RIGHTING THE WRONG

STRENGTHENING LOCAL HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP TO SAVE LIVES AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

OXFAM

INTRODUCTION

GOOD, BUT NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Tens of millions of people receive vital humanitarian aid every year, but millions more suffer without adequate help and protection, and their number is relentlessly rising.

Far too often their suffering is because their governments cannot, or intentionally will not, ensure their citizens' access to aid and protection.

In addition, international aid has not kept pace with the rising tide of climate-related disasters and seemingly intractable conflicts, and promises to help affected people reduce their vulnerability to future disasters and lead their own humanitarian response have not yet been kept.

The international humanitarian system—the vast UN-led network in which Oxfam and other international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, and others play key roles—is not saving as many lives as it could because of deep design flaws that perpetuate an unsustainable reliance by aid recipients on international donors.

Despite these flaws, much has been accomplished in the past 70 years. Courageous aid workers have saved thousands of lives and provided vital services such as health care, water, and protection to millions. But today's system is overstretched, and humanitarian assistance is often insufficient, late, and inappropriate for the local context.

How do we right this wrong? By shifting more power, resources, and responsibility from the international actors—UN agencies, wealthy donor countries, large INGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement—to local actors, including Red Cross/Red Crescent local chapters, national governments, national NGOs, local NGOs, community-based groups, and other civil society organizations.

It's a huge task. Today, only a small fraction of funding is given directly to local actors. More often, local humanitarian aid workers take direction from the international humanitarian community, which tends to relegate them to the role of subcontractors, rather than equal partners. This role leaves the local actors in no better position to prevent or respond to the next crisis.
In addition, donors and national governments are investing too little in prevention and risk reduction efforts that could diminish the need for humanitarian response.

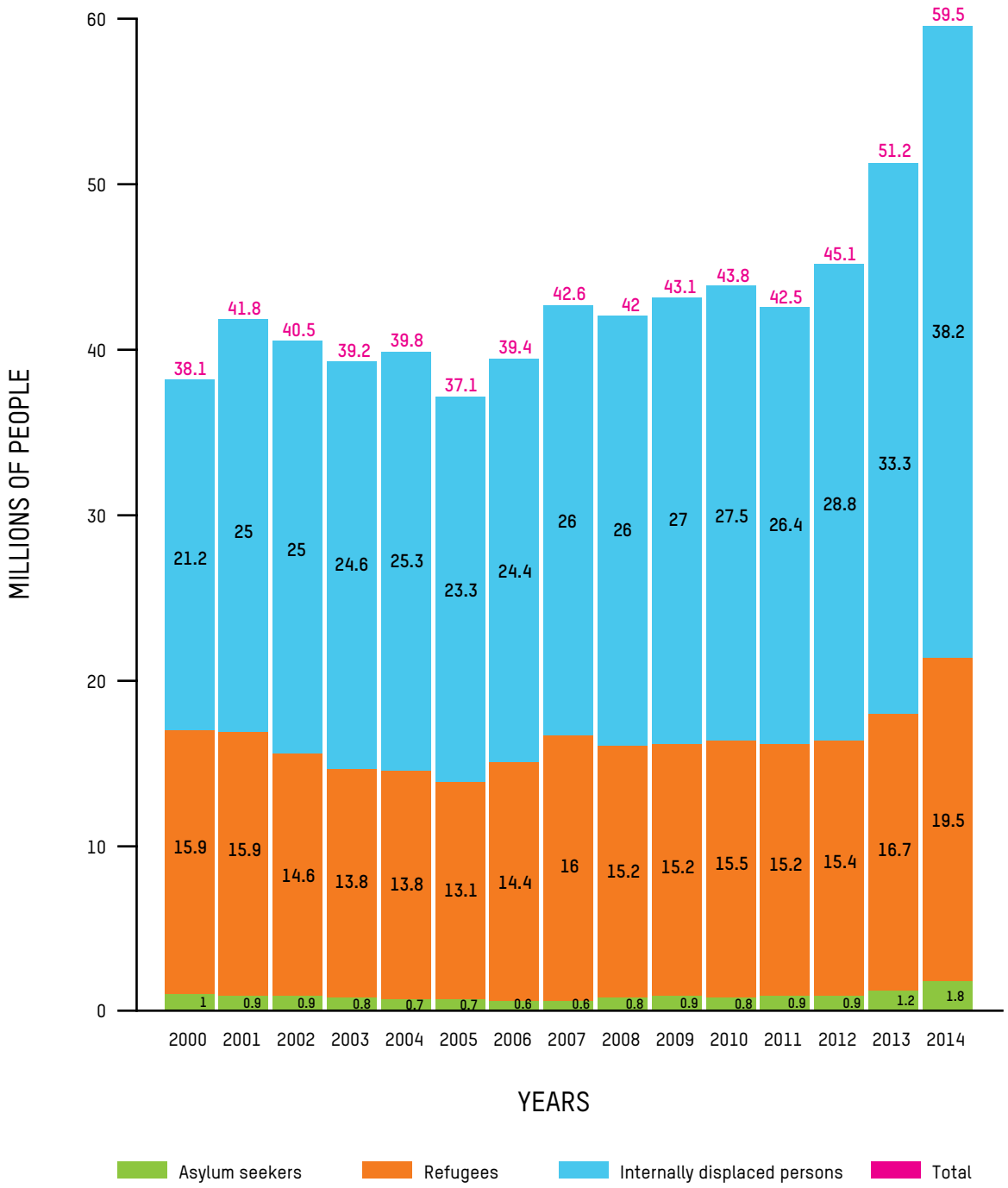
WHAT IS WRONG?

DEMAND OUTSTRIPPING SUPPLY

Although more humanitarian assistance is being delivered than ever before—hitting a record $24.5 billion in 2014[1]—the need for aid is growing even faster. By the end of 2014, violent conflict and political oppression had displaced nearly 60 million people, a number not seen since World War II (see Figure 1).[2] That same year, disasters from climate-related natural hazards affected 138 million people, and since 1965, the number of such disasters occurring annually increased dramatically from 52 to an all-time high of 401 in 2005 (see Figure 2). These trends are projected to continue as a result of unabated protracted crises due to conflict[3] and climate change that is leading to more frequent and more intense droughts, floods, and storms.[4]

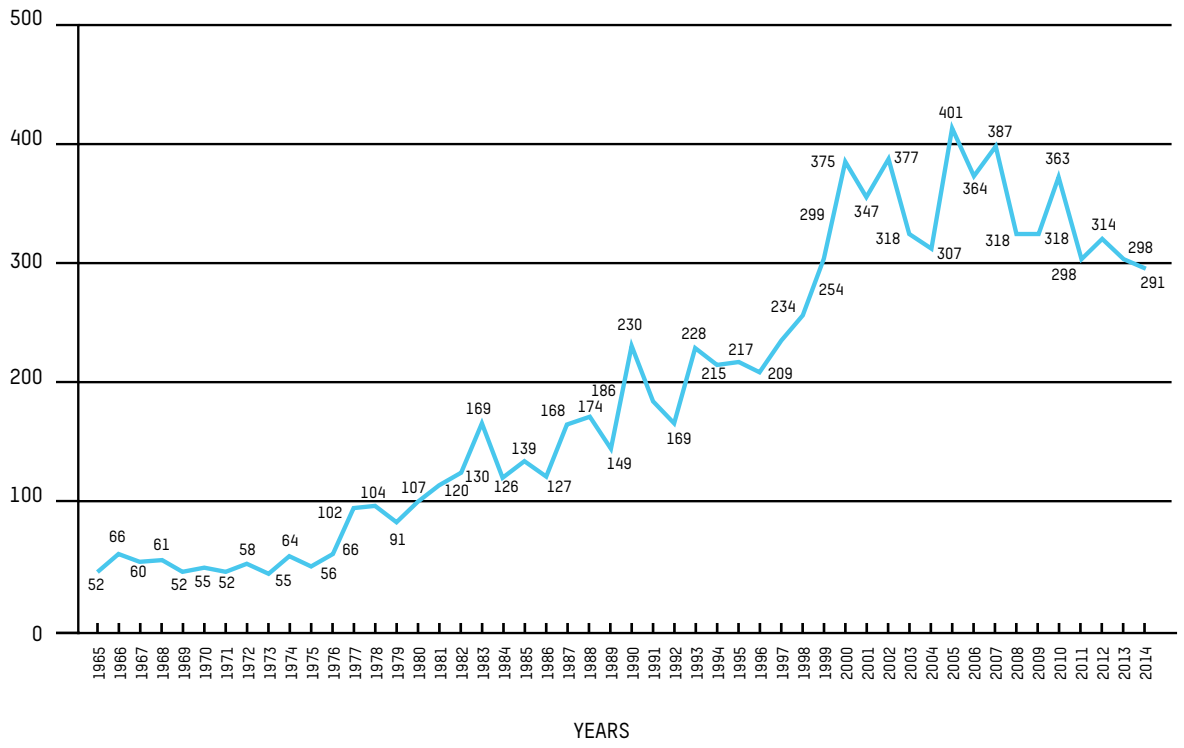
Unfortunately, there is also a long-term trend of aid shortages. From 2004 to 2013, on average, donors met less than two-thirds of humanitarian needs annually (see Figure 3),[5] and these shortages have had devastating consequences. For example, in late 2014, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) temporarily suspended food aid to 1.7 million Syrian refugees. And again in July 2015, WFP had to slash food aid to Syrian refugees due to funding shortfalls.[6] To some extent, we can attribute this chronic underfunding of humanitarian assistance to weak economies or broader cuts to official development assistance (ODA) in some major donor countries, such as Spain and Australia. However, the problem is mainly due to donors' failure to make humanitarian assistance more of a policy priority. For example, collectively, the members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC)—which accounted for the overwhelming bulk of humanitarian assistance from governments—provided $11.8 billion in humanitarian aid in 2012, but the wealthy OECD countries' military spending that year totaled $1.2 trillion, or more than 100 times as much.[7]

FIGURE 1: Forced migration, 2000–2014



Sources: UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Norwegian Refugee Council, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

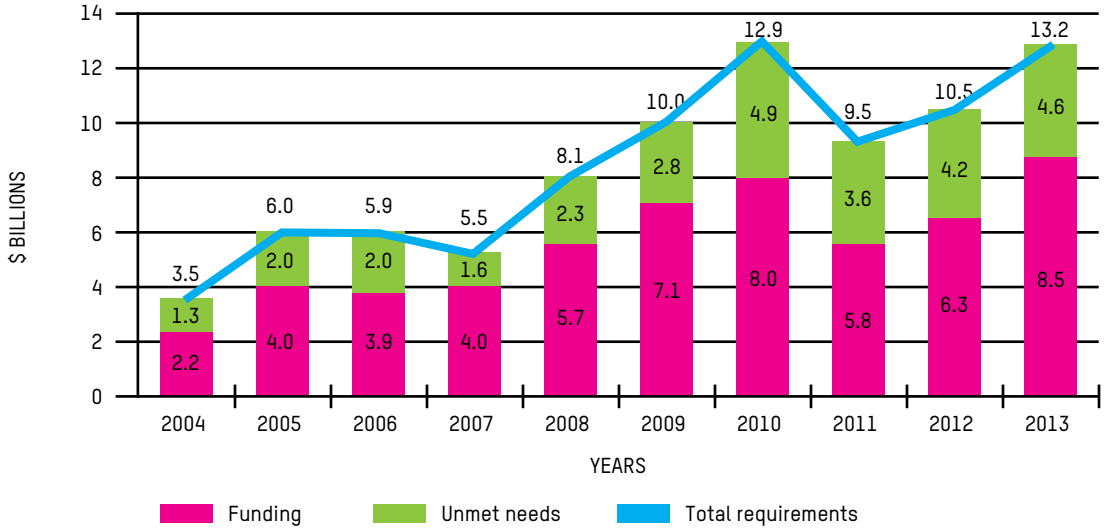
FIGURE 2: Disasters from climate-related natural hazards, 1965–2014



Source: Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) EM-DAT database, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, http://emdat.be/.

Note: Includes meteorological, hydrological, and climatological disasters: Meteorological = extreme temperature, fog, storm; Hydrological = flood, landslide, wave action; Climatological = drought, glacial lake outburst, wildfire. Some of the increases in the number of disasters and people affected over time may be due to improved reporting.

FIGURE 3: Demand outstripping supply, UN-coordinated humanitarian appeals, 2004–2013



Source: Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014*, Figure 2.2, 16.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

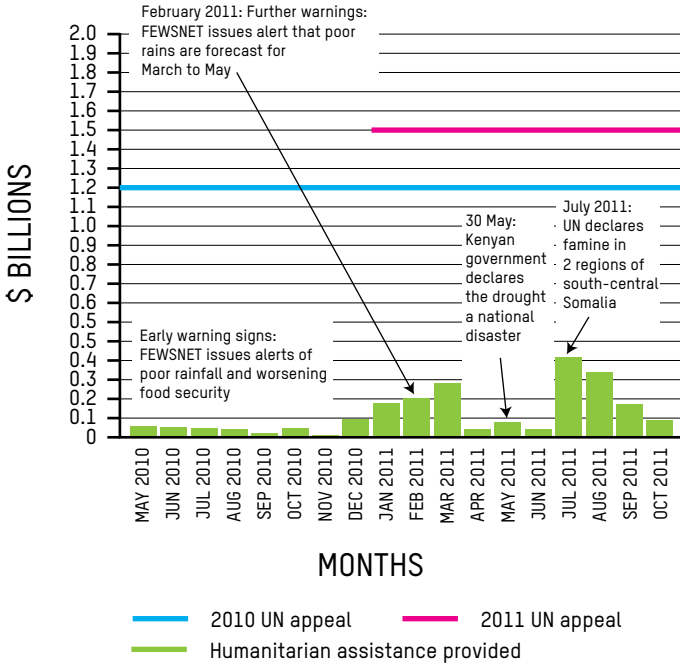
// Imagine if your local fire department had to petition the mayor for money to turn on the water every time a fire broke out.// [8]

—Former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland

Aid shortfalls can, in part, be attributed to the voluntary nature of humanitarian assistance—in contrast to peacekeeping operations, the UN does not charge member states a mandatory fee to cover its humanitarian aid.

Not only is there too little humanitarian assistance to meet needs, aid often arrives too late. According to The State of the Humanitarian System 2012 report by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), "There were concerns about delays in response in all three major emergencies since 2009—the drought and conflict in the Horn of Africa, the 2010 floods in Pakistan and the earthquake in Haiti."[9] Figure 4 shows the late and inadequate response to the Horn crisis.

FIGURE 4: Too little, too late: Horn of Africa drought response, 2010–2011



Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking Service.

Note: FEWSNET is the US Agency for International Development's Famine Early Warning Systems Network.

RESPONSE NOT ALWAYS BASED ON LOCAL NEEDS

// This food assistance ought to stop. This money should be given to infrastructure development. Seventy-five percent of families in this village receive rations for food each month but are unable to pull themselves out of poverty. Changes will be there definitely if families take their economic development into their hands.//

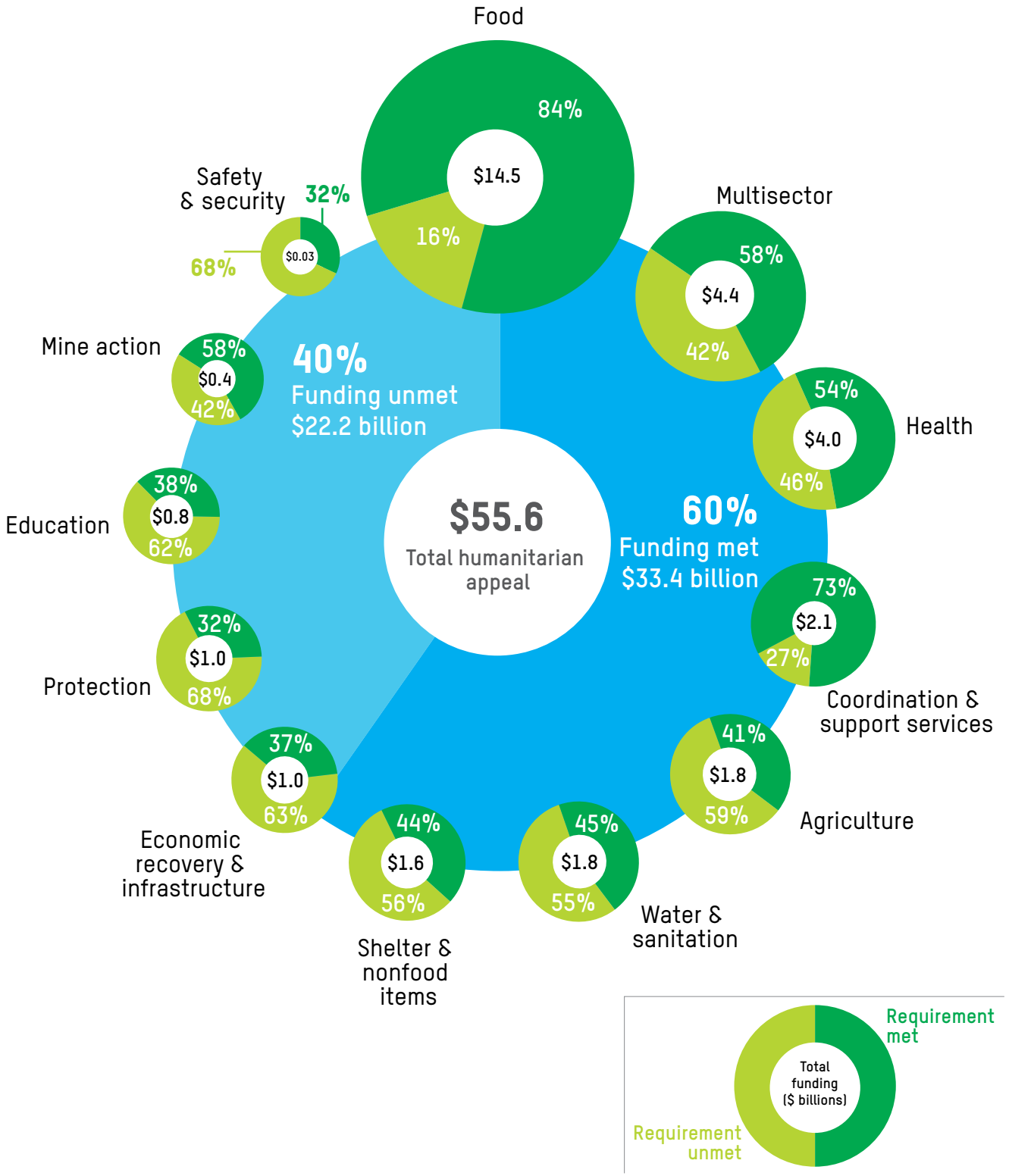
—Villager, Sri Lanka, quoted in Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid (Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012). 22.

Too often, donor countries' domestic priorities trump the needs of the recipient countries. The US, which is the largest donor of food and humanitarian assistance, provides mostly in-kind food aid drawn from US harvests, regardless of recipient-country supply conditions. This practice can reduce local prices and farm income if not carefully managed, and can lead to long delays in the arrival of aid. In Haiti, for example, during the first nine months after the 2010 earthquake, the US (which accounted for 78 percent of all food aid to Haiti during that period) provided 72 percent of its food assistance as in-kind aid and only 28 percent as cash transfers and vouchers. By contrast, Canada, France, Brazil, and the WFP provided assistance in the form of food purchases from Haitian farmers for use in both school feeding programs and emergency food baskets.[10]

The large role of US-sourced, in-kind food aid reflects a sizable problem of donors providing what they have on hand—such as boats, prefabricated shelters, ready-to-use therapeutic foods, or used clothing—whether or not these are most appropriate. Yet providing crisis-affected people with cash empowers them to decide how best to meet their needs.

Breaking down the gap between needs and assistance by sector reveals that often aid is not based on the local context but on donor priorities. For example, between 2009 and 2013, appeals for food assistance received 84 percent of the amount requested for that sector while figures for other sectors were much lower, falling below one-third for protection (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: Appeal requirements and proportions met by sector in UN-coordinated appeals, 2009–2013



Source: Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014*, 74.
Note: "Multisector" is predominantly used for multisector assistance to refugees.

LACK OF LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

// Before, everything was in our hands, but not now … now they are not sharing information with us; this makes us feel like they are keeping us like workers only. We feel we are not respected, and it hurts our self-esteem. Before we made decisions together; now they dictate from outside. //

—Local NGO leader, Thai-Burma border, quoted in Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid (Cambridge, MA, 2012: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012), 31.

Over the past 25 years, the UN has led significant reforms of the humanitarian system, based on lessons from complex emergencies like the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf crisis and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. Although these reforms have created some important improvements, there has been little progress on increasing accountability to affected people and little coordination with all levels of government and civil society in affected countries. For example, evaluations have found that the UN's Cluster System—which coordinates UN and non-UN humanitarian efforts within "clusters," such as food security and water, sanitation, and hygiene—is particularly poor at engaging local people and organizations.[11] In some cases, this system, which is designed to support local humanitarian actors, can go so far as to undermine those actors' capacity to respond independently.[12] For instance, in Cluster System pilot countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda, as well as in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "relevant authorities were barely consulted before the implementation of clusters and … the clusters systematically undermined local coordination efforts."[13]

MEDIA ROLE

Media attention greatly affects the level of aid provided. The response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami offers perhaps the most extreme example of the results of disparate media attention. The media offered saturated coverage of the calamity, and donors provided $2,700 in aid per person affected. This number compares with the $3 in aid to each person affected by the 2004 floods in Bangladesh, which received considerably less media notice, although the floods affected 30 million people, six times more than the tsunami.[14]

When reporting on humanitarian crises (particularly emergency response efforts), the media often portray international aid workers as the heroes, flying into the country to "save the day."[15] These aid workers are often from the country or region of the media outlet audience, or they at least look as if they could be. Journalists and editors do this because "proximity" and "bringing back home" or "regionalizing" the events portrayed make a story newsworthy and thus garner media attention.[16] A 2004 survey of almost 300 journalists who cover humanitarian crises conducted by the Fritz Institute asked respondents what makes a story about a humanitarian crisis most compelling from an editor's perspective; the second-most-selected answer, after a high death toll, was involvement of aid workers from the journalist's region.[17]

Without adequate coverage of local aid workers responding to humanitarian crises, the public isn't hearing enough about the critical, and often risky, role they play in saving lives. Since 2001, local aid workers have accounted for nearly 80 percent of aid worker fatalities.[18] The Aid Worker Security Database,[19] run by the consulting group Humanitarian Outcomes, illustrates the human cost of aid work—particularly for local aid workers.

Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Oxfam and its partners carried out research in affected communities in India and Sri Lanka. The overarching finding was that local people want the chance to guide their own relief and rehabilitation. *Credit: ©2007 Atul Loke / Panos.*

HARDLY AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Investing in resilience and disaster risk reduction in advance of shocks, such as earthquakes, floods, or hurricanes, or in the early stages of a crisis, is more cost-effective than humanitarian response when a disaster is in full swing. "These investments lessen needless suffering and loss of life and, by protecting livelihoods, help communities recover much more quickly," according to a study commissioned by the UK Department for International Development.[20] The report goes on to note that every $1 spent on disaster resilience in Kenya over a 20-year period resulted in $2.90 saved in the form of reduced humanitarian spending, avoided losses, and development gains. In Bangladesh, the equivalent figure was $5 for every $1 spent.

Despite such a favorable return on investment, and despite promises after the 2011 Horn of Africa drought by the UN, donors, national governments, and NGOs to do more to fund preventive measures, only 0.4 percent of total ODA over the past 30 years has been spent on reducing the risks of disasters.[21] As Figure 6 shows, in 2012, seven of the 10 leading humanitarian aid donors provided less than 10 percent of their overall humanitarian assistance to disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

Low-income people and communities, especially in countries prone to disasters, are at the greatest risk. By 2030, up to 325 million extremely poor people could be living in countries—mostly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—most prone to climate-related hazards.[22] The scientific consensus is that climate change will lead to more frequent and intense extreme weather events.[23] Disaster risk reduction is about preparing these communities and mitigating the impact of natural hazards.

LACK OF INVESTMENT IN LOCAL CAPACITY

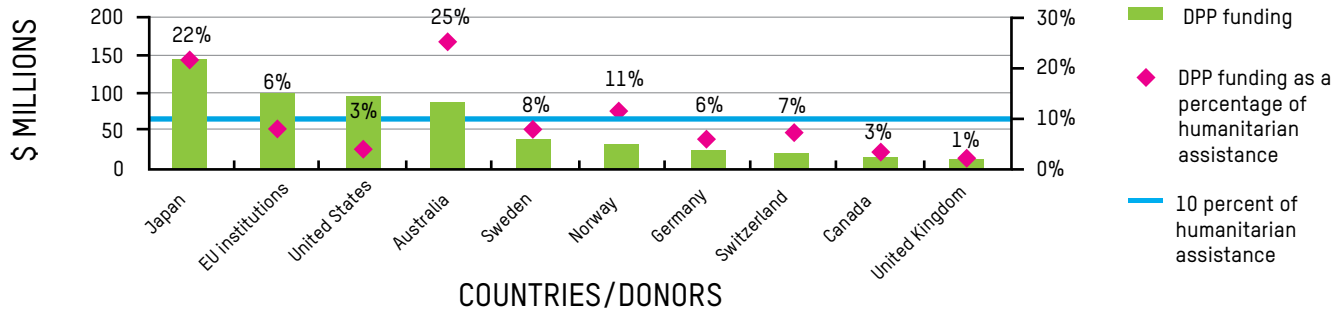
// I was attending a UN meeting and heard that the area we were working in was considered hard-to-reach. But it's on the main road and we travel there every day. Perhaps it's hard-to-reach by international rather than national standards. //

—An Oxfam partner in the Philippines, following Typhoon Haiyan

Local governmental and nongovernmental actors know the local context better than international organizations do, often have better access, and remain long after the cameras and international community have left. Locally led humanitarian action is better placed to ensure a smooth transition from emergency response to recovery and development, and it increases accountability to affected people. It is also frequently cheaper than a response with a big international footprint, as labor, procurement, and logistics costs all tend to be lower in crisis-affected countries. Yet, Oxfam research found that remarkably little humanitarian assistance goes directly to local and national NGOs (L/NNGOs) in crisis-affected countries. In 2012, only 2.3 percent of humanitarian funding went directly to L/NNGOs, while nearly 89 percent was managed and distributed by international NGOs (see Figure 7).

And this is no statistical fluke. Oxfam research indicates that over 2007–2013 only 1.87 percent of humanitarian assistance went directly to local actors, including national governments. While it is true that UN agencies and INGOs pass resources that they receive

FIGURE 6: Disaster prevention, preparedness, and risk reduction (DPP) funding from top OECD Development Assistance Comittee (DAC) donors as share of their bilateral humanitarian assistance, 2012



Source: Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014*, Figure 6.9, 78.

to local actors, little information is available on such second-level funding. Currently, there is no standardized reporting system that can trace funds from donors to all levels of recipients (see Figure 8). Moreover, the flow of funds alone does not reveal the quality of the partnerships involved, (i.e., whether they are between equals, if knowledge and skills are transferred, or whether local actors are involved in the design of interventions or are simply expected to implement projects designed elsewhere).

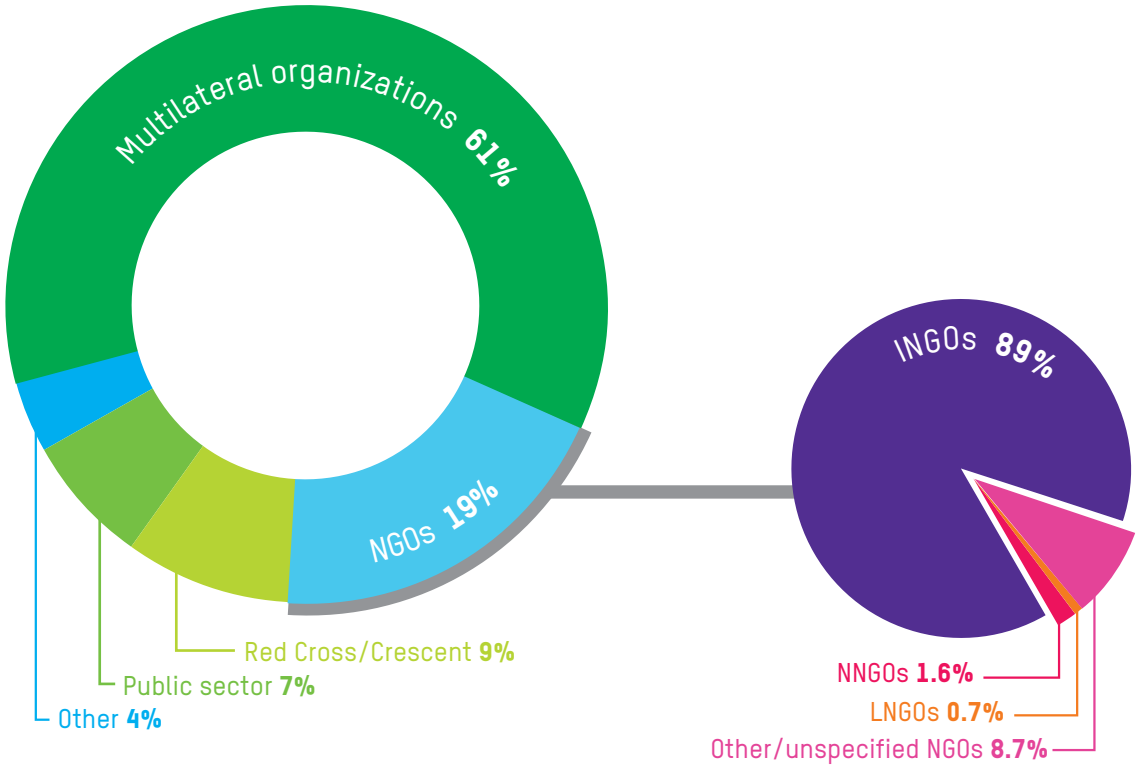
Even when donors do provide direct funding to local actors, they offer very little as core funding, which would help build local NGOs' long-term capacity. Instead, financial resources are usually tied to specific projects. For example, Oxfam research shows that in 2013, the vast majority of the funds the UN provided to local NGOs was earmarked, project, or program-based funding, with only $3.9 million for core funding that is essential to supporting local organizations' growth and sustainability.

Some donors have legal or policy restrictions on direct funding of L/NNGOs. This is the case for the European Union (EU), which is legally bound to fund only humanitarian NGOs registered in Europe.[24]

While the funded European NGOs do frequently work in partnership with L/NNGOs, these local organizations cannot receive direct funding even if they are best placed to respond. The EU recently evaluated this policy and decided to maintain it.[25]

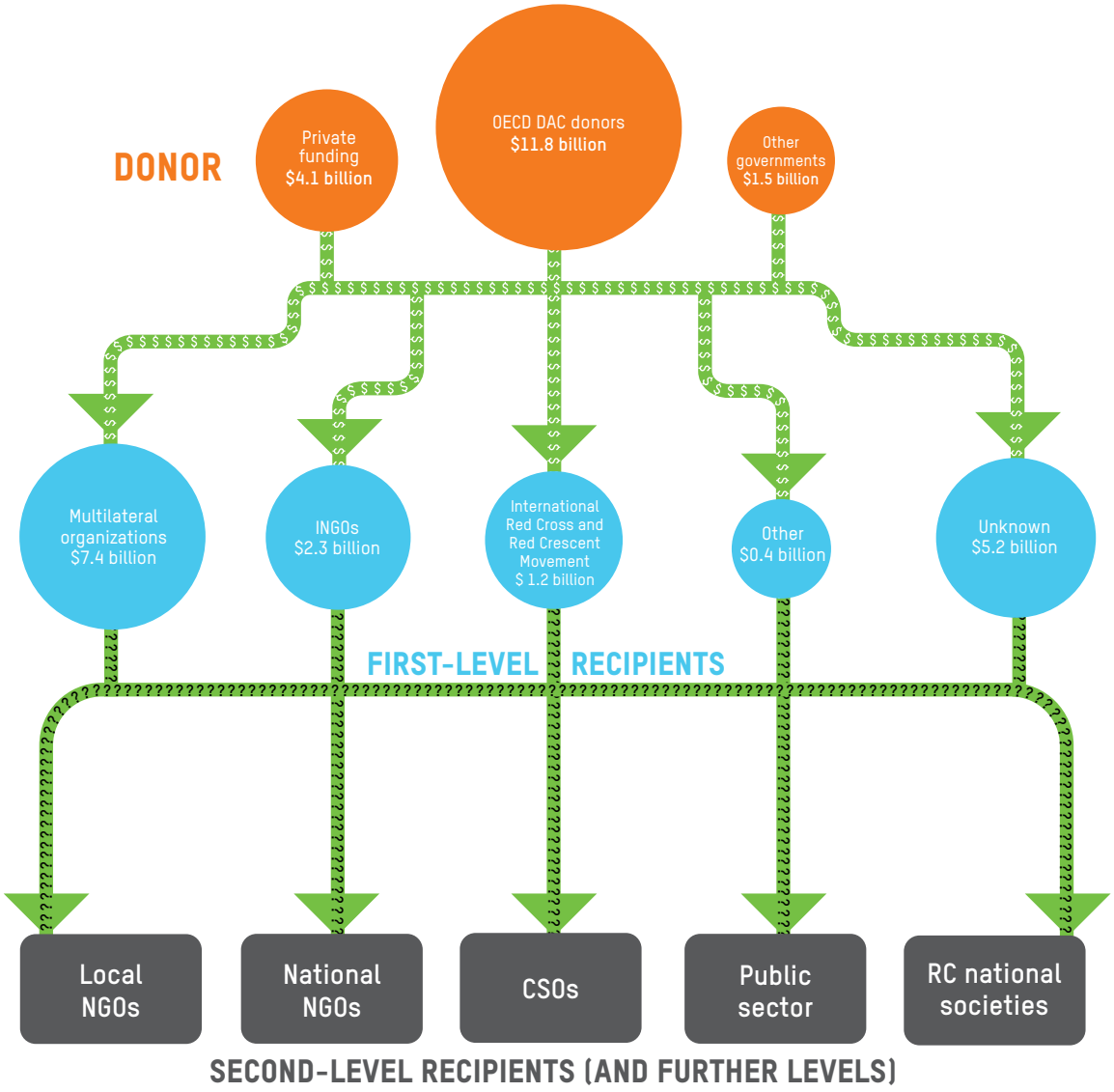
Local humanitarian leadership is certainly not a panacea and is not always prudent or possible. There are, and will continue to be, governments that are unwilling to lead humanitarian efforts or that are unwilling to lead in a responsible, equitable manner. This could be in conflict settings where governments are parties to the violence or where aid is being delivered along lines of political affiliation and religion, as recently witnessed during floods in Malaysia[26]). There will also continue to be mega-crises to which no one country can respond alone and crises that render the local government and people unable to lead response efforts. But even in those instances, the international community should look first to see the existing capacity on the ground before taking the lead in humanitarian action or steamrolling over existing local capacity. If leadership by international actors is necessary, resources should be devoted to developing local capacity in parallel to delivering the response.

FIGURE 7: First-level recipients of all donors' humanitarian assistance, 2012



Source: Adapted by Oxfam from Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014*, 5.
Note: "Red Cross/Crescent" refers to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. "Public sector" includes national and lower levels of government in both donor and recipient countries, and may also include situations in which the donor delegates implementation of a given activity to another donor country.

FIGURE 8: Humanitarian funding channels, all donors, 2012



Source: Adapted from Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014*, 57.
Note: CSOs=civil society organizations; RC=Red Cross/Red Crescent; DAC=Development Assistance Committee.

WHO'S WRONG?

The United Nations, the biggest international nongovernmental organizations (including Oxfam), and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement provide too few resources directly to local state and civil society actors. The principal donors are stuck in the status quo, lacking incentives to change and unable to conceive of a new business model if they cede responsibility and leadership to local actors.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE (DAC) DONORS

The DAC donors, including the US, the UK, and the EU, have consistently chosen to fund the UN over local actors. For example, DAC donors provided just 2 percent of their humanitarian aid directly to local actors in 2013—even less than in the three preceding years (see Figure 9). Of this 2 percent, over 90 percent went to national governments, with the tiny remainder going directly to L/NNGOs and other civil society organizations.[27] DAC donors' policies create a number of obstacles for local actors seeking to access their funds, such as extremely detailed and complex financial reporting requirements and vetting processes—aimed at preventing the diversion of resources to terrorist groups—that require collection of personal information about local aid workers that may compromise humanitarian agencies' independence from donors' political agendas. Also, some donors conduct lengthy audits of grantees before providing funds, and some have short timelines for funding. Both practices make it difficult for local actors, governmental and nongovermental, to grow in a sustainable manner. These obstacles reinforce the current system, whereby it seems easier and more efficient for DAC donors to fund the UN and major INGOs, which, in turn, may or may not fund local actors.

UN AGENCIES

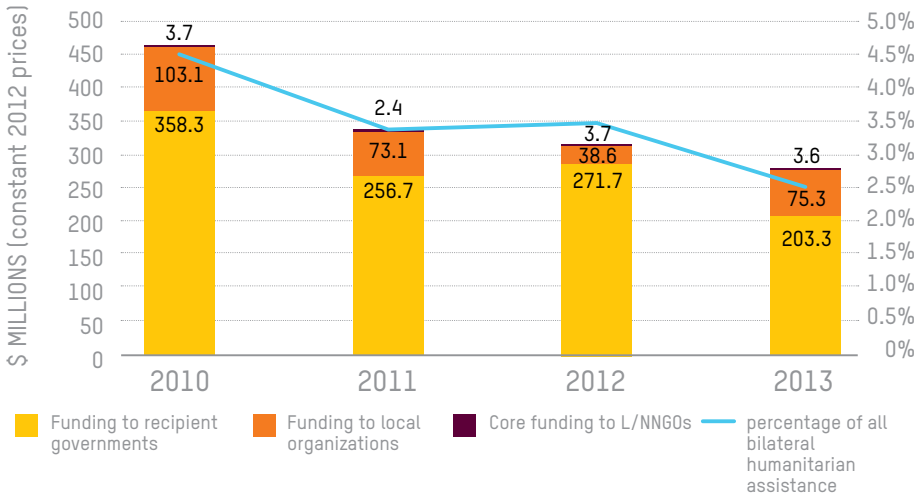
UN agencies are, by far, the largest first-level recipients of humanitarian assistance, receiving over half of all international humanitarian assistance from government donors in 2012.[28] UN and other multilateral agencies pass on a portion of this funding to implementing partners, including local actors, but, with the exception of the UN Refugee Agency and WFP, do not provide details on their partnership arrangements and funding.

INGOS

Little data is available on how much funding INGOs pass on to their local governmental and nongovernmental partners. The 2013 report of the Catholic Agency For Overseas Development's (CAFOD) on investing in national NGO response capacity is the only public report that presents data on this second level of humanitarian spending, and it focuses only on funding to civil society, not government entities, by five UK-based INGOs (see Figure 10). Our research found that, overall, the Oxfam confederation provided 24 percent of its humanitarian resources to local partners over the past three years. The substantial difference among INGOs as to how much humanitarian funding they pass on to local actors reflects the varying approaches that INGOs take toward working with, and working to strengthen the capacity of, those local partners.

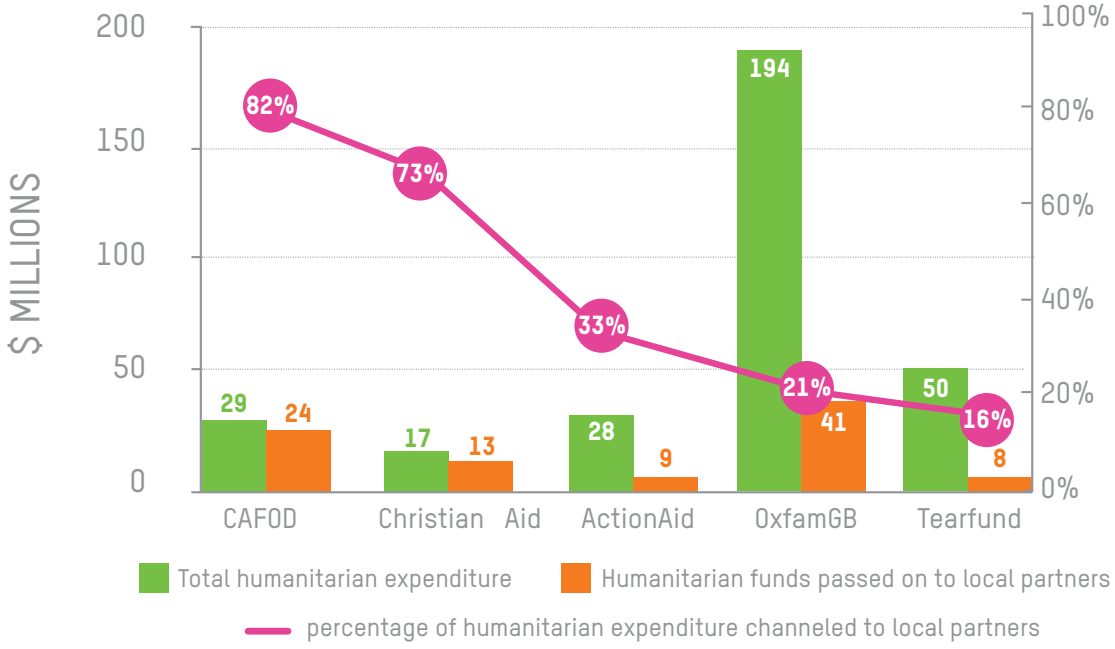
Some organizations, notably Christian Aid, implement their programming almost entirely through local partners, which they explicitly seek to strengthen. Other organizations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council[29] and Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF), exclude capacity building from their goals. MSF insists that when INGOs localize humanitarian assistance, they are "hanging local actors out to dry" by transferring risk to them and abandoning them, rather than empowering them.[30] However, Oxfam believes that local actors face the most risk regardless of whether local or international actors are leading humanitarian assistance efforts. In fact, Oxfam believes that the inherent risk to local actors is one of the reasons why it is local actors with the necessary capacity who should, whenever possible, be in the driver's seat of decision-making.

FIGURE 9: Direct humanitarian funding of local actors by DAC donors, 2010–2013



Source: Oxfam calculations from DAC CRS data.

FIGURE 10: Direct funding of L/NNGOs by INGOs as share of total humanitarian expenditure, 2011



Source: Lydia Poole, *Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in National NGO Response Capacity* (London: CAFOD, 2013), 19.
Note that data for Christian Aid are based on financial year 2012–2013.

RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement—the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the 189 national societies—received 9 percent of all international humanitarian funding in 2012 ($1.2 billion).[31] The IFRC calls itself "the world's largest humanitarian organization." Its model is to work through national societies "to reach individual communities,"[32] but in 2011, the IFRC directed only 11 percent of its total humanitarian expenditure to these societies.[33]

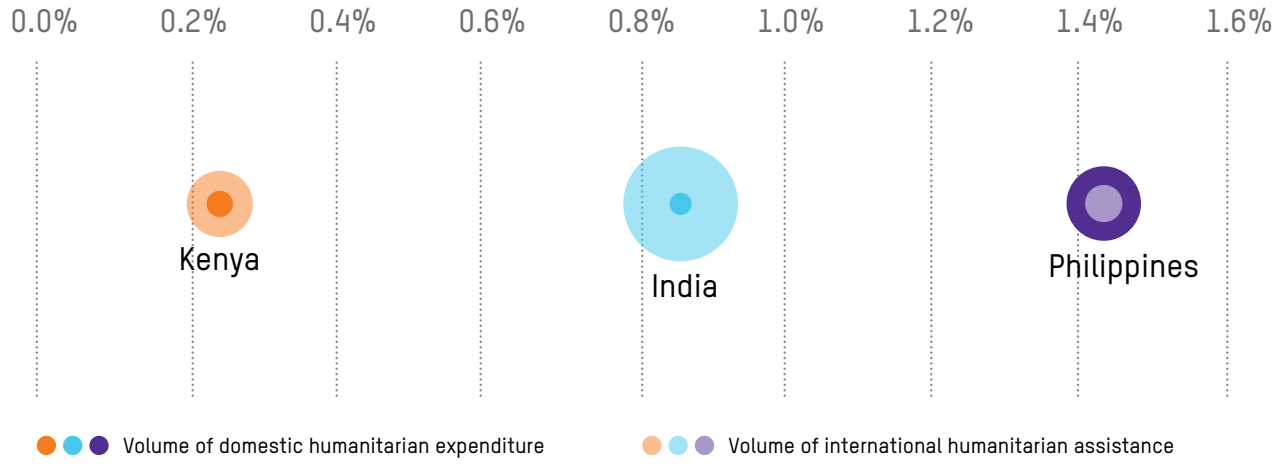
NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Under international law, states have the responsibility to protect the safety and rights of their citizens. According to a 1991 UN General Assembly resolution, in a humanitarian crisis it is the primary responsibility of states to provide assistance to affected people within their territory. The same resolution asserts that where a state's capacity is insufficient, it should seek international assistance.[34]

Although there will always be mega-disasters to which no country can reasonably be expected to respond alone, many governments are capable of not only responding to emergencies but leading the response to large-scale disasters (augmented by international assistance). However, the available data—which are admittedly quite limited—suggest that many of these governments devote only modest domestic resources to emergency preparedness and response and need to do a lot more (see Figure 11).

> // In emergencies, even if the government doesn't have the capacity to do all the work, coordination and leadership should always rest with them. It is their responsibility to carry out the response, and they are accountable for getting it right. They understand the needs and the logistical issues, and they are in a good position to provide coordination so there is no duplication of effort, and to sort out problems among the various actors. The international community should support governments to lead in emergencies. //
>
> —Government health official, Guinea-Bissau

FIGURE 11: Average annual domestic and international humanitarian contributions for India, Kenya, and the Philippines as a percentage of national budgets, 2008–2012



Source: Development Iniatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014, 41.

In addition to increasing domestic funding for humanitarian response, national governments must also meet the needs and uphold the rights of their citizens and ensure impartial delivery of assistance. In instances where national governments fail to respond effectively and fairly, international engagement is essential for delivering humanitarian assistance or helping local populations hold the government accountable, or both. This support is especially critical in countries where governments have placed restrictions on civil society to constrain their citizens' efforts to hold authorities to account.

A government's handling of an emergency may depend on the nature of the crisis (conflict versus "natural disaster"); the goverment's role in a conflict situation; the affected population's political, ethnic, religious, and other characteristics; the government's desire to appear self-sufficient to the international community; and numerous other factors. These factors may be more obvious in conflict settings, such as Darfur or Colombia, but they are equally evident in disasters from natural hazards, where there may be residual tensions following a conflict or ongoing discrimination or polarization in the community.

Oxfam sees a range of situations, in which the leadership role of national governments and international actors varies depending on the situation. In all instances, if national governments have the will and ability to take the lead to respond to crises, they should be empowered to do so—in partnership with national and local NGOs—and they should be allowed the space to take on as much of a leadership role as they are able to assume. Furthermore, international actors should look for all opportunities to help strengthen the capacity of local actors, including any pockets of government (at any level) possible.

RIGHTING THE WRONG

If we are to save more lives, the international humanitarian system must be turned on its head by shifting more power and resources to local actors. To make this shift we must (1) insist on more and predictable humanitarian funding, (2) increase direct humanitarian funding to national governments, as well as to national and local NGOs, (3) increase investment in disaster risk reduction before crises hit, and (4) do more to strengthen local capacity.

PROVIDE MORE AND PREDICTABLE HUMANITARIAN FUNDING

Oxfam is calling for more humanitarian funding overall. In 2013, the world spent $60 billion on ice cream, almost three times as much as was spent on humanitarian aid.[35] We also need predictable humanitarian funding. One idea is to have mandatory assessed contributions for humanitarian emergencies, similar to the mandatory assessments for UN peacekeeping missions charged to member states. Even the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas imposes mandatory dues for its member states.[36]

The level of funding that assessed contributions would make available would likely not cover all of the needs generated by large-scale, rapid-onset emergencies. But the mandatory funding would cover minimum and predictable levels of need for humanitarian assistance and capacity development, with additional voluntary contributions frequently still necessary.

INCREASE DIRECT HUMANITARIAN FUNDING TO LOCAL ACTORS

> // For the salary of a project manager deployed from Europe or the US, I could hire 50 outreach workers to talk to communities near the border about Ebola prevention. Which is more important? //
>
> —Oxfam partner, Guinea-Bissau

Oxfam is calling for the international community, by 2020, to provide at least 10 percent of its global humanitarian funding directly to local actors. Some of this funding could be used to strengthen local capacity in order to increase leadership—humanitarian response led by local actors in affected countries means that it is likely to be faster, cheaper, and better grounded in local realities.

The amounts and channels of direct funding will vary from country to country depending on circumstances, and it will be more complicated in confict-affected and fragile states. In many scenarios, however, humanitarian funding going directly to local actors, along with capacity strengthening where appropriate, should be increased.

When intervening, international actors should always be looking at existing capacity first, should never steamroll over existing capacity, and should focus more resources on strengthening national and local capacity, and on supporting civil society to hold governments accountable in their leadership role.

INCREASE INVESTMENT IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION BEFORE CRISES HIT

Oxfam is calling for $5 billion in annual ODA for disaster risk reduction (DRR). Because reducing risks is not solely a humanitarian challenge, more needs to be done to help countries build their resilience and reduce the risk of disasters and their impact—before disaster strikes.

As seen most dramatically in Bangladesh, DRR efforts pay enormous humanitarian returns on investment. For example, the frequency and high loss of life experienced during disasters from 1971 to the early 1990s led the country's government to enact an extensive legal and policy framework that defined the roles and responsibilities of agencies in crises at all levels of government. With financial support from donors, the government invested substantial national resources in DRR, including building a network of cyclone shelters and early warning systems. Bangladeshi NGOs engaged in preparedness and response activities, and INGOs provided capacity-strengthening support at the local level. As a result of these investments, the country has dramatically reduced casualties resulting from floods and cyclones. In 1970, the Bhola cyclone killed over 500,000 people. By 2007, when the much-higher-intensity Cyclone Sidr struck, the death toll was 3,300, or less than 1 percent of that of 1970.[37]

STRENGTHEN LOCAL CAPACITY

Oxfam is calling for international actors, including Oxfam, to do more to strengthen local capacity, including strengthening technical capacity (water and sanitation, shelter, humanitarian principles and standards) and organizational capacity (financial and human resources systems) capacity. INGOs should also be helping their partners raise their own funds; promote their work publicly, and develop joint strategies for humanitarian intervention. For their part, donors should increase the core funding provided to local actors, including payment of overhead costs, which donors already cover for international actors.

Too often, local NGOs on the front lines of humanitarian responses in crisis-affected countries play the role of mere program implementers, even though they are often best placed to respond to emergencies: they know the local language and culture, have knowledge of the local context, and can be held more accountable by local communities because they often live in those communities or nearby.

Based on our experience in the field, Oxfam offers this guidance on local capacity building:[38]

- It must be conceived of, designed, and implemented in close collaboration with national and local actors. International actors should support partners' efforts to build their own capacity.
- Efforts must be country-specific, taking into account local experiences, history, risks of disasters and conflicts, current capabilities (state and nonstate), capacity-building programs already underway, and political will.
- It can take place in periods of calm or in the midst of an emergency response. The model will differ according to context and partner capacity.
- International actors need to recognize just how complex capacity building is, and they need to invest in long-term relationships with partners, even more so where there is no educational system or rule of law, and discrimination is institutionalized.
- Capacity building should consider active-learning methods such as secondments that can be more effective than classroom-style trainings.
- Capacity building should address gender, international humanitarian law, and humanitarian principles.
- International actors should support the organizational capacity of both state and nonstate actors.
- Capacity strengthening does not need to be limited to North-South interventions. South-South initiatives can be equally or more effective. For example, Oxfam staff from Haiti have conducted trainings in Senegal. There can also be peer support mechanisms in a particular country.

Following the 2011 floods in Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia, Pat Kay, 55, mother of nine children, received loans from her Oxfam-sponsored savings group that helped her replant her rice field and buy food. *Credit: Sokunthea Chor / Oxfam America, 2011.*

CONCLUSION

Until governments address the injustice behind humanitarian crises, especially when it comes to conflict, humanitarian crises will continue to occur, causing loss of life and livelihoods and immense damage.

While world leaders must demand that states are held to account for their international obligations on assistance and protection, the global humanitarian system must do more to save the lives of men, women, and children.

The international humanitarian system created decades ago has saved many thousands of lives and provided vital services to countless millions more. Humanitarian aid workers have worked bravely and tirelessly, against enormous and increasing challenges, and with relatively few resources. Their accomplishments are irrefutable. Yet we need to do better. We face ever greater challenges in the future because of climate change and intractable conflicts. If we were to create a global humanitarian system today, we believe it would focus on national government leadership, supported and held accountable by civil society, and have resilient communities at its core, with international actors standing by to assist whenever necessary. This is not the system that we have today, but we must move toward such a system starting now. We must move toward a system that is more effective, efficient, and equitable and that puts responsibility, decision-making, and power where they should be: in the hands of the people affected most by a disaster, conflict, or other major crisis.

We cannot offer a fail safe formula for quantifying the resources that should be redirected. But it's clear that if we, the international humanitarian community, want to help local communities, we need to start trusting them more with their own future.

Since 2010, Oxfam and its Peruvian partner, the NGO PREDES, have been training people in Nueva Rinconada—an arid, hilly zone of poverty in Peru's capital, Lima—on how to prepare for a major earthquake. Led by women and young people, residents have conducted drills, planned evacuation routes, and learned how to help others in an emergency. Preparedness plans also focus on water and sanitation, and PREDES trains elected officials in the district on comprehensive earthquake response planning. *Credit: Percy Ramírez/Oxfam America, 2012.*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper was written by Marc J. Cohen, Kevin Ferguson, Tara R. Gingerich, and Shannon Scribner. Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Jeff Deutsch, Tony Evreniadis, Lauren Hartnett, Jane Huber, Meredith Larson, Kimberly Pfeifer, Carl Soares, and Lauren Wilson in its production. It is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

CITATION OF THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is copyright, but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with it for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for reuse in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured; please email your request to permissions@oxfamamerica.org. The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

This paper is based on a longer study: Tara R. Gingerich and Marc J. Cohen, Turning the Humanitarian System on Its Head: Saving Lives and Livelihoods by Strengthening Local Capacity and Shifting Leadership to Local Actors, Oxfam Research Report, (July 2015), https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/turning-humanitarian-system-its-head.

ABOUT OXFAM

Oxfam is an international confederation of 17 organizations networked in more than 90 countries as part of a global movement for change to build a future free from the injustice of poverty:

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)
Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)
Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)
Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)
Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)
Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)
Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)
Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)
Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)
Oxfam Intermón (Spain) (www.intermonoxfam.org)
Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)
Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)
Oxfam Japan (www.oxfam.jp)
Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfammexico.org)
Oxfam New Zealand (www.oxfam.org.nz)
Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) (www.oxfamnovib.nl)
Oxfam Québec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Please visit www.oxfam.org for more information.

NOTES

[1] Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015 (Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives, 2015), 4.

[2] UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), World at War: UNHCR Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2014 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015), 5. This figure includes refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons. See also Giada Zampano, Liam Moloney, and Jovi Juan, "Migrant Crisis: A History of Displacement," Wall Street Journal, September 22, 2015, http://graphics.wsj.com/migrant-crisis-a-history-of-displacement/.

[3] Monty G. Marshall and Benjamin R. Cole, Global Report 2014: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility (Vienna, VA: Center for Systemic Peace, 2014).

[4] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Summary for Policymakers," in Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects; Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, ed. Christopher B. Field et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11–13.

[5] There are problems with using UN appeals as a proxy for humanitarian needs, as they do not necessarily reflect the results of rigorous assessments and are issued only if external assistance is requested. Nevertheless, they are the broadest measure available. Multiple initiatives are underway to improve the quality of needs assessment; see Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014 (Bristol, UK: Development Initiatives, 2014), 110–13.

[6] See Reuters, "WFP to Cut Food Vouchers for Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon," The Guardian, July 1, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jul/01/syria-refugees-food-vouchers-cut-lebanon-jordan-wfp-un.

[7] For humanitarian assistance, see Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014, 4. Military spending is calculated from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute military expenditure database; see http://www.portal.sipri.org/publications/pages/expenditures/splash-expenditures.

[8] Jan Egeland, "Be Prepared," The Wall Street Journal, October 25, 2005, republished on Reliefweb as "Be Prepared: Op-ed by Jan Egeland on Launch of Global Emergency Fund," http:// reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/be-prepared-op-ed-jan-egeland-launch-global-emergency-fund.

[9] ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action), The State of the Humanitarian System 2012 (London: ALNAP, 2012), 54.

[10] Marc J. Cohen, Planting Now: Agricultural Challenges and Opportunities for Haiti's Reconstruction, Oxfam Briefing Paper 140 (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2010); Marc J. Cohen, "Diri Nasyonal ou Diri Miami? Food, Agriculture and US-Haiti Relations," Food Security 5 (2013): 597–606.

[11] Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, Katherine Haver, Dirk Salomons, and Victoria Wheeler, Cluster Approach Evaluation (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] Evaluation and Studies Section, November 2007), 16, 21–22, http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/4955.pdf.

[12] Julia Steets et al., Cluster Approach Evaluation 2: Synthesis Report (Paris and Berlin: Groupe URD and Global Public Policy Institute, 2010), 9.

[13] Streets et al., Cluster Approach Evaluation 2, 9.

[14] Sophia Ayele, The Indian Ocean Tsunami, 10 Years On, Oxfam Research Report (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2014).

[15] Susan F. Moeller, Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War, and Death (London: Routledge, 2002).

[16] Johan Galtung and Marie Holmboe Ruge, "The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers," Journal of Peace Research 2 (1965): 64–91; Owen Spencer-Thomas, "News Values," OwenSpencer-Thomas.com, http://www.owenspencer-thomas.com/journalism/newsvalues; Simon Cottle and David Nolan, "Simon Cottle and David Nolan: How the Media's Codes and Rules Influence the Ways NGOs Work," NiemanLab.org, November 16, 2009, http://www.niemanlab.org/2009/11/simon-cottle-and-david-nolan-how-the-medias-codes-and-rules-influence-the-ways-ngos-work/.

[17] Steven Ross, Toward New Understandings: Journalists & Humanitarian Relief Coverage (San Francisco: Fritz Institute and Reuters Foundation's AlertNet, 2004), 42, http://www.fritzinstitute.org/PDFs/Case-Studies/Media_study_wAppendices.pdf. Interestingly, however, there was a stark difference based on the origin of the respondent: 44 percent of responding journalists from North America felt that the involvement of aid workers from North America made a crisis story most compelling, while only 22 percent of responding journalists from outside North America felt so.

[18] See Eva Svoboda, "World Humanitarian Day: Counting the Costs," odi.org (Overseas Development Institute), August 18, 2013, http://www.odi.org/comment/7745-aid-worker-attack-world-humanitarian-day-whd.

[19] See Humanitarian Outcomes' Aid Worker Security Database, at https://aidworkersecurity.org/.

[20] See Appendix 2, "Helping Countries Protect Themselves Against Future Disasters," in 2010 to 2015 Government Policy: Humanitarian Emergencies (UK Department for International Development [DFID], 2013; updated 2015), https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-developing-countries-deal-with-humanitarian-emergencies/supporting-pages/helping-countries-protect-themselves-against-future-disasters.

[21] Jan Kellett and Alice Caravani, Financing Disaster Risk Reduction: A 20 Year Story of International Aid (London and Washington, DC: Overseas Development Institute and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013), 5.

[22] Overseas Development Institute (ODI), UK Met Office, and Risk Management Solutions, The Geography of Poverty, Disasters and Climate Extremes in 2030 (London: ODI, 2013), vii, including Figures 14, 16, and 18, http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/7491-geography-poverty-disasters-climate-change-2030?utm_source=ODI_Update&utm_medium=feed.

See also Tracy Carty and John Magrath, Growing Disruption: Climate Change, Food Security, and the Fight Against Hunger, Oxfam Issue Briefing (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2013), 10, http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/growing-disruption-climate-change-food-and-the-fight-against-hunger-301878.

[23] According to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, risks from heat waves, heavy rainfall, and coastal flooding are likely to increase. See IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers."

[24] Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 Concerning Humanitarian Aid, Article 7.1, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CONSLEG:1996R1257:20090420:EN:PDF; European Commission, General Guidelines on Operational Priorities for Humanitarian Aid in 2013, Commission Staff Working Document SWD (2012) 405 final, November 27, 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/strategy/ strategy_2013_en.pdf.

[25] The question of whether the EU should change this policy was raised in 2011 by the European Commission's Internal Audit Service. The EU humanitarian department (ECHO) contracted GERMAX International Consulting Services to conduct an analysis. The final evaluation report, released in January 2013, found that ECHO had only been able to collect very limited information regarding the use of funds channeled through LNGOs, which appears detrimental to overall accountability. Despite the limited information available, the report concludes that it is unlikely that closer working relations between ECHO with LNGOs would result in a significantly better value-for-money situation, as lower management costs of LNGOs would still have to be compensated by continuous capacity building. See GERMAX, Evaluation of the Potential Effectiveness and Efficiency Gains of Working Directly with Local NGOs in the Humanitarian Interventions of the Commission (2013), 12, http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/evaluation/2013/LNGO_Evaluation.pdf.

[26] Ngai Weng Chan, "Impacts of Disasters and Disasters Risk Management in Malaysia: The Case of Floods," in Economic and Welfare Impacts of Disasters in East Asia and Policy Responses, ERIA (Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia) Research Project Report 2011, no. 8, edited by Yasuyuki Sawada and Sothea Oum (Jakarta: ERIA, 2012), 503–51.

[27] These figures are based on the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) data.

[28] Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014, 59.

[29] Nicklas Svensson, Hannes Berts, Jens Schjörlien, Organisational Assessments of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in View of Possible Qualification as Sida's Framework and/or Strategic Partner Organisations: Norwegian Refugee Council, final report, 20111-0001308 (Swedish Institute for Public Administration International, 2013), 6, 12, http://www.nrc.no/ arch/_img/9180065.pdf.

[30] Sean Healy and Sandrine Tiller, Where Is Everyone? Responding to Emergencies in the Most Difficult Places (London: Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders, 2014), 4; Oxfam interview with Sandrine Tiller.

[31] Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance 2014, 5.

[32] See International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "Our Vision and Mission," ifrc.org, http://www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/.

[33] Lydia Poole, Funding at the Sharp End: Investing in National NGO Response Capacity (London: Catholic Agency for Overseas Development [CAFOD], 2013), 19, Figure 5.

[34] UN General Assembly, Annex I.4, in "Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations," A/RES/46/182 (1991).

[35] Edmund Cairns, For Human Dignity: The World Humanitarian Summit—The Challenge to Deliver, Oxfam Briefing Paper (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2015), 9.

[36] See International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), "Finances," iccat.org, at http://www.iccat.org/en/finances.htm.

[37] Government of Bangladesh, National Plan for Disaster Management 2010–2015 (Dhaka: Disaster Management Bureau, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, 2010), http://www.dmb.gov.bd/reports/npdm_final.pdf; Ubydul Haque et al., "Reduced Death Rates from Cyclones in Bangladesh: What More Needs to Be Done?," Bulletin of the World Health Organization 90 (2012): 150–56; Golam M. Mathbor, "Enhancement of Community Preparedness for Natural Disasters: The Role of Social Work in Building Social Capital for Sustainable Disaster Relief and Management," International Social Work 50 (2007): 357–69; Bishawjit Mallick and Joachim Vogt, "Social Supremacy and Its Role in Local Level Disaster Mitigation Planning in Bangladesh," Disaster Prevention and Management 20 (2011): 543–56.

[38] In addition to Oxfam field experience, this discussion is based on Oxfam interviews with Sara Pantuliano and John Borton, Overseas Development Institute; Peter Walker and Kimberly Howe, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University; Rick James, International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC); Nigel Timmins, Oxfam; Katherine Nightingale, Christian Aid; Nan Buzard, International Council of Voluntary Agencies; Jarrod Goentzel, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); and Steve Goudswaard, World Vision.

See also Jeremy Harkey, Experiences of National Governments in Expanding Their Role in Humanitarian Preparedness and Response (Somerville, MA: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2014); and Niloufer De Silva and Diane Ponasik, USAID's Local Capacity Development Efforts: Past and Present, report prepared for the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (Washington, DC: Learning Agenda on Local Capacity Development, 2013), http://www.developmentiscapacity.org/reports-findings/usaid-historical-study.

Cover photo: The Sabougnuma (meaning "good deed") women's savings group in Banakoro Village, Mali, holds its weekly meeting. Worldwide, such microfinance groups often provide members with loans from their pooled savings in times of emergency. Credit: *Rebecca Blackwell / Oxfam America*, 2009.

OXFAM

WWW.OXFAM.ORG

Oxfam is a worldwide development organization that mobilizes the power of people against poverty.

© 2016 Oxfam America Inc. Oxfam America is a registered trademark of Oxfam America Inc., and the Oxfam logo is a registered trademark of Stichting Oxfam International. 1504045

Printed on 100 percent postconsumer recycled paper.