Fit for the Future: Priorities for Australia’s Humanitarian Action

ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group
Policy Report
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This paper has been written on behalf of the ACFID Humanitarian Reference Group, involving leading Australian humanitarian organisations:

- Act for Peace
- ActionAid Australia
- Anglican Board of Mission
- Anglican Overseas Aid
- Australia for UNHCR
- Australian Lutheran World Service
- Australian Red Cross
- CARE Australia
- Caritas Australia
- ChildFund Australia
- Church Agencies Network – Disaster Operations (CAN DO)
- Habitat for Humanity
- Oxfam Australia
- Plan International Australia
- RedR Australia
- Save the Children Australia
- TEAR Australia
- Transform Aid International
- UNICEF Australia
- Uniting World
- World Vision Australia

The information in this publication is correct as of 17 February 2020.
ACFID’s Vision, Purpose and Values

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) is the peak body for Australian non-government organisations involved in international development and humanitarian action.

ABOUT ACFID

Our vision is of a world where all people are free from extreme poverty, injustice and inequality and where the earth’s finite resources are managed sustainably.

Our purpose is to lead and unite our members in action for a just, equitable and sustainable world.

Founded in 1965, ACFID currently has 122 members and 27 affiliates operating in more than 86 developing countries. In 2017–18, the total revenue raised by ACFID’s members amounted to $1.6 billion — $846 million of which was raised by 1.5 million individual donors. ACFID’s members range from large Australian multi-sectoral organisations that are linked to international federations of non-government organisations (NGOs), agencies with specialised thematic expertise, and smaller community-based groups, with a mix of secular and faith-based organisations.

ACFID’s members comply with ACFID’s Code of Conduct, a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aims to improve international development and humanitarian action outcomes and increase stakeholder trust by enhancing the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of signatory organisations.

Covering nine Quality Principles, 33 Commitments and 90 Compliance Indicators, the Code sets good standards for program effectiveness, fundraising, governance and financial reporting. Compliance includes annual reporting and checks, accompanied by an independent complaints-handling process.

ACFID’S VALUES

Respect for human rights. We champion human rights as a precondition for sustainable and equitable development and promote rights-based approaches that hold power-holders to account.

Gender justice. We stand for social, political and economic gender equality and see gender justice as both an end in itself and a means to alleviating poverty, reducing inequality and building peace.

Systemic and transformational change. We are committed to development that addresses the root causes of poverty, conflict and injustice, and transforms the lives of the poorest and most marginalised people.

A strong independent civil society. We believe that a vibrant civil society is an essential feature of free societies, bringing benefits to the public that governments and the market cannot do alone.

Environmental sustainability. We promote environmentally sustainable development solutions because poverty reduction, natural resource management and development are inextricably linked.

Accountability and transparency. We promote accountability and transparency as a standard of good practice for NGOs and other development actors, particularly downward accountability to people affected by poverty or crisis.

Quality and innovation. We exist to support and promote quality, innovation and continuous improvement in NGO governance, management and practice.

ACFID’S CODE OF CONDUCT

ACFID’s Code of Conduct offers a voluntary, self-regulatory sector code of good practice that aligns with the global standard set by the Fundraising Institute of Australia (FIA) and the World Federation of Fundraising (WFF).

It includes annual reporting and checks, accompanied by an independent complaints-handling process.

ACFID is the only AUSCAD-approved organisation in Australia and the independent complaints-handling process.

ACFID’s members are supported by a wide cross-section of the Australian community to deliver humanitarian action on which to build. However as global need continues to rise, we urge the Australian Government to scale up its ambition, resourcing and commitment to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity amid crises.

Executive Summary

Australia has a proud history of supporting people affected by crises. It has been a champion for the rights of women and girls, led the charge on disability inclusion, and been a steadfast supporter of disaster-affected countries around the world. But as the global humanitarian landscape shifts, Australia must realign its strategy to ensure it continues to reach the people in greatest need. Humanitarian crises are today driven overwhelmingly by conflict and violence, and the persistent gap between needs and funding demands all governments increase their support to better respond to the most pressing global challenges.

Australia is well positioned to aim higher in taking a principled, Whole-of-Government approach to humanitarian action, in line with our role as a wealthy, middle-power actor. As Australia’s humanitarian budget continues to grow, it must be directed to proven and effective partners and a concerted effort made to turn policy rhetoric into tangible action for crisis-affected populations. Finally, Australia must try harder to address the driving factors behind many crises: investing in risk reduction, preparedness and prevention.

In supporting this higher ambition, the Australian Government must improve the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s (DFAT) ability to deliver on a more ambitious humanitarian agenda. Critical to this is the need for greater transparency and accountability on where Australian Government funding is going and continued open, honest dialogue with humanitarian partners on the challenges, changes and opportunities facing the international humanitarian sector.

This paper has been developed by the Australian Council for International Development’s (ACFID) Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG). The HRG is the independent voice of ACFID-member humanitarian agencies in Australia and the principle mechanism for sector-wide humanitarian policy and advocacy. HRG members are supported by a wide cross-section of the Australian community to deliver humanitarian action around the world and are delivery partners in the Australian Government’s humanitarian program.

We hope this publication will form the basis for ongoing dialogue between the Australian Government and ACFID and its members on the issues it addresses.

Australia has a strong foundation of principled humanitarian action on which to build. However as global need continues to rise, we urge the Australian Government to scale up its ambition, resourcing and commitment to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity amid crises.

A Syrian refugee family in Lebanon warms themselves by a fire in front of their tents, burning garbage - mostly plastic - to stay warm. In September 2019 there were over 5.6 million registered Syrian refugees, including over 920,000 in Lebanon. Photo: Jon Warren/World Vision.
Habiba* lives in Kutupalong Camp, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh, with her three children. Oxfam has recently installed four handpumps near to her home. “We are really thankful for this water. Before it was here we were using the stream as there was no other option. The children were sick and we had no medicine.” “The children haven’t seen water like this for a while, so they are really excited. The water tastes good - tastes so much better. The other water was so smelly.”

*Name changed to protect identity

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Despite gains in global development, in 2018 over 206.4 million people in 81 countries were estimated to need humanitarian assistance. The number of people displaced each year by conflicts or natural hazards continues to grow: from 59.5 million in 2014 to over 70.8 million at the end of 2018. The complexity of humanitarian crises is increasing as we collectively grapple with the impacts of climate change, food insecurity, urbanisation, infectious disease outbreaks, and conflict, and their complex interrelationships.

The number of countries experiencing armed conflict today is greater than at any time in the past 30 years, with a devastating human cost. At the same time, climate change is causing longer, more frequent and more intense extreme weather events, reducing access to natural resources and increasing the risk of forced displacement. Simultaneously, the speed and scale of urbanisation is placing unprecedented pressure on cities and their infrastructure with predictions that by 2050 68 percent of the global population will live in urban areas.

These trends are changing the nature of vulnerability and significantly altering the contexts in which both humanitarian organisations and donors operate.

Australia has a proud history of providing lifesaving assistance to people affected by humanitarian crises, playing a pivotal role in advancing the rules-based international order and advocating for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peace building at the international level. As noted in its latest OECD DAC peer review, Australia is “punching above its weight in global policy discussions,” particularly on disability and issues related to the Pacific. But as the nature of humanitarian crises changes, Australia’s humanitarian policy and practice must also change to more proactively and constructively prepare for, prevent and respond to crises.

AUSTRALIAN HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES: PARTNERS TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT’S HUMANITARIAN AGENDA

Australian humanitarian agencies are working around the world providing lifesaving assistance to people impacted by conflict and disasters, leading innovative approaches to the delivery of humanitarian aid, and advocating for people caught in crises. The Australian Government actively supports the work of Australian humanitarian agencies in humanitarian contexts through the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, a partnership with the Australian Red Cross and the Australia Assists program, managed by RedR Australia. Australian humanitarian agencies also seek to strengthen the policy and practice environment that influences international humanitarian assistance. This policy report builds on these foundations, drawing on the views and experiences of Australian agencies working at the frontline of humanitarian crises around the world, to identify how Australia’s future humanitarian policy and practice can best support people affected by crises.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

The Australian Council for International Development’s (ACFID) Humanitarian Reference Group (HRG) was actively engaged in the development of Australia’s current Humanitarian Strategy, launched in May 2016. HRG members generally think it remains a well-articulated and principled approach to Australia’s humanitarian assistance. However, in the three years since the strategy’s release, several changes and initiatives have occurred at national and global levels that are reshaping approaches to the delivery of international humanitarian assistance. Domestically, the 2017 release of the Foreign Policy White Paper, and the recent Pacific Step-up, have articulated priorities which will impact Australia’s approach to humanitarian action. Australia’s humanitarian policy must keep pace with these changes.

Shortly after the release of the 2016 Humanitarian Strategy, the global humanitarian community gathered in Istanbul, Turkey for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) – convened by the UN Secretary General. The purpose of the WHS was to ensure the international humanitarian system is better able to help people in need. More than a dozen alliances, initiatives, partnerships and platforms were either newly developed or strengthened through the WHS process to help implement the Core Responsibilities and turn the Agenda for Humanity into reality. A key outcome of the Agenda for Humanity was “The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need,” an agreement between the biggest donors, including Australia, and humanitarian organisations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action. The Grand Bargain, and associated Agenda for Humanity commitments and initiatives laid an important roadmap for the future of humanitarian action, and the Australian Government now has an opportunity to reflect these changes in its own policy and practice. Reviewing and updating DFAT’s Humanitarian Strategy, as part of the Australian Government’s International Development Policy Review, in light of these commitments is timely.

Drawing on current global challenges and opportunities, this paper provides recommendations for strengthening Australia’s humanitarian policy and practice, with a view to maximising the potential for Australia’s humanitarian action to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain human dignity.
1. A Principled Approach to Australia’s Humanitarian Policy

The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence are the internationally agreed foundation of humanitarian action. They have been endorsed by UN General Assembly Resolutions and are at the core of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative, of which Australia is a member and was co-chair in 2018. HRG members welcomed the recognition of the principles in Australia’s 2016 Humanitarian Strategy and encourage the Government to ensure that these principles remain central to Australia’s future humanitarian policies and practice. In keeping with the principles, Australia should commit to ensuring that humanitarian funding is allocated on the basis of need alone, irrespective of where that need arises. Humanitarian decisions, especially related to funding allocations, must be made independently of any other political, economic, or military motivations. Ensuring respect and adherence to the humanitarian principles in all aspects of humanitarian policy and operations should be embedded within the Australian Government’s structures and decision-making processes.

RECOMMENDATION:

1.1 Ensure Australia’s policy, funding decisions, program activities and organisational structure uphold and strengthen the internationally recognised humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence.
2. Whole of Australian Government Policy Coherence

Humanitarian crises are the result of a complex interaction of developmental, political, and human rights breakdowns. To effectively respond to these crises, Australia has a multi-pronged responsibility: to ensure that humanitarian funding decisions remain principled; to ensure that Australia’s development, political and economic objectives do not undermine effective humanitarian action; and to take steps to address the root causes of crises.

Effectively preventing and responding to humanitarian crises requires a holistic, Whole-of-Government approach. Wherever Australia provides humanitarian assistance, it should also assess how it can address the root causes (e.g. conflict, climate change), contributing factors (e.g. inequalities, particularly gender) and any enabling factors (e.g. the flow of arms to perpetrators) that result in, or perpetuate, crises. Australia must consider all dimensions of its own relationship with crisis-affected countries, as well as parties to conflicts, and examine whether any aspects of its engagement contributes to the drivers or perpetuation of the crisis. Trade relationships and military cooperation require particular scrutiny, especially in cases where a trade partner nation, its leaders or military forces have been implicated in human rights violations.

The need for a Whole-of-Government approach has been recognised in numerous Government policies and strategies, most notably the Foreign Policy White Paper, the DFAT Humanitarian Strategy, and the Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework. Australia’s second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security also offers another opportunity to strengthen such an approach. HRG members commend the Australian Government for recognising the importance of a coherent approach but are concerned that this awareness has not always translated into action. See textbox II for one example.

Other peer governments, most notably Canada, have an established practice of developing public, Whole-of-Government strategies to guide their engagement in relevant crises.10 We encourage the Australian Government to adopt a similar approach and develop Whole-of-Government strategies for regional and major global humanitarian crises.

Whole-of-Government strategies would ensure that Australia’s policies and approaches do not work against one another – for example, by ensuring that Australia does not sell or export arms to a state accused of perpetrating rights violations, while simultaneously providing humanitarian assistance to mitigate the impacts of those abuses. The strategies should also examine opportunities for Australia to use its voice and leverage in international forums, including the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council, as well as regional forums such as the Bali Process and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) led forums, to seek sustainable resolutions to crises and adequate support for crisis-affected populations.

The Australian Government should commit to using a human rights lens when developing such strategies and must give priority to humanitarian considerations over other political or economic interests. Relevant Government departments and agencies should come together in the development of the strategy and regularly in their work thereafter, to ensure a consistent, coherent, and collaborative approach. Crucially, civil society in both Australia and affected countries should also be regularly engaged (including during the strategy development) given their direct contact with people affected by crises.

While recognising that some elements of the Government’s approach will be sensitive, the basic framework of the strategies should be made publicly available. This will support understanding and build trust in Australia’s approach by taxpayers and will enable more effective engagement by civil society. Furthermore, many countries have found it useful to appoint high-level humanitarian envoys to oversee their government’s engagement and response to priority crises. HRG members encourage Australia to adopt this practice. Working in close collaboration with the Foreign Minister, high-level envoys would ensure there is dedicated focus and leadership on the crisis and would provide a single point of responsibility for bringing together different teams to develop a joined-up strategy. A high-level envoy would also help ensure appropriate follow up and action once a strategy has been developed – including ongoing engagement with civil society and the Australian public.

RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 Develop public, Whole-of-Government strategies for Australia’s engagement in key humanitarian crises, in consultation with key humanitarian stakeholders.

2.2 Appoint high-level envoys to oversee the Australian Government’s engagement and response to priority crises.
3. Australia’s Civil-Military-Police Engagement

Ensuring that Australia’s defence and humanitarian objectives remain distinct and that military objectives do not subsume humanitarian goals, is critical for ensuring the ongoing effectiveness and impact of Australia’s humanitarian assistance. The Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative reinforces that humanitarian assistance must be provided based on needs alone, without influence from political or military agendas, and affirms the primary role of civilian organisations in implementing humanitarian action, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict. This is likewise consistent with the OECD guidelines, which clearly specify that “Military aid and promotion of donor’s security interests” do not constitute Official Development Assistance.15

Humanitarian response must be principled in both its intent and in the way it is perceived. This means that the use of international military assets is best considered as complementary to existing relief mechanisms, and should only be used when there is no comparable civilian alternative, and where it supports civilian action in achieving humanitarian outcomes.16

We reaffirm that Australia’s support to humanitarian crises must be led by civilians and Australia’s use of its military in humanitarian operations must be in line with the Oslo Guidelines on the use of Foreign Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief.17

DFAT is the lead for the Australian Government’s responses to international humanitarian crises.18 Australia should continue to consider its military as the provider of last resort in humanitarian response, including in the Pacific. The Government must uphold the clear and firm distinction between defence and humanitarian response in political and policy spaces and adequately resource civilian agencies to lead Australian Government responses, particularly when responding in the Pacific where Australia may deploy supplies and personnel.

There is a continued need to build understanding and coordination between civil, military and police actors in disaster management settings, particularly in the Pacific region where Australian Defence and Police forces have played a significant role in supporting Australia’s humanitarian preparedness and response. Since its establishment, the Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC) has been a key partner for ACFDID and its members in enhancing dialogue and coordination between Government, including Defence and Police, and the humanitarian sector in Australia. ACFDID, with the assistance of the Australian Government and HRG members, has been supporting secondments to the ACMC since September 2009. The ACMC’s program of training, exercises, dialogue, stakeholder engagement and research has been a key enabler in improving engagement between civil, military and police actors in Australia. We encourage the Australian Government to continue investing in ACMC and in those training and dialogue opportunities and supporting the participation of civil society actors in them.

We urge the Government to prioritise investment in its capacity to implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, ensuring resources are committed to implementing, monitoring, evaluating, reporting, and engaging with civil society on Australia’s second National Action Plan on WPS. Australia should commit to priority countries for promoting the WPS agenda, including (but not limited to) Myanmar, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Indonesia. Further, the Australian Government should look at supporting local leadership of the WPS agenda in the Pacific, including through supporting local civil society and women’s organisations. Australia should support a regular dialogue mechanism between civil, military and police stakeholders in the Pacific region on WPS. These dialogues should focus on improving understanding and cooperation between the different stakeholders and actively promote women’s leadership in peace and stability in the region.19 These dialogues should also be aligned with the Government’s priorities on progressing locally led humanitarian action, and the Government’s commitments to the Grand Bargain should be focalised with military and police stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

3.1 Use Australia’s humanitarian policy to reaffirm Australia’s commitment to civilian led humanitarian response, in line with the Oslo Guidelines.20

3.2 Continue to invest in institutions and processes that strengthen Australia’s civil, military and police engagement.21

3.3 Continue to invest in implementation of the WPS agenda, including through supporting local civil society and women’s organisations to promote women’s leadership in peace and stability in the region.
Protection, gender, and inclusion have been a welcome hallmark of Australia’s current Humanitarian Strategy. Australia’s focus on these issues is reflected in DFAT’s Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy, Development for All Strategy as well as in Australia’s core pillars of work at the Human Rights Council. The Government’s commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of people with disability, the specific focus on the needs of persons with disability in disasters and support to local Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) is to be further commended. DFAT also shows great promise in being a champion on ensuring the inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian response and should strengthen this commitment in future policy agendas. HRG members urge DFAT to continue to champion protection, gender, and inclusion in Australia’s humanitarian policy and programs, and in its broader international engagement.

Protection
Protection should be a central priority at both the strategic policy level (informing Aid Investment Plans and strategy for Australian Humanitarian Partnership activations) and at the operational program level (to ensure adequate resourcing, funding modalities and collaborative action) in line with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action and subsequent policy.22 Australia has the potential to become a leading stakeholder in this space.

There are, however, areas in which Australia can strengthen its protection efforts. Despite the commitments in DFAT’s Humanitarian Strategy and Protection Framework, for example, to “advocate for and support protection of civilians,” and in the WHS to “speak out and systematically condemn serious violations of international humanitarian law,” Australia’s leadership and leadership in key crises has sometimes been lacking. Likewise, while the Humanitarian Strategy pledges to “prioritise humanitarian action that protects civilians from serious harm,” humanitarians struggle to access information and data on how much funding has been allocated to protection or prevention-focused interventions. Australia could likewise strengthen its leadership on accountability to affected populations – a key component of protection and inclusion.23 HRG members urge DFAT to implement the recommendations from the recent evaluation of Protection in Australia’s Disaster Responses in the Pacific, particularly the recommendations to increase comprehensive protection risk analysis and to review the application of its Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework in protracted crises. As a signatory to the Global Call to Action on Protection from Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies, the Australian Government should integrate these commitments into its humanitarian policy and funding priorities. Resourcing stand-alone protection programming in emergencies focused explicitly on GBV protection, including locally-led response, can be an important contribution to this.

DISABILITY INCLUSIVENESS
Australia’s role in supporting disability-inclusive humanitarian action and championing the Charter on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action at and beyond the WHS is to be commended. People with disabilities are at significant risk of being left behind, injured or even killed during a disaster or emergency.24 Women with disabilities face double discrimination on the basis of gender and ability. DFAT must continue to prioritise people with disabilities in humanitarian investments, ensuring all humanitarian programs are designed to meet the needs of people with disabilities and all data is disaggregated, and reported on, by sex, age, and disability. DFAT should also continue to be a champion for the implementation of the Charter in humanitarian responses. As well as its inclusion in the humanitarian strategy, a third iteration of DFAT’s disability-inclusive development strategy, Development for All, is an opportune moment to reiterate Australia’s commitment on the inclusion of people with disability in humanitarian action.

GENDER RESPONSIVENESS
An estimated 67 million women and girls around the world are in need of humanitarian assistance. Conflict, violence and disasters leave women at heightened risk of gender-based violence, trafficking, unintended pregnancy, maternal morbidity and mortality, unsafe abortions, and child, early and forced marriage.25 The rights of women and girls are too often forgotten in situations of conflict and emergency and women are often excluded from decision making at all levels due to widespread gender inequalities. Despite Australia’s ambitious target to ensure more than 80 percent of investments address gender issues in implementation, Australia’s humanitarian program is one of the lowest performing areas on this target.26 At a minimum, DFAT should ensure effective gender mainstreaming across all of its humanitarian portfolio. However, it can also step up its global leadership and resourcing of targeted efforts to support women’s participation and leadership in humanitarian action, and resourcing of women’s organisations and networks to drive more gender-responsive humanitarian action. Opening space for Pacific women’s voices in regional and global humanitarian policy forums should become a systematic focus of Australia’s foreign diplomacy. Australia’s commitment to ensuring better outcomes for women and girls in conflict and post-conflict settings should also continue to be reflected in Australia’s second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. There is growing recognition that the experiences of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian contexts warrants specific attention. Pre-existing specific protection needs of sexual and gender minorities are often exacerbated within communities and by institutions before, during and after disasters and the specific needs of people with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) often fail to be acknowledged or addressed. The Tropical Cyclone Winston Post Disaster Needs Assessment, published three months after the Cyclone struck, analysed the cyclone’s impact on a range of marginalised groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly, and disaggregated impact by geography and various other factors. The Assessment made a minor reference to Fijian sexual and gender minorities and offered no insight into either their differential experience of the disaster, or their specific relief, reconstruction and recovery needs.

This prompted a research project by the Rainbow Pride Foundation Fiji, Edge Effect and Oxfam with the support of DFAT. ‘Down by the River’ highlighted the challenges that people with diverse SOGIESC face in humanitarian contexts. The research identified the biases that exist, allowing sexual and gender minorities to become an invisible population in times of crisis.27

Sexual and gender minorities are often rendered vulnerable and further marginalised in emergencies and few guidelines exist for their inclusion in humanitarian responses.28 To effectively engage sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian and development programs, there are a number of important conversations that need to happen within countries — including with national disaster management offices, between local civil society and international NGOs, and with communities and donors. This highlights the need for Australia to champion the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, particularly as they relate to humanitarian contexts.29

4. Australia as a Champion for Protection, Gender and Inclusion

TEXTBOX III: DOWN BY THE RIVER

There is growing recognition that the experiences of sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian contexts warrants specific attention. Pre-existing specific protection needs of sexual and gender minorities are often exacerbated within communities and by institutions before, during and after disasters and the specific needs of people with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) often fail to be acknowledged or addressed. The Tropical Cyclone Winston Post Disaster Needs Assessment, published three months after the Cyclone struck, analysed the cyclone’s impact on a range of marginalised groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly, and disaggregated impact by geography and various other factors. The Assessment made a minor reference to Fijian sexual and gender minorities and offered no insight into either their differential experience of the disaster, or their specific relief, reconstruction and recovery needs.

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Sexual and gender minorities are often rendered vulnerable and further marginalised in emergencies and few guidelines exist for their inclusion in humanitarian responses.27 To effectively engage sexual and gender minorities in humanitarian and development programs, there are a number of important conversations that need to happen within countries — including with national disaster management offices, between local civil society and international NGOs, and with communities and donors. This highlights the need for Australia to champion the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, particularly as they relate to humanitarian contexts.28

Lasarusu Seru (Rainbow Pride Foundation) and Matelita Seva (Reproductive & Family Health Association Fiji) explore stories during the workshop with DPA and humanitarian actors. Photo: Emily Dwyer/Edge Effect.
RECOMMENDATIONS:

4.1 Ensure that protection remains central to Australia’s humanitarian strategy and funding decisions, including support for standalone protection programming, protection mainstreaming, and targeted efforts to prevent and protect from GBV in emergencies.

4.2 Undertake a review of the application of DFAT’s Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework in protracted crises.

4.3 Increase funding for protection, gender and inclusion as a component of DFAT’s humanitarian expenditure, and transparently report back on these allocations on a regular basis. Ensure that gender is mainstreamed across all future funding for humanitarian response and a minimum of 15 percent is targeted to gender responsive humanitarian programming, including funding to women’s organisations as important actors in achieving this objective.29

Use the opportunity of the development of Australia’s second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security to rearticulate commitments and resourcing to increased women’s leadership in decision-making, engagement with women’s civil society organisations in disaster contexts, and enhance collection and analysis of age, gender, and disability disaggregated data.

4.4 Continue to maintain a strong focus on sexual and reproductive health and the rights of women and girls in crises, including supporting women’s leadership and agency in driving these agendas.

4.5 Continue to be a leader on disability inclusive humanitarian action, ensuring the third Development for All strategy incorporates the rights of people with disabilities in humanitarian contexts.

Promote the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in humanitarian contexts.

4.6 Recognising the “pressing need for stronger global support for displaced populations and to respond to natural disasters,” the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper committed the Australian Government to increasing Australia’s global humanitarian funding to more than $500 million a year. This commitment is now being projected to commence in 2020-2021, three years after the initial commitment. HRG members have welcomed this scale up of Australian humanitarian assistance. However, calculations based on GNI find that Australia’s fair share of global humanitarian assistance in 2020 is at least $696 million.31 We recommend that upon reaching the White Paper commitment in 2020-2021, the Government establish a trajectory for continuing to grow Australia’s humanitarian assistance to be in line with Australia’s global fair share. Australia’s global humanitarian assistance makes genuine change for communities impacted by crisis and increases Australia’s international leverage and influence to address the underlying root causes and consequences of humanitarian crises. Continuing to increase Australia’s international humanitarian assistance will strengthen Australia’s global reputation and influence.

4.7 Increases in Australia’s humanitarian assistance funding should, however, not come at the expense of Australia’s development expenditure, which plays a critical role in supporting the enabling conditions for the economic and social development of countries, in building local resilience, and in preventing crisis situations from escalating. The OECD’s recent development cooperation report notes that, despite increases overall in Official Development Assistance (ODA) globally, a greater proportion of these funds is being directed to humanitarian crises and in-donor refugee costs, rather than “addressing the drivers of conflict and fragility.”32 To that end we urge the Australian Government to grow Australia’s Official Development Assistance program to reach 0.5 percent of GNI in no more than five years, and 0.7 percent of GNI in no more than 10 years. Humanitarian and development funding increases should be transparently reported.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.1 Urgently meet Australia’s commitment to funding humanitarian action of $500 million per year, as outlined in the Foreign Policy White Paper, and scale up to meet Australia’s fair share of global humanitarian assistance (at least $696 million per annum).

5.2 Grow Australia’s aid program to reach ODA spending of 0.5 percent of GNI in no more than five years and 0.7 percent of GNI in no more than 10 years.

5. Australia’s Fair-Share of Humanitarian Financing

In 2020, the UN estimates that 167.6 million people around the world will need humanitarian assistance, appealing for US$28.8 billion in response.30 As the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance grows, so too does the gap between funding required and funding received. In 2019, this gap reached US$13.7 billion, up from US$0.7 billion in 2007.31 This is a US$13 billion increase in just over one decade. This means humanitarian responders are forced to do more with less, and people are not receiving the assistance they need.

To that end we urge the Australian Government to grow Australia’s Official Development Assistance program to reach 0.5 percent of GNI in no more than five years and 0.7 percent of GNI in no more than 10 years. Humanitarian and development funding increases should be transparently reported.

We are living in a time of immense challenge for people on the move around the world. By the end of 2018, 70.8 million people were experiencing forced displacement. As such an unprecedented moment of global migration and displacement, Australia must play its part in sharing global responsibility for the displacement crises in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The Australian Government voted in support of the GCR but abstained from the vote on the GCM. Neither Compact creates any binding legal obligations on States and the GCM explicitly “upholds the sovereignty of states and their obligations under international law.” HRG members regret the Australian Government’s decision to abstain from endorsing the GCM. Given the importance of global solidarity in addressing the humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities of people impacted by current displacement contexts and the linkages between migration and displacement, the ACFID HRG believe it critical that the Australian Government endorse the GCM and work collaboratively with other states to find effective means of responding to the humanitarian impacts and challenges of migration.

At a minimum we urge the Australian Government not to hinder any other states, especially in the region, in progressing their commitments to implement the GCM. We also encourage the Australian Government to continue to work with relevant actors to explore the scope for strengthening joint action with respect to complementarity between the Compacts.

In 2018, less than 5 percent of refugees identified as needing resettlement by UNHCR were resettled – just 0.2 percent of the global refugee population. Four-fifths of all refugees live in predominantly low- and middle-income neighbouring countries. Australia has historically had strong bipartisan commitment and public support for a robust Refugee and Humanitarian Program and settlement services that contribute to global responsibility-sharing. Against the challenging backdrop of escalating need when the availability of global resettlement places is declining, a further scale-up of contribution and strengthening of related initiatives, such as special humanitarian intakes and complementary pathways is highly warranted.

The 2019 Global Refugee Forum was a missed opportunity for Australia to step up and commit its fair share to both funding refugee responses and increasing its resettlement commitment. As a high-income country Australia should commit to its fair share by increasing its annual refugee and humanitarian intake to 44,000 by 2022-23. There is strong evidence that refugees contribute positively to the societies and economies in which they settle. In addition to the rich social contribution of refugees, analysis commissioned by Oxfam suggests that increasing Australia’s annual intake to its fair share level would increase the size of Australia’s economy by $37.7 billion, in today’s dollars over the next 50 years.

The Australian Government’s current use of mandatory and in some cases reportedly indefinite detention, offshore processing, refusal to resettle registered refugees in Indonesia, and boat turn-backs is inhumane and has been condemned by the UN as a violation of international law. Australia holds ultimate responsibility for people transferred to Nauru and Papua New Guinea under regional processing agreements. Safe, durable solutions must be found for refugees and people seeking asylum currently on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea. We urge the Government to ensure that Australia’s policies with respect to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants uphold international law and do not undermine global responsibility sharing.

Many stakeholders consider there to be an opportunity for the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime to play a stronger role in supporting regional protection for refugees and asylum seekers. We encourage the Australian Government, as co-chair of the Process, to explore all opportunities to maximise the protective potential of the Bali Process mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

6.1 Endorse the Global Compact for Migration and work collaboratively with other states to find effective means of responding to the humanitarian impacts and challenges of migration.

6.2 Improve Australia’s refugee processing systems to align with international law, including through ending the use of mandatory and indefinite detention, offshore processing, refusal to resettle registered refugees in Indonesia, and boat turn-backs.

6.3 Scale-up Australia’s refugee resettlement commitment and strengthen related initiatives, including special humanitarian intakes, family reunion, work visas, scholarships and student visas, community sponsorship and complementary pathways, in consultation with UNHCR and other relevant actors.

Ayasha, pictured with her daughter, leans on a dignity kit donated by Act for Peace inside their shelter next to the Community Kitchen in Jamtoli refugee camp. There are over 911,000 Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Act for Peace.
Championing Locally Led Humanitarian Responses

A priority area of action emerging from Pacific consultations in advance of the WHS was on better supporting local capacity and action of Pacific communities in response to humanitarian crises. This priority was reflected in the Grand Bargain, with a workstream dedicated to ensuring more support and funding for local and national responders. The Grand Bargain acknowledges that national and local actors are first responders in crises and have the greatest knowledge of local contexts and proposes that such actors be enabled to lead humanitarian responses.

We commend the Australian Government for its work in making this a priority at the WHS and for its commitment to ensuring progress on this issue in the years since. We note that host governments in the Indo-Pacific and beyond are central stakeholders in the localisation agenda and are reminding the international community of their sovereign responsibility to lead disaster responses. This was most recently demonstrated by the Indonesian Government’s leadership of the 2018 Sulawesi, Lombok and Sundra Straits earthquake and tsunami response, supported by the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre). The international humanitarian community needs to acknowledge national and local leadership as the ‘new normal’ and get better at providing a supporting role in times of crisis.

Many HRG members are signatories to the Grand Bargain and have made commitments beyond the Grand Bargain to ensure humanitarian action continues to be fit for purpose. Many HRG organisations are also at the forefront of the localisation discussion, leading the way in translating these commitments into action, and are actively advocating for the role of local actors in times of crisis.

For localisation to move from rhetoric to reality, a major reallocation of power and resources to national and local actors must occur. As indicated in the 2018 Grand Bargain report, despite many signatories indicating that localisation is a high-level policy priority, significant challenges remain in implementation. The challenge for all Grand Bargain signatories is now to move from policy and discussion into action and implementation.

In progressing work on locally led humanitarian action, we urge the Australian Government to ensure that existing power imbalances within the humanitarian system are not simply replicated and perpetuated. Ensuring that barriers to participation in humanitarian forums and decision-making processes are removed, is an important step towards local leadership.

Supporting local women’s and Disabled People’s Organisations, and initiatives that foster women leaders in the humanitarian sector is an important contribution to addressing power imbalances and ensuring the needs of women, girls and diverse groups are addressed by both international and local responses. This includes directing an increasing share of resources to local and national organisations, including women’s organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

7.1 Continue to support global commitments towards the localisation of humanitarian assistance, through trialling and evaluating new approaches, forming new partnerships, removing barriers to participation for local actors and ensuring adequate funding for localised responses.

7.2 Work to address the tension between the commitment to funding local and national actors with risk management, due diligence and safeguarding requirements, including through:

- Resourcing local and national actors to better understand and meet these requirements, including through the provision of funding for core and organisational capacity strengthening costs; and
- Reducing the duplication of compliance requirements to increase efficiencies for local actors and reduce organisational and administrative costs.
7.3 Recognise the ‘accompaniment’ role that Australian humanitarian agencies play in assisting local organisations engage with the humanitarian sector and comply with donor reporting and requirements, and ensure that adequate funding provision for supporting this contribution towards localisation continues to be prioritised in future partnership agreements with ANGOs and the Australian Red Cross.

7.4 Collaborate with humanitarian agency leadership, boards, institutional donors and the public to build the Australian public’s understanding of the significance and importance of localisation, and how it can be achieved.

7.5 Work towards the Grand Bargain target of providing at least 25 percent of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible. Ensure this funding is directed to both implementing organisations and local coordination mechanisms and includes targeted funding for women’s organisations so as not to replicate gender inequalities in access to resources.

7.6 Ensure that funding mechanisms and opportunities are structured to enable, and encourage, local organisations, in particular women and girls’ and Disabled People’s Organisations, to access and receive international humanitarian funding without having to compete with international actors, and advocate for partner multilateral organisations to do similar.

7.7 Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework, with input from Australian humanitarian agencies, to track progress towards localisation in a collective and transparent way.

TEXTBOX IV: SUPPORTING LOCALISATION IN THE PACIFIC

The Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO) is a consortium of eight Australian church-based aid and development agencies with long-established relationships in the Pacific region. Pacific churches have high levels of legitimacy and support in their communities and are seen as an essential part of the fabric of their society. Churches are often amongst the first responders in emergencies, drawing on their extensive local resources and understanding of local knowledge, leadership and cultures to guide their response.

In September 2017 the Monaro volcano on Ambae island in Vanuatu erupted, destroying infrastructure, crops, livestock and impacting human health. In March 2018, the Monaro volcano erupted again and for the second time in six months triggered a state of emergency and the mandatory evacuation of the entire island’s population. CAN DO responded via its ongoing and long-established relationships with local churches in Ambae communities. CAN DO church partners were able to respond immediately, with the response locally owned and led from the outset, connecting with Government and technical services.

Alongside the distribution of dignity kits and the provision of psychosocial first aid, one of the key activities of the response was convening four Leadership summits in Ambae, Maewo, Espirito and Santo Islands. These summits were designed to both support improved disaster preparedness and response by churches and address cultural tensions and conflict between relocated and host communities and were implemented entirely by the two local church partners, ACOM and ADRA Vanuatu. Churches were able to facilitate open dialogue and present important information due to their deep relationship with affected communities. The summits also enabled partnerships between community leaders, the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), police and provincial government representatives.

The CAN DO consortium is a good example of promoting localisation in the Pacific, where church partners are utilising their longstanding presence in the community to deliver effective coordination and response.

Evacuees from Ambae set up makeshift accommodation on Santo. Photo: Chris Shearer/Anglican Media.
8. Fit for Purpose Engagement in Protracted Crises

Year on year, the number of people targeted for humanitarian assistance continues to climb as the average length of humanitarian response plans also grows. In the 2018 UNOCHA Global Humanitarian Overview, 90 percent of people targeted for humanitarian assistance were in contexts that had been targeted for assistance for more than five years. The average length of a humanitarian appeal is now seven years. This result is in about 89 percent of humanitarian funding from OECD DAC members now being directed to crises lasting over three years. Between 2014-2018 over half of global humanitarian funding was provided to respond to four protracted crises – Syria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. In this context, providing assistance that focuses on addressing root causes of crisis, while also meeting immediate humanitarian needs is required, taking seriously the challenge issued by the Secretary General to "transcend the humanitarian-development divide." In signing on to the Grand Bargain at the WHS, donors and other agencies agreed to enhancing engagement between humanitarian and development actors to address protracted crises and to work to reduce humanitarian need over the long term. We recommend that the Australian Government fully utilise the comprehensive framework for bridging the 'triple nexus' (as set out in the 2019 OECD DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus) when responding to protracted crises in fragile states or conflict-affected areas. At a strategic policy level, the Australian Government could increase humanitarian – development coherence through ensuring that the causal factors of potential crises are systematically incorporated and addressed in Aid Investment Plans. In contexts of protracted, or recurrent crises, an increasingly large body of evidence is demonstrating the wide range of benefits of multi-year approaches. Multi-year programs assist in building community resilience to protracted or recurrent crises as evidenced in textbox V. Furthermore, studies have identified the significant efficiency and effectiveness gains from the provision of predictable and flexible funding.

The efficiency gains of multi-year approaches also extend to ensuring that partners, both national and international, can maintain their responsive capacity and quickly scale up to deliver life-saving assistance in the advent of a conflict spike, or recurrent crisis. The Australian Government has committed to strengthening multi-year funding through several international initiatives. The Good Humanitarian Donorship principles recognise the provision of multi-year funding or planning instruments as best practice in situations of recurrent, chronic or protracted crises. Further, under the Grand Bargain, donors (including the Australian Government) and aid organisations have agreed to enhance engagement between humanitarian and development actors, committing to "work collaboratively across institutional boundaries on the basis of comparative advantage" to address protracted crises and to work to reduce humanitarian need over the long term, including through increasing multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning. DFAT's current Humanitarian Strategy (2016) includes a welcome commitment to building resilience in protracted and slow-onset crises, but disappointingly there is no commitment to the use of multi-year funding approaches in situations of protracted crises. The Australian Government has established multi-year funding agreements, including substantial packages of assistance announced for Syria, Iraq, and a combined package for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The multi-year funding packages in Syria and Iraq are making an important contribution to supporting a coherent approach to both meeting humanitarian needs and addressing longer-term needs including livelihoods and education. We also note the ongoing contribution that NGO cooperation programs have had for building resilience in protracted contexts, most notably in Afghanistan and the occupied Palestinian Territory. This is a welcome start, but the Australian Government has yet to reach its Grand Bargain commitment of five agreements by 2017, and in light of the ever-growing pressure on the international humanitarian system, we urge the Australian Government to scale up Australia's investment in multi-year humanitarian programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

8.1 Ensure all Aid Investment Plans include a risk analysis of root causes (or potential causes) of crises, drivers of conflict and local resilience mechanisms, as recommended by the OECD Development Cooperation Peer Review.

8.2 Increase Australia's investment in multi-year planning and funding for protracted or recurrent crises designing, at minimum, a further two packages of assistance in line with Australia's Grand Bargain commitments. Ensure that the design, implementation and monitoring of these funding agreements is compatible and supports Whole-of-Government strategy for Australia's engagement, and draws upon and supports the expertise of civil society, development and peacebuilding experts.

Ensure existing flexible funding agreements (e.g. ANCP) are able to deliver programs in protracted contexts, to enable longer-term development work to contribute to resolving causes and consequences of humanitarian crises.

TEXTBOX V: BUILDING RESILIENCE IN SOMALIA

The Somalia Resilience Program (SomReP) is a consortium of seven International NGOs (ACF, ADRA, CARE, COOPI, DRC, Oxfam and World Vision), who are taking a long-term approach to increasing the resilience of chronically vulnerable communities across Somalia. SomReP has been operational since 2012, drawing on multi-year funding from a number of donors including DFAT, Sida, SDC and EuropeAid. On the back of anecdotal evidence that some SomReP households and communities were displaying successful coping mechanisms (starting businesses, hosting IDPs) in the midst of drought conditions, SomReP commissioned a positive deviance study to understand the correlates of successful coping or resilience in the face of shocks. The 2018 study found that participants in SomReP projects had better food security and coping scores during the 2017 drought as compared to previous droughts. Savings groups were found to be particularly high-impact, particularly when group members were also enrolled in Cash for Work programs. Savings groups were found to have strengthened informal safety nets, and enabled members to accumulate assets, exchange information, manage stress and feel pride in their abilities. The study also found that the benefits of SomReP activities were additive, with food security positive deviant households more likely to have participated in multiple SomReP activities. While the study found that SomReP participants were coping better during a drought, it also found that key activities supporting absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacity were only just beginning to take effect at the end of a three-year project - clearly showing the value of multi-year funding in building household and community resilience in contexts of recurrent crises.
9. Funding Effective Partners

The ‘formal’ international humanitarian system, as defined by ALNAP in their ‘State of the Humanitarian System’ report, is comprised of many actors including UN humanitarian agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, local, national and international NGOs, donor agencies, host government agencies and regional / intergovernmental organisations. All actors in the humanitarian system have unique roles and mandates, however they share common principles, have interconnected operational and/or financial relationships, and work collectively to achieve impact for people affected by crises.

In line with GHD principles, the Australian Government has committed to delivering humanitarian assistance through various members of the humanitarian system, including through: partner governments and regional organisations; partnerships with humanitarian agencies including the UN, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs; and the provision of technical expertise.

HRG members recognise the importance and distinct contribution of all members of the humanitarian system. We understand that each of these members have unique strengths and are engaged by DFAT to address specific needs in individual responses.

We also recognise that in supporting the UN and multilateral organisations, Australia is supporting the humanitarian system. We understand that each of these members have unique roles and mandates, however they share common principles, have interconnected operational and/or financial relationships, and work collectively to achieve impact for people affected by crises.

In recognition of the effectiveness and efficiency of ANGO humanitarian programming (see textbox VI) the 2016 Investment Design Document for DFAT’s Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP) recommended an increase in the proportion of DFAT humanitarian financing channelled through ANGOs from approximately 10 percent to the OECD DAC average of 20 percent. However despite the proven track-record of Australian NGOs, and the creation of the AHP mechanism to reduce the administrative burden of funding ANGOs directly, the vast majority of Australia’s humanitarian assistance is still channelled to multilateral organisations.

Many multilateral organisations sub-contract NGOs – both international and local – to deliver their programs. For example, three-quarters of WFP’s food and cash-based transfer operations are delivered together with NGOs. Such subcontracting arrangements slow down the process of funding reaching people in need and reduces the direct funding available for implementing agencies, with many multilaterals also charging overhead fees. Tracking humanitarian funding flows beyond the first level of transactions remains challenging. A 2013 study found that money allocated through the UN Central Emergency Response Fund lost an estimated 10 percent in overhead fees before even reaching the organisation doing the actual implementation. Funding implementing partners directly has significant benefits for the timeliness, efficiency, appropriateness, and accountability of humanitarian response. Direct funding also enables detailed reporting on Australian aid priorities (i.e. gender equality and disability inclusion) and the impact of Australian aid programs. Funding implementing partners provides greater visibility of the impact of Australian aid investments and represents greater value for money for Australian taxpayers.

The HRG recommends DFAT increase funding to NGOs in humanitarian responses to ensure effective relief is provided to affected populations as quickly as possible. We also recommend that DFAT is increasingly transparent around decision making processes and criteria for humanitarian funding allocations, as outlined in section IV below.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

9.1 Increase funding to NGOs as a proportion of Australia’s humanitarian assistance to the OECD DAC average of 20 percent of humanitarian financing and make full and effective use of the AHP mechanism.
Australian NGOs are an important partner to the Australian Government’s humanitarian response efforts because of:

- the speed in which Australian funding to ANGOs can be received on the ground in the aftermath of a disaster;
- the effective and unique role that NGOs play in humanitarian response due to their local connections and relationships – with both communities and governments;
- the multi-mandated nature of many NGOs which mean they are committed to the communities with which they work before, during and after crises;
- the efficiencies in directly funding NGOs rather than channelling funds to multilaterals who often subcontract implementation back through international or local NGOs;
- the reach that ANGOs have in countries and locations beyond the Australian Government’s own aid program and presence; and
- the visibility and oversight the Australian Government has over NGO’s humanitarian action, including the ability to track Australian aid priorities (i.e. gender and disability inclusion), and the opportunity this provides to the Australian Government to communicate the role of Australia’s assistance to the Australian community.

**TEXTBOX VI: NGOS IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE.**

Australian NGOs are an important partner to the Australian Government’s humanitarian response efforts because of:

- the speed in which Australian funding to ANGOs can be received on the ground in the aftermath of a disaster;
- the effective and unique role that NGOs play in humanitarian response due to their local connections and relationships – with both communities and governments;
- the multi-mandated nature of many NGOs which mean they are committed to the communities with which they work before, during and after crises;
- the efficiencies in directly funding NGOs rather than channelling funds to multilaterals who often subcontract implementation back through international or local NGOs;
- the reach that ANGOs have in countries and locations beyond the Australian Government’s own aid program and presence; and
- the visibility and oversight the Australian Government has over NGO’s humanitarian action, including the ability to track Australian aid priorities (i.e. gender and disability inclusion), and the opportunity this provides to the Australian Government to communicate the role of Australia’s assistance to the Australian community.

**10. From Doing ‘More’ to Doing ‘Better’ Cash and Voucher Assistance**

A key commitment in the Grand Bargain made by donors and humanitarian organisations was to increase the use and coordination of cash-based programming. Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) enables recipients of humanitarian assistance to choose how best to meet their needs. CVA programs uphold the principles of dignity and preference of the recipients, enabling faster recovery after a shock event in a manner that allows self-determination. Evidence shows that people prefer cash to other types of aid as it enables choice in a range of goods and services, providing a sense of autonomy and empowerment at an otherwise distressing time. Evidence has also shown that when implemented correctly CVA stimulates local markets, enhancing local recovery while having multiplier effects for local businesses.

Recognising the transformative impact of CVA programs, many humanitarian agencies have been providing CVA programs in contexts around the world for over a decade and have established robust systems and policies to ensure assistance reaches those in need safely and effectively. For example, in 2017 World Vision delivered more than 22 percent ($150 million) of its global humanitarian assistance as cash transfers in humanitarian response. While not a panacea to the funding pressures facing the humanitarian community, when implemented correctly, CVA is a cost-effective and dignity-enhancing means of supporting people impacted by crises. A four-country study comparing cash distributions and food aid found 18 percent more people could be assisted through CVA than non CVA programming.

In recent years, debate on the role of CVA in humanitarian response has moved from “why?” to “how?” and from doing “more” to doing “better”. Although DFAT has increased its investment in CVA programs during responses and increased its policy guidance on cash transfer programming, cash-based assistance is not yet systematically being used by the Australian Government in humanitarian responses.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

10.1 Strengthen engagement with Australian humanitarian agencies with regards to cash transfer programming, increase investment in innovation related to cash-based programming and ensure sufficient funding is available for cash transfer programming and cash-preparedness particularly in the Pacific region.

10.2 Build partner government capability and commitment for the use of unconditional cash transfers in humanitarian response. This should include supporting the necessary social and policy infrastructure needed for effective cash transfer programming.

10.3 Develop public communication initiatives that strengthen understanding and support for CVA among the Australian public.
In Vanuatu, the nationwide assessment conducted highlights that while it's possible to implement cash and voucher assistance in various parts of the country, different approaches are needed depending on the location coupled with strong capacity building measures. The research identified the locations where CVA is viable, to whom CVA may be appropriately delivered, when this type of assistance is most effective, and provided recommendations on what forms of CVA can be delivered in Vanuatu. Both the Fiji and Vanuatu studies recommend piloting different cash transfer modalities at a small scale, to improve understanding of CVA in communities and understanding of these processes amongst stakeholders.

When communities were displaced as a result of the volcanic eruption on Ambae the Government of Vanuatu requested Oxfam in Vanuatu to consider if cash transfers were feasible. As Oxfam in Vanuatu had the relevant data for disaster-affected Espiritu Santo, they were able to work with government, community and financial services providers and provide over 13,000 volcano-affected individuals and their hosts with multi-purpose cash grants over a three-month period. Oxfam was able to respond quickly because the results of the feasibility assessment demonstrated community preference for CVA, appropriate access to and use of markets as well as willing financial service providers located in response target areas. In addition, investment in cash preparedness, which had involved advocacy, awareness raising, building the capacity of staff and local partners and developing standard operating procedures with financial service providers, ensured a successful operation.

**TEXTBOX VII: INVESTING IN PREPAREDNESS TO ENABLE SWIFT AND EFFECTIVE RESPONSE: IMPROVING THE DIGNITY OF BENEFICIARIES IN VANUATU**

Oxfam, Save the Children and the UN World Food Programme have recently analysed the feasibility of cash programs in Fiji and Vanuatu.

With more than half of the global population now living in cities and surrounding areas and more than half of the world’s refugees living in urban areas, it is clear the future of humanitarian crises is urban. This is particularly so in the Indo-Pacific region. The nine biggest megacities are in Asia, and by 2050 Asia will host half of the world’s urban population. The slums alone in the Asia Pacific region are home to more than 30 percent of the world’s urban population. Urban growth in the Pacific is often overlooked due to the region’s small population size, but the impacts of urbanisation in the Pacific are similar to those seen in the larger cities of Asia. For example, it is estimated that up to 50 percent of the urban population in Melanesia is living in informal settlements. Given the scale and immediacy of urbanisation, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, Australia must take a more intentional approach, including through its humanitarian policy and practice, to working and responding in urban contexts. Evaluating DFAT’s current capacity for urban humanitarian crises is a first step in taking a more intentional approach and strengthening Australia’s approach.

Humanitarian responses in urban settings demand fresh and collaborative approaches. Cities are complex, dynamic environments, with their own unique systems and multiplicity of actors, such as local and national authorities, utilities, civil society organisations, and businesses. Urban contexts often provide greater existing local capacity, better access to market systems and communication systems. Urban response activities need to be reflective of the challenges and opportunities of operating in an urban environment, not just an update of existing processes more suitable for rural or camp contexts. We must understand and be able to adapt our responses to existing and future urban systems and stakeholders, especially those who may not be traditional disaster/humanitarian responders. Responses in urban contexts should empower a connected sustainable ‘systems approach’ during implementation, rather than a traditional sector by sector approach.

The international community recognises the importance of urban programming, as demonstrated by the promotion of Sustainable Development Goal 11. The New Urban Agenda also highlights the natural and human-made threats cities and human settlements face and commits to sustainable and resilient management of urban environments. Due to regional dynamics of urbanisation, DFAT is uniquely placed to take forward the urban agenda within humanitarian operations. By including urban contexts as a thematic priority in the next Humanitarian Strategy and providing support to sector partners to better understand this increasingly complex challenge, DFAT and partners have an opportunity to impact on urbanisation issues and create significant positive humanitarian and development outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

11.1 Conduct an evaluation of DFAT’s current capacity for urban humanitarian response with a view to strengthening Australia’s policy, partnerships and practice for future humanitarian responses in urban areas.

11.2 Include urban contexts, and urban considerations as a thematic priority within DFAT’s future humanitarian strategy, encouraging the Department to strengthen its ability to respond effectively in urban contexts.
12. Enabling Early Recovery in Disaster Contexts

Early Recovery is a critical step in the humanitarian response process, supporting the transition from humanitarian relief to longer-term recovery following natural hazards. When prioritised and resourced appropriately, it can strengthen local institutions and systems, putting people and affected communities in charge of their own development and providing a sense of agency. By carefully transitioning humanitarian action into longer term activities, we can avoid dependency and institutionalisation of relief and speed up the transition to sustainable, long term development solutions. Early Recovery is sustainable, scalable, and cost efficient and builds resilient, disaster ready communities from day one.

Despite the critical role it plays, challenges in Early Recovery programming remain, including:

- Early Recovery activities are chronically underfunded, and it is difficult to find donors willing to support early recovery activities;
- Shelter is often overlooked, despite housing encompassing 50-70 percent of damage costs, as well as being the platform on which other response and recovery activities are built;
- Responders too often wait until the designated ‘early recovery’ period commences, rather than incorporating early recovery principles into response activities from day one; and
- There is a lack of clarity around responsibility for leading, coordinating and executing early recovery activities.

The Australian Government has made a significant and welcome commitment to Early Recovery through its inclusion as one of four key objectives within the current Humanitarian Strategy. DFAT’s current strategic focus on early recovery should be revised to better align with the four core knowledge competencies identified by the Cluster Coordination for Early Recovery: Livelihoods, Infrastructure, Governance and Capacity.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

12.1 Advocate for increased prioritisation and funding for Early Recovery activities in humanitarian response plans, particularly relating to the restoration of market systems and shelter initiatives.

12.2 Ensure humanitarian funding is flexible enough to include recovery activities beyond the initial relief, with acquittals extending to 12 months or more, depending on the context of the response and crisis.

**TEXTBOX VIII: EARLY RECOVERY CASE STUDY**

When Tropical Cyclone Winston roared across Fiji in 2016, Joni and his family invited their neighbours to take shelter in their small house outside of Nadi. Joni and his family had experienced significant damage to their home in previous disasters and had partnered with Habitat for Humanity Fiji (HFHF) to ‘Build Back Safer’, taking part in HFHF’s early recovery program to incrementally rebuild a stronger, cyclone resilient home. More than 30,000 homes were destroyed or significantly damaged during TC Winston, but Joni’s family’s home stood strong and they were able to provide a safe haven for many of their neighbours.

“Some nearby relatives came to stay in my house and there was a total of 16 people in my home built by Habitat. We are very lucky to have this house. It kept us safe and my children protected,” said Joni. With their home secured, Joni and his family were able to focus on rebuilding their farm and livelihood sooner and moving on with life. “Our crops were damaged but we could recover quickly. Our biggest asset, our house, is still here and we are very pleased about it. I cannot imagine losing my home and everything in it,” Joni said. Starting the recovery process as early as possible means families like Joni’s can focus on rebuilding not just their home, but a safer future.
13. Champion Disaster Risk Reduction

The Asia Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world. The 2017 Asia Pacific Disasters Report found that a person living in the Asia Pacific region is five times more likely to be affected by natural disasters than a person living elsewhere.\textsuperscript{23} The UN has warned that economic losses due to disasters in Asia and the Pacific could exceed $160 billion annually by 2030.\textsuperscript{74} Investment in DRR and climate change adaptation are critical for protecting lives, safeguarding development gains and ensuring ongoing economic development.

The economic burden of natural hazards falls heavily on lower income countries. Between 1998 and 2017, 65 percent of global climate-related disaster losses were reported by high-income countries, however this represented just 0.41 percent of their combined GDP. In contrast, climate-related disaster losses recorded by low-income countries amounted to an average of 1.8 percent of their GDP, well above the IMF’s threshold for a major economic disaster.\textsuperscript{75} Supporting low-income countries, particularly in the Asia Pacific region, to reduce the risk of hazards turning into disasters is therefore critical for supporting sustainable development.

It is often easier to fund response than prevention or early/anticipatory action, even though the cost benefit ratio of DRR has been proven to save lives and money across a wide range of contexts. For every dollar invested in evidence-based DRR, between USD$2 and $80 have been saved in disaster response and recovery costs.\textsuperscript{76} Effective, community-driven DRR also increases community-level ownership of DRR initiatives and helps individuals and families to psychologically cope with crises, increasing their sense of agency in the face of natural hazards.\textsuperscript{77}

We commend Australia for having been a firm advocate for the principles and approaches enshrined in the Sendai Framework for DRR and encourage the Government to continue to support partner governments to ensure that these are reflected in their own national development plans. Australia’s leadership of the 2020 Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on DRR is a critical opportunity to further this aim.

DFAT’s commitment to DRR is outlined in its 2016 Humanitarian Strategy. This includes a welcome recognition of the impact of climate change on global humanitarian action, and a commitment to strengthen alignment between the Department’s DRR and Climate Change Adaptation work. However, DFAT’s current result areas – of supporting partner governments, and ensuring Australian aid investments are risk informed – are not sufficiently ambitious to make a genuine impact in reducing the risk and impact of disasters. We encourage the Australian Government to aim higher in its commitments to reducing the risk and impact of disasters, especially in the Asia Pacific region.

One of the key challenges with evaluating Australia’s approach to DRR is lack of visibility. Under AusAID’s DRR Policy, ‘Investing in a Safer Future’, regular progress reports were published on the implementation of the policy. These reports demonstrated Australia’s commitment to DRR and provided insight into both progress and challenges. The information DFAT currently provides through the annual Aid Budget Summary and Statistical Summary on Australia’s implementation of DRR reports is limited, and there is a lack of visibility on how much funding is provided for DRR and how well it is integrated across other aid investments.\textsuperscript{78} We would like to see Australia’s future development and humanitarian action place greater emphasis and investment on DRR programs, increasing the transparency around funding volume and impact. An independent analysis of Australia’s current investment in DRR would be valuable in reaching this aim.
To be effective, DRR must be everybody’s priority and this is no less true for DFAT. Currently, DFAT’s organisational structure places the section responsible for DRR within the Humanitarian Response, Risk and Recovery Branch. But Australia’s contribution to DRR should not be the sole responsibility of humanitarian actors. All DFAT staff and DFAT procurement and aid management policies should ensure that DRR is embedded, and cohesively aligned, across all areas of the Department’s work. The newly established Australia Pacific Climate Change Action program and facility will be a valuable resource in ensuring that DRR is embedded across DFAT’s policies and programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

13.1 Strengthen transparency and communication around DFAT’s progress on DRR through producing a publicly released, annual progress report that tracks and reports on Australia’s DRR investment and identifies what Australia’s development assistance investment has achieved in reducing disaster risk.79

13.2 Establish a new performance target for Australia’s aid program: “All new investments will consider and respond to disaster and climate change risks and impacts, and where appropriate, support opportunities for low emissions, climate resilient and disaster risk informed development.”

13.3 Increase Australia’s investment in funding for early/anticipatory action, based on credible forecasts, that can significantly reduce the impact of a disaster event.80

TEXTBOX IX: REDUCING THE IMPACT AND DAMAGE FROM TROPICAL CYCLONE PAM.

CARE Australia works with communities across the Pacific to help them prepare and plan for natural disasters. In the low-lying islands of Vanuatu, CARE has been training men and women to lead disaster preparedness teams, called Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees (CDCCCs). Through these committees, CARE helps communities develop evacuation plans, and prepare for future disasters and the impacts of climate change. This includes running disaster simulations, providing first aid training, and trialling new disease-resistant crop varieties. CARE also provides gender and disaster training for local authorities, so women’s skills and needs are recognised during a disaster.

As Cyclone Pam approached Vanuatu in 2015, the CDCCCs started evacuation procedures. Using the National Disaster Management Office’s cyclone tracking map and listening to warnings via radio, the team advised everyone to prepare their houses and to be ready to move to an evacuation centre. People started preparing immediately: cutting down branches near their homes, fastening roofs, pulling fishing boats out of the water, and gathering essential supplies. The CDCCCs were extremely successful, with no deaths reported in the villages where CARE was working.

A study of the impact of CARE’s DRR programs in Vanuatu found that in communities that had not had the same access to preparedness training, disaster preparation, response and recovery was seen as an individual household and family responsibility, action was not coordinated across the community, and overall very little action was taken to prepare for and respond to the cyclone.

Between 2002 and 2013, 86 percent of global humanitarian funding needs were for responses to situations of conflict and violence.81 In subsequent years, that number has risen to as high as 97 percent.82 Now more than ever, the Australian Government should be exploring ways in which conflict prevention and violence reduction can be more effectively supported across Australia’s aid program. World Bank research suggests that every $1 invested in conflict prevention saves $16 in response,83 and that the international community could save up to $1.5 billion in humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping costs per year if it scaled up its investments in violence prevention.

The Australian Government’s policy commitments have recognised the importance of conflict prevention. The Foreign Policy White Paper notes that Australia will “encourage a more coordinated focus on conflict prevention.”84 Prevention is a core component of Australia’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. At the World Humanitarian Summit Australia committed to acting early upon potential conflict situations, improving prevention and peaceful resolution capacities at the national, regional and international level, and sustaining political leadership and engagement through all stages of a crisis to prevent the emergence or relapse of conflict.85 At a time of growing demand on global humanitarian budgets to provide assistance in situations of conflict and violence, these policy commitments must move into action and investment to genuinely reduce suffering and save lives.

Recognising the inextricable link between violence, protection, and humanitarian needs, NGOs encourage the Australian Government to take a more ambitious role in relation to conflict prevention and violence reduction, scaling up its investment in prevention-focused interventions and its capacity to support such programs. We urge the Government to review and evaluate its own internal capacity to support conflict prevention and develop an action plan to strengthen DFAT’s commitment and capabilities in this area for the future.

The Australian Government’s investment in prevention should ensure that prevention initiatives are identified and funded as a priority across all stages of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding programs. As noted in DFAT’s Protection in Humanitarian Action Framework, violence prevention forms a key part of humanitarian protection in crisis settings and should be funded as a priority, lifesaving humanitarian intervention. Peacebuilding and long-term social cohesion and conflict prevention programs should be funded through the Australian Government’s development budget, with a particular focus on fragile contexts. We urge the Government to systematically track and report on this funding to enable a shared understanding of levels of investment and areas where additional support may be needed.

Finally, it is critical that the Government distinguish between prevention from a humanitarian perspective and efforts specifically aimed at countering violent extremism (CVE). The aim of humanitarian prevention is to alleviate future human suffering that may be caused by conflict and violence – not to advance a political agenda. While recognising that in some cases the programs and outcomes may be similar, the success of humanitarian action (and the safety of humanitarian personnel) relies on neutrality, impartiality and independence from political or military objectives, and adherence to the humanitarian imperative. Framing prevention work under a CVE heading would fundamentally compromise these principles, would hinder the success of humanitarian assistance efforts, and would jeopardise the safety of humanitarian staff and beneficiaries.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

14.1 Review and evaluate DFAT’s capability to support conflict prevention and violence reduction with a view to:
- Scale up Australia’s investment in violence prevention and reduction programming within both the humanitarian and development budgets;
- Systematically track and report on prevention-focused funding; and
- Ensure that humanitarian and development prevention activities are distinguished from CVE to avoid compromising the ability of Australian Government partners to deliver neutral, impartial and independent assistance in humanitarian crises.

TEXTBOX X: PROGRAMMING TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

When WFP food rations were reduced in the Central African Republic, World Vision teams were concerned about the potential for violence to erupt between Christian and Muslim communities over how the remaining food would be allocated. World Vision engaged with leaders across both faiths, who were able to successfully reduce tensions in their communities through previously established prevention approaches and channels. The food distribution was able to go ahead smoothly. Had a riot erupted, not only would this have led to violence and possibly loss of life, but it could have also led to food being looted or not reaching the most vulnerable members of the community. Through proactive, preventive engagement, the limited food stocks were able to reach those in greatest need.
15. Investing in DFAT’s Humanitarian Capacity and Capability

The implementation of DFAT’s ambitious humanitarian reforms, and commitment to increasing Australia’s humanitarian assistance must be appropriately resourced, with experienced humanitarian policy and program practitioners. DFAT’s management should not underestimate the capability required to manage a high-functioning humanitarian program that manages rapid responses, responds to protracted crises, manages strategic partnerships, develops humanitarian policy and promotes humanitarian reform.

The 2018 Australian Aid Stakeholder Survey ‘Australian Aid Five Years On’ found that staff continuity and expertise remain a perceived challenge for the department by aid stakeholders, and that DFAT should continue to drive improvements in this area.86 DFAT has gone some way in addressing the specialist skills gap through recruiting specialist streams, including the humanitarian recruitment stream. We encourage DFAT to continue to build its internal humanitarian specialist capacity, but also ensure that being recruited through such a stream is seen as an attractive career option within the Department, with the same access to promotions and postings as generalist positions.

The 2018 OECD DAC Peer Review suggests that humanitarian training should be mandatory for non-humanitarian specialists within the Department who are going to be posted to the Pacific.87 This is a sensible suggestion considering the strong role Posts play in crisis response across the Asia Pacific.

The OECD DAC Peer Review also credited DFAT’s deployment of humanitarian staff to major protracted crises, including to Amman and Beirut to work on the Syria response, as a positive development. This practice should extend to the deployment of dedicated DFAT Humanitarian Advisors who, acting within a Whole-of-Government strategy, are deployed to oversee Australian Government funding, and participate in donor coordination forums in all crises where DFAT has a significant and long-term investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

15.1 Continue to invest in DFAT staff capability for responding to humanitarian crises and promoting international humanitarian reform, including through specific training for non-humanitarian posted DFAT staff in aid recipient countries and a dedicated humanitarian specialist recruitment stream within DFAT’s career pathway to ensure DFAT recruits, trains and retains dedicated and skilled humanitarian experts.

15.2 In line with the Government’s commitment to scale up Australia’s humanitarian funding, and in line with Whole-of-Government strategy, deploy dedicated DFAT Humanitarian Advisors to crises where DFAT has a long-term investment.
16. Transparency and Accountability

Australia has committed to provide detailed and timely information on its official development and humanitarian assistance expenditure through its membership of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), its endorsement of the GHS principles, and as a signatory to the Grand Bargain.

Publish What You Fund’s 2018 Aid Transparency Index currently rates DFAT as ‘fair’ against IATI indicators, rating it 23 out of 45 donors. The 2018 Australian Aid Stakeholder Survey rated the aid program’s transparency as significantly worse in 2018 than it was in 2013, with only 38 percent of respondents assessing transparency as a strength of the aid program in 2018, down from 62 percent in 2013. Both the 2018 Stakeholder Survey, and a transparency audit completed by the Australian National University’s (ANU) Development Policy Centre in 2016 state that transparency fell markedly after the AusAID-DFAT merger, in part due to the discontinuation of the transparency charter.

Both documents recommend that transparency needs “urgent attention” and “should be made one of the official benchmarks by which quality of aid is assessed.” The ANU’s 2016 transparency audit looked at the transparency of the Australian aid program at the project level, measuring the availability of project information and project-level documentation by country program and by sector. It concluded that across all thematic sectors, “humanitarian and DRR projects remain the least transparently documented” and that the transparency of these programs had decreased between 2013 and 2016.

DFAT’s new Crisis Hub goes some way towards providing additional transparency about DFAT humanitarian responses, however it remains difficult for Australian taxpayers and DFAT’s humanitarian stakeholders to determine how funding has been allocated, how these allocations are determined, and to access project-level information and performance analysis. The OECD DAC Peer Review suggests that “despite a clear range of criteria in the 2016 Humanitarian Strategy, it is still not clear, even to Australia’s partners, how humanitarian funding allocations are made.”

RECOMMENDATION:

16.1 Improve the transparency and accountability of DFAT funded humanitarian programs, including the rationale for funding decisions, and ensure that program level information is publicly available. Efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability should include:

• Continuing to report all humanitarian programming to both the IATI and the FTS, and support efforts to strengthen the flow of data between the two systems;

• Publishing greater project-related information and documentation on DFAT’s humanitarian programming, including detailed breakdown of funding per sector, with exception only for compelling confidentiality requirements (DFID’s Development Tracker provides a good example of donor transparency);

• Increasing transparency on how decisions are made within the humanitarian program, including which crises are prioritised, and the assessment methodology and rationale for decisions around funding allocation; and

• Publishing an annual official humanitarian assistance report that provides an update on DFAT’s progress on its Humanitarian Strategy and provides clear information to the public about how much humanitarian assistance Australia has provided (including sector specific breakdowns), where and to whom the funding has gone, which sectors and its overall impact on the lives of people affected.

17. Work with Humanitarian Actors to Address Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment

Power relations are at the heart of all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. During times of crisis, power inequalities are exacerbated: individual vulnerabilities are heightened due to family separation, disrupted social networks, and loss of income, while humanitarians wield even greater power linked to control over goods and services. These dynamics contribute to heightened risks of exploitation, abuse and harassment, particularly for women, girls, people with disabilities, and sexual and gender minorities. This includes, but is not limited to, exploitation, abuse, and harassment of a sexual nature. Responding to recent reports of sexual misconduct, abuse and harassment in the international development and humanitarian sectors, ACFID commissioned an independent review into sexual misconduct incidents, and systems and practice in place among ACFID members to protect staff, volunteers, partners and communities from sexual misconduct. The VIFM report ‘Shaping the Path’ provides comprehensive and important insights in developing effective policy and approaches to the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH). Accountability mechanisms are critical for addressing and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in humanitarian settings. Studies have repeatedly shown that exploitation and abuse is able to occur in situations where there is no safe means by which affected people can report abuse, indicating a failure of accountability to beneficiaries of humanitarian aid. The humanitarian sector continues to lag behind in terms of accountability to affected populations. In its examination of humanitarian organisations’ performance against the nine Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) commitments, the lowest scoring commitment was Commitment 5: complaints are welcomed and addressed.
18. Managing Risk to Leave No-one Behind

Over the last few decades the risks facing humanitarian actors have evolved. Security risks have increased for organisations working in countries experiencing conflict, including due to the rise of non-state armed groups and terrorist or terrorist-affiliated organisations. In the face of an evolving risk environment, humanitarian organisations must balance the humanitarian mandate of their organisation to relieve suffering wherever it is found, with risk mitigation strategies to reduce the risk of harm to their staff, their organisation, and the populations they seek to serve. Australian humanitarian actors fear increased reticence of the Australian Government to continue providing funding to Australian humanitarian agencies working in insecure environments, despite the robust risk management practices that NGOs and the Red Cross have in place.

In light of these comprehensive security measures and experience operating in fragile and conflict-affected environments, the HRG recommends DFAT continue to fund Australian humanitarian agencies working in insecure contexts. DFAT should maintain close dialogue with NGO partners to ensure appropriate Government policy, effective contractual requirements and funding mechanisms that both meet the humanitarian imperative, and ensure safety and security of staff, programs and beneficiaries in insecure environments.

OPERATING IN INSECURE ENVIRONMENTS

Driven by the mandate to alleviate suffering and provide assistance, humanitarian organisations are increasingly operating in fragile and conflict-affected environments. Humanitarian organisations must balance their mandate to relieve human suffering wherever it is found, with their commitment to the safety and security of staff and beneficiaries. The vast majority of ANGO programs in fragile and conflict-affected environments are led by locally employed staff, or local partners. Nonetheless, there may be a need to draw on the technical expertise and managerial oversight of expatriate or Australian staff, including to address other risk areas. Most HRG members are part of global organisations with well-established security policies, protocols and procedures to support national offices and partner organisations.

In order to deliver aid in these areas, it can be difficult for humanitarian actors to avoid contact with designated organisations: indeed, in many cases such contact may be essential to negotiate access and provide assistance to affected populations.

Afghan Red Crescent staff and volunteers help distribute aid to people in need. Recurring shocks, conflict and displacement have left over 6.3 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. Photo: IFRC.
The counter-terrorism requirements of donors – including the vetting of staff, partners and even beneficiaries - can also put humanitarian work at risk through undermining the perception that humanitarian organisations are operating in accordance with the humanitarian principles. Adherence to the humanitarian principles provides legitimacy to humanitarian organisations, is essential for ensuring humanitarian assistance is effective and reaches those who need it the most and contributes to the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. A perception of partisanship or partiality can endanger the safety of humanitarian staff and program beneficiaries and impede access to affected populations, particularly if organisations depend on community-acceptance for both access and security.

In commenting on the importance of perception, a study on the USAID pilot project to vet partners, staff, vendors and some beneficiaries in humanitarian programs found that:

“Once these vetting measures are made public in a particular field context, it may matter very little (if at all) whether a given organization is actually involved in the program, as even non-vetting organizations may be “tainted” by the perception, whether real or imagined, among local populations that all humanitarian organizations are intelligence-gatherers…”

The additional administrative burden imposed by some donors’ due diligence requirements, along with additional scrutiny around operations in insecure environments, may result in a ‘chilling effect’ in which humanitarian action in high-risk environments is untenable for some organisations. This compromises the impartiality of humanitarian action, as only those easiest to reach or in less risky environments receive assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

18.1 Maintain a close dialogue with HRG members for discussion, review and negotiation regarding any changes to DFAT’s risk policy and practice, to ensure changes can be realistically implemented in order to minimise risk and maximise the rewards of humanitarian action in insecure environments.

18.2 Empower accredited Australian humanitarian agencies and their local partners to assess risk according to local conditions and design their own controls based upon the risks and opportunities that are specific to their programs, partners and geographic location. Good risk management depends upon context-specific checks and balances; and such practice would be consistent with the Financial Action Task Force’s call to “apply focused and proportionate measures, in line with the risk-based approach”.

18.3 In light of UN Security Council Resolution 2462 (2019) which requires all states to ensure that counter-terrorism measures comply with international humanitarian law, and specifically urges states when designing counter-terrorism measures to consider the potential impact on humanitarian activities - conduct a review of existing Australian Government counter-terrorism laws, policies and procedures to ensure that they comply with international human rights law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law.

18.4 In developing new counter-terrorism legislation, policies or procedures, ensure that any new developments are:

• in line with international humanitarian law, which states that impartial humanitarian actors have the right to offer their services to parties to conflict;

• informed by a robust Risks and Rewards Analysis; and

• viable for supporting greater local and national participation and leadership of humanitarian action.

As global humanitarian need continues to rise, and the challenges of humanitarian action become more complex, the Australian Government must urgently scale up its ambition, resourcing and commitment to international humanitarian action. Scaling up Australia’s humanitarian effort should not be the sole responsibility of DFAT’s Humanitarian Division, although they play a critical role. Australia’s humanitarian commitment must be Whole-of-Government and driven by a clear, sustained and ambitious commitment to be a principled, global, humanitarian actor.

Realising this vision is also not solely the responsibility of Government. Our vision for Australia’s humanitarian program is for lifesaving assistance to be available for all people caught in crises, and to alleviate the worst human suffering. As partners of Australia’s humanitarian program, the organisations contributing to this report stand ready to work with the Australian Government to make these changes a reality.
Therefore, this fair share should be seen as the absolute minimum a wealthy country like Australia should be expected to allocate towards humanitarian action.


35 The GCR and GCM were decisively adopted and endorsed respectively by the UN General Assembly in separate votes in December 2018.


48 This was a recommendation in the 2018 OECD Development Cooperation Peer Review of Australia OECD, OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia 2018, p. 100.

49 An analysis commissioned by DFID found that multi-year programs enabled early response, which resulted in significant cost savings compared with a late response. Multi-year funding in Ethiopia meant World Food Program (WFP) was able to procure supplies at an optimal time, spending between 18 and 29% less than if they were to purchase in the heat of an emergency. Cabot Venton, C. and Lewis Sida, The Value for Money of Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding: Emerging Findings, May 2017, available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/world/value-money-multi-year-humanitarian-funding-emerging-findings.


71 SDG 11 seeks to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.


78 The budget line that captures primary spending on DRR is labeled “Building resilience: humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction and social protection” and little effort is made to break down these lines into their composite parts.


80 DRR Specialists recommend a minimum of 5% of humanitarian assistance is allocated to DRR programs.


83 World Bank, Pathways for Peace, p.4.

84 Australian Government, 2017 Foreign Policy White paper, p. 82.


87 OECD, OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: Australia, 2018, p. 104.

88 Principle 23 of the General Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship outlines that donors should ‘Ensure a high degree of accuracy, timeliness, and transparency in donor reporting on official humanitarian assistance spending and encourage the development of standardised formats for such reporting’.

89 The first stream of the Grand Bargain commits donors and aid organisations to enhance transparency and decision making, with the working group agreeing to prioritise Commitment 1.1 which states that aid organisations and donors commit to ‘Publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.’


92 DeCourcy, V. and Burkot, C., Gone backwards: findings from the 2016 Australian aid transparency audit, p.13.


94 We note that there is work underway and a pilot project currently being implemented to harmonise the reporting processes between IFAT and FTS, in line with commitments under the Grand Bargain.

95 Available at: https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/

96 These disruptive factors also increase the risk of gender-based and sexual violence within affected communities and by external actors (for example armed groups in conflict settings). These risks must be addressed by increased support for protection in humanitarian action but must not be conflated with PSEA which refers to the prevention of exploitation, abuse and harassment committed within the humanitarian system, or by humanitarian actors towards affected populations.


100 The lowest indicators under this commitment were: Key Action 5.1: Communities and people affected by crisis are consulted on the design, implementation, and monitoring of complaints handling processes; and Organisational Responsibility 5.6: Communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of humanitarian staff, including organisational commitments made on the protection against sexual exploitation and abuse. CHS Alliance, How Change Happens in the Humanitarian Sector: Humanitarian Accountability Report, 2018 Edition, pp 10-11.

101 The full ACFID Submission is available at: https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site/acfid/files/ACFIDSubmission%20on%20FAT%20PSEA%20policy%20Feb%202019.pdf.

102 These include but are not limited to: staff safety and security protocols; child protection and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse policies and screening of staff through police checks; financial management protocols and fraud control including independent audits; counter-terrorism funding protocols including screening of local partners.

103 These include: dedicated security staff in-country, at regional offices and centrally; country Security Management Plans updated regularly or whenever there is a major change in the operational environment; global processes for incident response and escalation to crisis management; mandatory Hostile Environment Awareness Training for staff travelling to insecure and conflict-affected environments; mandatory, comprehensive security briefings prior to, and on arrival in-country; and, clearance of accommodation and travel routes for staff.

104 See ACFID Code of Conduct Commitment 8.2 We ensure that funds and resources entrusted to us are properly controlled and managed, available at: https://acfid.asn.au/content/commitment-8-2-we-ensure-funds-and-resources-entrusted-us-are-properly-controlled-and-managed.


108 Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions.
Cover photo: Syrian refugee boys walk on the hillside that overlooks an informal tented settlement in Lebanon. Photo: Laura Reinhardt/World Vision.

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