



Analysis of emergency evaluations

An updated discussion paper

April 2005

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1. Executive Summary

This paper provides an overview and broad analysis of evaluations of Concern's major emergency operations from 2000-2004, as a follow up to the original meta-evaluation document produced in April 2001. Without covering again the basics of the organisation's definition of and approach to humanitarian issues, it updates some of the major contextual aspects such as the nature of the engagement between humanitarian organisations and the military, the issue of protection, the impact of UN integrated missions, and the impact of rights based programming approaches on humanitarian approaches.

The paper provides a snap-shot and thus does not cover the implementation and impact of important advances in the organisation's approach, such as the roll out of the Programme Participant Protection Policy (P4).

The quality of evaluations and the effort to monitor the impact of interventions has improved. Concern's own evaluations (whether conducted internally, externally or with a mixed team) remain the most useful source of potential organisational learning as the wider inter-organisational evaluations tend to focus more on broad trends than on specific points of learning for the organisation. Performance standards are increasingly embedded or referred to in evaluations, which is a step forward. Real time evaluation is the new watchword in measuring impact and maximising programme flexibility to respond to needs (or to changing needs assessments), and can be expected to be much more evident when the next meta-evaluation is conducted.

Country situations analysed in whole or part include:

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Afghanistan | Food aid, shelter, non food item distribution, food security and agricultural rehabilitation (IDPs) |
| Southern Africa (Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe) | Food aid, food security and nutrition |
| Liberia | Water, sanitation and hygiene promotion for IDPs |
| Iran – Bam | Health and education infrastructure rehabilitation (through partner organisations – Merlin and People in Need) |
| South Sudan Darfur | Food aid, food security, nutrition Water and sanitation, nutrition, non food items, camp management, livelihoods. NB this is not a complete evaluation. |
| Ethiopia | Food aid and food security |
| Indian Ocean tsunami | NB documents reviewed were not complete evaluations, but broader comments on the humanitarian response in general. Concern's intervention included/s: |
| Sri Lanka | (mainly south, south west), through partners: NFI distribution housing, land tenure/ownership legal issues, livelihoods, sanitation, infrastructure rehabilitation |
| Indonesia | (Banda Aceh, Simueli, Paula Nasi–NFI and emergency food distributions, emergency shelter, school cleaning and rehabilitation; plans for reconstruction, shelter, water and sanitation, livelihoods, food security |

India (Tamil Nadu State) – distribution of NFIs with small food component through two partners. Plans for shelter and infrastructure reconstruction

A full list of reports and background literature reviewed is attached as an annexe¹.

Perhaps reflecting the fact that there are now an estimated 25 million IDPs, more than double the estimated number of refugees, none of the evaluations reviewed involved Concern working with refugee populations, but several were of IDP contexts.

- **The future**

Threats and responses are increasingly interconnected. We can expect to face fewer “classic” (e.g. a food aid response to a famine) and many more “new paradigm” emergencies (the Twenty First Century’s complex emergencies, where a range of factors such as HIV/AIDS, the environmental impacts of human behaviour, the globalisation of information and economies, and more may all influence how a crisis occurs and how humanitarians will and should respond to it). In this sense, the fact that Concern remains multi-sectoral is a strength, but it highlights the need for it to make intelligent, strategic linkages between its programme sectors. This means having well understood and articulated reasons for prioritising some sectors over others, which take organisational capacity, and contexts in terms of politics, resources available and the activities of other agencies into account. It also implies that to provide optimal service within prioritised sectors, that the agency’s analysis and contextual understanding must remain strong across the broad spectrum of issues. For this reason, it could be considered a strength to maintain major issues such as HIV/AIDS and equality as cross-cutting, as this will require their consistent consideration in assessment and programme delivery.

Predictions on future threats are familiar: changing weather patterns will lead to major vulnerability to coastal flooding; conflicts will occur over the unequal distribution of and access to resources; and a range of public health and livelihoods issues will result from trends in urbanisation (the UN estimates 60% of the world’s population will be living in cities by 2030, up from 50% today). Inevitably, those who are already poor, afflicted by major epidemics like HIV/AIDS, TB or malaria, and who are uninsured will suffer disproportionately from crises. Finally, there is the issue of the war on terror and the emergence of influential networked non-state armed groups such as Al Qaeda. The activities of such groups, and the responses of states to them, do not fit easily within the current frame work of international law.

Humanitarian agencies of the North are still practicing more rhetoric than reality in terms of partnership, although organisations like Concern have made strenuous efforts to improve the nature and degree of engagement with Southern partner organisations. However, culture, language, approach and financial control still represent major challenges. In the search for cost efficiency and local solutions to local problems, donors may turn more to local NGO funding; however, for major crises where capacities in logistics, pre-financing and comparative experience are critical, old patterns of behaviour will persist – at least in the medium term. The onus remains on both the NGOs of the

¹ For a full list of evaluations and literature reviewed, refer to Annexe 1

South and North, the former to continue advocating their cause, and the latter to put their money (or the donors' money) where their mouth is in terms of investing in specific training and support to local and national organisations for humanitarian response. The Bam response showed that it is far from impossible.

- **Human rights**

Human rights implementation is in the spotlight due to important UN reforms. This puts pressure on NGOs to become more astute in their policy analysis and advocacy, and their positions on rights-based approaches. While none of the evaluations reviewed here explicitly raised the question a clash between the humanitarian imperative and rights-based approaches, Concern's responses (e.g. Zimbabwe) would suggest that the organisation remains in practice, principally motivated by the humanitarian imperative in its humanitarian response. This is a policy discussion which requires priority attention, and which must match knowledge of the debate in general with attitudes and practice of country teams on the ground.

- **Funding**

Funding remains highly sensitive to the pulling power of each emergency in terms of the media, and politics (national, regional and international). Europe has pulled far ahead of the US in terms of the per capita level of its humanitarian funding, but this funding may be increasingly politicized (for example, European policy on humanitarian assistance is increasingly and explicitly linked to foreign policy and security objectives). While donors are more present in the field, NGOs still miss opportunities to educate them better – on the policy level as well as within specific funding. The launch of the Good Humanitarian Donorship has been a positive step, but NGOs must work harder to ensure donors hold to the pledges they make within it. This may require more sophisticated advocacy aimed not only at the civil servants with whom NGO staff might normally interact, but more directly at the politicians who remain the decision makers. At the very least, information tracking how humanitarian assistance funding decisions are made should be tracked and broadcast by agencies like Concern. Concern's success in fundraising is not noted in the evaluations, but is clearly one of the keys to its timely responses. Concern's status as a middle-sized organisation provides useful flexibility, in that it does not rank amongst the mega-NGOs like World Vision and Care, and thus does not seem like a Microsoft of the NGO world; yet its budgets, presence and reputation are such that it is able to achieve access and influence in important places.

- **Constriction of humanitarian space**

Afghanistan, Iraq and Zimbabwe saw fears of encroachment of political and military actors on the humanitarian agenda played out: the more involved military forces are, or are perceived to be, in the provision of humanitarian assistance, or in pursuing an explicitly humanitarian objective, the more the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian aid is called into question. This may lead to aid not reaching those who need it most; the corruption the image of the humanitarian endeavour with serious long term consequences to its effectiveness in saving lives in crisis; and compromise the security of humanitarian workers. Concern has devoted useful time to exploring the debate, and to educating the Irish Army at home on the issue. These discussions have

suggested there is a need for better understanding of international humanitarian law, which includes an appreciation for the proper role of humanitarian agencies, governments and the military in situations where the clearest right of all is that of the beneficiaries to receive aid, rather than anyone else's to deliver it – except in those situations of international conflict covered by the Geneva Conventions.

- **Protection**

'Protection' means to address the violation of civilian rights under human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law through a range of possible actions described by the ICRC and ALNAP as including substitution, persuasion, denunciation, mobilization and support to existing structures and services². The rights referred to are fundamental, such as those to life, freedom of thought, religion and expression, to the due process of law, not to be tortured, etc. Modern emergencies increasingly centre around these issues (Darfur, Zimbabwe, etc.), but agencies need to face the question of how they square some protection activities with the neutrality and impartiality required by the Code of Conduct, and whether they consider their protection activities include preventive as well as assistance action. Concern's development of its Programme Participant Protection Policy, and its efforts to recruit a dedicated advisor on humanitarian protection issues, are positive steps, but the organisation gives the impression of having an uncertain approach to protection issues. Like many agencies, it has not been prepared to state publicly what often happens in practice, which is that answering the humanitarian imperative does, on occasion and in practice, trump the maintenance of complete neutrality. So far, it has also not chosen to address protection routinely in humanitarian project proposals, and thus to monitor and report on it. This, according to ALNAP³, is the activity required in order for humanitarians to understand better the implications and impact of protection activity.

- **Link between relief and development**

While the theoretical debate has moved beyond a linear progression from relief to development, culture clashes in agencies and between staff of one "school" or the other are still a reality. In general, failure to conduct good capacity building in emergency and emergency-prone situations is identified as a major weakness of larger, northern NGOs. Concern's Disaster Risk Reduction approach was developed during the period covered by this review, and should address some of these issues. This is not to say, however, that an end to disaster can be envisaged even in the long term, or that a disaster risk reduction approach, while vital, could ever be a substitute for emergency preparedness and humanitarian response.

- **Summary of substantive findings**

In general, the evaluations come down very much on the positive side for Concern, with responses described as timely, robust, preventing increased morbidity and mortality, reducing or preventing distress migration, and with improvements noted in policy analysis and strategic decision-making.

²"Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards" ICRC, Geneva 2001

³ "Strengthening Humanitarian Protection, A Guidance Booklet", Hugo Slim and Luis Enrique Eguren, ALNAP 2004

Strengths and Achievements

- **Responses have been timely**

The deployment of RDU and senior staff has worked well, although handover and building institutional memory are problematic.

- **Programming: good sectoral choices, better standards compliance**

There has been a growth in early focus on food security and livelihood issues. Major areas remain food aid, food security, nutrition, shelter, non food item distribution, water and sanitation and food security-related infrastructure rehabilitation. Indications are that Sphere compliance has improved, and certainly awareness that Sphere standards are the target.

Concern should think about how strong a research capacity it should have, so that it can be in a position to constructively challenge findings by other agencies. For example, Concern could use its own research to validate, expand on or contest research and analysis that will form the backbone of major programming decisions by organisations such as WFP. The interests of beneficiaries may best be served where comparative research is available. For example, in Afghanistan, Concern's analysis which was supported by that of other NGOs, found important gaps in the methodology and coverage of WFP's VAM survey.

- **Improved targeting with better beneficiary participation**

Targeting has been much more in evidence, and much more appropriate, despite the fact that it remains hard to do this well in short timeframes and over very difficult terrain, such as Afghanistan. The use of triangulation in Malawi stood out as good practice that would certainly bear replication. Essentially, this approach involved dividing communities into three groups (two arbitrary halves and a group made up of chiefs and local leaders), and asking each group to separately list beneficiaries, then engage in discussion to reach an agreement. The aim was to minimize the role of the village headman and ensure a more equitable level of targeting.

- **Use of the CTC approach**

While this paper is not the appropriate place to examine in-depth the technical aspects of Concern's humanitarian performance, it is clear that Concern's adoption of the innovative approach of Community Therapeutic Care has been very positive, both in its impact on directly reducing morbidity and mortality, and in building the capacity and awareness of the approach amongst other agencies including governments. However, fielding experienced emergency nutritionists remains a challenge.

- **Principled decision making**

There are several examples (e.g. Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Chad) of principled decision-making in terms of programming and intervention. These decisions are noted by other agencies, and contribute positively to Concern's reputation as an organisation of integrity.

Weaknesses and challenges

- **HIV/AIDS: insufficient analysis and implementation across programmes**

Along with all other humanitarian agencies, Concern is criticised (and self-critical) for this weakness. The problem seems to be that while the organisation is very aware that HIV/AIDS must be taken into account, it is often at a loss as to how, technically, this should be done. The IASC guideline, together with amplified technical resources directed at this issue, will be crucial. Concern should undertake evaluations and audits that focus on the cross-cutting issues, and try to understand the difficulties in implementing them and advocating on them meaningfully.

- **Gender and equality: analysis and implementation across programmes**

The second glaring gap is gender and equality – again something most agencies seem to be criticized for: basically talking the talk without walking the walk. The evaluations do not tend to reveal why this should be so difficult. Understanding and addressing this should be a major focus for Concern in its strategic planning.

- **Partnership – more quantity than quality?**

Concern has significantly stepped up its efforts to work through partners, but perhaps not always strategically. Its approach can be more opportunistic, meaning that it relies on the personal contacts and relationships of members of staff, which may be defined by factors of chance, such as meeting someone in the course of work; but of course the problem of partner existence and capacity in situations of great need (like Darfur) remains very real.

- **Impact monitoring: data is increasingly collected, but insufficiently analysed**

While there has been good progress on targeting, monitoring is still an area of weakness – specifically analysis of and subsequent response to data collection.

- **Advocacy: Concern's voice still not heard in the crowd**

While Concern remains a respected NGO in co-ordination groups, its advocacy voice remains muted, still driven more by individual personality than by organisational weight. The organisation has a stronger grasp of policy analysis than before, but still seems to lag behind its peers in channelling this into successful advocacy. Where it does well is in channelling this analysis into design or redesign of programme responses. Perhaps the organisation should audit the advocacy skills of its staff and seek external guidance in improving those of staff in key positions.

- **Protection: continuing uncertainty**

The evaluations have suggested Concern still remains strongest, and best known for, a service delivery response (although this should not suggest it is still seen as traditional, as it is frequently described as being innovative and flexible). The implication is that the organisation has yet to come to grips with the full range of concepts understood to be part of protection. Service delivery or substitution is a mode of protection, but it is not clear that all Concern staff involved in humanitarian service delivery would describe that as a mode of protection in this sense, or that they would readily understand the other modes and how Concern might choose to undertake them. The current recruitment of a

Humanitarian Protection Advisor is a step forwards in developing the organisation's approach to the different modes of protection., and the implementation of the PPPP will also help to ensure that the organisational culture is sensitised to protection issues in terms of staff behaviour.

- **Recruitment: not always timely or appropriate; turnover often problematic**

Evaluations which cover other agencies suggest that this problem is not unique to Concern. They also vary on whether the practice of fielding a small number of highly experienced emergency staff is positive or negative. Programmes have been affected by burnout and occasional weaknesses in field management and headquarters support which have contributed to high turnover. In general it is surprising that, given the level of turnover and the amount of organisational discussion about staffing problems, these issues have received relatively little focus from evaluators.

- **Impact of improved systems procedures not yet fully evident**

On systems, both financial and logistical, intense efforts were made during the review period to address the common problem of situations where a major systems overhaul was needed once the emergency was over. It is too early to judge the fruits of these efforts, but the trend is already established towards being not just functional, but also accountable.

- **Managing shifts within programmes from development to emergency and vice versa**

Clashes of concept, culture and skill continue to emerge. It is clear that leadership of the country team and relations with Dublin play a critical role here, and need more strategic management. It is hoped that a more comprehensive roll out of the Disaster Risk Reduction approach would be helpful in this regard, but the impact of this remains to be seen. However, a DRR approach is not going to eradicate disasters, even in the medium to long term, and both types of skill set will still be required. There is no substitute for the consistent monitoring of country situations, and for ensuring emergency preparedness. This may indeed result in the tricky, but necessary challenge, of a change in programme focus and priority in response to a pressing humanitarian need.

Alliance:2015

In terms of humanitarian action, Concern's relationship with the Alliance has yet to be fully realised, as it has focussed much more on developmental responses to date. Ongoing collaboration in the Indian Ocean tsunami response has yet to be evaluated, but the Alliance would appear to have added value to the speed and nature of the response in some of the tsunami-affected countries.

2. Background

This paper is a meta-evaluation, or analysis, of external and internal evaluations of Concern's major emergency operations from 2000 to 2004, together with a limited review of relevant recent literature on humanitarian intervention and evaluation. It stands as an update of the original meta-evaluation document Concern produced in April 2001⁴. The fundamental issues addressed in that document such as definitions, stages of emergencies and ways of working remain essentially unchanged, and thus are not further discussed; however, the paper addresses those contextual issues on the macro level which are relevant to how the humanitarian endeavour functions in today's world, and which require updating or including. These include the nature of the engagement between humanitarian organisations and the military, the issue of protection, the impact of UN integrated missions, the impact of rights based programming approaches on humanitarian approaches, and so forth.

On the specific programming issues, the same analytical approach is taken as was used in the original paper (i.e. looking at programming, personnel, local knowledge, speed of response, impact/data collection, contingency planning, application of performance standards, donors, coordination, logistical issues and the media), with an additional comment on the ways in which Alliance:2015 has impacted on Concern's emergency interventions.

Country situations analysed in whole or part include:

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Afghanistan | Food aid, shelter, non food item distribution, food security and agricultural rehabilitation (IDPs) |
| Southern Africa (Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe) | Food aid, food security and nutrition |
| Liberia | Water, sanitation and hygiene promotion for IDPs |
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| South Sudan | Food aid, food security, nutrition |
| Darfur | Water and sanitation, nutrition, non food items, camp management, livelihoods. NB this is not a complete evaluation. |
| Ethiopia | food aid and food security |
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| Indonesia (Banda Aceh, Simueli, Paula Nasi) | NFI and emergency food distributions, emergency shelter, school cleaning and rehabilitation; plans for reconstruction, shelter, water and sanitation, livelihoods, food security |
| India (Tamil Nadu State) | – distribution of NFIs with small food component through two partners. Plans for shelter and infrastructure reconstruction |

⁴ "Analysis of Emergency Evaluations: a discussion paper", April 2001

A full list of reports and background literature reviewed is attached as an annexe⁵.

3. Nature and quality of evaluations

In general, improvement in the quality and thoroughness of evaluations is evident. There is no suggestion that mere lip service is being paid to the concept of evaluation, and impact, outcome and process are being taken much more seriously (though impact remains hard to prove in some cases).

Of the documents reviewed, the internal and external evaluations produced by and specifically for Concern were more consistent in substantive quality than those produced by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) – the main external bodies who undertook relevant evaluations. In some ways they are obviously more thorough because they are presented through the prism of the Strategic Plan and more intimate knowledge of Concern's modus operandi. However, both internal or external evaluations of the programmes commissioned by Concern, and independent donor evaluations present a reassuring consistency in terms of the issues identified. This implies that Concern continues, in general, to manifest the ability to self-appraise with some objectivity.

Evaluations of country responses conducted by donors or coordinating agencies are only truly useful when agencies are clearly identified and their programmes specifically appraised. For example, the DCI Afghanistan report does not do this, and is thus almost impossible to draw any useful lessons from. Essentially, these external reports are only as good as the teams who conduct them – and thus are variable. DEC reports are of fairly reasonable quality, but tend to agonise somewhat on how the DEC is perceived, and the fact that DEC agencies tend not to use their DEC membership as an organising principle or platform for advocacy. They ask whether it matters that agencies see the DEC as little more than an – albeit highly useful – funding mechanism (the fact that DEC does not earmark is a significant plus for agencies). Analysis would suggest that, to Concern, it does not matter that the DEC is principally a funding organ. Very real concerns about improving policy analysis and advocacy impact remain for the organisation, but nothing suggests that the DEC provides the key to unlocking that challenge for Concern.

While it is clear that the recommendation should be that Concern continues to conduct its own evaluations, it may be useful to pursue the option of using combined teams of Concern staff and consultants. The reason for this is to ensure that terms of reference are not framed too narrowly: they should pay attention to the broader brush issues, as well as being able to assess openly the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation's prioritising, performance and impact. Insiders will inevitably be affected by bias through their familiarity with the organisation, and their knowledge of how the organisation has evolved its responses to specific issues.

Interestingly, none of the evaluations reviewed involved Concern working with refugee populations, but predominantly IDPs or acutely vulnerable populations where distress

⁵ For a full list of evaluations and literature reviewed, refer to Annexe 1

migration is a potential issue. This is reflected in the fact that the organisation partners with UNHCR in fewer and fewer situations, a trend which is likely to continue, especially as there are now an estimated 25 million IDPs - more than double the estimated number of refugees.

3.1 Use of performance standards

There is an increasing trend of structuring humanitarian evaluations around the principles of the Code of Conduct, which is very helpful. However, for internal evaluations, this approach is unlikely to produce sufficient detail on other important aspects such as sectoral choices, cross-cutting issues such as gender and HIV/AIDS, and specifics on logistics, finance and administration. The Concern Zimbabwe evaluation is notable for its explicit and useful analysis of the operating environment for NGOs, a contextual issue which might usefully be included in all evaluations.

The extent to which the Code, Sphere and People in Aid are embedded in all evaluations and more programming is notable compared to the previous meta-evaluation. Awareness of the IASC guidelines on the prevention of sexual exploitation is evident but not ubiquitous amongst humanitarian agencies in general. It was during this period that Concern developed its own policy, the Programme Participant Protection Policy (PPPP), thus its impacts are not yet really evident in the emergencies considered. Presumably, formal evaluations of Darfur and the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami will allow this to be more clearly analysed.

3.2 Real Time Evaluation

The 'hot' concept in evaluation is the Real Time Evaluation (RTE), something it is expected that we will see much more of. While it is a tool which allows for programmes to be adapted in a way which more closely matches needs, the challenge will always be for emergency teams, already under huge strain, to handle an evaluation simultaneously to conducting their response.

Inevitably, a meta-evaluation such as this suffers from only being a snap-shot. It is unable to comment on areas which evaluations may have neglected – or indeed programmes which were not evaluated (though no major intervention has been left unexamined in this time period). What are not included, for example, are smaller emergency responses within existing longer-term programmes, for example Bangladesh. It is also not in a position to comment on organisational efforts which started to roll out in the period under review – which may from time to time give the impression that good work which is ongoing has not been fairly taken into account (implementation of the PPPP and of the new Logistics Manual are cases in point here).

4. Macro Issues

4.1. *Gazing into the crystal ball: the future*⁶

To state the obvious: the world continues to evolve, perhaps faster than ever. Consensus, most recently expressed in the report of the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel⁷, suggests that the world is increasingly interconnected, a place where the threats faced by all peoples, and the responses required to tackle them, are linked – even if they are experienced in very different ways. In humanitarian terms, this means facing fewer and fewer “classic” and many more “new paradigm” emergencies. Classic emergencies might be described as single or limited issue crises, requiring a response that is narrow in terms of sectors and logistically intense - for example a food aid response to a famine; the new paradigm emergencies are the Twenty First Century's complex emergencies, where a range of factors such as HIV/AIDS, the environmental impacts of human behaviour, the globalisation of information and economies, the impact of remittances, increasing inequalities of opportunity and resource access, terrorism, and profound questions over the structure and role of key players in the international order like the UN (to name but a few) may all influence how a crisis occurs and how humanitarians will and should respond to it. To this extent, the fact that Concern remains multi-sectoral, is perhaps a strength, allowing for deeper analysis and more flexible response. Through its ongoing strategic planning process, the organisation has tried to redefine itself away from a “jack of all trades” image, and has managed to achieve more clarity around clusters of sectors or issues. What this analysis of threats to the world of today and tomorrow suggests is that there is great importance attached to understanding the linkages between threats and responses – thus Concern's clusters of sectors and issues must be self-consciously and intelligently linked to one another. This means having well understood and articulated reasons for prioritising some sectors over others, which take organisational capacity, and contexts in terms of politics, resources available, and the activities of other agencies into account. It also implies that to provide optimal service within prioritised sectors, the agency's analysis and contextual understanding must remain strong across the broad spectrum of issues. For this reason, it could be considered a strength to maintain issues such as HIV/AIDS and equality as cross-cutting, as this will require their consistent consideration in assessment and programme delivery. The question of whether those cross-cutting issues are effectively dealt with in implementation is addressed below.

There is an increasing body of literature on future threats. This is partly, of course, the result of scientific advances and, in particular, better understanding of changing weather patterns and their consequences. Secondly, the war on terror and the emergence of influential networked non-state armed groups have profoundly changed the way we perceive the future in terms of conflict and the threat of violence. Thirdly, the humanitarian and development world continues to pick up on the old ideas of the business world, which has been taking scenario planning for the future very seriously for some years.

⁶ This section draws heavily on *Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future*, The Alan Shawn Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, August 2004

⁷ “A more secure world: our shared responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change”, United Nations A/59/565, December 2004

This crystal-gazing predicts that future threats are expected to include: major vulnerability to coastal flooding (the UN estimates that by 2025, 50% of the world's population will be subject to major storms and flooding); conflicts over the unequal distribution of and access to resources; and a range of public health and livelihoods issues resulting from trends in urbanisation (the UN estimates 60% of the world's population will be living in cities by 2030 - up from 50% today). Inevitably, those who are already poor, afflicted by major epidemics like HIV/AIDS, TB or malaria, and who are uninsured will suffer disproportionately from the crises that may befall. Additionally, new vulnerable groups will emerge, such as ex-child soldiers, trafficked women and children, sweat shop workers, requiring a newly nuanced set of responses when disaster strikes them.

In terms of response to these crises, it may be time for humanitarian agencies to come clean – at least internally – about failures in true partnership and understanding between relief organisations of the North and South, and between those of the predominantly Christian western world, and the parallel universes of Islamic humanitarian action and community, religion and kinship-based responses of other parts of the world. While agencies like Concern may have made genuine efforts to narrow the rhetoric-reality gap in this regard, the chasm remains deep, etched in culture, language, approach and financial control. More intense and imaginative efforts are required to persuade people that values held by agencies like Concern to be objectively true or universally applicable (like, for example, the organisation's commitment to equality, or the humanitarian imperative) find their own expression in different cultures, and are not unthinking constructs of an outmoded, but still potent, hegemonic attitude

In the search for cost efficiency and local solutions to local problems, donors may turn more to the provision of local NGO funding; however, for major crises where capacities in logistics, pre-financing and comparative experience are critical, old patterns of behaviour will persist in the medium term, which means supporting international NGOs to provide humanitarian response. The onus remains on both the NGOs of the South and North, the former to continue advocating their cause, and the latter to put their money (or the donors' money) where their mouth is in terms of investing in specific training and support to local and national organisations for humanitarian response. The Bam response showed that it is far from impossible – although context, inevitably, is a critical differential between situations.

4.2. *The new human rights agenda*⁸

Predictions suggest we can expect to see an increasing conflation of human rights and development agendas, which will only boost the need for NGOs to continue becoming more astute about policy analysis and advocacy, especially NGOs like Concern which

⁸ This section draws on *Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future*, The Alan Shawn Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, August 2004, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, United Nations A/59/565, December 2004 and *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all, Report of the Secretary General*, United Nations A/59/2005, March 2005

continue to combine humanitarian and development programming. The concepts and real applicability of human rights discourse are being dusted off and reappraised in some of the most potentially far reaching UN reform proposals for years, a result of which may be an unprecedented focus on the implementation of programmes to improve the target populations' enjoyment of human rights. Given that this is likely to collide, literally, in the field with NGOs undertaking their own implementation of humanitarian and development programmes, any uncertainties or weaknesses in agencies' understanding of rights-based approaches are certain to be exposed. This will only be exacerbated by the likelihood that wealthy nations are likely to use the agenda and language of the human rights movement to achieve non-human rights ends (ends which are more in their national, strategic interest).

The evaluations reviewed here do not explicitly raise the question of where the tradition of following the humanitarian imperative clashes, or at least is inconsistent with, the newer practice of committing to rights-based approaches. Concern's response in Zimbabwe would suggest that the organisation remains in practice, principally motivated by the humanitarian imperative in its humanitarian response. The fact that (as discussed below) the organisation seems to have improved its ability in targeting may be significant in this regard, in terms of making a *de facto* case for continuing to focus first and foremost on need – the humanitarian imperative, matched with a commitment to proportionality. The most practical and immediate conclusion to draw is that this is a policy discussion which requires priority attention, and which must match knowledge of the debate in general with attitudes and practice of country teams on the ground.

4.3. *Funding*

Unsurprisingly, funding remains highly sensitive to the pulling power of each emergency in terms of the media, and politics (national, regional and international). The overwhelming response to the Indian Ocean tsunami can be compared to the feeble reaction to Liberia's crisis⁹ and the crushingly slow response to that of Darfur. Europe has pulled far ahead of the US in terms of the per capita level of its humanitarian funding, but arguments that its funding is increasingly politicized are mounting¹⁰ (for example, European policy on humanitarian assistance is increasingly and explicitly linked to foreign policy and security objectives). Donors have become markedly more pressed to be accountable to those who fill their purses, and this has been passed on to service deliverers like NGOs in terms of higher levels of financial and programmatic control. Governments are increasingly deploying their own field teams, which, it is hoped, should lead to higher levels of donor knowledge about situations, needs and responses. In the meantime, NGOs have still not risen to the challenge of educating donors better, and especially in terms of educating them on the policy level, above and beyond within funding relationships. This may require more sophisticated advocacy aimed not only at the civil servants with whom NGO staff might normally interact, but more directly at the politicians who remain the decision makers. At the very least, information tracking how humanitarian assistance funding decisions are made should be tracked and broadcast by

⁹ Liberia received, for example, 13% of the funds the UN appealed for in the 2003 CAP (DEC Liberia)

¹⁰ "Issues in and around 'humanitarian space' – a discussion paper", Dominic Crowley (Concern), August 2004

agencies like Concern. Concern's success in fundraising is not noted in the evaluations, but is clearly one of the keys to its timely responses. Its status as a middle-sized organisation provides useful flexibility, in that it does not rank amongst the mega-NGOs like World Vision and Care, and thus does not seem like a Microsoft of the NGO world; yet its budgets, presence and reputation are such that it is able to achieve access and influence in important places.

Closer still to home, DCI's evaluations confirm their commitment to maintain a significant proportion of their funding flow through NGOs who are more flexible, and produce better, more detailed reporting than UN agencies. In terms of DCI's relationship with Concern and its other current NGO partners, it is vocal on its commitment to the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (see below), and is pushing agencies to improve their performance in terms of HIV/AIDS and gender/equality mainstreaming.

In general, for larger funders, the economies of scale and improved business relationships on offer with bigger agencies, tends to a push towards fewer, larger agencies, a kind of 'wholesaling' approach which may well be of detriment to more southern-led, local responses (although of course not necessarily to Concern, which sits rather neatly in the medium sized bracket, allowing it from time to time to behave as a bigger or smaller organisation might). Concern's success in fundraising is not specifically noted in the literature; this is by way of a backhanded compliment in that none of the evaluations suggests that inadequate funding has negatively impacted the programmes Concern has set itself to do. However the evaluations make it clear that the ability to pre-finance through General Donations remains one of the organisation's great strengths in terms of ensuring a swift response. This may also be one of the reasons Concern was praised by the DEC for scaling up unexpectedly effectively in chronically under-funded Liberia.

Following attempts made over the last decade to professionalize the humanitarian sector, the increased influence of the Code of Conduct, and a deepening commitment to applying lessons learnt, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative was launched during this period. The initiative aims to promote better donor compliance with the Code of Conduct, including improved donor coordination in emergencies, and conducting joint assessments based on needs rather than starting from the point of what resources donors think they have available, and fitting the assessment of needs around them. The jury is still out on the Initiative, which is being piloted; however donor response and coordination in both Darfur and SE Asia in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami have not been wholly encouraging in this regard. Thus NGOs may want to consider ways of holding donors more accountable to the standards they have set themselves, as well as educating them better to influence policy in favour of addressing and reducing vulnerability.

4.4. *Constriction of humanitarian space*¹¹

The period under review saw humanitarians agonize over threats to their space to operate according to their interpretation of international humanitarian law and voluntary standards such as the Code by encroachment of political and military actors. Afghanistan

¹¹ Reference presentation to the Irish Army by Dominic Crowley, April 2005; presentation to the Concern September Meetings by Antonia Potter, September 2004

and Iraq were the key, but far from the only, theatres where these fears were played out, with the military delivering humanitarian aid according to overtly political objectives. Zimbabwe provided a depressing example of state attempts to subvert humanitarian aid for political ends. However, the debate from the humanitarian point of view might often have suggested that there is no role at all for the military in situations where humanitarian aid is required. Concern's own discussions on the debate suggest there is a need for better understanding of international humanitarian law, which includes an appreciation for the proper role of humanitarian agencies, governments and the military, in situations where the clearest right of all is that of the beneficiaries to receive aid, rather than anyone else's to deliver it – except in those situations of international conflict covered by the Geneva Conventions.

In situations where UN missions are deployed, the role of forces present under UN auspices is defined by whether Chapters VI or VII of the UN Charter is used in the resolution authorising the force; essentially Chapter VII is the more robust, authorising the use of force to restore or maintain international peace or security. While Concern's experience of working operationally alongside UN forces who provide security and protection has been largely positive (Haiti, East Timor, Liberia), it also works alongside other kinds of international forces which raise the issues in question more sharply (for example the US-led coalition force in Afghanistan). The key issue is that the more involved military forces are, or are perceived to be, in the actual provision of humanitarian assistance, or in pursuing an explicitly humanitarian objective, the more the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian aid is called into question. This may have several serious effects: it may prevent aid reaching those who need it most; corrupt the image of the humanitarian endeavour with serious long term consequences to its effectiveness in saving lives in crisis; and compromise the security of humanitarian workers where the line between civilian and military actors has become blurred.

Another facet of this issue is the question of UN integrated missions, and the concern that the humanitarian imperative loses out to political objectives under such arrangements. Experience would suggest that the personality at the head of the country team holds disproportionate influence in this regard. The Liberia case showed a troubling undermining of humanitarian space, whereas the current Burundi case suggests more optimism, largely, the reports would suggest, due to the attitude and personality of head of the UN mission in each case. The method of selection, and accountability to the broader humanitarian community of these highly influential officials remains a sore point for NGOs, and one on which further "inside the industry" advocacy is required.

The recommendation of the 2001 meta evaluation was for Concern to produce and promulgate a paper outlining how the organisation should engage with the military. This has been achieved to some degree¹²; but the topic clearly requires continual reassessment in terms of both analysis and response. Concern has made conscious efforts to engage with and educate the Irish military on these issues; although it must be said in recent emergencies Concern's actual coincidence with the Irish military on the ground has been minimal, thus the ability to judge impact is limited. However, the engagement has

¹² *Approaches to Emergencies*, Dominic Crowley, 2002, *Humanitarian Space*, Dominic Crowley 2004

provided the agency with the opportunity to sharpen its thinking on the question. There may still be room for a paper outlining the updated issues, and particularly giving guidance for less confrontational situations than those that exist in Afghanistan and Iraq.

4.5. *Protection*

Linked to the politicisation of aid and the constriction of humanitarian space is the rising concern about protection issues, something that traditional service delivery organisations have long fought shy of, on the very grounds that advocacy, and even the monitoring of protection issues, is too political and thus in direct contravention of the Code of Conduct, or only the province of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement. Protection means to address the violation of civilian rights under human rights, refugee and international humanitarian law through a range of possible actions described by the ICRC and ALNAP as including substitution, persuasion, denunciation, mobilization and support to existing structures and services¹³. The rights referred to are fundamental, such as those to life, freedom of thought, religion and expression, to the due process of law, not to be tortured, etc. The legal framework provided by the body of law made up by refugee, human rights and international humanitarian law continues to be flouted by states to whom it applies (the so-called ‘protection gap’), and was not designed to apply to non-state actors. Thus, as conflict becomes increasingly interstate, protection issues become more tense and complex, as states with internal problems tend to cite sovereignty as a reason for rejecting outside intervention. Darfur provides one of today’s paradigm, disheartening examples of a failure to implement international humanitarian law. Again, Zimbabwe provides a less in-the-spotlight example: the presence of humanitarian agencies is made problematic by an unwelcoming “host” government, and the receipt of aid can seriously threaten the security of needy recipients, even as their neglected basic needs are being met by that aid.

Concern has made strides on this issue during the period under review, especially in the development and roll out of its Programme Participant Protection Policy and its efforts to recruit a dedicated advisor on humanitarian protection issues. This momentum will need to be maintained for the organisation to keep current with the debate, and to be able to demonstrate a consistent, effective response to protection questions on the ground. Like many agencies, it has not been prepared to state publicly what often happens in practice, which is that answering the humanitarian imperative does on occasion and in practice, trump the maintenance of complete neutrality. So far it has also not chosen to address protection routinely in humanitarian project proposals, and thus to monitor and report on it. This, according to ALNAP¹⁴, is the activity required in order for humanitarians to understand better the implementation, implications and impact of protection activity.

4.6. *Link between relief and development*

The literature suggests that the old concept of a progressive continuum between relief and development is indeed yesterday’s news. Instead, it identifies an increasing need to multi-task, carry out relief and recovery in parallel and conduct second wave needs assessments early in the recovery phase. It suggests that the old approach of rebuilding and

¹³“Strengthening Protection in War: A Search for Professional Standards” ICRC, Geneva 2001

¹⁴ “Strengthening Humanitarian Protection, A Guidance Booklet”, Hugo Slim and Luis Enrique Eguren, ALNAP 2004

reconstructing should be replaced by one which enables people to re-envision the way they live in a manner which will help them to manage future risk, and then implementing interventions accordingly. This approach suggests that in addition to providing temporary solutions to meet basic needs, agencies must also integrate a disaster risk reduction approach from the earliest possible moment. Honest and constructive assessment of partner capacity is key to this.

A challenge seen more and more often is the need to be able to programme emergency responses from the platform of existing and often longstanding development responses. Again, this highlights the need to build in disaster risk reduction strategies, and to get governments to invest in them. It also emphasizes the “culture clash” between developmental and humanitarian responses, which agencies like Concern need to handle more effectively in expectation that such changes in programme emphasis will remain sadly likely, at least in the short to medium term.

The roll-out of Concern’s disaster risk reduction approach policy was ongoing during this period, and again, it is too early to have a sense of its impact. Undoubtedly this will involve improved attention to capacity building in emergency and emergency-prone situations – an area which is identified in the literature as a major weakness of larger, northern NGOs. This is not to say, however, that an end to disaster can be envisaged even in the long term, or that a disaster risk reduction approach, while vital, could ever be a straight substitute for emergency preparedness and humanitarian response.

5. Summary of substantive findings

In general, the evaluations come down very much on the positive side for Concern, with responses described as timely, robust, preventing increased morbidity and mortality, reducing or preventing stress migration, and with improvements noted in policy analysis and strategic decision-making.

Strengths, achievements, weaknesses, challenges and related recommendations are discussed below:

5.1. Strengths and Achievements

- **Responses have been timely**

The balance to strike, as noted in the last meta-evaluation, is between responding immediately, and developing an adequate understanding of the response required. Prior presence in the country may not in fact be a precondition for timely response. Prior presence may assist in speed, but only where monitoring, preparedness and staffing are adequate. The evaluations suggest that a strong developmental orientation will act against emergency monitoring and preparedness. Concern’s ability to deploy senior, experienced staff rapidly plays a critical role here. Both Darfur and Afghanistan are singled out for the useful deployment either of Rapid Deployment Unit or simply very senior and experienced staff for emergency phases, which is often able to cover up, as it were, a gap in preparedness by the country team. This does raise questions about the sustainability of this approach, and the problem with handling exit, handover of institutional memory, and replacement of these staff when their short term assignments are over.

- **Sectoral choices have been appropriate and not over ambitious**

There has been a growth in early focus on food security and livelihood issues. Major areas remain food aid, food security, nutrition, shelter, non food item distribution, water and sanitation and food security-related infrastructure rehabilitation. In some cases, infrastructure rehabilitation did not pay sufficient attention to maintenance (Afghanistan). In Liberia, Concern was noted for sticking to sectors in which it was already involved, which enabled much better scaling up; this included demonstrating good practice in terms of methodologies used for community-based hygiene promotion (KAPs, child to child education, etc.)

Indications are that Sphere compliance has improved, and certainly awareness that Sphere standards are the target.

Afghanistan raises the interesting issue of how strong a research capacity Concern should have, so that it can be in a position to constructively challenge findings by other agencies. For example, in Afghanistan, Concern's analysis which was supported by that of other NGOs, found important gaps in the methodology and coverage of WFP's VAM survey. Using this data, Concern persuaded WFP to change distribution plans in some areas. Southern Africa provides another example of why this is important, as the DEC evaluation points out the misinterpretation (or mis-design) by some agencies of nutritional surveys (which has led to a wider debate about whether this crisis was overstated or not).

- **Improved targeting and beneficiary participation**

Targeting has been much more in evidence, and much more appropriate, despite the fact that it remains hard to do this well in short time frames and over very difficult terrain, such as Afghanistan. The use of triangulation in Malawi stood out as good practice that would certainly bear replication. Concern was singled out for praise here, for delivering a proportionally greater impact to beneficiaries than other agencies "*because they involved beneficiaries in deciding what the project should do for them*"¹⁵. This triangulation involved dividing communities into three groups (two arbitrary halves and a group made up of chiefs and local leaders), and asking each group to separately list beneficiaries, then engage in discussion to reach an agreement. The aim was to minimize the role of the village headman.

- **Use of the CTC approach**

While this paper is not the appropriate place to examine in-depth the technical aspects of Concern's humanitarian performance, one particular type of intervention merits discussion: the Community Therapeutic Care approach to emergency nutrition interventions. It is clear from the literature reviewed that Concern's adoption of this innovative approach has been very positive, both in its impact on directly reducing morbidity and mortality, and in building the capacity and awareness of the approach amongst other agencies including governments. This is not to suggest CTC interventions

¹⁵ p. 50

have been without issues, such as default rates, timing issues around discharge and classification, and the link with medical service provision; the south Sudan evaluation in particular calls for a systematic review, but there is no indication that this has been carried out. Concern tends to draw more attention to its CTC implementation than external evaluations do¹⁶, for obvious reasons. Fielding experienced emergency nutritionists remains a challenge, as does the appropriate linkage of this approach with integrated interventions in other sectors like primary health (for example the issues with seconding medical staff from IRC in south Sudan).

- **Principled decision making and good practice**

Concern decided not to join a major food consortium in Malawi, fearing (rightly, it transpired) that membership would hinder timely response due to pipeline delays. Although this effectively cut Concern off from US funding, this in fact did not impact Concern's ability to respond. In Liberia, the organisation held off on bed net distribution until it could be linked with an appropriate education/awareness campaign. It also decided not to become operational in Chad, on the basis of an analysis that it could not add value to existing responses. These are all examples of real efforts to put principles in practice in terms of needs-focussed programming, and attempting to add value.

In Zimbabwe, Concern demonstrated its commitment to its humanitarian mandate by undertaking controversial "clandestine" programmes without government permission to reach vulnerable urban populations. This meant the programme did not follow Concern's standard project cycle management process.

In both Malawi and Zimbabwe the organisation used faith-based groups to extend reach or access to otherwise inaccessible populations. The problem with such groups is that they can be very welfare-focused and have a different approach to the evaluation of need. While noting this issue, it is hard to imagine that, in similar situations, the same decisions would not be made again. Unsurprisingly this places great emphasis on how relationships are built and managed at field level.

5.2. Weaknesses and Challenges

- **HIV/AIDS: analysis and implementation across programmes**

*"The dying has only just begun. By 2015, the HIV/AIDS pandemic will be killing between 5 and 10 million people a year... It is the leading cause of death in Sub-Saharan Africa and kills ten times as many people as war."*¹⁷ ... *"Like all sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS spreads faster when communities are in crisis"*.¹⁸

¹⁶ For example the DCI evaluation of the Malawi response barely mentions Concern's innovative CTC work, choosing instead to singling out the organisation's efforts to respond to the crisis with an eye to the longer term. The DEC evaluation of the response in Southern Africa is the same, praising Concern for beneficiary involvement instead.

¹⁷ *Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future*, The Alan Shawn Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, August 2004, p32

¹⁸ Ibid p34.

Perhaps the most glaring gap is Concern's response to HIV/AIDS. It should be noted that this weakness is noted across the board with humanitarian agencies in the literature reviewed, and thus is not unique to Concern. As the quotations show, however, this is no time to take refuge in being one among many who are not stepping up to the plate. With HIV/AIDS, the problem seems to be, put baldly, that staff are aware they need to take it into account, but often are at a loss as to how, technically, this should be done. The increasingly well-promulgated IASC guidelines, together with amplified technical resources directed at this issue, will be crucial in this regard. This problem suggests that Concern should undertake evaluations and audits that focus on the cross-cutting issues, and try to get at the difficulties in implementing them meaningfully.

The Feinstein International Famine Centre report also points out that accountable leadership is a crucial factor in combating the pandemic. This implies that service delivery approaches must be accompanied by concerted policy and advocacy efforts.

- **Gender and equality: analysis and implementation across programmes**

The second glaring gap is gender and equality – again something most agencies seem to be criticized for. With gender and equality, the problem is perhaps more insidious: language and intention are everywhere, but implementation is weak to frequently non-existent. In Afghanistan, where gender is an issue spoken of ubiquitously but rarely tackled with the sensitivity and insight required, it was not until the transition out of emergency that gender issues really got any attention. In Zimbabwe, 80% of beneficiaries were women, while 80% of the teams working with them were men, which may have negatively impacted issues such as data gathering for programme design, monitoring and evaluation purposes.

The evaluations do not tend to reveal why integrating equality into programming should be so difficult. Understanding and addressing this should be a major focus for Concern in its strategic planning.

- **Partnership – more quantity than quality?**

There is a strong suggestion that while Concern has significantly stepped up its efforts to work through partners, these efforts have not always been strategic. The approach to partnership described as sometimes too opportunistic and personal relationship-driven, and thus not able to withstand the test of emergency pressure. The organisation continues to face the problem that in many situations, sufficiently strong partners do not yet exist (e.g. in Darfur and Aceh).

- **Impact monitoring: data is increasingly collected, but insufficiently analysed**

While there seems to have been encouraging strides made in targeting (Concern is singled out for praise in this, especially in the DEC and DCI reports on Southern Africa) and in beneficiary participation, monitoring is still an area of weakness – specifically analysis of and subsequent response to data collection.

- **Advocacy: Concern's voice still not heard in the crowd**

While Concern remains a respected NGO in coordination groups, its advocacy voice remains quiet, still driven more by individual personality than by organisational weight. The organisation has a stronger grasp of policy analysis than before, but still seems to lag behind its peers in channelling this into successful advocacy. Where it does well is in channelling this analysis into design or redesign of programme responses.

Afghanistan provides an example of an almost total lack of policy analysis and advocacy work in the humanitarian phase. In Sudan, the evaluation suggested that Concern should have taken a stronger position in making WFP accountable for its weaknesses and failures in response.

- **Protection: continuing uncertainty**

A coherent position on this has yet to be achieved and communicated. On protection, the evaluations have suggested Concern still remains strongest, and best known for, a service-delivery response (although this should not suggest it is still seen as traditional, as it is frequently described as being innovative and flexible). Whether Concern interprets that service delivery as protection through assistance or not, is not articulated or does not come across in the evaluations. The implication is that the organisation has yet to come to grips with the nuances of the concept of protection, and how it intends to face up to the challenges posed by articles 1 (on the humanitarian imperative) and 3 (on neutrality) of the Code in this regard. The current recruitment of a Humanitarian Protection Advisor is a step forwards. It is important to understand that this position is not solely related to the important work of rolling out the PPPP, but also more broadly to playing a role in seeing that the subjects of international humanitarian law obey and are accountable to it. As suggested above, perhaps a policy should be enacted that ensures that possible modes of protection are reviewed as part of assessment, and articulated as part of project proposals for humanitarian interventions.

- **Recruitment: timeliness, appropriateness, turnover problems**

Evaluations which cover other agencies suggest that the problem that Concern has had with finding sufficient staff in a sufficiently timely manner is not a problem that is unique to Concern. The evaluations also vary on whether the practice of fielding a small number of highly experienced emergency staff is positive or negative. Obviously it has significance for institutionalizing (or rather failing to) the core skills and experience of those individuals. One skill this set of staff seem to demonstrate well is the ability to communicate solid, advocacy focussed analysis of the emergency to the media, who are often criticized for failing or refusing to understand and explain the complexities of a given situation (e.g. Darfur and Zimbabwe). In general, it is surprising that given the level of turnover and the amount of organisational discussion about staffing problems, that they have received relatively little focus from evaluators.

Emergency programmes have been affected by burnout and occasional weaknesses in field management and headquarters support which have contributed to high turnover. The DEC review of Liberia warns that rapid recruitment should not be taken to equal

increased capacity. However, Concern was praised for hiring solid staff with regional expertise in countries where it did not have experience (e.g. Malawi).

ALNAP notes that nothing is better than peer-to-peer briefing, arguing that internet and printed resources often simply do not get used under pressure of time, or in the former case, for technological reasons. They strongly advocate that IT advances should not crowd out social and experiential learning and face to face communication, pointing out that information and learning are not the same thing.¹⁹

- **Keeping up the efforts to achieve the early establishment of robust and sustainable financial and logistical systems**

The programmes reviewed suggest that the set of manuals and systems which are in place to set up strong financial and logistical systems are still too often being overrun or ignored. Several situations required a clean-up operation post the emergency to get things back on track (e.g. Afghanistan). It is clear that a much stronger effort is being made to be accountable as well as functional, and it is expected that progress will be evident in the next meta-evaluation given the level of resources currently being directed at this issue.

- **Managing shifts within programmes from development to emergency and vice versa**

Conceptual and skill clashes continue to emerge, although the Malawi intervention was singled out for its efforts to respond to the crisis with its eye on the longer term. The Afghanistan programme shift was praised as strategic, if not slightly too early, but provided a good example of how staff need to be supported, reoriented and even in some cases replaced in order to manage the shift in emphasis. The Ethiopia programme provides an example of problematic tensions in this regard. It is hoped that a more comprehensive roll out of the Disaster Risk Reduction approach would be helpful in this regard, but the impact of this remains to be seen. This is not to say, however, that an end to disaster can be envisaged even in the long term, or that a disaster risk reduction approach, while vital, could ever be a straight substitute for emergency preparedness and humanitarian response. Thus, being in a position to field staff with skills in emergency preparedness and response will remain a priority for the organisation.

Many of these issues come down to who is recruited as Country Director, and how relationships between the field and the different parts of the Dublin office are managed.

6. Alliance:2015

In terms of humanitarian action, Concern's relationship with the Alliance has yet to be fully realised, as it has focussed much more on developmental responses to date. In the situations reviewed, the sole mention was the – highly useful – sharing of office space with GAA in Dushanbe to support the Afghanistan programme.

Both the Alliance and Dochas have ongoing humanitarian working groups, which are at different stages of development. The primary intent of the Alliance working group was to

¹⁹ Key messages from ALNAP's review of Humanitarian Action in 2003

develop a methodology for sharing information and approaches in the event of a sudden onset emergency. The Indian Ocean tsunami occurred shortly after this methodology was developed and allowed for it to be tested.

The internal evaluation of the tsunami response conducted by the working group suggested that:

- the methodology had worked well in the initial stages of the response,
- support from Alliance members benefited agencies responding to the tsunami.
- Head Office co-operation contributed to the establishment of field level interventions.
- co-operation helped some organisations to feel closer to the Alliance both at head office and field level.

However:

- co-operation among the humanitarian group was not mirrored on the ground and there was a feeling that when other people became involved in the process, some of the cohesion that had existed was lost.
- there was some confusion as to where the point of co-ordination should be following the establishment of an emergency response – head office or field – and a belated realisation that this was different for different organisations.
- for some organisations, the mandate for programming decisions lay with the field and that this was where co-ordination should be centred once programmes had been established. Thus, the desire of some head offices for joint programmes was not reflected by the realities of this adding value on the ground.
- there was a recognition that if joint assessments did not lead to joint programmes, they may create a degree of competition and tension between the participating agencies.

It was agreed that there was still considerable work for the group to undertake if the process were to be more firmly founded for the future. As such, the group will continue to meet to discuss thematic issues, will be the initial focal point for new sudden onset emergencies, and will facilitate self-assessment of how the Alliance has responded to emergencies.

The Dochas working group is far less well developed, having been formally established only in the last month after a year's trial period – partly at the behest of DCI. The Terms of Reference for the group are still being developed but are likely to be shaped around sharing information between Irish NGOs on humanitarian action and policies. As such, the areas of focus for the group are likely to be:

- Mutual learning: in relation to programme quality in humanitarian action – e.g. HIV/AIDS, humanitarian principles, training, assessments, conferences, etc;
- Joint advocacy: sharing information about members' planned and current activities and advocacy priorities.
- Relations with donors: sharing information donor involvement in humanitarian aid, and – where relevant – sharing strategies in influencing donor policies.

7. Conclusion: measuring up against the last meta-evaluation

How do the issues singled out for attention above compare to those in the previous meta-evaluation? In general, Concern's humanitarian response seems to have improved; timeliness and effectiveness are evident, and responses have remained needs-based while clustering around a more clearly defined group of issues (especially nutrition, food security, and non food items). The internalising of performance standards has advanced dramatically. Some areas still remain challenging:

Contingency planning is not yet state of the art, for example a failure to adequately monitor and analyse the worsening food security situation in south Sudan in 2003, although this is reported to have improved since then. In Afghanistan *“more could have been done earlier. That it responded so effectively to the fresh crisis attests to the skill of its emergency staff, and the fact that, relatively speaking, responding to an emergency is generally easier than tackling the root causes of the crisis.”*²⁰

This leads to another ongoing challenge: effective recruitment and rotation of emergency staff. Again from Afghanistan: *“The repeated deployment of senior programme staff on short term contracts retard programme development, institutional memory and programme coherence”*²¹ (p. 23). Turnover in Ethiopia was an acute problem. Although there is a sense that Concern is not the only organisation to experience these difficulties, it is important to constantly apply fresh thinking and resources to this issue until it eases up. The evaluations do not make it clear whether Concern recognises sufficiently the skills and experience of national staff who have worked with it in emergencies.

Concern's tendency to be a good “coordinatee”, and to have that reputation, persists. However, it is not clear that opportunities to advocate to OCHA that it strengthens its coordination skills have been well utilised.

Crises are becoming no less complex. In tandem, the modern media is an increasingly complex beast, especially with the growth of the internet as a primary, but frequently unedited, news vehicle. Concern's handling of the media is something most likely to be addressed in internal evaluations, but the evaluations are almost silent on the issue. For example, the media is characterized as “a mixed blessing” in the Malawi evaluation, but there is no discussion of how well or badly Concern managed it, or indeed what the nature was of its advantages and disadvantages.

²⁰ *Forgotten Crisis and Swift Response: An Evaluation of Concern Worldwide's Emergency Operations in Afghanistan September 2001 – April 2002*, Concern Worldwide, November 2002, p 8

²¹ *Ibid* p 23

Annexe 1 Evaluations and Literature Reviewed

- *Lessons from Natural Disasters and Emergency Construction*, The World Bank Group, Operations Evaluation Department, January 10 2005
- Key messages from ALNAP's review of Humanitarian Action in 2003
- *Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future*, The Alan Shawn Feinstein International Famine Centre, Tufts University, August 2004
- *Forgotten Crisis and Swift Response: An Evaluation of Concern Worldwide's Emergency Operations in Afghanistan September 2001 – April 2002*, Concern Worldwide, November 2002
- *Public Expenditure Review of Support to Afghanistan 2000 to 2003*, Development Cooperation Ireland, October 2004
- *Independent Evaluation of the Disasters Emergency Committee's Liberia Crisis Appeal, August 2003 to February 2004*, Peta Sandison, August 2004
- *Review of Emergency Response in Zimbabwe and Planning the Way Forward*, Paul Sherlock (for Concern Worldwide), August 2003
- *The Impact of Concern Worldwide's Emergency Programmes, Malawi 2002-3*, Fiona Edwards (for Concern Worldwide)
- *Evaluation of the 2002 to 2003 Development Cooperation Ireland Support for NGO Emergency Response in Malawi*, DCI, July 2004
- *A Stitch in Time: Independent Evaluation of the Disasters Emergency Committee's Southern Africa Crisis Appeal July 2002 to June 2003*, Valid International, January 2004
- *Report of the Workshop of Lessons Learnt on the National and International Response to the Bam Earthquake*, OCHA, April 2004
- *Lessons for Life*, Edmund Cairns (Oxfam), Opinion piece, The Guardian, January 12 2005
- *Learning from the Indian Ocean Disaster*, Edward Clay, ODI Opinions, January 2005
- *Review of Emergency Response Programme, Aweil North and West, Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan*, Dominic Crowley, Concern, September 2003
- *Evaluation of the Ethiopia Programme's Response to the 2003 Emergency*, Dominic Crowley and Melissa Durda (Concern Worldwide), March 2004
- *Darfur Monitoring Mission Report*, DEC Secretariat, November 2004
- *Independent Evaluation of the DEC Goma Crisis Appeal*, Carlo de Hennin and Patricia Kormoss (GFE Consulting Worldwide), March 2003
- *Indian Ocean Tsunami Emergency, Lessons from Previous Natural Disasters*, Rachel Houghton, Observer Member of ALNAP
- *A more secure world: our shared responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, United Nations A/59/565, December 2004
- *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all, Report of the Secretary General*, United Nations A/59/2005, March 2005