

Considerations for Responding to Natural Disasters in Situations of Fragility and Conflict

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Introduction¹

A natural disaster represents an external shock with a potentially significant impact on a country's economy and environment, a people's livelihoods, a government's fiscal position, and a nation's social fabric. Essential to an effective post-disaster response is not only the prompt availability of financial and technical resources but also determined national leadership, functioning institutional structures and processes, and sufficient local capacities.

Addressing the varied impacts of a natural disaster is challenging enough in stable and prosperous states. And so, responding to a natural disaster is particularly daunting a task in situations where state and societal institutions are weak and have other competing priorities; states and sub-national governments do not provide protection and access to justice; markets do not provide employment opportunities; and communities have lost the social cohesion that contains conflict—the hallmarks of a state where political and criminal violence flourishes.

Over the past several years, some of the major natural disasters have occurred in fragile and conflict-affected countries, notably the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 which seriously affected Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods in Pakistan, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, and the 2008 series of hurricanes and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. In such situations, the impact of a natural disaster is inevitably more pronounced, and evidence suggests that disasters exacerbate the weaknesses of political, economic, and social systems that are due to prolonged conflict.²

The 2011 World Development Report³ highlights some fundamental differences between fragile and violent situations and stable developing environments. First is the need to restore confidence in collective action before embarking on wider institutional transformation. Second is the priority of transforming institutions that provide citizen security, justice, and jobs. Third is the role of regional and international action to contain external stresses. Fourth is the specialized nature of external support needed.

This paper argues that what is essential for a country to break repeated cycles of violence is equally if not more important for the national and international response to natural

¹ The authors are grateful for the advice and support they received from Henriette von Kaltenborn-Stachau from the World Bank's Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Group in preparing this paper.

² United Nations Development Programme, *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Disaster Prevention and Recovery*, Evaluation Office (2010).

³ World Bank, *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development* (Washington, DC, 2011), <http://wdr2011.worldbank.org/>.

disasters in fragile and conflict situations.⁴ Taking the World Development Report as our point of departure, we reflect on its insights from successful transitions and discuss the adequacy of the tools that have been adapted successfully across country contexts. The paper is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the subject matter. Rather, it aims to stimulate international debate and enhance collective action to improve disaster preparedness and response for when the next disaster strikes.⁵

Specific Post-Disaster Challenges in Fragile and Conflict Situations

There are some significant differences between natural disasters in situations of fragility and violence and those in stable developing environments. To mention but a few:⁶

- *Needs*: The World Development Report indicates that poverty is higher in countries affected by violence. Other research indicates that destruction and mortality due to major earthquakes are higher in fragile (and poor) states.⁷ Furthermore, there is often significant population displacement as a result of conflict, and prolonged conflict undermines a community's coping capacity. All these factors add to the humanitarian and recovery needs emanating from a natural disaster.
- *Capacity*: Fragile and conflict-affected countries often have weaker institutions, poorer governance, and more limited capacity. Moreover, leaders and government officials may perish in the disaster, further reducing available capacity.
- *Coverage*: Post-disaster assistance that focuses only on the disaster area risks creating discontent from unaffected but equally poor fragile or violent areas.
- *Timeline*: Post-disaster assistance is usually shorter-term in nature whilst, as the World Development Report points out, a transition process out of fragility can last more than a generation.
- *Leadership*: Leadership at the national level and/or in the disaster-affected area may be contested in a fragile or conflict situation, and citizens' trust in their leaders may be low.
- *Sensitivity to context*: A natural disaster can open new societal rifts, or widen already existing ones. At the same time, the post-disaster response can help or

⁴ Drawing from the experience of responding to the Indian Ocean tsunami in conflict-affected countries, the UNDP review (*Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Disaster Prevention and Recovery*) equally indicates that it is no longer possible to address disaster issues without also addressing the associated conflict dimension.

⁵ We do not address external stresses such as the infiltration of organized crime and trafficking networks, spillovers from neighboring conflicts, and economic shocks.

⁶ See also United Nations Development Programme, *Disaster-Conflict Interface: Comparative Experiences* (2011), and Villar Former, Mireia, and Markus Kostner, "Post-Disaster Needs Assessments and Post-Conflict Needs Assessments: Similarities and Differences," presentation at the orientation and awareness session on the development of a common framework for post-disaster and post-conflict needs assessments (Brussels, May 7, 2010).

⁷ Keefer, Philip, Eric Neumayer, and Thomas Plümper, "Earthquake Propensity and the Politics of Mortality Prevention," Policy Research Working Paper No. 5182 (World Bank, 2010). In a similar vein, United Nations Development Programme, *Disaster-Conflict Interface: Comparative Experiences*.

- hinder a broader transition process. “Building back better” thereby acquires a societal dimension in addition to its established physical dimension.
- *Political and security dimensions*: Political processes and lack of security in fragile and violent settings can undermine the recovery process. The post-disaster response needs to include political and security considerations and requires continued adaptation to the evolving situation.

From a review of several recent cases we conclude that these differences have on the whole not been adequately considered in or integrated into the international community’s post-disaster response. Though the sheer time pressure to respond to a major natural disaster undoubtedly contributes to a narrower focus on physical, economic, and financial assistance, the more binding constraint may be institutional. For instance, the World Bank views fragility and conflict and disaster reduction and recovery as two distinct lines of business. UNDP notes that while it is recognized that conflict can undermine the capacities of governments and communities to address natural disasters, and vice-versa, its own programming in the two areas does not reflect this fact.⁸ And the Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning by the European Commission, the United Nations Development Group, and the World Bank discusses commonalities and differences in situations of disaster and of conflict but not any combination of the two.⁹

We now turn to possible elements of a differentiated approach to post-disaster assistance in fragile and conflict settings. In so doing, we follow the World Development Report and its framework.

Introducing Sensitivity to Fragility and Violence in Post-Disaster Assistance

Analysis of country cases carried out for the World Development Report reveals five insights from successful transitions. We discuss each of them by considering the particular circumstances of a natural disaster during a transition process.

First, the state cannot address complex violent challenges alone. Successful national leaders have built momentum through “inclusive enough” coalitions—at both national and local levels.

An effective post-disaster response requires determined national leadership from mobilizing domestic and international resources all the way to taking corrective action

⁸ “Several factors contribute to separate programming in this area. First, the political sensitivities associated with conflict-related crises are much higher than those related to natural disasters. UNDP country offices are of the view that a complex crisis approach may delay programme implementation in both areas. Second, it is perceived that conflict and peace-building require more focused attention and cannot be tied to disaster risk reduction programmes. Third, [...] the political space available for working on issues related to internal violence and conflict is sometimes limited. Fourth, mobilizing resources for joint programming has been difficult for the country offices, and funds are more often available for conflict-related support” (UNDP, *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Disaster Prevention and Recovery*, 39).

⁹ European Commission, United Nations Development Group, and World Bank, “Joint Declaration on Post-Crisis Assessments and Recovery Planning” (2008).

when indicated by a robust monitoring and evaluation system. Given the enormous time pressure for saving lives and reestablishing livelihoods, decisive action is essential. Where the state's legitimacy and authority are contested and trust in leaders and state institutions is low, such decisiveness depends on the ability of leaders to establish a coalition that is inclusive enough to allow decisions to be taken swiftly and firmly so that the recovery and reconstruction effort can proceed unhindered. In turn, a well managed disaster response can help to increase confidence in governance structures.

Situations vary, but the inclusion of the private sector, civil society, informal and traditional institutions, and women in inclusive-enough coalitions helps to acquire broader societal legitimacy, as does the use of multisectoral community empowerment programs. Gaining the confidence of these stakeholder groups often requires policies that signal a break from the past and instill trust that the new directions will not be reversed.¹⁰ In this regard, it may be particularly important for leaders to pursue an inclusive and interdisciplinary approach that addresses not just the impact of a natural disaster but also the causes and consequences of the underlying violence. Aid providers need to be cognizant of the leaders' need to establish a strong-enough coalition and the time it may take to build it. This does not imply that no aid should be provided until such a coalition is built. Rather, aid providers need to be inclusive as well lest exclusion of certain groups from the post-disaster response may inadvertently translate into exclusion from the political process.

At the same time, even the worst natural disasters can provide opportunities for transitions from conflict and fragility, and international actors can help to facilitate the process of coalition building. Taking advantage of such opportunities requires purposeful cooperation between the international aid and diplomatic communities. In the case of Aceh, the international community helped to facilitate the negotiation of a peace agreement in 2005 while the post-tsunami recovery effort was in full swing. Another example is regional and international diplomatic action after Cyclone Nargis which opened space for the provision of aid; the two processes were linked closely through a Tripartite Core Group which comprised the Government of the Union of Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the United Nations.

Second, some early, tangible, results need to be delivered in a transition period to restore confidence.

Experience has demonstrated that, given pervasive capacity and institutional constraints in many fragile and conflict-affected countries, "priorities and sequences go hand in hand. If existing capacity is focused on priority items in sequence (rather than dispersed at everything all at once), some items can move ahead rapidly, and once they have enough momentum to sustain gradual progress, the country can move on to tackle the next items."¹¹ The risks associated with operating in a fragile context notwithstanding, this concept is severely challenged in the aftermath of a major natural disaster when the

¹⁰ Civil society and other groups are not, however, without their own interests, and aid providers need to be aware of these.

¹¹ World Bank, *World Development Report*, 171.

affected population is traumatized, the need to deliver results is greatest, and local capacities are overwhelmed.

The default option for delivering aid in such instances is commonly the non-government execution model, mostly through international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In general, this model can fill the immediate capacity gap and deliver results more quickly and more effectively than any other. However, cocooning such efforts into parallel channels that facilitate short-run accomplishment by bypassing national organizations and institutions can undermine institution-building in the longer term.

In fragile and conflict situations, it is particularly important, therefore, to undertake local institutional and capacity development from the outset, in order to strike a pragmatic balance between the quick delivery of results and the strengthening of institutions and governance required for a transition out of violence. This should include the (more purposeful) use of local personnel and community systems.¹² Central to this balance is the careful crafting of an exit strategy. International agencies and NGOs that have both humanitarian and development mandates have demonstrated that bridges from relief to early results and institutional transformation can be built.¹³ Such bridges are of even greater importance for post-disaster aid in fragile and conflict situations.

In spite of, or perhaps because of the inevitable heavy reliance on non-government execution, government itself needs to deliver early results, even if few in number, to build citizen trust. Otherwise, especially when a disaster occurs in a geographic area that is politically contested, the legitimacy of non-state actors may be strengthened if they are able to provide assistance more effectively than the government. Government actions that enhance social justice for excluded disaster- and conflict-affected populations appear particularly relevant. These can include (reform) measures that facilitate the aid effort and ensure proper targeting of affected groups, in addition to delivering select high-priority services directly.

Delivery of some key actions in and of itself is not enough, however. As the World Development Report indicates, “citizens who lack credible information about progress made and challenges ahead will likely attribute the lack of visible improvements to a lack of political will and can lose trust in—and even turn against—those they believed or

¹² Perhaps by default as much as by design, community involvement still tends to be considered as hindering the speed of aid delivery, even though successful examples from post-tsunami aid in Aceh and post-conflict assistance in Afghanistan and Timor-Leste demonstrate the contrary. Two years after Cyclone Nargis, for instance, aid providers continued to be the main decision makers when it came to determining both the type of aid project and the process of implementation. As a result, there was a significant disjuncture between aid provision and the needs of certain groups in the community. See Tripartite Core Group, “Post-Nargis Social Impacts Monitoring: April 2010” (July 2010) and World Bank and ASEAN, “Community-based Recovery in the Ayeyarwady Delta,” Discussion Note for the Livelihoods Sector, Draft (2008).

¹³ The phased approach to rebuilding the health sector in Timor-Leste prior to and after independence in 2002 is a particularly noteworthy example; see Bailey, Laura, “State (Trans-) Formation in Timor-Leste: Building Institutions that Contribute to Peace,” Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries Group, Occasional Note #3, (World Bank, 2008).

elected.”¹⁴ Timely, accurate, and easily understandable communication is equally important for the post-disaster recovery effort. The information needs of conflict-affected and other marginalized groups merit particular attention and call for the application of appropriate methods (and language) and technology (such as community radio).

Third, reform of security and justice institutions and employment generation need to be prioritized.

The World Development Report points out that in fragile and violent environments people’s top priority after basic security and law and order is their own economic revival. Indeed, the importance of issues like land governance¹⁵ and job creation¹⁶ in the post-disaster response has been recognized. However, post-disaster aid in these settings needs to strengthen more explicitly than in a normal environment national institutions and governance to provide citizen security, justice, and jobs, all crucial to break repeated cycles of political and criminal violence. Prioritizing security, justice, and jobs does not mean addressing all the wide-ranging functions that will be needed in these areas as societies develop—but simply a focus on basic progress in these areas early in transitions to build resilience from violence.

A lack of security may be a constraint at the most fundamental level, hindering the access of aid providers to the disaster-affected area. Rioting and looting may destroy or divert scarce aid resources. This calls for closer cooperation between aid providers and security actors than is commonly the case. Moreover, dedicated security measures may be warranted as an integral part of a transition out of violence or fragility, but these in turn need to recognize and complement the aid effort.

Violence-affected groups lack access to justice in many fragile situations, and vulnerable groups (the poor, women, children, the elderly) often have little access to suitable counsel. These groups are also likely to be among the most affected by a natural disaster. Ensuring their due access to relief and recovery is, thus, not a matter of targeting or accountability only. For justice to be rendered, broader measures may need to be put in place quickly to reduce impunity and ensure the rights and safety of those affected by a disaster. Some aid providers may view activities such as linking the police to other justice institutions and using non-formal and traditional justice systems as longer-term issues that should be dealt with once the emergency and early recovery period is over. In contrast, we argue that such activities require attention for stabilizing a doubly fragile situation with in turn a positive impact on the implementation of the aid effort.

Recovery and reconstruction need to generate jobs to compensate for the loss of livelihoods and life savings from violence and disaster. Reform measures that alleviate key bottlenecks identified by the private sector can be quick and effective wins. Labor-

¹⁴ World Bank, *World Development Report*, 124.

¹⁵ Jha, Abhas K., “Reconstruction after Disasters: Ten Lessons (Learnt the Hard Way),” Presentation (2010).

¹⁶ Independent Evaluation Group, *World Bank Group Response to the Haiti Earthquake: Evaluative Lessons* (2010).

intensive public works programs are popular in fragile and post-disaster situations, but are rarely sustained beyond a two- to three-year horizon. This may be more acceptable in a normal post-disaster setting in a reasonably strong economy. As the World Development Report highlights, however, youth unemployment is consistently cited in citizen perception surveys as a motive for joining both rebel movements and urban gangs. Job creation programs, thus, need to go beyond short-term material benefits by providing a productive role and occupation for youth. Supporting self-employment and small businesses (for instance, through access to affordable finance, easing registration, and local purchases) is equally important for creating jobs and generating incomes.

Fourth, pragmatic, “best-fit” approaches adapted to the local political context need to be adopted, rather than “one-size-fits-all” technical solutions.

Common to the post-conflict and post-disaster response is the temptation to apply “one-size-fits-all” technical solutions. In the rush to help after disaster strikes, it is too often the quantity and speed rather than the quality of humanitarian and recovery aid that matters. And yet, even in stable situations, stories abound about tents being too flimsy to withstand storms, seeds and farming implements being ill-suited for a particular agro-ecological zone, or imported food seriously affecting local production. The same is true for technical assistance, the international community’s general response to the pervasive capacity deficit in fragile situations. Because they are constrained by short contracts and under pressure to deliver outputs, technical advisors often bring with them a focus on transplanted best practices from other disaster experiences, which can undermine the search for tailored and context-specific approaches. A balance of local expertise and personnel, hopefully versed in local conditions, may help to remedy this situation.

Practical approaches are also important for monitoring the flow and use of funds, to enhance transparency, and to reduce the risk of corruption. Transplanted databases can be set up quickly, but may require a level of sophistication that is not achievable in a weak capacity context.¹⁷ Even when they function effectively, they can only trace the funds to the activities that are financed, but not assess the impact on the ground. To fill this critical information gap, a range of tools have been developed through which citizens can hold state institutions and aid providers accountable and make them responsive to their needs, such as citizen report cards, community scorecards, and expenditure tracking surveys, as well as using short message service through cell phones. In fragile situations, such social accountability tools can contribute to build citizens’ trust in the state and the aid effort, and warrant more purposeful inclusion in the post-disaster response than has hitherto been the case.¹⁸

¹⁷ See, for instance, Agustina, Cut Dian, *Tracking the Money: International Experience with Financial Information Systems and Databases for Reconstruction* (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2008).

¹⁸ A notable exception is the post-disaster social impacts monitoring in Myanmar and the Philippines. See World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, *Analyzing the Social Impacts of Disasters* (2011).

Fifth, countries that have moved away from violence have passed through a succession of transitions over time, not one “transition moment.” The process of transforming institutions and governance for sustained resilience to violence is slow.

A post-disaster response needs to be fast to save lives and restore livelihoods. Yet, as the World Development Report points out, historically, no country has transformed its institutions in less than a generation, with timings in most aspects of basic institutional development ranging from 15 to 30 years. Thus, among the greatest challenges for post-disaster assistance in fragile and conflict settings is the need to recognize this long time horizon of a transition process.

This challenge is three-fold. First, it is of critical importance that short-term post-disaster actions not undermine longer-term transition actions. Second, adequate assistance needs to continue beyond a normal reconstruction period. A poignant example is Aceh. Six years after the tsunami, most donors have withdrawn from Aceh, even though challenges to political stability and security remain, power-sharing arrangements between Aceh and Jakarta are still to be solidly defined, and peace is still not sufficiently consolidated.¹⁹ Third, since multiple transitions are required for breaking the cycle of violence, set-backs in a transition process should not affect the post-disaster response since this would only amplify the nefarious effects of aid volatility on service delivery and institutional performance.

In general, fragile transition processes are not the moment to pursue far-reaching political or economic reforms, as the World Development Report stresses. However, natural disasters may not only constitute transition moments themselves, they may also open specific reform opportunities. These are country-specific, but three stand out: reforming emergency response policy to allow for a faster and better coordinated response; reforming land policy to avoid those who have been affected severely by disaster getting hit twice by not being able to return to their place of livelihood or settle in a new place of their choice; and developing and implementing disaster risk reduction policy to reduce the impact of future disasters.

Many natural disasters are recurrent, such as floods and tropical storms. For many countries, it is, thus, not a question of whether another disaster will strike, but when. Consequently, the need to invest in adequate disaster risk reduction/management measures is of even greater importance for fragile or conflict-affected countries, to build greater resilience into systems and institutions so that the next cycle of disaster does not lead to the next cycle of violence. This need cuts both ways, however. First, assistance during a transition process needs to pay more attention to risk management and reduction

¹⁹ *Multi-Stakeholder Review of Post-Conflict Programming in Aceh: Identifying the Foundations for Sustainable Peace and Development in Aceh* (December 2009). It is also noteworthy that within the first five years after the tsunami, funds for the post-disaster reconstruction effort were estimated at seven times the funds committed to reintegration and peace-building (IDR 9.0 trillion), whilst the estimated economic cost of the conflict (IDR 107.4 trillion) was almost twice the cost of damage and losses from the December 2004 tsunami (ibid.).

efforts and related capacity building. Second, to achieve effective results, disaster risk management efforts cannot afford to ignore investing in conflict prevention and aiding the transition process.²⁰

Enhancing the Post-Disaster Response in Fragile and Conflict Settings

Guiding principles for a post-disaster response are routinely prepared during the damage, loss, and needs assessment process. These principles are adapted to context but generally include a focus on poverty reduction, community-based modes of implementation, transparency and accountability, and results. Such principles are necessary but not sufficient for fragile and conflict environments.

Fragile and conflict settings vary greatly, and so does the engagement of the international community. In Haiti, a large-scale effort to build the country's institutions had been underway prior to the 2010 earthquake. In Pakistan, a multi-agency Post-Crisis Needs Assessment for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been completed just prior to the 2010 floods. In contrast, in Aceh, conflict had been raging between the warring factions by the time the tsunami hit, with very few aid providers present in parts of the province. And in Myanmar, the international response has been severely curtailed by the sanctions regime that had been in place prior to Nargis, and the authorizing environment.

The previous section has identified a number of measures that can be taken by both national stakeholders and their international partners to make post-disaster assistance in fragile and conflict settings more appropriate. This relates both to individual projects and strategies and programming that have the potential for wider socioeconomic transformation.²¹ This section contains additional specific suggestions for the international response.

Integrating Conflict Sensitivity into the Aid Response and Beyond

Because no two situations are alike, the World Development Report puts forward a differentiated political economy framework to²²: (1) specify the type(s) of violence occurring; (2) indicate the types of transition moments that are coming up, and the opportunities they present; (3) determine the stresses a country faces that increase the risks of violence occurring or reoccurring; (4) identify the stakeholder groups that are crucial to building confidence and transforming institutions as well as the signals, commitment mechanisms, and results that are most important to these groups; and (5) ascertain the paramount institutional characteristics and challenges. To this we add (6) the type(s) of natural disaster the country is exposed to.

²⁰ See also UNDP, *Evaluation of UNDP Contribution to Disaster Prevention and Recovery*.

²¹ UNDP, *Disaster-Conflict Interface: Comparative Experiences*, 9.

²² World Bank, *World Development Report 2011*, 111.

Table 1: Spectra of Challenges and Opportunities

Types of Violence: Civil and/or criminal and/or cross-border and/or sub-national and/or ideological	Type of Natural Disaster: Earthquake, floods, tropical storm, tsunami, volcanic eruption
Transition Opportunity: Gradual/limited to immediate/major space for change	Key Stakeholders: Internal vs. external; state vs. non-state; low-income vs. middle-high-income
Key Stresses: Internal vs. external stresses; economic vs. political stresses; high vs. low level of divisions among groups	Institutional Challenges: Low vs. high capacity constraints; low vs. high accountability; exclusion vs. inclusion

We argue that analyzing the country context along these lines, either in preparation of a possible disaster or during the immediate post-disaster assessment phase, and integrating the findings in the planning and implementation of the aid effort, would go a long way toward enhancing the adequacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of the international community’s post-disaster response. This would be particularly important considering the high turnover of international staff during a post-disaster response. Depending on the situation and pre-disaster engagement of the international community, a dedicated conflict analysis could produce important additional insights.²³

Since countries undergo multiple transitions out of violence, this framework, as well as the aid response (and any exit strategy from a parallel/non-government to a government execution model), should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure continued appropriateness, in particular at different transition moments or when stresses are noticeably changing.

Moving from Coordination to Combined Programs

Coordination between the main international actors in a post-disaster period has been difficult enough in the past. To aid a country that suffers from a natural disaster whilst undergoing a transition process requires a quantum leap in international cooperation in two directions.

First, humanitarian and development partners ought to ensure consistency between and promote the necessary continuum from the humanitarian response to recovery, reconstruction, and development. To date, in only two post-conflict cases, Georgia in 2008 and Liberia in 2004, did humanitarian and development partners fully integrate their efforts.²⁴ On the post-disaster side, humanitarian and recovery/reconstruction assessments

²³ As was the case in Pakistan, where a crisis analysis framework had been prepared as part of the Post-Crisis Needs Assessment for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

²⁴ In the case of Georgia, the revision of the United Nations Flash Appeal and the Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) were conducted in parallel to ensure consistency between humanitarian, transitional, and development-oriented actions. The budget of the revised Flash Appeal was consolidated with that of the JNA to provide government and donors a complete picture of funding needs. United Nations and World Bank, “Georgia Joint Needs Assessment” (2008). This consolidation also facilitated the mobilization of resources for the revised Flash Appeal.

have generally been undertaken in parallel or in sequence, but have not been adequately integrated.²⁵

Second, as argued in the World Development Report, combined action by external actors across the security, diplomatic, humanitarian, and development disciplines under one overall program framework is necessary to support national institutional transformations. For a post-disaster response, such combined action would be a significant departure from past practice. Post-disaster-only solutions will inevitably falter, and a specialized suite of programs is needed in fragile environments, combining elements of security, justice, and economic transformation in addition to addressing the direct impacts of the disaster. Such a response would also need to come to terms with the dichotomy between impartial humanitarian aid and the political economy of institution- and state-building.

Managing Risks

Post-disaster situations are commonly characterized by a rapid international response. Even so, it can take a considerable amount of time until commitments are translated into activities (and even more so, impact) on the ground. Agency procedures often play a big part in such delays. As the World Development Report points out, historically, many procedures in international agencies were developed for more stable environments. For example, the procurement procedures of the international financial institutions were based on the assumption of ongoing security, a reasonable level of state institutional capacity, and competitive markets, none of which can be taken for granted in a fragile or violent context. Regardless of time pressures, practical difficulties of contracting and the lack of competitive markets in vendors risk delaying any post-disaster response significantly. Various agencies have, thus, adopted procedures that would allow a more nimble response to natural and man-made crises and disasters.²⁶ However, their application rarely reflects the particular challenges of protracted fragility, much less of responding to a natural disaster in such contexts.²⁷

The more adequate use of (existing) simplified agency procedures is a necessary but insufficient ingredient to achieve faster impact on the ground. Even when the need to save lives and reestablish livelihoods is paramount, political and risk considerations ultimately determine the post-disaster response in situations of fragility and conflict. Such considerations play out in various forms.

At its most basic, the question is about the amount of financial support to be provided. For instance, in a context of various forms of sanctions, initial donor commitments to the United Nations' US\$477 million Cyclone Nargis Response Plan in Myanmar were

²⁵ The post-disaster needs assessment in the Philippines after Typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng in 2009 made an attempt to consolidate humanitarian and recovery/reconstruction needs at the sector level.

²⁶ Such as the World Bank's Operational Policy 8.0 and Bank Procedure 8.0, *Rapid Response to Crises and Emergencies* (2008).

²⁷ See, for example, World Bank, "Rapid Response to Crises and Emergencies (OP8.00): Progress Report," Report No. SecM2009-0200 (2009).

comparatively modest.²⁸ In a related vein, the risk to donors of action (especially the potential misuse of funds) can outweigh the risk of inaction (such as renewed violence or institutional collapse) even for a post-disaster response. This “dual accountability dilemma”²⁹ can heavily influence the speed and the flow of funds.³⁰

In both cases, the dilemma is clear: post-disaster assistance to and through weak national institutions is needed if they are ever to strengthen and help to lead the transition out of violence, but their weakness in itself poses fiduciary and political risks to donors.

A range of approaches to engage with national institutions exist that deal with differing levels of fiduciary and reputational risk, such as the use of independent monitoring agents and external financial management and procurement agencies. The pre-selection of qualified firms for highly disaster-prone countries could also speed up the emergency response considerably. At the same time, a mixture of state and non-state, bottom-up and top-down approaches has proven to be an effective underpinning for longer-term institutional transformation, with functions shifting to national institutions over time, and has shown to both build confidence in the state and deliver results.

Ultimately, though, donors need to be willing to accept a higher level of risk. As the World Development Report indicates, “because returns to successful programs are high, international assistance can afford a higher failure rate in violent situations. This is not how most assistance works, however: donors expect the same degree of success in risky environments as in secure ones. A better approach is to adapt private sector principles for venture capital investment to support for fragile and violence-affected situations: pilot many different types of approaches to see which work best; accept a higher failure rate; evaluate rigorously and adapt quickly; and scale up approaches that are working.”³¹ This stance has even greater relevance when responding to a natural disaster in a fragile or conflict situation.

Enhancing the International Response

As indicated above, the post-disaster response in situations of fragility and conflict suffers from a lack of integration of the two streams within some important international agencies. Using conflict specialists on post-disaster response teams in these settings as well as targeted staff training would be important steps. However, existing rigidities may

²⁸ About three years after the disaster, almost three-quarters (around US\$350 million) were funded; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Flash Appeal: Myanmar Flash Appeal (Revised) 2008,” funding status as of March 17, 2011, <http://www.reliefweb.int/fts>. In contrast, total damage and losses of Cyclone Nargis were estimated at about US\$4 billion and recovery needs over a three-year period at US\$1 billion. Tripartite Core Group, “Post Nargis Joint Assessment” (2008).

²⁹ World Bank, *World Development Report*, 201.

³⁰ For example, early discussions about aid to post-floods Pakistan in 2010 included a proposal about conditioning pledges on the establishment of an acceptable governance arrangement.

³¹ World Bank, *World Development Report*, 32.

require a more far-reaching organizational restructuring to achieve better orchestrated action.³²

More generally, a broader consensus about the specific requirements of fragile and conflict-affected countries as they aim to address the impacts of natural disasters needs to be built to guide international action. In this regard, joint reflection on possible links between the Hyogo Framework for Action, which guides disaster prevention as well as preparedness measures, and the findings and recommendations emanating from the World Development Report would merit attention, as would the incorporation of the principles and approaches proposed in this paper in the guidance for Post-Disaster Needs Assessments. Moreover, a political economy analysis as outlined above for fragile and conflict-affected countries that are also disaster hotspots would doubtlessly enhance the preparedness of the international community, and of the countries themselves, especially if undertaken jointly. Such analysis could in turn become a confidence building measure.

Conclusion

International partners—bilateral donors, multilateral organizations, and international non-governmental organizations alike—have built sensitivity to fragility and violence into their post-disaster efforts at various occasions. However, they have done so largely individually, not collectively. The model that we propose is, thus, different from what we have seen to date. It aims to deliver a post-disaster response that addresses the impacts of the disaster and at the same time purposefully both cushions a disaster's impact on a country's social and institutional fabric and supports the country's transition process out of violence. Though different, this model would not slow down the post-disaster response as long as international partners have a common vision for addressing a natural disaster within a context of fragility, and are ready to overcome the different goals, planning timeframes, decision-making processes, funding streams, and risk calculus across disciplines to implement this vision.

³² This organizational challenge is not unique to donor and agency bureaucracies, however. It is reflected in the institutional setup of many governments in disaster-prone countries as well, where closer cooperation between disaster and peace bodies may merit equal attention.