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# The Future Issues and Challenges for Humanitarian Action and the Role of Southern NGOs

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## The Future Humanitarian Issue and Challenges

- 1 The frequency of disasters is growing for the past 30 years, with marked rise in climate related disasters and this trend is expected to remain as the major threat to mankind and nature in next one to two decades. Globally, on an average, almost 250 million people are affected by 'natural' disasters every year and by 2015 this could grow to an average of over 375 million people per year. Poorly constructed and poorly managed infrastructure like dams, roads, bridges and buildings particularly houses and community buildings pose threat to the communities living in hazard prone and fragile environments. Gradual shifts in weather patterns or sea levels, due to climate change will put 46 countries a home of the 40 % of the world population at increased risk of being affected by violent conflict on natural resources. Main causes of conflict could be scarcity of resources like water, fertile land, pasture, and energy. It is evident that the poor and those having less control over resources will suffer the most.
- 2 Negative impacts of globalization are increasingly posing threats to the livelihoods of the poor in the South. During 2008, due to Europe's increased use of food items in production of bio-fuels and other global reasons the poor suffered from rise in the food prices. Northern governments and donors' failure to invest in sustainable development in the South, particularly in agriculture, environment and disaster risk management had created chronic malnutrition among the poor, which may result in acute humanitarian crisis within next few years. Keeping in mind the current trends, during the next five years alone, the humanitarian needs to respond natural disaster will be two-fold and it will overwhelm the current humanitarian capacity.

- 3 The current trends in increasing conflicts, war and violence in the Southern fragile states, are obvious threats to the people's lives. The political and economic interests of the developed nations have been attained through imposing wars on the fragile Southern nations, resulting in the devastating and long lasting impacts on the lives of innocent poor. As a result the innocent people of the developed nations are also becoming victims of the conflicts. The trends indicate that the conflicts are happening in a vicious cycle and there are no chances for these to subside in the coming 20 years or so. It is important to realize that, only one to two percent people are killed due to direct fighting and majority of them dies due to the affects of conflicts and war. In addition, tackling with the psychological trauma and the sufferings of the poor women, children and vulnerable would be a major challenge to the humanitarian community during the next ten to twenty years. A number of states like Pakistan are under threat of terrorism and are having fragile societies and economies, suffering from the poor governance. There will be increased insecurity and it would be a challenge for humanitarian community to handle the consequences.
- 4 Poverty is on rise and it increases vulnerabilities, and when the poor are exposed to disasters they are at high risk of being killed or made destitute. Poor live in more fragile and densely populated areas, have unsafe houses and lack financial, social, political, natural, physical and human assets. Majority of the poor live in the world affected by conflicts, lack of basic health, water and sanitation facilities, insecure land tenure and areas exposed to natural disasters. Average number of deaths per disaster in the poor countries is around 1,052, whereas this is only 23 deaths per disaster in the developed countries (IFRC, 2007). Reducing the vulnerabilities of the poor in the South, would require long term sustainable pro-poor development programmes, aimed at improving peoples' livelihoods, food security, climate change and disaster risk management.

## Role of Southern NGOs in The Future Humanitarian Action

- 5 Local NGOs, CSOs, and Volunteers have better access, knowledge and capacity to operate in emergencies, and having long term presence and relationship with the local communities in the disaster prone areas. This places local civil society organizations particularly the established NGOs in an important position to support international humanitarian actors to operate in emergencies particularly in complex emergencies. Local NGOs of the South operate in hostile environments, where the issues of governance, accountability, political complexities and fragility of the governments, security and unrest exist and will continue to prevail during the next decade and beyond. There is a large number of local NGOs in the South, but only a small percentage of those are operational and sustaining their programmes and organizational capacities. Majority of the Southern NGOs are donor dependant and are struggling to survive.
- 6 Local communities are the first responders to emergencies, and they are the key actors in disaster risk management and mitigation. There is a need to build their capacities and making men and women active players in disaster risk management and emergency response in the foreseeable future. This will require long term efforts to develop resilient communities through developing sustainable livelihoods and their

capacities to mitigate and respond disasters. Local NGOs can play a major role in this regard.

- 7 Governments of 168 nations through Hyego Framework of Action had committed to “reduce vulnerabilities of their citizens to natural disasters”, but a few could lived up to these commitments. Government actions on disaster risk reduction are negligible or limited to emergency response and highly technical projects, having no or limited role in developing local capacities. There is a need to built Southern governments’ capacity to develop policies, procedures and institutional setups to respond and mitigate disasters.
- 8 National NGOs shall build grassroots institutions in disaster prone areas, to promote social cohesion, peace and to develop disaster resilient communities. The cohesive disaster resilient communities will be able to cope with emergencies through their capacities and local support systems, and at the same time they would be able to minimize the risks through informed steps for disaster risk reduction.
- 9 There is a need to develop sustainable livelihoods of the local communities particularly the most vulnerable and women, so that the people have secure incomes, food, assets and skills to take appropriate measures for ensuring disaster risk reduction and coping with emergencies.
- 10 Being on ground, the local and national NGOs have to take lead role in emergencies and shall support international humanitarian community and the government to carry out relief operations. Local NGOs can initiate humanitarian response within the shortest possible time and if they have developed grassroots institutions on ground the response would be quicker, impartial and it would be easy to ensure humanitarian principles and accountability.
- 11 It would be the responsibility of the national NGOs to mobilize communities and civil society for challenging and engaging with the government to develop and improve policies and institutional framework for disaster risk management and humanitarian system in the countries and to promote community based disaster management.

## Future Relationships of Southern and Northern Humanitarian Actors

- 12 There are few NGOs who are enjoying long term institutional support and having empowered relationships with the INGOs and Northern government donors. Despite a number of initiatives, by the global humanitarian community to improve partnership practices and building capacities of NGOs in south, it can be concluded that empowered partnership would not happen in the foreseeable future. There is a need for a responsive international humanitarian system, promoting local capacities in humanitarian action and provide financial and technical support to build long term humanitarian and institutional capacities of the Southern NGOs.
- 13 The northern governments have to fulfill their responsibility to cut global emissions and provide financial assistance for containing global warming. Oxfam recommends that northern governments shall provide at least US\$ 50 billion per year to help poor countries adapt to climate change (Oxfam, 2009). So there is a need that Northern government donors, the UN, and humanitarian agencies must invest in disaster risk

reduction, disaster mitigation to avoid and at least minimize the occurrence and impacts of climate related disasters.

- 14 International NGOs and donors must develop long term partnership with local NGOs, and support promotion of community based disaster risk management practices. Capacities of the local civil society shall be improved through empowered partnership, based on the principles of partnership agreed by the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP). To achieve this, Northern governments and INGOs shall substantially increase their support in developing capacities of the Southern governments and national NGOs to reduce vulnerability.
  - 15 A new business model for improving international humanitarian system is under consideration and widely accepted by international humanitarian community. This model would ensure building local capacities to support future humanitarian action. International humanitarian agencies must work with the local NGOs and governments to build their capacities to mitigate disasters and respond emergencies.
  - 16 Abbreviations/Acronyms :
  - 17 NGO Non Government Organization
  - 18 GHP Global Humanitarian Platform
  - 19 INGO International Non Government Organization
  - 20 UN United Nations
  - 21 CSO Civil Society Organization
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