



Humanitarian aid

in Finnish Development Cooperation



Ministry for Foreign Affairs



Photos:

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More crises - more responsibility

Humanitarian aid in Finnish Development Cooperation

Every year tens of millions of people all over the world are forced to experience how it feels when their safe and peaceful environment suddenly becomes terrifying, inconceivable chaos.

There are nearly 30 serious humanitarian crises going on in the world today that threaten to undermine the basic foundations of existence — health, human dignity, freedom or life itself. They affect about 50 million people directly, and pose a constant threat to five times that number.

Humanitarian aid is a mark of the shared responsibility that the world feels for its most distressed inhabitants. It is given as emergency care for the victims of natural disasters and war who are unable to get enough - or indeed any - of the help they need from their own community or from the authorities in the place where they live.

Humanitarian aid will still be needed in the future, because the plague of war and natural disaster has not decreased in recent years. On the contrary: the number of people in distress and crisis situations has risen. At the same time, the crises have become more complicated and harder to control, witness tragedies like those in Africa's Great Lakes region or the former Yugoslavia, or the hurricanes that swept across Central America.

It is impossible to halt floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes or tornadoes with rules and regulations. Armed conflicts can be ended by a peace treaty, but only when those involved are ready for it.

That does not mean we have to resign ourselves to crises, however. Quite the reverse: rapid advances in communications and travel have turned the world into a global village and its capacity for showing a sense of shared responsibility and for responding rapidly to the challenge posed by crisis has grown.



Famine in Africa or mass flight from aggression in the case of Kosovo no longer bring distant echoes of disaster from somewhere far away, but a huge international aid programme in which the first consignments set off almost immediately according to jointly agreed goals.

On the threshold of the new millennium, the proportion of all development assistance from the industrial countries represented by humanitarian aid has risen ten-fold on what it was some fifteen years ago. Humanitarian aid now accounts for a tenth of all assistance, i.e. some FIM 35 billion a year.

With the need for and volume of aid growing all the time, international sources of aid, such as the UN, humanitarian NGOs and also individual states, have felt the need to

comprehensively reassess the guiding principles and priorities of their own aid operations. The nature of crises has changed, and the old methods used to manage them have proved inadequate.

In shaping their joint forms of action, these bodies have also universally accepted that humanitarian aid is not an isolated phenomenon but an important tool that helps the international community to forecast, prevent and solve crises. At its best, fast, effective humanitarian aid can do much to alleviate the after-effects of armed conflict. It can also help prevent bitterness and resentment from finding expression in acts of violence, and buy more time for political negotiations.

The EU and its member states are one of the world's leading donors of humanitarian aid. Together, the Nordic countries are also a 'great power' in humanitarian assistance. Finland contributes actively in both cases, striving in its own way to find new solutions to growing challenges.

CIVIL WARS ARE GETTING LONGER

These days, the most common cause of crisis is armed conflict within a country's own borders, that is, civil war. Though the threat of large-scale conflict has receded since the end of the Cold War and such armed clashes are not usually so widespread, there are more of them and they last longer.

Armed conflicts now tend to be prolonged, paralysing the whole of society. The power of government is weakened, laws are broken by superior force, and hospitals cannot get drugs. Fields are not tilled because they are mined, and there is no food to be had from vandalized and burnt-out shops. In these conditions even a minor natural disaster becomes a major emergency that the dislocated society is unable to cope with.

Well over 90 per cent of the four million people who have died in localized wars in the '90s were civilians. It is increasingly common for the weakest and most vulnerable social categories - children, old people, women, minorities - to be the victims. In this knowledge, people flee the country or all crowd into the safest corners. There are currently some 30 million people who have been forced to leave their home regions living in exile, in refugee camps, and with relatives.

Finland as a source of aid

Finland has given altogether some FIM 3 billion in humanitarian aid since 1974.

The money has been used to provide people with some security in most of the large-scale humanitarian tragedies that have occurred during this period.

It has also been used to promote the struggle for freedom, especially in southern Africa. In the '80s, freedom movements in Namibia and South Africa were given training, ambulances, clinics and books during their years of exile. The importance of money for training is particularly visible now that these same countries have started to rebuild their social systems during the last decade.

In 1998, Finland gave FIM 196 million in humanitarian aid. It was

THE PRINCIPLE OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IS WRITTEN INTO TREATIES

International treaties strive to lay down precise and detailed principles for humanitarian aid.

Some of the best known treaties on international humanitarian aid are the Geneva Conventions (1949) and the various protocols appended to them (1977). Other important agreements are the Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) and its protocol (1967), and various international human rights treaties.

A particularly valuable contribution has been made by the Red Cross, whose rules of operation for humanitarian aid have been worked out with various other NGOs and have largely been accepted as the main guidelines for international aid work.

distributed to the needy through national and international aid organizations.

The humanitarian aid that Finland gives is aimed primarily at saving human lives, relieving human distress and helping those most in need.

The long-range goals also include restoring stability and preventing crises.

Aid work must be impartial, just and humane. When it is given, respect must be shown for the right to national self-determination, and for local cultures and customs.

Humanitarian aid is part of Finland's development cooperation. It is used as a foundation for development assistance proper and thus reconstruction. It is also the means by which Finland contributes to international crisis management in developing countries and neighbouring countries, and is thus firmly integrated into Finland's foreign relations and foreign policy, as indeed is other development cooperation.

Under the Decision - in- principle on development cooperation in autumn 1996, humanitarian aid should account for 10-15 per cent of the national development cooperation budget.



Who gets the aid?

Finland gives priority to the population groups most urgently in need of assistance and the countries least able to cope on their own. That mainly means the poorest developing countries.

About half of the humanitarian aid given by Finland is shared out on geographical principles. In recent years, about half has gone to Africa. There, the biggest recipients have been Mozambique, which is recovering from a long war, the Great Lakes region, and the Sudan, which has been torn apart by civil war. In Asia, the main recipients are Afghanistan and Cambodia.



Main Recipients of Finnish Humanitarian Aid

If the need arises, humanitarian aid also goes to other than developing countries. Various parts of the former Yugoslavia, especially Bosnia and Kosovo, have been key recipients. Other major individual targets are parts of the former Soviet Union, such as Georgia and Tajikistan. Areas close to Finland have also taken on greater importance in humanitarian aid work.

Finland contributes annual grants to international aid organizations, regionally targeted general assistance and help with crisis prevention.





What does the aid comprise?

The humanitarian aid given by Finland comprises

- emergency relief
- support for reconstruction during transition
- help with crisis prevention

Emergency relief is given in crises that arise as a result of armed conflict and natural disasters.



In the early stages of practically every crisis, what is needed most are drugs, food, clean water, blankets and tents - the basic essentials for survival. People need shelter, and are hungry and suffering from cold, or then stifling heat has caused stomach diseases that spread like wildfire in crowded conditions. Finland has also helped to get items such as hand pumps, water tanker-trucks, building materials and ready-to-erect houses to crisis areas.

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A crisis often becomes long-drawn-out. The aim then is not only to sustain the basic necessities for survival but also to help people to cope on their own. Humanitarian aid must not create a dependency on assistance, as this can sometimes make the conflict even more protracted because getting aid becomes viewed as a 'natural resource' or a permanent source of income benefiting certain groups.

Though emergency relief may not support reconstruction proper, it acts as an important bridge-builder from crisis to greater stability. As the crisis recedes, it becomes vital to create a framework for rapid reconstruction that will promote stability. In practice, that means providing humanitarian aid to promote the return of refugees, clearing mines and helping soldiers who have carried arms for years to fit back into society.

Prevention increasingly important

The importance of crisis prevention as part of humanitarian aid is growing all the time. As its name suggests, crisis prevention supports work to prevent crises and conflicts from arising and strengthens the readiness for

MINES HAMPER RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS

Mine-clearing is coming to be one of the most important targets for international humanitarian aid.

Mines are one of the biggest obstacles to reconstruction. Refugees returning to their home regions often find their village has been destroyed, and that an unknown number of land mines are hidden in their fields, watering places and forests. These effectively prevent reconstruction of homes, farming and the collection of firewood, and cause great suffering.

There are thought to be tens of millions of anti-personnel land mines in various parts of the world, and every year they kill or maim over 20,000 people. Most of the victims are poor civilians living in rural areas.

Finland is one of the main sources of funding for the UNDP's mine-clearing programmes in Cambodia and Mozambique, which are both trying to adjust to peace after decades of war. Both face an acute problem with land mines, millions of which still lie hidden within their borders.

In 1998, Finland dispatched a mechanized mine-clearance unit to Cambodia, made up of two Finnish special vehicles (flails) and personnel carriers and their crews. A similar group will be setting off for Mozambique in 1999. In both countries Finland is also helping to finance the international NGOs doing mine-clearing. For future work of this kind, Finland has set up a special rapid deployment unit for humanitarian mine-clearance which can be rapidly transferred to an area in need of mechanized help.

All in all, Finland will be spending FIM 120 million on humanitarian mine-clearance in 1998-2001. This will be spent on aid programmes for mine victims and information programmes, as well as mine-clearance proper and related training.





emergencies in situations where there is an obvious threat of conflict coming to a head.

The more able a society is to resort to legal, accepted channels for solving their differences, the better chance it has of averting escalation into irreconcilable armed conflict.

Crisis prevention is used to support the building and strengthening of social peace and justice.

It can mean support for countries that have a democratic government for the first time ever. The assistance then goes to organizations that distribute information and training in the right way to ensure fair and peaceful elections. Aid can also go to promoting an independent judiciary and work for human rights, such as furthering the rights of women, children, indigenous peoples and minorities, and educating the rest of the nation about them.

STOPPING TRADE IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN

A vast amount of smuggling and trading in human beings is going on in southeast Asia as a side effect of migration and refugeeism, and this is merely worsened by the economic crisis in the area. It is mainly women and children that fall victim to these abuses. The related legislation in countries in the area is far from satisfactory, and the same applies to cooperation between states and authorities.

The problem is particularly great in Thailand. Finland supports the International Organization for Migration (IOM) project there aimed at distributing general information about smuggling and trade in people, but especially providing the Thai police force with information about the legislation and the legal protection of affected women and children.

Finland also supports the work of the IOM in Cambodia, where the organization is launching a project to reduce smuggling and trade in women and girls. Cambodia is a poor country struggling to recover from a long war and every year nearly half the workforce have to go round seeking work wherever it can be found. Most of the seasonal workers leaving their homes in this way are women and children, and many get smuggled out and traded in as cheap labour without legal rights. This is possible because either there are no laws, or they are not enforced or complied with.

Crisis prevention also includes crisis management. This supports furtherance of the peace process, control and aftercare of conflicts, and refugee administration.

Use of military force

One of the criteria for humanitarian aid is that it must be impartial and equal. It cannot take sides in a conflict or work for the ends of any particular party. Those in need of help must be aided on an equal basis and with respect for human dignity.

Finland's starting principle is that international humanitarian work and a policy of military sanctions must be kept strictly separate. If military means have to be used to ensure that aid reaches its destination and aid workers are safe, limited use of force can be accepted only if it will have obvious benefits for the aid operation. The crucial thing is that military operations must only be used to get the aid to those who need it.

As a general rule, humanitarian assistance can only be given with the consent of the recipient country. Effective crisis prevention may sometimes require the use of means that the countries concerned do not find acceptable. Finland considers such cases individually and presupposes UN Security Council or OSCE authorization for the aid project concerned.

Cooperation partners

Increasingly, international emergency relief work calls for joint efforts between various organizations, countries and authorities.

In sudden emergencies, especially, it is literally a matter of life and death for aid donors to be capable of flexible, mutually supplementary cooperation that avoids overlapping. If there are 100,000 people suffering from cold and hunger in the mountains, it makes no sense to send them 200,000 pairs of boots, but not a single sack of flour.

Finland gives aid through impartial humanitarian aid organizations according to their estimate of what is most needed. Organizations whose operations show they understand the importance of cooperation are chosen as channels for assistance.

Finland and the UN

The UN and its agencies are the main distribution channel for Finland's humanitarian aid.

Most assistance to refugees goes through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Finland also pays annual grants to the UNHCR and the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

In the case of emergency areas, the main channel for Finnish food aid is the World Food Programme (WFP).

Several other UN agencies also receive regular help from Finland. UNICEF does important work in emergencies to safeguard basic water supply and health care services. It also launches and promotes programmes for the psychological rehabilitation of children who have been through the horrors of war, including war orphans and child soldiers.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has refugee programmes that help to restore stable conditions and start on recon-

struction. Other UN agencies that provide humanitarian aid are the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Finland has not only given money to the UN. With the other Nordic countries, it has also tried to encourage the expansion of UN humanitarian aid on uniform principles that avoid overlapping. It is also important to coordinate the work of NGOs with that of the UN.

As humanitarian crises have become more complicated and their number is rising, the UN's traditional peacekeeping operations have proved inadequate in managing them. The world body has also been forced to formulate new approaches and forms of operation in the last decade.

There is still plenty of work to do. Several recent crises in which new approaches have been used have demonstrated that much remains to be done in the creation of a UN humanitarian aid system that can act fast, efficiently and consistently.



The Red Cross and other organizations

Under the Geneva Convention, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has its own acknowledged role to play in protecting and helping the victims of war, especially refugees.

Finland considers that the ICRC is the most important organization in conflict situations, after the UN, and supports the body with an annual grant as well as individual programmes. Finland also supports the aid programmes of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The work done by the IOM is also important in areas close to Finland.

THE TAMPERE CONVENTION WILL MEAN FASTER, BETTER LINKS WITH CRISIS AREAS

When a natural disaster strikes, it is usually unexpected, violent and destructive. As part of the physical damage it does, it destroys telephone and radio systems, meaning that it is impossible to get in touch with the areas affected. Information that is vital if fast, effective relief is to be provided cannot be obtained. How many people need help? Where is the need greatest? What is needed first? Because roads are blocked or flooded it is even impossible to find things out by travelling there in person.

Knowing this, international aid organizations usually fly in their own communications equipment such as mobile and satellite phones and a radio system.

Frustrating and infuriating though this is, such equipment rarely gets to where it is needed, or not in time. Expensive gear gets stuck at the airport or at the border because there has been no time to get the proper import licences and permits. In the worst cases, this bureaucratic process can take months.

The price of such red tape is unnecessary loss of life, protracted suffering, and duplications and oversights caused by lack of information.

In future, however, there is some hope that links essential for the alleviation of major crises can be set up faster and more easily. Efforts to eliminate obstacles to communications took a crucial step forward at an intergovernmental conference in Tampere arranged by Finland in 1998, on emergency telecommunications.

This Intergovernmental Conference on Emergency Telecommunications (ICET -98) approved a new international convention in which the signatory states engage to simplify and ease the entry of telecommunications equipment needed in humanitarian crises and disasters. This is one of the most important decisions of the decade in UN efforts to combat natural disasters, though putting it into effect in chaotic areas struck by earthquakes, floods and hurricanes will still demand a lot of effort.

NGOs

More active and more diversified involvement in international humanitarian work by Finnish non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, is in Finland's interests.

Among Finnish aid organizations, the Finnish Red Cross, FINNCHUR-CHAID and the Finnish Free Foreign Mission, all of which are able to operate in a professional manner in humanitarian aid projects, have received funding.

In refugee and catastrophe relief, foreign and international NGOs are only supported in special cases such as mine-clearance. On the other hand, international NGOs that promote human rights and democracy often receive funding from Finland's official humanitarian aid programme.



Finland and the EU

Finland contributes to the European Union's humanitarian aid funding through the Community budget. Humanitarian aid has also grown in importance in the development assistance distributed by the Union. The EU's humanitarian aid functions were centralized in 1992 with the foundation of ECHO (the European Community Humanitarian Office), which has fast become an important supplier and financier of humanitarian aid in international crises.

ECHO and the EU Member States jointly pay for over half of all the humanitarian aid given in the world. ECHO's sphere of operations covers disaster relief and work to promote national readiness in countries susceptible to natural disasters. Most of ECHO's aid is channelled through individual NGOs, with UN agencies accounting for nearly one third.

Forgotten crises: Abkhazian soup



Finland also works for the world's forgotten crises.

The situation in Abkhazia rarely hits the world's headlines. But a bloody civil war took place there in 1992-93, as a result of which hundreds of thousands of people are still suffering.

Before the war, some half a million people lived in the area, which was sometimes called the Soviet Union's Riviera. Now, there are only half this number. During the war, the lovely old spa and sanatorium town of Sukhum was totally destroyed, and today the social infrastructure there is still shattered. There is food available for those who can pay for it, but most

people have no work, no income and no savings.

Finnish humanitarian aid has been channelled through the Finnish Red Cross into street soup kitchens in Sukhum that feed 7,000 people at 21 outlets every day. Overall, the ICRC distributes food packages in 57 villages and 11 towns, guaranteeing one meal a day for nearly 50,000 people.

In major disasters, natural upheavals, social unrest, starvation and warfare, it is old people – together with children – who suffer the most.

The bread and soup distributed through the street kitchens are also keeping Anastasia alive. Because of her Greek origins, Anastasia is a tough old lady. She was exiled to Kazakhstan in the '30s, in one of Stalin's purges. When more liberal winds began to blow in the Soviet Union in the mid '80s, she was allowed back to Abkhazia.

Now Anastasia is a widow who has survived three wars and lives on a pension of two Finnish marks per month. Without the street kitchen, she would have no chance of surviving.

A REFUGEE'S MOBILE PHONE DOESN'T WORK



As day breaks on Easter Sunday 1999, engineer Ibrahim Jakupaj sits with his wife, son and three daughters in a muddy field next to a rapidly assembled medical tent at the Blace border crossing point in no-man's land between Macedonia and Kosovo.

They are all wet through after a chilly rainy night without shelter, and in a state of shock. The youngest, a boy of 7, has just fainted. The previous day, he was at risk of being killed. Jakupaj tries to phone a number on his mobile, but it's no good: the battery has gone. Per-

haps, anyway, the Serbian authorities in Kosovo have already cut off his service, or then the transmitter has been damaged in the bombing.

The dead mobile phone is all that the Jakupaj family have left of their former life. The previous day, masked Serbian soldiers broke into their house in Pristina, and in 15 minutes drove them all out under threat of death. With hundreds of other Kosovo Albanians, they were crowded into a train to the Macedonian frontier and forced out of Kosovo. The train then returned to Pristina to pick up another load.

The family was stuck in no-man's land, forced to make their way down into a muddy valley with tens of thousands of other Albanian refugees whom the Macedonian authorities refused to let across the border. Night fell, and from over in Kosovo shots echoed out.

Jakupaj and his family are now no-bodies. Behind in Kosovo lie their work, car, home, school, memories, relatives - even their identities, for before they crossed the border their passports, identity cards and money were taken from them. Mrs Jakupaj's hair is still beautifully coiffed; she had just been to the hairdresser's. Twenty-four hours after she got up happily from the hairdresser's chair in her home town, she is a nameless refugee.

In April this year, there were over 600,000 Kosovo refugees. Finland was one of the many countries that came swiftly to their aid. In early April, some FIM 43 million had been allocated to help relieve the refugees' sufferings. Public collections by the Finnish Red Cross and other organizations gathered an equal sum. In Kosovo there is going to be an enormous and continuing need for assistance.

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