aid is provided to all those who need it. But the above brief survey of some of the year's worst humanitarian emergencies exposes major and life-threatening shortcomings.

While humanitarian assistance has increased in recent years, thanks to the efforts of some donors, it still is failing too many people. Humanitarian assistance still does not cover all needs, often arrives too late, and is too often determined more by media profile or political criteria than humanitarian need, condemning thousands of people to unnecessary suffering and death.

Humanitarian aid often arrives late. Even if the majority of funds are eventually provided, they often arrive too late to prevent avoidable suffering and death. The

recent food crisis in Niger was predicted months before it hit the headlines, and many deaths could have been prevented if funding had been made available at that time. It took television pictures of starving children in July 2005 to prompt adequate funds by which time the shortage had turned into a crisis. The Niger crisis received around 22% and Malawi around 30 % of requested funds in the first month of the UN appeal. More widely, although UN flash appeals (for rapid onset natural disasters or sudden deteriorations in existing humanitarian crises) are put out within days, most of them receive less than 30 % of requested funds in the first month.^{xxix} In many of these crises, time costs lives.

Humanitarian aid is too often determined more by media profile or political criteria than humanitarian need. Massive media coverage helped ensure that the Tsunami appeal received US \$3.8 billion in pledges for humanitarian assistance by May 2005 – roughly half the funds for all emergencies everywhere in 2003. In contrast many other humanitarian emergencies continued to suffer severe shortages of funding. Worldwide media coverage has driven a generous initial response to South Asia's earthquake. But as international television crews are already departing, a week after the quake, Oxfam staff on the ground ask how long donor governments' generosity will continue.

The percentage of funds received by UN appeals is one indicator of whether global humanitarian needs are being met. Although far from perfect, there is currently no better information publicly available that compares humanitarian aid from one crisis to another. (Of course, donors also give bilaterally to humanitarian crises, and the UN data does not capture this).

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 2.3 million people have been displaced by the conflict and 3.8 million have lost their lives since 1997. Yet just 53% of the US\$194,109,117 requested by the UN for the DRC had been received as of 12th October 2005.
- Similarly in Darfur where an estimated 200,000 people have been killed and 1.8 million displaced by the conflict, just 46% of US\$1,866,325,654 requested by the UN for the humanitarian crisis in Darfur had been received as of October 12th 2005

More widely the UN estimates that 16 million people are at immediate risk in ten 'neglected emergencies' in Africa alone.^{xxx} Oxfam defines 'neglected emergencies' as those that consistently suffer low levels of funding either because they have a lower media or political profile e.g. the Democratic Republic of the Congo; involve few beneficiaries e.g. Madagascar floods; or have been continuing for many years e.g. northern Uganda's 20 year conflict. In 2004 UN faced an annual shortfall of over US\$1.3 billion for its appeals, effectively abandoning people to destitution, starvation or death once their own coping strategies and national resources have been exhausted.

4. The Solutions – Oxfam response

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund

At the UN World Summit in September 2005, governments recognised the need to improve the timeliness and predictability of emergency aid, and promised to upgrade the UN's existing Central Emergency Revolving Fund. The proposal is to turn this fund into a much larger and more efficient grant-giving 'Response Fund' that will be able to provide a rapid response and adequately fund 'neglected emergencies'.

Oxfam believes that **a reformed and fully funded CERF would make a positive difference to the global humanitarian response**, and is asking UN member states to commit an additional US\$1 billion per year to the fund on top of their existing humanitarian aid budgets.

By providing increased funding and allowing early action, the CERF could help:

- avert much avoidable suffering and death.
- prevent external shocks turning into full-blown crises thus making humanitarian operations more cost effective
- ensure that funds are allocated according to humanitarian need rather than media or political profile

The UN and donors must ensure that the CERF is well governed, transparent and accountable if it is to achieve its potential. While providing sufficient funds for the international humanitarian system is vital to saving lives, this must be backed up by improvements both in quality of the humanitarian response, and in tackling the poverty that underlies humanitarian crises.

Appropriate and Quality Assistance

Every humanitarian agency should provide aid according to the internationally accepted *Sphere* standards and Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and NGOs. These commit humanitarian agencies, among other things, to:

- give aid impartiality and proportionality according to need;
- remain independent of governments;
- build disaster responses on local capacities where possible and appropriate, including the local purchase of goods;
- involve beneficiaries in the management of aid;
- strive to use aid to reduce future vulnerability to disasters;
- ensure accountability to beneficiaries and donors

At the same time, humanitarian agencies must support the safety as well as the material needs of their beneficiaries.

Other Action

An effective response to humanitarian emergencies also requires international action in early warning, disaster preparedness and mitigation, investment in long-term development, conflict prevention and resolution.

Investment in development, for example, can not only help improve life chances but is also crucial to help reduce people's vulnerability to future disaster. While the link is not automatic, extreme poverty can vastly increase vulnerability to disaster. In countries with high human development indices there were an average of 44 people killed per disaster, while countries with low human development an average of 300 people were killed per disaster.^{xxxi}

2005 has been a year of disasters. The international response has been characterized by televised suffering of the survivors of South Asia's earthquake and the tsunami, driving great generosity. But it has *also* been characterised by the continuing failure of governments to provide timely, sufficient aid to those, largely in Sub Saharan Africa, who suffer equally but less visibly.

Reforming the UN CERF, and providing US\$1 billion for it, would not resolve all of the problems of the international system of humanitarian response. But it is a vital first step that governments must now take when they review humanitarian action at the UN General Assembly in November.

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i See boxes for sources of data for individual crises. Data on disasters and other humanitarian crises should be treated with caution and viewed only as indicative of magnitude as data is not available or complete for all disasters. Many of the figures for this briefing are taken mainly from the World Disaster Reports of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), or directly from the Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), on which the IFRC reports rely. CRED defines a disaster a 'situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating a request to national or international level for external assistance; an unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction and human suffering' .

ii The number of people killed by the Tsunami was massive, but the death toll was not the highest ever. The Ethiopian 1984 famine killed 900,000 people; sea floods in Bangladesh in 1970 killed between 200-500,000 people; and famine in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea from 1995-1999 resulted in at least 270,000 deaths.

iii It is important to note however that the numbers of people killed by natural disasters is decreasing, in part due to better satellite forecasting, improved early warning systems, and improved community preparedness in some countries such as India and Bangladesh, apart from 2004 when the numbers soared due to the Tsunami effect.

iv World Disasters Report 2005, IFRC, Table 1, pp194, tables

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- ^v World Disasters Report, 2005, IFRC, Table 3 pp 196
- ^{vi} World Disasters Report, 2005, IFRC, Table 3, pp 196
- ^{vii} World Disaster Report, 2005, IFRC Table 2 pp 195 (April 2005 figures)
- ^{viii} World Disaster Report, 2005, IFRC, Table 3 pp 196
- ^{ix} OCHA, Financial Tracking Service, FTS, Consolidated Appeals, Summary of Requirements and Pledges/Contributions by affected country/region as of 11th October 2005
- ^x Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Update, 2004-05,
- ^{xi} Jan Eglan, October 2005, Power point, UN Humanitarian Response: An Agenda for Reform
- ^{xii} UN OCHA, October 9th –12th situation reports
- ^{xiii} UN Ocha, October 9th –12th situation Report
- ^{xiv} OCHA FTS ibid
- ^{xv} Pakistan government estimates, OCHA situation report, no 7, 12th October 2005
- ^{xvi} OCHA situation report, no 6, 11th October 2005
- ^{xvii} Pakistan government estimates, taken from OCHA situation report, no 7, 12th October 2005
- ^{xviii} OCHA, FTS, ibid
- ^{xix} CRED data base updated to October 3rd
- ^{xx} Jan Eglan, October 2005, ibid
- ^{xxi} This figure represents the full spectrum, from people who will be slightly affected at some point over the next six months to those very badly affected already. It does not mean they all need food aid. The figures are based on government-run Vulnerability Assessment Committees in each country in the region which are also the basis for the UN figures
- ^{xxii} OCHA, FTS, ibid
- ^{xxiii} Jan Eglan, October 2005, ibid
- ^{xxiv} OCHA, FTS, ibid
- ^{xxv} UN, 13th October 2005, Forgotten and Neglected Emergencies Campaign, <http://ochaonline.un.org>
- ^{xxvi} Oxfam, September 2005, DRC:Protection of civilians and increased humanitarian assistance needed, http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/where_we_work/drc/protective.htm
- ^{xxvii} OCHA, FTS, ibid
- ^{xxviii} See boxes for sources of information on individual crisis
- ^{xxix} Eglan, Jan, power point presentation on UN Humanitarian Response: An Agenda for Reform, October 2005
- ^{xxx} OCHA, 13th October 2005, Campaigns, Forgotten and Neglected Emergencies, , <http://ochaonline.un.org> The 10 African countries include: Niger, Chad, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea, Republic of Congo, Somalia, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo and Northern Uganda.
- ^{xxxi} World Disasters Report, IFRC, pp 164.