

# Taking Action for the World's Poor and Hungry People

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## SPEAKER SUMMARY NOTE

<b>Session:</b>	<b>Improving Governance and Reaching the Poor and Hungry during and after Emergencies and Crises</b>
<b>Speaker:</b>	<b><i>Tom Arnold, Chief Executive Officer, Concern Worldwide, Ireland</i></b>
<b>Title:</b>	How to effectively reach and provide services to the poorest and hungry people during and after crises and emergencies

The number of humanitarian crises and disasters has increased substantially over the past two decades. The reasons include conflict, natural disasters and increased climatic variability. In response, a major humanitarian 'system', involving UN agencies, donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector companies, has been developed.

This paper starts by identifying key elements in the operating environment which influence the nature and scale of crises and emergencies. It outlines the major initiatives taken in recent years aimed at improving the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. It concludes by proposing a broader based approach to risk management which needs to be incorporated into programming approaches by governments and the wider humanitarian system.

My perspective in presenting the analysis of the problem and possible improvements in humanitarian responses is shaped by the experience of my organisation, Concern Worldwide. In the almost forty years since its foundation, Concern has responded to most of the major humanitarian disasters which have occurred over that period. We currently operate in thirty of the world's poorest countries, mainly in Sub Saharan Africa and Asia.

### **The Changing Context**

Three elements of the changing context merit particular discussion:

- The Political context, with its associated conflict and security dimensions;
- Climate Change and its implications for the poorest; and
- Chronic emergencies, resulting from a combination of pervasive poverty, poor governance and administrative capacity, chronic diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Complex political emergencies, particularly involving long running conflicts, inevitably produce humanitarian crises. Examples include Sudan/Darfur, Northern Uganda, Somalia and DRC. The political crisis in Zimbabwe risks producing a humanitarian crisis within the coming year.

The increasing focus by the international community on conflict prevention and mitigation in recent years has been welcome. But the current capacity of the international community to prevent conflict and to forge political settlements is limited. How this capacity can be improved, through new rules for global governance, increased responsibilities to regional actors, such as the African Union, and increased support to civil society actors working to prevent and resolve conflict, is a major challenge.

Conflict provides major challenges for all the main humanitarian actors seeking to respond to emergencies. Security of staff is an increasingly difficult issue. Under the Fourth Geneva Convention, governments have a responsibility to provide access for humanitarian workers to people affected by emergencies—but this does not always happen. Here also, the international community has demonstrated a combination of lack of capacity and political will to respond to such situations—and to

find practical ways of exercising 'The Responsibility to Protect' vulnerable populations which the UN approved at its Summit in 2005.

The implications of climate change for the poorest and hungry people is coming into sharper focus—and this conference should contribute to greater clarity as to the impact and possible solutions. It is evident that the poorest have the least capacity to cope with shocks of any sort—and that climate change is increasing the vulnerability of the poorest to such shocks. There is a real urgency to devise practical measures which can mitigate risk, such as more robust, shorter cycle farming systems.

I suggest that what we have in many African countries is a 'chronic emergency'—and it needs to be named and acknowledged as such. The component parts are weak governance, poor administrative structures, low tax revenues and low spending on health and education, a disease burden which is sapping human resources and capacity. It represents the classic 'poverty trap' we spoke about in the opening session of this conference. Practical policy priorities to break out of that trap need to be more clearly identified.

This—probably over simplistic—analysis of the problems must shape our thinking about the solutions. Devising more effective responses to humanitarian crises and disasters is not enough. We must increasingly link our commitment to more effective humanitarian responses with a broader approach that addresses underlying causes and vulnerabilities if we want to seriously address the causes and impacts of poverty.

That is the background against which I now want to discuss some of the main international developments in the field of humanitarian response which have been occurring in recent years.

### **Initiatives to Improve Humanitarian Responses**

I mentioned earlier that a major humanitarian 'system' has developed over the past two decades. It involves a large number of different actors, ranging from UN agencies, donor agencies, NGOs. Many of these agencies work well together with structured relationships and clearly defined roles. But there was also a sense that this 'system' could be improved. That was the political impulse behind the Humanitarian Reform Process which was commenced in 2004 and which I will speak about in a moment.

But before doing that, it is important that one central reality is acknowledged. It is this: that notwithstanding the range of actors in the international humanitarian 'system', it is national governments and local capacities which provide the keystone to responding to disasters in developing countries. Any overall vision to improve services to the poorest and hungry during and after crises and disasters must include the strengthening of these capacities in addition to improving how the international system operates.

In outlining the requirements for reform of the humanitarian system in March 2005, Kofi Annan identified three areas:

- More predictable human and financial response capacity;
- Strengthened field coordination structures; and
- Predictable right of access and guaranteed security for humanitarian workers.

He also proposed a series of measures to bring about improvement in each of these areas. Progress has been made in some areas.

To increase the UN's capacity to respond more quickly and effectively to emergencies, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has been established. This is a revolving fund, with a target amount of \$500 million, which enables the UN to act both for sudden onset emergencies and on some of the so-called 'forgotten emergencies' which don't receive much attention—or funding.

Humanitarian 'clusters' of specialised UN agencies and NGOs operate in a number of areas—such as nutrition, water and sanitation, logistics. The aim of these clusters is both to improve the effectiveness of humanitarian response but also to raise standards. This represents progress even though there have been teething problems.

Systematic efforts are being made to improve coordination at country level, both within the UN system and between the UN, the NGOs and the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

Broadly speaking, this humanitarian reform process is pointing in the right direction and more work needs to be done to build on the progress which has been made.

### **Risk Management in Programming**

The increasing complexity of the operating environment highlights the need to link humanitarian responses into a broader approach that addresses the underlying causes of poverty and the vulnerabilities of poor people. It also highlights the importance of using risk management as a key part of the contextual analysis which should underpin programming.

In recent years, Concern has been developing its approach to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in its programmes. We are doing so with the aim of reducing the impact of disasters on the people with whom we work and increasing the sustainability of our development interventions.

We use a working definition of risk as being the frequency of exposure to a hazard or hazards, and the magnitude of their impact on people's assets and livelihoods. We take a broad view of hazards. In addition to the orthodox hazards associated with weather, diseases and pests, we explicitly recognise conflict, poor policies, poor governance and the impact of climate change as posing hazards to the communities with whom we work.

We have consequently taken a broad view of risk, incorporating the concept of 'extensive risk' which is characterised by large numbers of localised events which affect relatively few people—but due to their cumulative impact over years of cyclical recurrence can erode the assets of the poor.

We believe that this approach is helping us do better contextual analysis, leading in turn to better quality programming, better integration of sectors such as health, education and livelihood improvement—and ultimately more sustainable development impacts.

While we are at a relatively early stage in drawing conclusions about the value and practical application of this approach to programming, we believe it merits more broad based discussion—and possibly, in due course, adoption by other humanitarian actors. It appears to complement one of the key insights of this conference—that we are dealing with different categories of poor people and that programmes aimed at finding pathways out of poverty need to take account of their different exposure to risk and vulnerability. And that preventing poor people from becoming 'ultra poor' should be a real and urgent priority.