

India's Growing Involvement in Humanitarian Assistance

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Imprint

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CERF.....	Central Emergency Response Fund
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DI	Development Initiatives
DPA	UN Department of Political Affairs
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FTS.....	OCHA Financial Tracking Service
G77.....	Group of 77
GA.....	United Nations General Assembly
GFDRR.....	World Bank Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GHD.....	Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative
Gol	Government of India
IASC.....	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IBSA	India Brazil South Africa Initiative
ICRC.....	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INR	Indian Rupees
INSARAG.....	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
ISDR.....	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation program
LTTE.....	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam
MEA.....	Indian Ministry of External Affairs
NDMA.....	National Disaster Management Authority
NIDM.....	National Institute for Disaster Management
NGO.....	Non-governmental organization
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA.....	Official Development Assistance
OECD.....	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
PMIUN.....	Permanent Mission of India to United Nations, New York
SAARC.....	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA.....	UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
WFP	World Food Program
\$	United States Dollar

1. Introduction

On 13 September 2005, an Indian army aircraft landed on a United States Air Force base in Little Rock, Arkansas, carrying 25 tons of relief supplies to the victims of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. At around the same time, the World Food Program (WFP), a major net provider of food assistance in India until the early 2000s, recognized India as its 15th largest donor (WFP 2006). These two instances show that humanitarian assistance – that is, assistance “designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies”¹ – has fast developed from small occasional contributions into a notable instrument of Indian “soft power” (Nye 2004) within the framework of the country’s foreign policy.

Despite this trend, India’s motives for giving humanitarian assistance, its geographic and thematic priorities and its internal decision processes remain largely unknown. In an attempt to close this research gap, the present paper analyzes India’s humanitarian aid as part of its foreign policy, asking why India gives humanitarian assistance and how internal norms and interests shape the country’s decisions regarding humanitarian assistance.

India is still in the process of defining its role in disaster relief efforts. Since its independence, the country has come to the aid of people in need. For example, it became home for thousands of Tibetan Refugees in 1959 and millions from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971. In 1987, during the Sri Lankan Civil War, India flew humanitarian assistance materials to civilians in the city of Jaffna, an act that could be viewed as one of the few humanitarian interventions worldwide. In the past 10 years, the scale and frequency of India’s efforts to help those in distress have changed significantly. Today, as the world’s fourth largest economy, India has the means to contribute to international aid efforts more systematically. Although a large share of its population is still poor, and though huge income gaps characterize the Indian economy,² India has come a long way; once dependent on Western aid, it is now part of the group of non-Western humanitarian donors which together account for at least 12 percent of worldwide humanitarian aid each year (Harmer and Cotterrell 2005: 16).

Studies undertaken in the past have largely focused on India’s development aid or treated humanitarian aid as part of development assistance.³ However, the normative

1 For this paper, we use the official OECD DAC definition of humanitarian assistance (OECD DAC, 2007).

2 According to the Human Development Report, 421 million “multi-dimensionally poor people” live in eight Indian states – a figure higher than in the 26 poorest African countries taken together (*The Hindu*, 5 November 2010).

3 On India’s new role as a development assistance partner, see Chanana (2009), Bijoy (2009), Agrawal (2007), Jobelius (2007), Raja Mohan (2006). Dutt (1980) is an interesting historic example of the debate. The only papers explicitly focusing on disaster assistance are Chandran et al (2009) on India’s disaster assistance in Asia, and Jacob (2009) on disaster aid politics in Asia. Price (2005) mixes development and humanitarian considerations in his paper.

framework and international structures governing humanitarian donorship are distinct from development aid. States aspire to follow a strict normative framework, providing assistance in an independent, neutral and impartial manner⁴ and avoiding political conditionality. In no other area of foreign policy do decision makers take as much care to avoid looking as though they are driven by national interests – and yet interests shape humanitarian policy for all donors (cf. Binder, Meier, Steets 2010: 28).

The present paper, which is part of a broader research project on non-Western humanitarian assistance donors conducted by the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)⁵, therefore seeks to analyze state behavior in humanitarian assistance separately from development aid.⁶ The paper is based on a review of the primary documents and literature about Indian foreign policy as well as 31 semi-structured interviews conducted in New Delhi and elsewhere, mostly with serving and retired officials in the Indian Government (notably the Ministry of External Affairs), representatives of international organizations, Western donors and the corporate world. Due to the absence of reliable centralized humanitarian aid records, quantitative data served only as a secondary source. The authors compiled their own overview of Indian humanitarian contributions from 2000-2010 from a range of sources.⁷ While this mix of methods allowed the authors to answer the research question at hand, we should note that assessing the effectiveness of Indian humanitarian assistance was beyond the scope of the study and that the quantitative data on India's contributions is still not exhaustive.⁸

Following this introduction, chapter 2 looks at the Indian conception of humanitarian assistance in terms of definition, motives and principles of disaster relief. Chapter 3 analyzes India's internal humanitarian bureaucracy, decision making processes and the policy implications of this organizational setup on the way India provides assistance. The next two sections focus on the implementation of humanitarian assistance, analyzing India's aid practice bilaterally (chapter 4), through multilateral organizations and in cooperation with other countries (chapter 5). Chapter 6 provides a conclusion about the role of humanitarian assistance in India's foreign policy by synthesizing India's normative and interest-based motives with its aid practice. Chapter 7 proposes a path towards increased cooperation between the Indian government, multilateral humanitarian organizations and established donors.

4 See for example General Assembly Resolution 46/182 (United Nations, 1991), or the *Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD, 2003).

5 The case studies of the project have been conducted in joint research teams comprising one researcher from the country chosen for the study and one GPPi researcher. Information about the project and all other publications can be found at http://www.gppi.net/approach/research/truly_universal/.

6 The authors have based their research on the analytical framework developed in the mapping phase of the project. See Binder, Meier, Steets (2010: 24-31)

7 The compiled data set – represented in the illustrations below – contains information from the annual reports of the Ministry of External Affairs, press releases, reports to the Indian parliament, OCHA's financial tracking service (FTS), annual reports of international organizations, WFP interfaiss and AidData.

8 The paper takes into account developments until December 2010; final interviews were conducted in October 2010.

2. India's conception of humanitarian assistance

There is no straight answer for why India provides humanitarian assistance or how it goes about providing it. An assessment of official Indian disaster relief activities is constrained by the fact that no specific policy guides the government's aid decisions, partly a consequence of generally weak foreign policy planning (cf. Bagchi 2009). At first sight, India's actions look like ad hoc aid decisions made in response to particular humanitarian situations. However, upon closer inspection, the official Indian line on humanitarian assistance provides explanations about India's preferred channels for aid delivery, as well as its underlying cultural principles and priorities. This chapter focuses on India's self-conception as a humanitarian donor, that is, how government officials perceive the country's role in disaster assistance.¹

2.1 India's definition of humanitarian assistance

The Indian government uses the terms “humanitarian assistance” or “disaster relief” to refer to activities that address human suffering caused by natural disasters like cyclones, droughts, earthquakes or floods. This definition is narrower than Western donors' conception of humanitarian assistance, which also includes helping civilian populations affected by armed conflicts. Indeed, over the years India has provided ample assistance to countries struck by natural disasters, but in reality its humanitarian outreach is not restricted to such emergencies – India has supplied the bulk of humanitarian assistance in two post-conflict situations, namely Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. India's “disaster relief” rhetoric is possibly deliberate in order to avoid international political controversies associated with giving aid during civil war situations.

With respect to the separation between short-term relief and development assistance, Indian officials have only recently started to distinguish the two (Chaturvedi 2008: 33). In 2003, the government supplied Cambodia with indelible ink to support elections, an act that it categorized under “humanitarian aid” (MEA Report 2003-04). Today, Indian decision makers use the same conceptual separation as Western donors, designating short-term assistance in the aftermath of disasters as humanitarian assistance and long-term assistance as development assistance.

2.2 India's motives for providing relief

According to the Indian self-conception, the central reasons for providing relief are a genuine desire to help countries in distress and a wish to foster friendly relations through the provision of such assistance.

¹ How the conception translates into practice will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Humanitarianism lies at the heart of Indian spiritual and cultural values. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism all espouse solidarity with the suffering and giving without expectations for return. The Hindu term *daan*, for example, emphasizes the selfless nature of giving. In fact, the sacred Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* preaches that “there should be no motive in charity and there should be no aim, direct or indirect” (Bornstein 2009:1). These spiritual traditions influence the humanitarian impulses of Indian decision makers. India conceives humanitarian assistance as “extending sympathy” to the disaster-affected or as “a goodwill gesture” (MEA 2008 and GoI 2006a). Because of India’s deep cultural tradition of giving, the population generally endorses relief efforts by the government.

Indian decision makers also show a strong desire to share their expertise in domestic disaster management with other countries affected by disasters. Every year the Indian government copes with a large number of internal disasters and in response has developed a sophisticated disaster management system over the past decade.² India has helped other South Asian countries set up similar systems, for instance in Pakistan and Afghanistan, or sent disaster management experts to affected countries, for example to Guyana in 2006.

Additionally, India sees humanitarian assistance as an instrument to maintain and foster friendly relations with other countries. Decision makers aim to earn the goodwill of foreign governments and local people affected by disasters by nurturing a positive image of India in these countries. Disaster assistance is often portrayed as a “symbol of friendship” (MEA 2009b). For example, the Ministry of External Affairs stated that “creating a positive humanitarian image of Indian doctors” is one goal of the medical missions in Afghanistan (MEA 2010d).

2.3 India’s aid principles, priorities and modalities

Although they are not formulated in policy, certain principles and priorities inform the way India goes about dispersing humanitarian aid. The imperative to respect the sovereignty of the affected state is the most important guiding principle. It is an important legacy of the country’s struggle against colonialism and was the defining commitment of the non-aligned movement³ (Bandyopadhyaya 1980: 73-75, Binder, Meier, Steets 2010: 28, Harmer et al 2005). Time and again, Indian representatives at the United Nations stress that aid should only be provided following the “consent of the affected country and in principle on the basis of an

2 The Indian National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was established by the Indian Parliament as part of the 2005 Disaster Management Act. The NDMA, chaired by the Indian Prime Minister, is the regulatory authority for disaster management in India. The structure is replicated at the state and district level. In separate locations in the country, the NDMA maintains 8 battalions of disaster response specialists (separate from the Indian army) which make up the National Disaster Response Force. See <http://ndma.gov.in/> for further reference. The Delhi-based National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), part of the Ministry of Home Affairs, provides training and capacity building on disaster assistance. See <http://nidm.gov.in/>.

3 Established during the Cold War and still operative today, the non-aligned movement is a group of states that originally refrained from formally aligning with either of the blocs.

appeal by the affected country,” and that “sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States must be fully respected” (GoI 2006b). India even objected to the UN Secretary General’s call for granting relief organizations better access to disaster-affected populations (GoI 2006b). Accordingly, India dispenses most assistance directly to the affected country’s government, a preference that reflects its interest to foster friendly relations.

In line with this view on sovereignty, India aims to provide assistance according to the requirements and needs as defined by the affected government, an approach that Indian decision makers have labeled “demand-driven” aid. Western donors define “demand-driven” aid differently in that they focus on the needs of the affected population. India criticizes aid from Western donors and organizations as “supply driven” and accuses them of carelessly providing aid. This stance may stem from India’s experience as a recipient of international aid. In one instance, following India’s 2001 Gujarat earthquake, international humanitarian organizations supplied beef meals to the Hindu population.

India strives to adopt a strictly non-political approach to humanitarian assistance, stressing that humanitarian aid should not be linked to political objectives. This stance is a natural extension of India’s traditionally non-aligned worldview. Current and former government officials perceive humanitarian assistance from Western donors as political, for example in the case of the 2008 cyclone in Myanmar during which calls for regime change and humanitarian assistance were difficult to separate (Katoch 2008). As a consequence, India eschews the “donor” category and instead views itself as a “partner” who wants to stand in solidarity with its sister developing countries in distress.

Whereas the priorities described above are clearly more central to India’s humanitarian conception, the country also subscribes to the internationally agreed-upon humanitarian principles of universality, neutrality and impartiality.⁴ Furthermore, India emphasizes the importance of a smooth transition from immediate relief to the long term development phase. For more than a decade, India has proposed and drafted the General Assembly resolution on linking relief, rehabilitation and development on behalf of the G77 (MEA 2000-2010).⁵

Indian decision makers highlight the importance of reaching the affected country promptly in case of natural disasters. This is as much a question of genuine concern as it is of visibility. India also receives international visibility when stressing that it was among the first countries to disburse aid to high-level emergencies, notably the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

4 See for example the statement by the Minister of External Affairs, S.M. Krishna in the General Assembly 29 September 2010 (Government of India 2010).

5 For the 2010 General Assembly Resolution, International Cooperation on Humanitarian Assistance in the Field of Natural Disasters, From Relief to Development, see <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N09/476/89/PDF/N0947689.pdf?OpenElement>.

3. India's aid bureaucracy: actors and their influence

The Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is the nodal point for humanitarian assistance. However, decision making power is widely spread among different entities within the ministry. This bureaucratic set-up shapes the way India provides humanitarian assistance. Other state and non-state actors are secondary players in humanitarian aid practice.

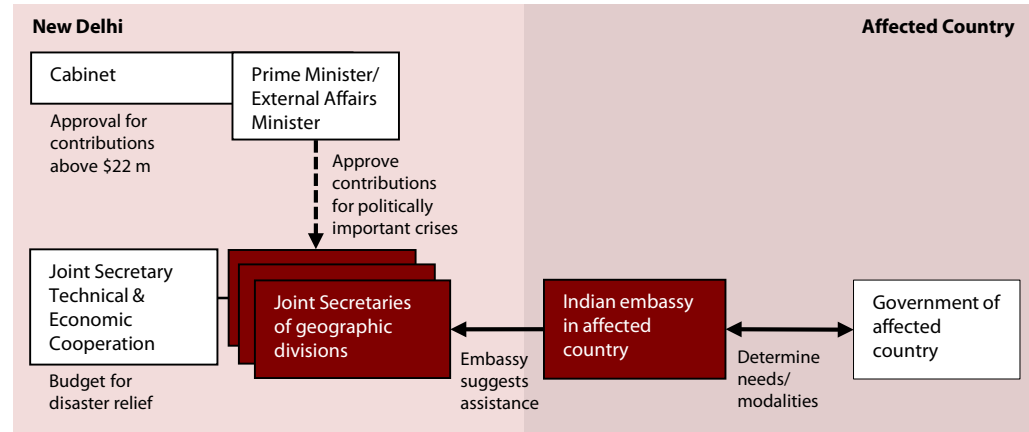
3.1 The Ministry of External Affairs

In New Delhi, approximately 16 geographic and functional divisions of the MEA – each headed by a joint secretary – make and implement decisions on humanitarian aid under the overall supervision of the foreign secretary.

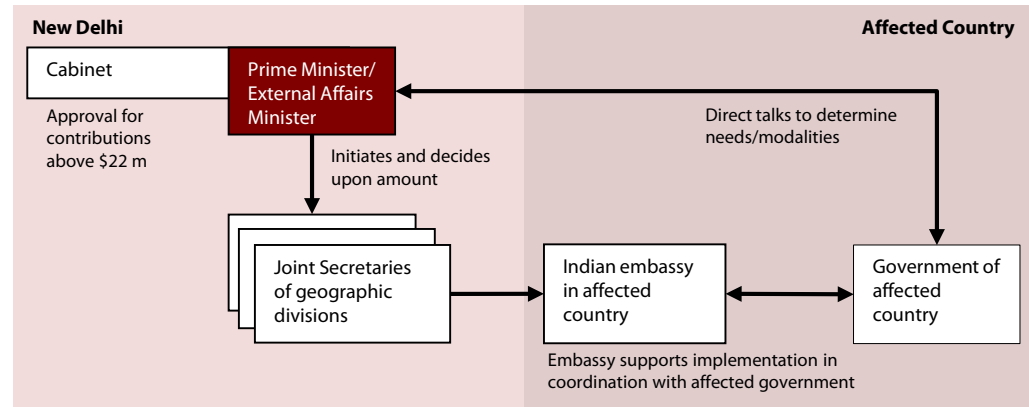
A separate decision making process for humanitarian issues does not exist. Depending on the scale of the disaster and the political importance India attributes to the concerned country, either a bottom up or a top down decision process takes place. For politically significant emergencies or emergencies that attract international attention, the Indian political leadership – usually the prime minister – announces a humanitarian contribution, which is then detailed and implemented by the geographic divisions of the Foreign Ministry. For less important and smaller scale disasters, the Indian ambassador to the disaster-struck country or the respective geographic division head in New Delhi initiates the case for humanitarian aid. Whether or not a contribution needs to be approved at the higher levels – i.e., the foreign or prime minister – depends again on the importance of the disaster. Generally, however, the joint secretaries retain a powerful position in the ministry and have a broad scope of action due to the weak policy planning in the Indian MEA (Bagchi 2009). Only expenditures that exceed \$22 million (INR 1 billion) are subjected to cabinet approval (Price 2005: 24). If diplomatic access to the affected country is limited, representatives at the permanent missions to the United Nations in Geneva or New York might submit a proposal.

Illustration 1**Three possible decision making processes in the Indian aid bureaucracy**

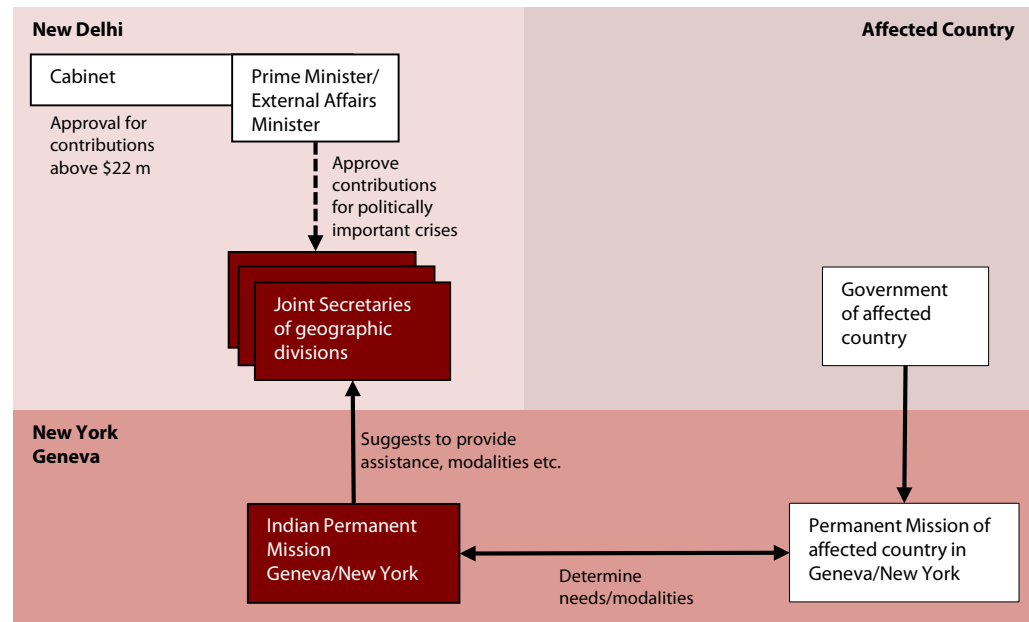
Usual process: Initiated by Indian Embassy in affected country



Process for high profile emergencies: initiated by Prime Minister/External Affairs Minister



Process via Permanent Missions in Geneva/New York for low diplomatic access



The different geographic MEA divisions rarely coordinate. Within the Foreign Ministry, the Technical and Economic Cooperation Division serves as the anchor for implementing decisions on humanitarian aid, as part of its mandate to administer development aid. Despite being the only point where information on overall humanitarian assistance potentially comes together, the division has no control or overview over individual joint-secretaries' decisions and does not use its anchor function to consolidate policy. The lack of cross-divisional cooperation is not unique to humanitarian assistance but rather part of a broader culture of non-cooperation within and among the different government ministries. In an attempt to improve development cooperation – and potentially humanitarian aid too – the government made plans to further institutionalize internal coordination in a new India International Development Cooperation Agency in 2007 (Chidambaram 2007: 19). However, turf wars between the MEA, the Ministry of Finance and other stakeholder ministries have so far inhibited progress. While government officials claim that the idea is still on the table, some observers have already dismissed it (Mitra 2010, Roy 2010).¹

As part of the same dynamic, humanitarian assistance has no centralized and separate budget line within the MEA. The financial resources for disaster relief are split among different ministries and instruments. Non-plan development aid budgets² of the individual geographic divisions account for the bulk of humanitarian spending. Since 2007, the Indian Parliament approves an annual budget head “Emergency Assistance for Natural Disasters” as part of the budget of the Finance Ministry. This budget line covers a growing yet still negligible part of total humanitarian assistance.³ India's core contributions to international organizations are managed by those ministries that also administer incoming assistance from the same organizations, reflecting India's history as an aid recipient.⁴

This organically grown humanitarian aid bureaucracy largely influences how India implements aid. To invert David Mitrany's famous dictum, in the case of Indian disaster relief, one could claim that function follows form.⁵ The results are three-fold.

First, without a common policy, the different geographic divisions make decisions in an ad hoc manner and on a case-by-case basis. On the one hand, such a flexible set

1 The External Affairs Ministry's fear of losing clout is sourced back to 2003, when it lost its monopoly over development aid policy because the government gave more influence to the Ministry of Commerce (Chanana 2009: 12).

2 Unlike plan expenditure, which is estimated after consultations between the ministries concerned and the Planning Commission, non-plan expenditure refers to budgeted allocations, such as interest payments, subsidies, salary payments to government employees and grants to foreign governments.

3 The budget doubled from \$400,000 to \$990,000 in 2008 (MEA 2007).

4 The Agriculture Ministry manages funding to WFP, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare provides contributions to the ICRC, and Ministry of Women and Child Development provides core funding to UNIFEM and UNICEF (cf. Government of India, 2000-2009).

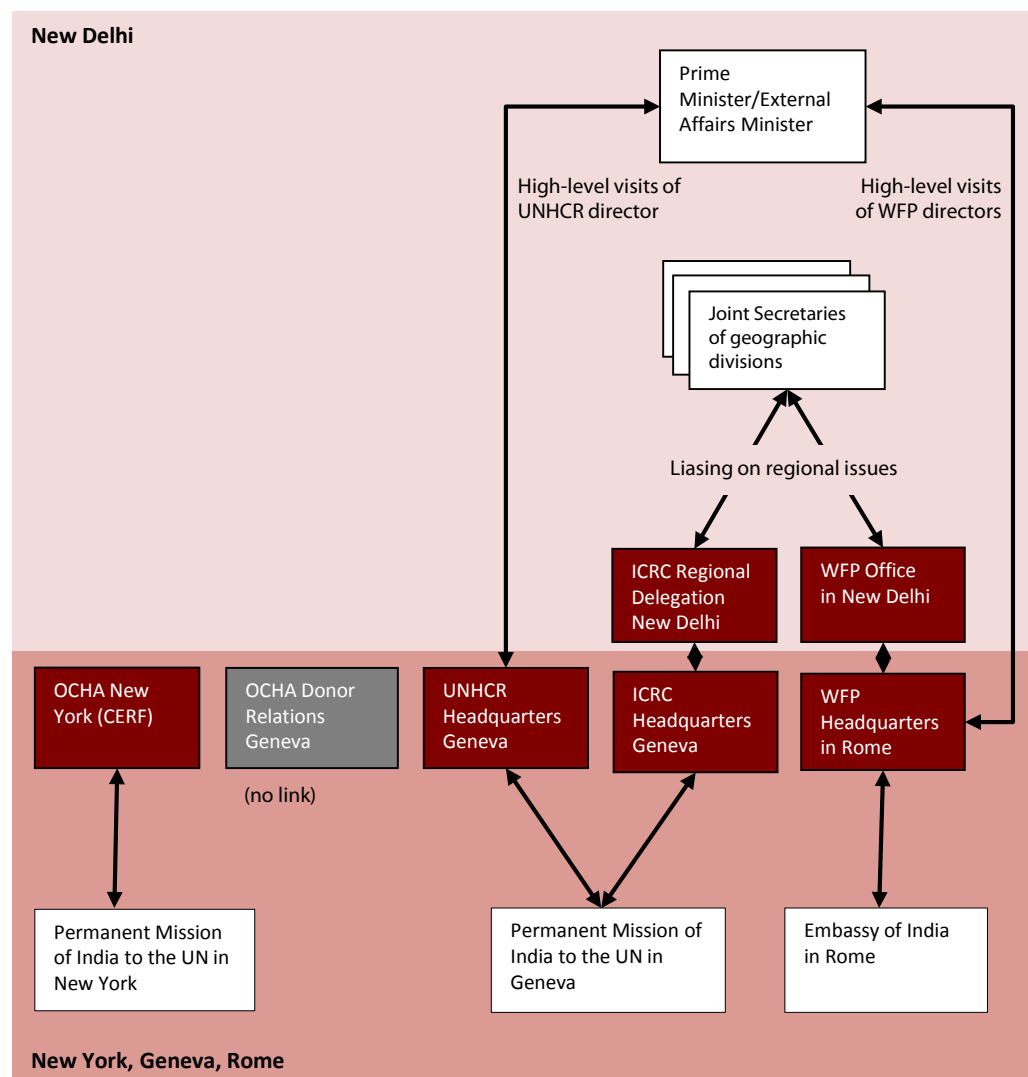
5 David Mitrany's (1975) pioneering work on functionalism privileges an area of cooperation (i.e. function) to determine the institutional form of cooperation.

up enables India to follow the priorities of the affected state and provide aid quickly. On the other hand, the current structures hinder learning from the experiences of other geographic divisions and inhibit policy coherence and predictability.

Second, as a consequence of decentralized decision making, humanitarian assistance follows a strong country-by-country logic. This logic creates a close connection between humanitarian aid allocations and the general foreign policy towards the affected state. The quality and importance of the relationship with the country can be expected to determine aid giving, which supports India's goal to foster relations with the affected state. Moreover, contributions to the operational budgets of multilateral organizations are also decided upon in the geographic divisions rather than in one central entity. International organizations, in turn, have no main conduit through which to continually communicate with the MEA. Some organizations solve this problem by engaging the different joint secretaries on regional issues and/or approaching Indian representations in New York, Geneva or Rome.

Illustration 2

How WFP, ICRC, UNHCR and OCHA liase with the Indian government



Third, due to the absence of a specialized agency, those making humanitarian aid decisions are not experts on the subject. Disaster relief is merely added to an already substantial foreign policy portfolio that requires bureaucrats and diplomats to have knowledge of multiple topics. Many interviewees recognized that with growing contributions, the lack of specialization becomes a problem – not only with respect to individual bilateral decisions, but even more so for multilateral assistance, which requires knowledge of the different funding mechanisms of international organizations.

All these factors are reinforced by a more general challenge: The Indian Foreign Service is massively understaffed, and the number of embassies is extremely low compared to countries of similar size and aspirations (Markey 2009).⁶ Against the background of an overstretched MEA, it is not surprising that humanitarian assistance decisions follow a reactive rather than proactive logic.

3.2 Other relevant institutions

Apart from the MEA, India's army and federal state-governments are two other institutions relevant to India's humanitarian assistance abroad.

Contributors: state governments and the special commitment of Tamil Nadu

Although the central government is constitutionally responsible for foreign relations, the federal states also play a role in foreign policy. Governments of some Indian states occasionally provide support to assistance efforts, particularly when they are geographically and ethnically connected with the suffering country and its people. Any such foreign engagement, however, is subject to clearance from the MEA. In 2008 and 2009, the government of Tamil Nadu provided substantial in-kind humanitarian assistance to the International Committee of the Red Cross for their operations in Sri Lanka. The two contributions (worth \$2.7 and \$3 million respectively) are thus far the only two instances where India has supported operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross abroad.

Implementers: the primary role of the Indian army

Apart from bilateral government-to-government funding and funding to multilateral organizations, the Indian government exclusively relies on the army for implementing humanitarian assistance abroad. India only involves its military in relief efforts in Asia, where the country has to keep a low profile to avoid appearing too powerful. Therefore, disaster-related activities involving the army are mostly limited to civilian personnel, such as doctors in field hospitals, and to

⁶ In New York, for example, only seven Indian diplomats represent the country at the United Nations, while Burkina Faso sends 13 diplomats, China over 100. The Indian embassies in La Havana and Bogotá are responsible for the diplomatic relations with three countries each.

the use of naval vessels to ship relief supplies. The Indian army is generally keen to leave the disaster scene as early as possible to avoid anything that could be seen as a demonstration of military power (Chandran et al. 2009: 72).

Unlike other donors, India does not yet have a search and rescue team for operations abroad. Neither does it provide funding for relief activities to the Indian Red Cross Society nor to Indian or international NGOs for relief activities abroad. The Indian Red Cross has only been active outside the country in a few exceptional cases. This is surprising given the organization's close link with the government (India's president is also the president of the Indian Red Cross) and its considerable expertise in providing disaster assistance internally.

Indian NGOs & the Indian private sector

Recent developments suggest that Indian NGOs and the private sector could become more important actors in international humanitarian assistance.

Indian NGOs

- Only a few Indian NGOs have started activities abroad. Examples include Seeds India and Unique Services Trust.
- Humanitarian NGOs coordinate their activities in India via Sphere India, an Indian-led initiative of the global Sphere Project.

India's private sector

- As part of their corporate responsibility programs, Indian multinationals operating in countries affected by natural disasters have started to contribute relief materials or manpower.
- Indian pharmaceutical companies donated medicines \$ 600,000 to fight an influenza outbreak in Ukraine.
- Individual companies organize collections for internal disasters, most recently the 2010 floods in Leh.

4. Indian disaster relief in practice

India prefers bilateral government-to-government aid to other aid modalities. Because of the institutional reasons, principles and priorities discussed above, humanitarian assistance is heavily anchored in the respective regional foreign policy frame. Therefore, India's contributions need to be analyzed in the broader contexts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The bulk of India's humanitarian assistance goes to its extended neighborhood in South and Central Asia. Contributions to countries in Africa and South America remain at a low level but have risen in the past 10 years. The approximate value of Indian humanitarian aid by region during the period 2001-10 is indicated in the graph below.

Illustration 3

Approximate total amounts of India's humanitarian assistance per region (2001-10)



The geographic location of the receiving country influences Indian contributions. For countries in regions easily reachable by sea and land, India's contributions mostly take the form of in-kind contributions to the affected government, particularly medical care, shelter materials and food aid, which was estimated at 43 percent of total Indian humanitarian assistance between 2000-05 (Harmer and Cotterrell 2005: 23). The further away the emergency, the more cash contributions India provides directly to the affected government. Assistance in the form of medicine and drugs – a priority for Indian humanitarian assistance – is an exception to this rule. India has always provided these items in kind, because as the world's third largest producer of pharmaceuticals it has an obvious economic interest in promoting its products abroad (cf. Chaudhuri 2005).

4.1 South Asia

The power imbalance in South Asia largely frames India's humanitarian aid to countries in the region. India holds an influential position towards its neighbors, maintained by strong trade links and financial assistance.¹ According to one interviewee, India's fast economic rise prompts the country to decide "whether it wants to be a nice or threatening neighbor." Competition with its regional rival China is another factor influencing India's humanitarian and development aid policy in the region. However, low levels of humanitarian assistance to strategically important countries along the Indo-Chinese boarder – i.e., Nepal and Bhutan – suggest that unlike development aid, humanitarian assistance is not (yet) part of this competition for influence.

India's most visible humanitarian engagement was its response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which hit India and its neighbors in December 2004. Although severely hit itself, India refused external aid and immediately dispatched assistance worth \$2.2 million to Sri Lanka and \$1.1 million to the Maldives (Price 2005: 15). The Indian army sent aircrafts and ships to ferry relief supplies – including 200 tons of relief supplies from international agencies – and maintained field hospitals in Sri Lanka. However, the Tsunami was neither the first nor the only instance where India provided succor to the suffering in the region (cf. illustration p. 18). Three contexts – Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – require a closer look because these three countries were the top recipients of Indian humanitarian assistance in the past 10 years.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, India's humanitarian engagement is an integral part of its soft power strategy. The strategy's central aim is to push back Pakistani influence and secure access to natural resources in competition with China. India has a vital interest in containing Taliban influence in Afghanistan. If the Taliban were to resume power in Kabul, India would experience two devastating effects. First, the Taliban wing in Pakistan would be strengthened, posing a direct security threat to India. Second, India's development investments – \$1.3 billion since 2001 (MEA 2009) – would have been in vain. In 2009, Afghanistan was the second largest recipient of Indian development aid and loan programs, receiving twice as much development aid as all African countries combined, and two hundred times the amount for Latin America (MEA Report 2009-10).

India's humanitarian assistance contributions to Afghanistan are also impressive. Since 2003 India has supplied high protein biscuits to Afghan school children through the World Food Programme's school-feeding program, in addition to a direct donation of one million tons of wheat in 2008. The five medical missions, all

¹ The most extreme case in this respect is Bhutan, where India funds three-fifths of the country's budget expenditures (CIA 2010).

run by Indian doctors, are located in the same cities as the Indian consulates and are likely part of a larger plan to mark a presence in the country. However, despite this overt interest-driven engagement, India is still following a principled approach. For example, India does not discriminate between areas with traditionally closer ties to India (the north) and areas with Pashtu majorities, with whom India has fewer contacts.

Pakistan

Pakistan is a very interesting case, as one would not expect India to come to its arch rival's rescue. Nonetheless, despite strained relations, India provided significant humanitarian assistance to Pakistan following the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods. In response to the earthquake, the Indian government provided \$25 million in cash assistance to the Pakistani government, along with \$15 million in in-kind contributions from both governmental and private sources. This gesture even brought about a short-lived hope for improved political relations when the two countries agreed to open five border points in Kashmir to facilitate the transfer of relief goods (Kelman 2006: 223, Chandran et al 2009: 69-70). Things were less warm hearted during the 2010 floods. For over a week, Pakistan did not reply to India's initial offer of \$5 million. Washington had to gently remind Islamabad of the offer before Pakistan finally accepted it (Dikshit and Joshua 2010). As the disaster unfolded, India subsequently increased its flood assistance to \$25 million in total. The Pakistani government preferred that the assistance be disbursed through multilateral organizations. India respected this preference and provided \$5 million to the World Food Programme and \$20 million through the Flash Appeal to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Domestic considerations explain the initially modest offer of \$5 million: Before offering more, the prime minister first needed to pay a symbolic visit to the flood affected areas within India to reassure the Indian public that the government does not prioritize foreign over domestic disaster response.

Sri Lanka

Politically and strategically, Sri Lanka is an extremely important neighbor for India. At the same time, the countries have been suspicious of each other's intentions. Sri Lanka has accused India of trying to impose itself as a hegemonic power, while India has complained about the second-class treatment of Tamils in Sri Lanka, and about Sri Lanka's balancing strategy against India, which entailed befriending outside powers. It is in this context that one must consider Indian humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka. In 1987, the Indian army airlifted humanitarian supplies to civilians caught in the war, a clear breach of its otherwise principled respect for sovereignty. Competitive politics in the Tamil Nadu state have always determined the Indian response to developments in Sri Lanka, and therefore the role of the state government has remained a key influence.

Over the last decade, India has supplied Sri Lanka with humanitarian assistance

three times. First, after the 2004 Tsunami, India provided a large share of the immediate aid to Sri Lanka. In addition to this immediate aid, India contributed \$23 million for long term reconstruction. The second dimension regards the suffering of Tamil civilians stranded in the northern parts of Sri Lanka, in the middle of the civil war. Apart from direct contributions to the Sri Lankan government, India provided \$2.5 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as \$5 million in relief supplies to the International Committee of the Red Cross. Third, following the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, India offered \$50 million in medicine and family relief packs to internally displaced people, and to this day supports housing construction for them.

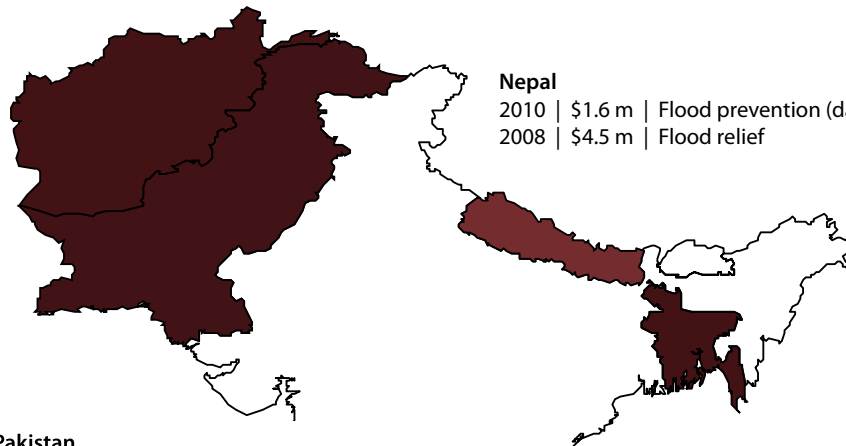
Illustration 4

India's humanitarian assistance to South Asian countries from 2001-10

Afghanistan

2009	amount unknown	School feeding (WFP), in-kind
		Medical missions in 5 cities
2008	amount unknown	School feeding (WFP), in-kind
	1 million tons of wheat	to Afghan government
		Medical missions in 5 cities
2007	15 tons of high-energy biscuits,	school feeding (WFP), in-kind
2006	7 tons of high-energy biscuits,	school feeding (WFP), in-kind
2005	17 tons of high-energy biscuits,	school feeding (WFP), in-kind
2004	8 tons of high-energy biscuits,	school feeding (WFP), in-kind
2003	9 tons of high-energy biscuits,	school feeding (WFP), in-kind
2001	\$7,000	Medicines (in-kind)

\$1 - 100,000
\$100,001 - < 1m
\$1m - < 5m
\$5m - < 20m
> \$20m



Nepal

2010	\$1.6 m	Flood prevention (dam construction)
2008	\$4.5 m	Flood relief

Pakistan

2010	\$20 m	Floods: Cash to OCHA
2010	\$5 m	Floods: Cash to WFP
2008	\$3 m	Flood relief
2005	\$25 m	Earthquake: Bilateral to government
	\$15.5 m	Earthquake: In-kind assistance

Bangladesh

2011	\$6 m	Construction of shelter in 11 cyclone affected villages (plan)
2008	40,000 tons of rice, milk powder	Construction of shelter after cyclone
2007	\$10 m	cash for mudslide recovery
	\$22 m	Food aid (rice, wheat) flood relief
2006	\$1.5 m	Cyclone relief goods
	\$2.5 m	Food aid (cyclone relief)
2005	27,500 tons of rice	

Sri Lanka

2010	\$108 m	Post-conflict relief and shelter construction
2009	\$2.8 m	In-kind to UNHCR
	\$3 m	In-kind to the ICRC (Tamil Nadu)
	\$2 m	Medical supplies (in-kind)
		Emergency field hospital (treated 50,000 persons)
2008	\$2.7 m	In-kind to the ICRC (from Tamil Nadu)
2005	\$2.2 m	Tsunami relief (in-kind)

4.2 South-East, Central and West Asia

In addition to its South Asian neighbors, India has extended humanitarian aid to countries in South East, Central and West Asia. Because of historical, cultural and geopolitical linkages, both before and after independence, India considers these regions as its extended neighborhood. Once connected by the Silk Road, India has maintained strong political and economic – particularly energy – interests in the Middle East and Central Asia. The region's stability is of utmost importance to India, as the growth of Islamic fundamentalism has had important domestic repercussions. The 1991 Look East policy initiated close economic and strategic relationships with several South-East and East Asian countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam, some of whom have grown wary of China's rise (Raja Mohan 2006).

Over the past decade, India has responded to all major humanitarian emergencies in South East, Central and West Asia. The Indian army provided \$5 million in in-kind relief when it responded to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake in China, and it ran a field hospital in the aftermath of the 2005 Bam earthquake in Iran. Further, India annually provides North Korea with 2,000 tons of rice and wheat, comparable to the amount supplied by mid-sized European donors like Finland or Switzerland (WFP 2010). In the Middle East, the Indian army provided shelter materials worth \$2.3 million during the 2006 Lebanon-Israel conflict, along with a direct cash contribution of \$10 million to the Lebanese government for relief and reconstruction. In Iraq, India contributed in-kind to the WFP's school-feeding program between 2004-07, in addition to a notable \$30 million contribution to the UN's Iraq-reconstruction fund for humanitarian and development aid. Moreover, the plight of Palestinian refugees is a politically important matter for India. Until 2008, India mostly provided direct support or budget assistance to the Palestinian authorities. Since 2009, however, the Indian government has put more emphasis on multilateral relief. India has increased its core contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine from \$20,000 to \$1 million, as well as provided another \$1 million to the organization's Gaza appeal that same year.

Myanmar

In the east of the continent, Myanmar provides an interesting example of India's disaster relief. When Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008, Western donors did not gain access to the country for several critical weeks. Calls for a change in political leadership dominated the international debate (Katoch 2008, Belanger and Hoarsey 2008). Yet India was among the few countries granted access by the Burmese government. It provided the second largest contribution to the humanitarian response after China (BBC News 2008). The Indian military was the first to reach the delta with two ships of relief goods, and provided substantial assistance in the following weeks and months by supplying shelter materials, other relief goods and medical personnel.

Illustration 5**India's humanitarian assistance to South-East, Central and West Asia 2001-10****Palestine**

2009 | \$1 m | Core contribution UNRWA
 2008 | \$2 m | \$1 m core UNRWA
 \$1 m UNRWA Gaza Flash Appeal
 2006 | \$2,5 m | Medicines (in-kind)

Lebanon

2006 | \$2,3 m | Relief materials Lebanon war

Iran

2005 | Field hospital, Bam earthquake

Iraq

2004-2007 | School feeding (WFP)

Kyrgyzstan

2010 | Medicines, food, tents after Osh conflict

Mongolia

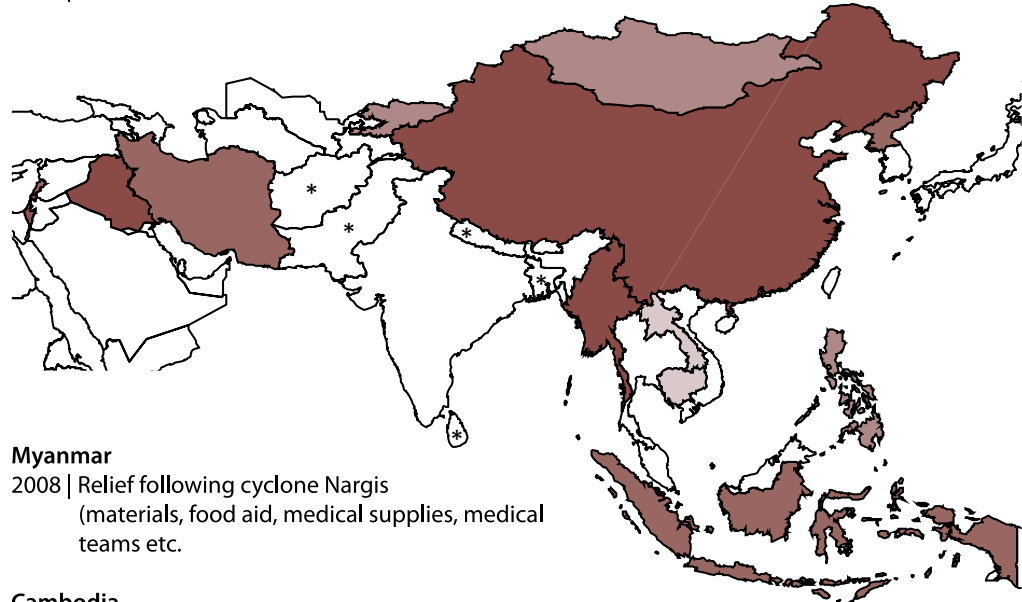
2008 | Rice and sugar
 2007 | Rice and sugar
 2003 | \$53,000 | Disaster relief, mainly
 pharmaceuticals

China

2008 | \$5 m | Sichuan earthquake relief
 (in-kind)

North Korea

2001-2010 | Annual shipments of
 rice/medicines

**Myanmar**

2008 | Relief following cyclone Nargis
 (materials, food aid, medical supplies, medical
 teams etc.)

Cambodia

2003 | \$18,000 | In-kind assistance, mainly medicines
 2001 | \$7,500 | In-kind medical aid to Cambodian Red
 Cross

Laos

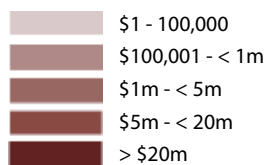
2003 | \$21,000 | Drought relief, mainly
 pharmaceuticals

Philippines

2008 | \$100,000 | Typhoon relief
 (cash to government)
 2006 | \$250,000 | Typhoon Reming
 (cash to government)

Indonesia

2006 | \$2 m | In-kind relief after
 Yogyakarta earthquake:
 army hospital, blankets, tents,
 food)
 2005 | \$2 m | Hospital ship to Banda Aceh
 after Tsunami (Relief materials
 and medical teams)



* see map above

4.3 Africa

India shares strong ideational and historical links with the African continent. Mahatma Gandhi's ideas for leading the independence movement in India largely derived from the discrimination that he experienced in South Africa. He became the most prominent representative of what is still a large Indian diaspora to the African continent. After independence, India vigorously supported anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles in Africa. Indian peacekeepers have been present in at least 17 out of 27 peacekeeping operations launched by the UN since 1960 (Rooyen 2010). The Indian contingents were among the largest in some of the major operations. Indo-African relations have further intensified in the past couple of years, with two major India-Africa summits and a growth in trade volumes from \$3 billion in 2000 to \$36 in 2008 (Mawdsley and McCann 2010: 85). Trade and credits have taken precedence over development aid. In 2008, India provided \$547 million in aid but cleared \$2.96 billion in credit for various African countries (Bijoy 2009:65). Notwithstanding India's pledge to contribute to the New Partnership for Africa's Development via the India-Africa Fund, the share of African countries in the Indian development assistance is currently at five percent, marginal compared to other countries (MEA 2010).

Just as for development aid, India's humanitarian assistance to African countries has a long tradition but remains marginal. As early as 1985, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs reported supplying a total 100,000 tons of wheat to famine-affected African countries (MEA-Report 1985-86). In the past 10 years, the sparse data available show a correlation between India's increasing diplomatic presence and humanitarian assistance. In many cases, Indian officials pledged humanitarian aid during state visits. In Niger, for example, the establishment of bilateral relations and the provision of medical assistance following a food crisis both occurred in 2005 (MEA 2010a). Likewise, the first-time contributions to Burkina Faso and Togo in 2007 – medical assistance for flood victims – correlate with India's growing interest in West Africa (Mawdsley and McCann 2010: 84).

Humanitarian needs arising from armed conflict on the African continent are so high that they dwarf those from natural disasters (United Nations 2010: iv). India, however, focuses on response to natural calamities and is mindful to avoid internationally politicized contexts on the continent. The case of Sudan, India's largest trading partner in Africa, illustrates this approach.

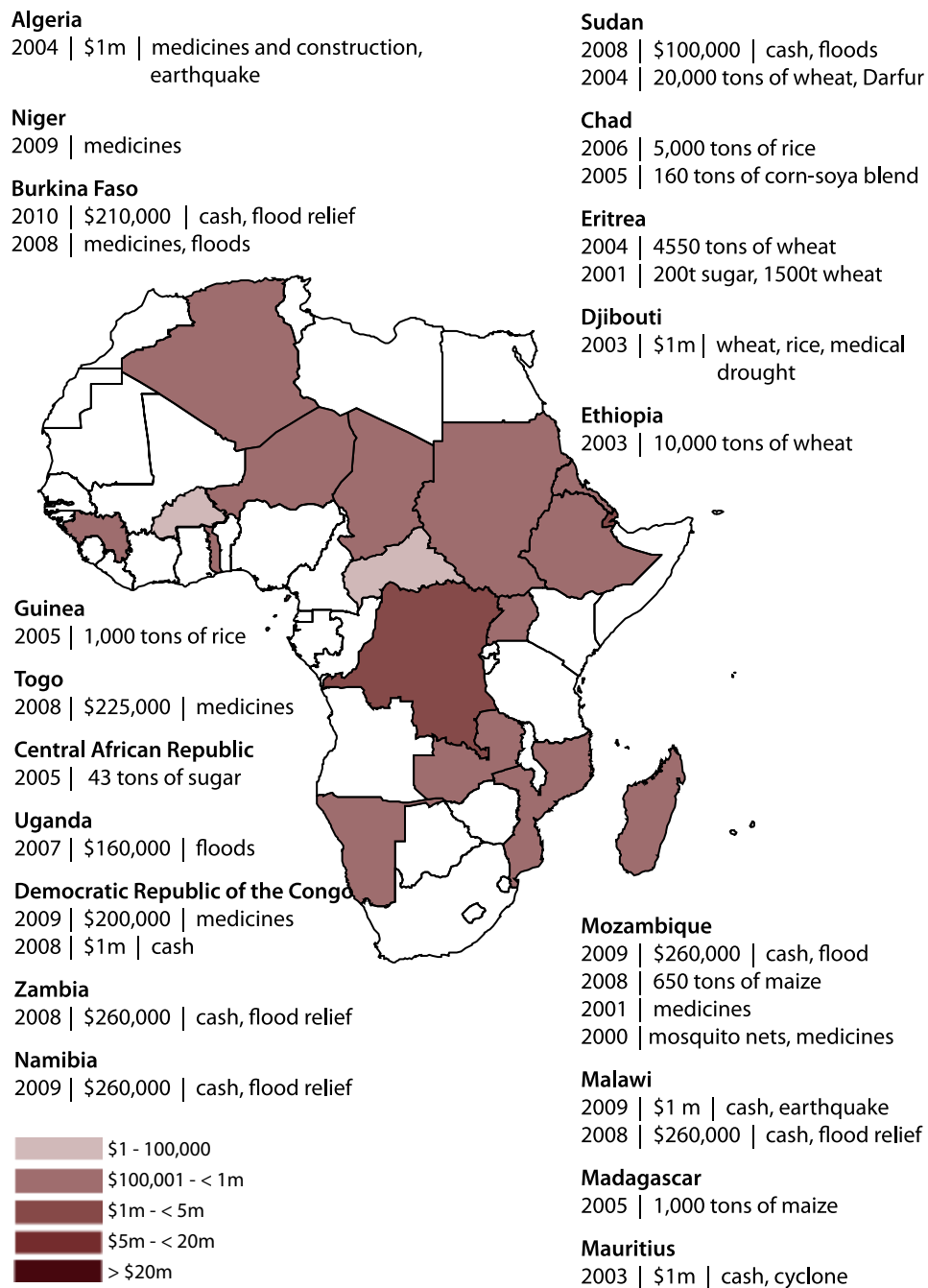
Sudan

Since the mid-1980s, India has provided natural disaster assistance to the Sudanese government (MEA 2010c). Appropriately, when the Sudanese government asked the Indian government for humanitarian assistance to help people affected by the conflict in Darfur in 2004, India responded positively and sent a consignment of 20,000 tons of wheat (MEA Report 2004-05). However, after the growing international criticism of the Sudanese government's involvement in the conflict,

which peaked in 2005 when the International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for President Al Bashir, India halted the humanitarian assistance.² At the same time, India has continued its development and economic cooperation with Sudan, an indication that the country tries to keep humanitarian assistance separate from development and only uses the latter if it can maintain its non-political stance.

Illustration 6

India's humanitarian assistance to African countries from 2001-2010



² Except when it provided flood relief in 2008, a less politically charged issue (MEA 2010c).

4.4 South America

As economic ties between India and Latin American countries have grown in recent years, India has begun to pay more attention to South America's humanitarian needs too. Apart from close political and investment relations with Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, India also keeps in mind the presence of the Indian diaspora in Caribbean countries like Guyana and Trinidad. From 2001-10, India's humanitarian aid following natural disasters has risen dramatically. In 2001, following severe droughts in Guatemala and Honduras, India provided \$10,000 in medical assistance to both countries. By 2010, assistance spiked into the millions of dollars in order to help Chile and Haiti cope with the aftermath of the devastating 2010 earthquakes.

Haiti

India's response to the 2010 earthquake – \$5 million to the Haitian government – was well received by officials there, who lauded the prompt contribution (Rediff News, 2010). For the Indian government, Haiti is a classic case of genuine humanitarianism, an example of India helping one of the world's poorest countries struggle with unimaginable loss of lives and property. At the same time, it was a good opportunity to show the world that India takes seriously the responsibilities associated with its new global position.

India's aid to Haiti was not restricted to a one-off bilateral contribution. The Indian government is co-financing two long term projects through the India-Brazil-South Africa Initiative (IBSA), one on solid waste collection and another on the construction of cisterns. Further, in a development that surprised even Indian government officials, Indian humanitarian NGOs, who have so far only operated in their home region, have also taken the initiative to work in Haiti. One example is Unique Service Trust, a small organization which adopted a Haitian village. The Haitian government also considered requesting India's help to build low cost housing similar those built in the Indian provinces of Gujarat and Maharashtra (Rediff News, 2010). These provinces were hit by earthquakes in 2001 and 1993 (Rediff News, 2010).

Again, it needs to be noted that 2010 is not the first instance of Indian humanitarian aid to Haiti. India provided cash assistance worth \$16,000 for the hurricane response in 2008 and medicine worth \$50,000 in the wake of the 2007 storms. Moreover, since 1997 Indians have been on duty as military observers and civilian police in the UN missions to help stabilize the country.

Illustration 7**India's humanitarian assistance to South America and the US 2001-2010**

5. Indian multilateral assistance and cooperation

Scholars have observed that new generation middle powers like Brazil and India are cautious about embracing multilateralism if strategically more promising bilateral financing options are available (Alden and Vieira 2005: 1079-80). Former and serving Indian officials echo this tone of caution. Recently, however, India has taken the initiative to support international humanitarian organizations more than it has in the past, a trend examined in the first part of this chapter. At the same time, cooperation with other donors has only occurred in exceptional cases.

5.1 India's unsteady relations with humanitarian organizations

Whereas India provides a steadily growing share to the United Nations budget, its financial contributions to multilateral humanitarian agencies have been less predictable. Indian officials voice two main criticisms against international humanitarian assistance organizations, humanitarian United Nations agencies in particular. First, they criticize the dominance of industrialized Western countries, a dominance that manifests itself in exclusive donor circles and mostly Western staff. Second, Indian officials accuse humanitarian organizations of not utilizing funds efficiently, and argue that organizations spend too much on “expensive international consultants.” Despite these criticisms, India's policy towards multilateral organizations has demonstrated a measure of adaptability in the past five years, and the country now turns to multilateral funding under two circumstances. First, if the recipient country indicates a preference towards multilateral channels, as Pakistan did in 2010, India apparently defers to this wish. Second, in complex humanitarian emergencies associated with protracted conflict situations, India prefers to use multilateral channels to avoid positioning itself on one side of the conflict.

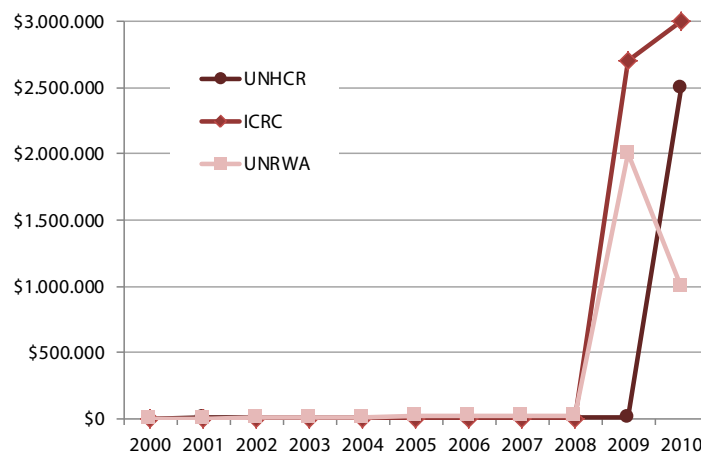
India's contributions to most of the international humanitarian organizations examined for this paper¹ show an emerging pattern. From 2008-2009, the Indian government has taken proactive steps to significantly increase contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), from previously symbolic or non-existing core contributions to several million dollars worth of operational support. For example, India approached UNRWA with an announcement to step up its core contributions to the organization

¹ In view of the large number of agencies involved in the humanitarian work, we have only selected a few to highlight the nuances in Indian contributions. We chose those organizations that focus mainly on humanitarian assistance as opposed to development, and therefore excluded World Health Organization or UNICEF.

from \$20,000 to \$1 million (UN DPA 2010). Similarly, UNHCR received the first contribution from the Indian government to its Sri Lanka operations in 2009. Consequentially, international organizations now seek to engage India on a more substantial and continuous basis. The ICRC has been working towards a “wider relationship that would reflect the growing international role of India as an emerging power” (ICRC 2009), and the head of UNHCR, Antonio Guterres, paid New Delhi a visit in December 2009, his second visit following his first one in 2006.² It is too early to tell whether the year 2009 marks a turning point in India's multilateral humanitarian funding. At least part of this development is owed to the influence of the then Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, Shashi Tharoor, who took office after a long career at the UN, including in various humanitarian agencies.³

Illustration 8

India's contributions to UNRWA, ICRC and UNHCR (2000-10)



Source: Annual reports and press releases

India's relationship with both the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and World Food Programme (WFP) are not part of this larger trend. They require a closer look because they represent the extremes of very low cooperation (i.e., OCHA) and an already seasoned relationship (i.e., WFP).

For a long time, top-level humanitarian assistance officials at the United Nations

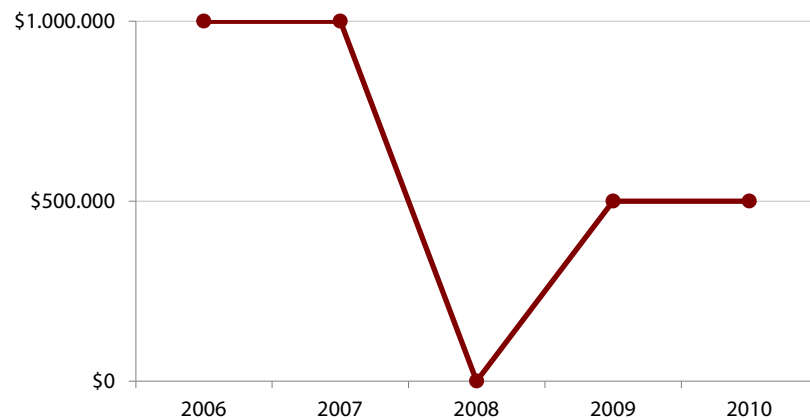
² The relationship between UNHCR and India is a walk on eggshells. India has never ratified the international refugee convention of 1951, which leaves the large number of refugees and migrants living in India in a legal limbo and deprives UNHCR a legal basis to work in the country (see Samaddar (2003) and Dhavan (2005)). All the same, India has become home to many refugees in its history and managed to cope with large influxes of refugees. It is estimated that India provided shelter and food assistance worth 2.5 million per day to the 10 million refugees from East Pakistan who fled into India in 1971 (Dhavan 2005: 128). The government came up with a simple but innovative solution to finance the relief efforts: It simply issued a special “refugee relief” postal stamp, raising the costs of ordinary stamps by a small amount for a couple of years.

³ In the Indian Cabinet, the Minister of State is the junior minister to the Minister for External Affairs.

have failed to recognize and include India as a humanitarian donor, with negative consequences for the relationship between OCHA and India.⁴ Neither Jan Egeland nor John Holmes, the two former United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinators, visited New Delhi to liaise with the highest levels of the Indian government. This non-engagement contrasts with the frequent visits the two paid to European capitals. Even OCHA's donor relations unit has until very recently largely ignored India as a potential donor.⁵ Cooperation with India has been limited to disaster risk reduction activities and best-practices exchange in national disaster management.

Illustration 9

India's contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund (2006-10)



Source: CERF (2010)

As a result of OCHA's passive stance, the Indian government perceives the organization as subject to the interests of the main Western donors and remains skeptical towards engaging it financially. Accordingly, India does not to date contribute to OCHA's core budget. The 2010 Pakistan floods were the first and only instance where India provided humanitarian funding (\$20 million) to an OCHA-managed mechanism, the Pakistan Emergency Response Fund (ERF).⁶ It remains to be seen whether this instance will point towards a continued improved donor relationship between India and OCHA, or whether it was rather owed to the constellation of decision makers and the Pakistani government's request to provide assistance through multilateral channels. The story is different for the OCHA-administered Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), which India

⁴ The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator/Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs is at the same time the director of OCHA.

⁵ When this study was finalized, a visit from the current ERC to New Delhi was scheduled for the end of March 2011, and a first meeting regarding the OCHA Donor Support Group had taken place between OCHA and the Indian Permanent Mission in Geneva.

⁶ Emergency Response Funds are country-level pooled funding mechanism through which donors provide un-earmarked humanitarian funding which are then assigned to cover the most pressing humanitarian needs.

supports both politically⁷ and financially.⁸ India's backing is due to the particular nature of the CERF's advisory board. The board comprises individuals from both affected and donor countries, and thus Indian decision makers do not perceive CERF as a Western donor-driven instrument.

Another decisive factor was that the executive director of the Indian National Institute of Disaster Management was on the CERF advisory board from 2006 (the year of its establishment) to 2009. This has allowed for a direct link between the fund and Indian government institutions, thereby enhancing India's acceptance of, and engagement with, the fund.

WFP represents the other extreme in India's relationship with international humanitarian organizations. In 2002, India pledged one million tons of wheat for several years for a school feeding program in Afghanistan – at the time the single largest pledge to WFP in the history of the organization (Bijoy 2009). Moreover, in 2008 India lifted commodity export restrictions – in place because of the food price crisis – which allowed the organization to economize \$43 million in 2008 alone by procuring rice from India at a cheaper price (WFP 2009). Following a personal visit by the organization's deputy executive director to New Delhi in September 2010, WFP and the Indian government are now working out a proposal for multi-year support from India. Two factors explain why in only eight years India has moved from a recipient to an important donor for WFP. First, with a more stable food security situation in India, the government recognized that it can use its surplus food stocks to contribute to the humanitarian system and thereby strategically showcase its contribution to the international humanitarian effort.⁹ India became a net donor to WFP in 2002 and has provided between \$6 million and \$33 million annually ever since.¹⁰ The diplomatic priority attributed to food aid is part of India's overall attention to agriculture related issues. The Indian embassy in Rome has a separate agricultural wing with a high-level representative responsible for the relations with the Rome based food aid and agricultural organizations (Ministry of Agriculture, 2010: 99). In humanitarian terms, Rome is thus closer to New Delhi than Geneva, where the political counselor is responsible for the bulk of humanitarian diplomacy, on top of all other political matters. However, the positive relationship between WFP and India is not just a result of New Delhi's priorities. A second decisive factor is that WFP has managed to strategically involve India. For example, by 2002, then WFP executive director James Morris

7 In 2007 for example India acknowledged CERF at the UN General Assembly as a "more responsive, prompt, fair and needs-based humanitarian assistance system" and as a "non-political collaborative instrument" (Indian statement at the 2007 UN General Assembly).

8 The Indian government provided initial funding of \$1 million in 2006 and 2007, and contributions of \$500,000 since then.

9 A vision that Arjun Katoch, Head of OCHA Field Support Section until 2009, had formulated as early as 1997. See his *Sad, India Refuses to be Humanitarian*, *Indian Express*, 31 December 1997.

10 Additionally, India funds parts of the country program in India. The Government of India contributes \$1.92 million every biennium towards the WFP, which it uses for support of its India Country Programme. Since its inception India has contributed \$33.58 million to the WFP up to the financial year 2009-2010 (Ministry of Agriculture, 2010: 99).

publicly “welcomed India into [the] family of donors” (WFP 2002). An institutional reason explains why WFP has put so much emphasis on non-Western donors: The diversification of donors helps WFP maintain a large tool box of instruments that might no longer be popular with established donors, such as in-kind assistance for school feeding programs.

Illustration 10

India's contributions to the World Food Programme (2000-10)



Source: WFP (2010)

In sum, India's relationship with WFP is by and large the most developed of all international organizations. The rising and significant contributions to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the International Committee of the Red Cross and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees show promising signs of a development towards more multilateralism, which, however, is yet to show continuity.

5.2 India's cooperation with other states

With respect to state-state cooperation on humanitarian assistance at the international level, India is a fervent advocate of inclusive fora that allow for an exchange between both donor and recipient countries. Cooperation with Western donors has been limited to two occasions, a sharp contrast to the intensifying cooperation among countries in Asia.

Cooperation with Western donors

The idea of collaborating with Western donors in closed donor circles – such as the OECD Development Assistance Committee, donor support groups of international organizations or in the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative – seems far off the radar of Indian decision makers. The only fora in which India actively participates

are those that it perceives as inclusive and beneficial for its own internal disaster management, notably the World Bank Global Facility on Disaster Risk Reduction (currently led by an Indian national) and the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. India seeks to promote alternatives to established donor cooperation at the global and cross-regional level. At the global level, India was instrumental in setting up the UN Development Cooperation Forum as an explicit alternative to coordination within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (Chanana 2009: 12). Second, in an effort to promote South-South cooperation, India has established a common trust fund for development and humanitarian projects with Brazil and South Africa as part of the India-Brazil-South Africa trilateral initiative. With a budget of \$3 million per year, the fund is however very small compared to the overall development aid expenditures of the three countries.

Despite its principled stand with respect to institutionalized donor cooperation, India has shown a pragmatic stance with respect to direct coordination. In the limited number of cases where Western donors have sought cooperation with India, the country has reacted positively. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, India was part of the Tsunami Core Group, through which it coordinated assistance efforts on a daily basis at the foreign secretary level with Japan, the United States and Australia (Grossmann 2005). In the aftermath of this unprecedented cooperation on disaster assistance, the United States and India launched a Disaster Relief Initiative to maintain a regular knowledge-exchange in view of future relief operations (US Department of State 2005). A second instance, this one rather symbolic, was a joint statement between India and Sweden on humanitarian assistance at the UN General Assembly in 2008 (Sweden and India, 2008). These two exceptions set aside, mutual misperceptions have hindered closer cooperation between India and Western donors. They accuse each other of furthering illegitimate foreign policy goals with humanitarian assistance – or, more precisely, with foreign aid in general: Existing narratives on both sides are based on an inability or unwillingness to distinguish each other's development from humanitarian aid. If Western governments have any detailed knowledge of India's donorship at all, their reservations are largely based on the view that India's development aid is linked to economic interests. Equally, India distances itself from Western donors because it perceives their humanitarian aid as linked to democracy promotion – again, objectives that those donors mostly seek with development assistance. Further, government officials are suspicious that India currently only receives more attention because the financial crisis has forced Western donors to lower their humanitarian aid budgets and thus search for alternative sources to fund the international system.

Regional cooperation

India has actively promoted institutionalized regional cooperation in Asia. Cooperation in the region has largely focused on disaster risk reduction so far, but this is now slowly paving the way for increased cooperation on disaster response, too. Asia is generally the region that pays the most attention to disaster risk

reduction. It was not the United Nations that adopted the first international cooperation agreement on disaster risk reduction, but rather the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2005. Due to its own vulnerability to disasters, India has been an active participant and promoter of regional cooperation on such matters in the ASEAN Regional Forum and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Cooperation on disaster risk reduction, in the SAARC in particular, has a spillover effect in other areas of disaster management. Plans to set up Natural Disaster Rapid Response Mechanisms have been on the table since 2008 (Chakrabarti 2009) but have not yet materialized because of Pakistan's opposition. Moreover, the idea to set up a pooled funding mechanism, the SAARC Relief Fund, finds broad support in the organization. India is at the forefront of these ideas and hosts the SAARC disaster management center. While all further initiatives are still in an early phase, their implementation would be a major step towards the regionalization of coordination on disaster response under Indian leadership.

6. Explaining the puzzle: norms and interests combined

India maintains that its reasons for providing humanitarian assistance are non-political, yet foreign policy considerations (regional stability or the desire to encourage friendly relations) play into aid decisions. As discussed in the introduction, humanitarian assistance is rarely analyzed as part of foreign policy because secondary interests for humanitarian assistance are seen as undesirable. However, because a combination of norms and interests animate humanitarian assistance in all donor countries, the more relevant question is whether the interest-based motives obstruct or complement a principled approach to humanitarian assistance. To answer this question, we first need to synthesize the main normative and interest-based motives that guide India's approach.

6.1 Humanitarianism as soft power

Humanitarian assistance is explicitly part of India's aspiration to lead by the "power of example" (Tharoor 2009), commonly labeled "soft power" (Nye 2004). India uses a combination of foreign policy instruments, which could be expressed metaphorically as bread, books and Bollywood. Similar to India's scholarship programs (books),¹ as well as the export of Indian cinema (Bollywood), humanitarian assistance (bread) represents one part of India's attempt to establish and promote its regional and global leadership. India addresses two target groups with its humanitarian engagement: the individual recipient countries and the international community.

Our analysis has shown that disaster assistance is indeed one diplomatic instrument used to build and strengthen India's bilateral relations, a reason why India prefers government-to-government channels to deliver aid. In both Central America and West Africa, we have observed a surge in humanitarian assistance activities parallel to generally intensifying diplomatic relations and rising investments.

Furthermore, we have found that through humanitarian assistance India seeks to demonstrate the country's aspiration to take on its share of global responsibility. In the aftermath of all the disasters headlined in the international media in 2010 – Haiti, Pakistan and Chile – India has proactively offered significant amounts of humanitarian assistance and shown eagerness to be the first to disburse assistance. As in peacekeeping, substantial humanitarian contributions aim to support the country's goal to have a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. The Indian

1 Since 1964, India provides scholarships enabling officials and students from other developing countries to come to study in India under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. The program is part of the Ministry of External Affairs and makes up for a large share of Indian development cooperation. See www.itec.mea.gov.in for more details.

government has understood that contributions to multilateral humanitarian organizations support this goal, and accordingly India has cultivated relations with multilateral organizations in the past years. This has resulted in multi-year contributions to the WFP since 2002 and a recent surge in contributions to UNHCR, UNRWA and the ICRC in 2009.

6.2 Stability and ethnic linkages in South Asia

The analysis provided in the section above holds true for all countries and regions where India gives humanitarian assistance – also for its immediate neighborhood (cf. Chandran et al 2009: 72-73). However, in South Asia, the region where India provides the bulk of its humanitarian aid, namely in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, additional objectives come into play. Regional stability considerations and ethnic linkages are key factors explaining the high contributions to this region.

The government knows that India can only fully realize the potential of its economic growth in a stable South Asia. In a region subjected to multiple types of disasters every year, India is the country that inevitably bears the consequences of poor disaster management in neighboring countries. Because of its relatively better economic standing, India either has to provide assistance or host disaster-related refugees. Indian decision makers therefore have interest in supporting the resilience of neighboring countries and help prevent disasters (Chandran et al 2009: 72-73).

Equally important are ethnic linkages in the region, particularly in Sri Lanka, where the Tamil Nadu government contributed substantially to India's relief efforts in the past two years.

6.3 Norms and interests – compatible or conflicting?

India strongly prefers bilateral government-to-government contributions and focuses on responding to the priorities of the affected state rather than assessing the needs of the affected population. In cases where the affected government is not willing or not able to distribute Indian relief goods according to needs, this could have negative consequences on the impartiality of Indian aid. However, as part of its soft power strategy, India also seeks a positive image with the affected population, not only with the government. For that reason, India cannot afford to be seen as favoring one part of the population over the other. Rather, it works through international organizations in conflict settings where the impartiality of the government is questionable. The quest for international recognition, also part of India's soft power approach, has led to an increased engagement with international organizations, and in this way India has supported a more coordinated approach to humanitarian aid.

As a result of India's primary focus on South Asia, Indian humanitarian funding is not equally distributed around the globe. Despite their greater needs compared to South Asian countries, countries in Africa receive far less humanitarian assistance from India (cf. United Nations 2010). That said, such an imbalance due to donor's considerations for stability is also a common feature of donorship among Western donors (Development Initiatives 2009: 13-14).

Regarding India's aid modalities, these may indeed run counter to principled humanitarian assistance. India often provides in-kind medical assistance and large amounts of in-kind food aid. If not well coordinated, in-kind humanitarian contributions could potentially have negative effects as they distort local markets. Determining whether this has been the case for Indian in-kind medical and food aid was beyond the scope of this study, as it would require further research in the recipient countries. Moreover, India does not have any accountability mechanism for direct cash-contributions to affected governments. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs does not ask its counterpart to prove that it spent India's money on humanitarian aid. Here as well, determining the impact of the absence of control mechanisms requires further research.

These two open questions on modalities aside, India's interest-based motives do not obstruct a principled – or, in India's words, “non-political” – approach to humanitarian aid. On the contrary, the interests have rather led to a general increase in humanitarian aid contributions, a positive effect. Therefore, the international system could potentially benefit from better cooperation with India, a prospect discussed in the next chapter.

7. Finding collective and cooperative solutions

Nations can, and indeed must, cooperate to find collective and cooperative solutions to the challenges that disasters represent.
Indian statement, UN General Assembly 2007

India's development from humanitarian-aid recipient to provider has largely happened outside of what is commonly known as the international humanitarian system. In the years to come, India's economic rise will provide the government with even more means to reduce suffering in the world. This contribution could potentially be even more significant if India, international aid organizations and Western donors were to effectively cooperate.

Such cooperation would help India gain new insights into how others manage humanitarian assistance. Increased multilateral engagement would also mean increased recognition of India as a responsible international power. Cooperation makes sense for Western donors and the multilateral humanitarian system too. With India becoming a potentially more important humanitarian donor in the future, it is better to engage them sooner than later. Further, Asia is likely to remain a region particularly vulnerable to disasters, and the impact of climate-change on some of India's neighbors – rising sea levels in Bangladesh, for instance – is expected to be particularly severe. With its regional ties and cultural proximity, India will be an indispensable partner in responding to these challenges. Finally, organizations and Western donors could learn from India's vast experience in tackling disasters internally.

To realize the benefits of such cooperation, there is some work ahead for all involved to overcome the mutual misperceptions that have led to the currently low level of cooperation between India, Western donors and multilateral organizations.

Western donors should

- **Give India the benefit of the doubt and proactively seek a dialogue on humanitarian donorship principles – or better, partnership principles.** India distinguishes disaster relief from other forms of aid and has no reservations about humanitarian principles. On the contrary, the country promotes a decidedly non-political stance on disaster relief, and India's interest-based motives do not conflict with a principled approach to humanitarian assistance. An open dialogue would require that traditional donors themselves acknowledge that humanitarian aid is part of their foreign policy and that they too aspire to follow humanitarian principles. Camouflaging interest-related motives with rhetoric about good humanitarian-donorship does not carry credibility.

- **Offer meaningful participation beyond burden sharing.** India will have to be included in a dialogue on how to shape the humanitarian system together. Indian policy makers resent the fact that their country currently only receives more attention because the financial crisis has forced Western donors to lower their humanitarian aid budgets and search for alternative sources to fund the international system.
- **Learn from India how to meaningfully engage with disaster affected governments.** The non-engagement of the host government has been one of the single largest failures of international disaster assistance to date (cf. ALNAP 2010). Western governments – and international organizations – can only learn from India in this regard.

India should

- **Engage in dialogue with Western donors and give them the benefit of the doubt that their humanitarian aid is not entirely political.** Most Western donors have made genuine efforts to achieve a more principled humanitarian-aid approach, either by cooperating with other donors – through pooled funding, for example – or by adopting norms-driven humanitarian assistance policies. Engaging in dialogue could reduce mutual misperceptions, provide an opportunity for India to explain its approach and allow for mutual learning.
- **Professionalize the humanitarian aid bureaucracy.** With its contributions to international efforts growing, India can “no longer deal with humanitarian assistance as a hobby,” as one interviewee put it. The Ministry of External Affairs should improve coordination and knowledge-exchange among the different divisions. If the different ministries fail to agree on a development cooperation ministry, the ministry division for technical and economic cooperation could serve as a node for such efforts.
- **Evaluate aid modalities to preclude negative consequences.** As part of its professionalization efforts, India should think about control mechanisms for the use of cash contributions by the affected government to avoid abuse of Indian aid money. Furthermore, the government should evaluate its aid modalities to make sure that in-kind medical and food donations do not distort local markets. More transparency in those areas will also enhance India's international credibility.
- **Articulate the government's policy on humanitarian assistance.** A disaster assistance policy could give decision makers in the Ministry of External Affairs guidance on humanitarian issues. Having a clearer idea of the role disaster assistance plays in foreign policy does not necessarily mean a loss of flexibility. In fact, it could avoid the negative consequences of the current ad hoc decision-making process.

- **Engage fully with multilateral humanitarian organizations.** India should take a seat at the table of multilateral organizations and shape the international humanitarian system from within – instead of criticizing it from the outside.
- **Try engaging the Indian Red Cross, Indian and international non-governmental organizations, and Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies.** So far, India mainly relies on the Indian army for implementing humanitarian aid and does not tap the expertise of the Indian Red Cross abroad. The same is true for international non-governmental organizations, as well as Indian NGOs, which have also started to work on humanitarian projects abroad. The Indian government could rely on the proven track record of these organizations and diversify its implementing partners by providing funding to Indian NGOs, the Indian Red Cross and international non-governmental organizations for disaster assistance abroad.
- **Keep up the good knowledge-exchange with other countries in the region.** Indian institutions, in particular the National Institute on Disaster Management and the SAARC Disaster Management Center, have contributed significantly to knowledge creation and capacity building for natural disasters in the region. India should keep up this commitment.

Multilateral organizations and non-governmental organizations should

- **Give India the attention it deserves and a seat at the table.** First and foremost, Valerie Amos, the new UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, should do what her two predecessors failed to do and liaise with New Delhi.¹ Humanitarian organizations have to recognize that India will not contribute substantially unless it has a real say in the organization.
- **Engage India regionally as a partner in South Asia.** India focuses its humanitarian assistance on the extended neighborhood, where the country has a vital interest to keep stability. It makes sense to engage India and to actively seek New Delhi's view on regional disasters and contexts. Multilateral and non-governmental organizations should seek Indian cooperation, particularly for Afghanistan. India is one of the few humanitarian-assistance providers who – together with Switzerland – are not at the same time party to the conflict, a potential advantage for the perception of international humanitarian assistance.
- **Include Indian nationals among the staff in multilateral humanitarian organizations.** Staff decisions in international organizations are a sensitive issue for India, and India resents the over-representation of European and US

¹ When this study was finalized, a visit from the current ERC to New Delhi was scheduled for the end of March 2011.

staff in those organizations. Indian General Assembly statements often use the Central Emergency Response Fund as an example of good hiring practices, even though the fund is administered by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, with which India has a troubled relationship. Multilateral organizations should follow the CERF's example and reduce the proportion of Anglo-Saxon staff members among their ranks to enhance multilateral credibility.

- **Involve India through the permanent missions in New York and Geneva.** The Indian government sends influential diplomats to their permanent missions at the United Nations; these diplomats have a direct channel to New Delhi. Multilateral organizations should therefore proactively approach Indian representatives.

Effective cooperation for effective humanitarian assistance requires time and energy from Western donors, international humanitarian organizations and India. However such efforts are worth it because they will enable all the stakeholders to assist those in need in the best possible way – a concern they all share.

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