

# Haiti Earthquake Response

## Mapping and analysis of gaps and duplications in evaluations

February 2011



**ALNAP**  
Active Learning Network for  
Accountability and Performance  
in Humanitarian Action



**UNEG**  
United Nations Evaluation Group

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The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of ALNAP or any of its members.

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# Acknowledgements

Many individuals and organizations assisted and supported this study by sharing documents on their planned evaluations and by giving their valuable time for interviews.

Special thanks are due to Tijana Bonjanic, Michel Denis, Annie Devonport, François Grünewald, Scott Green, Saul Guerrero, Paul Harvey, Katy Love, Maria Palacios, Jonathan Patrick and Glyn Taylor, who provided valuable insights and ideas on the role of evaluations in the Haiti humanitarian response. The author also wishes to thank the ALNAP Secretariat for its excellent support and facilitation of this study.

# Acronyms

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| ALNAP    | Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in humanitarian action      |
| DG-ECHO  | European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office  |
| GHD      | Good Humanitarian Donorship  |
| HAP      | Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International                                  |
| IASC     | Inter-Agency Standing Committee  |
| IFRC     | International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies                       |
| OCHA     | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs                     |
| OECD-DAC | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development–Development Assistance Committee |
| RTE      | Real Time Evaluation   |
| TOR      | Terms of Reference   |
| UN       | United Nations   |
| UNEG     | UN Evaluation Group  |

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

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The earthquake that struck Haiti on 12 January 2010 was by all measurements a ‘mega disaster’. Some 223,000 people were killed, 300,000 injured, and more than 2 million forced from their homes.<sup>1</sup> Seventeen percent of Haiti’s central government employees were killed when government buildings collapsed.<sup>2</sup> The UN experienced its largest loss of life on a single day ever, when 102 staff members died.<sup>3</sup>

As ever, local people responded immediately to pull their neighbours out of buildings, clear bodies and debris, and start rebuilding their lives. The crisis received extensive international media coverage and drew visits from high-profile politicians and personalities. Thousands of international organizations,<sup>4</sup> including those from the Caribbean and South America as well as Europe and North America, overcame huge logistical challenges to mount a massive humanitarian response. Haitians abroad sent home estimated hundreds of millions in remittances.<sup>5</sup> More than \$3 billion in humanitarian

assistance has been committed or contributed,<sup>6</sup> at least a third from private donations.<sup>7</sup>

As of January 2011, at least 45 evaluations are known to have been done of various aspects of the international response to the Haiti earthquake. Although over a year has passed, at least 800,000 people still sleep in tents or in the open each night,<sup>8</sup> a cholera epidemic has taken hold, and rising political instability brings additional challenges. The effort to understand what international humanitarian agencies have done well, and what could be done better, will continue until the end of 2011 and beyond.

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## 1.2 Objectives and structure

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For all of these reasons and more, the Haiti earthquake humanitarian response has generated a sizeable evaluative effort, not unlike that following the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004.

To try to make this effort more joined up, coherent, and less of a burden on operational agencies and local communities – while also providing good coverage and maximizing learning and accountability – ALNAP has worked with the OECD-DAC Evaluation Network, the UN Evaluation Group and others to bring together the key actors involved in evaluation.

The present report is part of a planned sequence of products, representing three stages of learning: *learning before, learning during and learning after.*

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- 1 N. Gronewald, ‘Earthquake-Relief Officials in Haiti Hoping 2011 Brings Better Results’, New York Times, 13 January 2011; IASC, ‘Haiti Earthquake Response, 6-month Report’, p. 22; and IOM, April 2010, quoted in F. Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p.7.
  - 2 UNEG, OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation and ALNAP, ‘Supporting Evaluation in Haiti: Concept Note’, 20 September 2010, p. 1.
  - 3 UN News Centre, ‘UN Staff Union Mourns Colleagues Killed in 2010’, 11 January 2011.
  - 4 IASC. ‘Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti following the 12 January 2010 Earthquake: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons to be Learned’. (Haiti Earthquake Response 6-Month Report.) Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 14 July 2010, p.4.
  - 5 World Bank Group, ‘Haiti Remittances Key to Earthquake Recovery’, 17 May 2010.

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- 6 ‘OCHA Financial Tracking Service, ‘Haiti – Earthquakes – January 2010’, Table A: List of all commitments/ contributions and pledges as of 31 January 2011. Includes funding within and outside of the Appeal.
  - 7 DARA, Crisis Reports: Haiti, Humanitarian Response Index (2011), p. 162.
  - 8 Gronewald, ‘Earthquake-Relief Officials’.

One example of *learning before* is the ALNAP 2008 paper on learning from earthquake recovery and response operations.<sup>9</sup> As part of *learning during*, ALNAP commissioned a context analysis and evaluative framework for Haiti, published in July 2010.<sup>10</sup> This document provided background material on the wider context in Haiti and a set of questions that serves as a basis for a common evaluation framework. ALNAP is also maintaining the Haiti Learning and Accountability Portal. The Portal provides an overview of ongoing and planned learning and accountability efforts by agencies operating in Haiti, in order to encourage the sharing of approaches, contacts, key resources and evaluation plans.<sup>11</sup> Documents related to evaluations, including terms of reference, final reports and report summaries, were collected for posting on the 'evaluative resources' section of the Portal. This mapping forms much of the basis for the analysis in this report.

As part of *learning after*, ALNAP plans to commission an evaluation synthesis to be published at the end of 2011, which will formulate lessons learned based on a larger set of completed evaluations of the Haiti response. ALNAP will also make efforts to track the utilization of the emergent findings from this report by first reflecting on initial take up in the synthesis, then tracking and considering this in more depth in future iterations of its *State of the Humanitarian System* report.<sup>12</sup>

This report is part of the *learning during* phase. It has three related aims, described below along with the target group for each.

- **Map what is being evaluated and by whom.** In Section 2, the report shares information on completed and planned evaluations in order to provide more coherence in the evaluative response.

Evaluation documents are listed in the references and are available on the Portal.

- Target groups: Evaluators and evaluation managers.
- **Identify emerging directions and findings from ongoing evaluations.** In Sections 3, 4 and 5, the report identifies gaps and duplications within the set of planned and ongoing evaluations, in order to identify key issues for learning now and to help set the agenda for deeper learning in the future. The report comments on the methodological approach of evaluations undertaken so far. The aim is to help inform terms of reference for current and future evaluations and to contribute to hypotheses to be tested in the forthcoming synthesis.
  - Target groups: Evaluators, evaluation managers, policy makers and operational staff of humanitarian agencies.
- **Make tentative recommendations for evaluation processes now and in the future.** Section 6 summarizes ideas for how evaluations can be improved going forward.
  - Target groups: Evaluators and evaluation managers. This will also inform the next edition of the *ALNAP Guide to Evaluation of Humanitarian Action*.<sup>13</sup>

The analysis contained in this report is based on the documents posted on the ALNAP Haiti Learning and Accountability Portal. It was complemented by face-to-face or telephone interviews with a small number of key informants who have commissioned or conducted evaluations of the earthquake response (listed the annex).

9 ALNAP and ProVention, 'Responding to Earthquakes 2008: Learning from Earthquake Relief and Recovery Operations' (2008).

10 N. Rencoret et al., 'Haiti Earthquake Response Context Analysis', ALNAP (DAC Network on Development Evaluation, and UNEG, July 2010).

11 See <http://www.alnap.org/current/Haitilearningportal.aspx>. Readers are welcome to submit reports to the database by contacting Franziska Orphal at [f.orphal@alnap.org](mailto:f.orphal@alnap.org).

12 P. Harvey, A. Stoddard, A. Harmer, G. Taylor, *The State of the Humanitarian System: Assessing Performance and Progress, A Pilot Study* (ALNAP, 2009).

13 See, T. Beck, *Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria* (ALNAP, March 2008).

## 2 The evaluation landscape

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### 2.1 Mapping evaluations in Haiti

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First, *the mapping exercise focused only on evaluations by international agencies and donors in the initial response to the humanitarian emergency.* This excludes several sets of important actors and activities. First, evaluations conducted by organizations or donors based outside of Europe, North America or Australia and New Zealand, such as the Dominican Republic and Brazil,<sup>14</sup> may not be captured here; not all of the ‘non-DAC’ donors<sup>15</sup> were canvassed their planned evaluations. This gap is particularly noteworthy given the sizeable role played by these countries. Second, some of the many smaller international NGOs that responded to the earthquake have likely conducted evaluations or reviews of their work, but these are not well represented. Third, evaluations by agencies that do not typically have an emergency relief mandate but are engaged in recovery efforts in Haiti have not been well captured here, in part because their efforts are longer-term in nature and many have not yet begun doing evaluations.

Second, *many other learning initiatives beyond the standard evaluation approach are not captured in the mapping database.* Many of these are described on the ALNAP Haiti Learning and Accountability Portal. They include, for example, an aid monitoring project being undertaken by Transparency International’s local partner in Haiti, La Fondation Heritage pour Haiti; the six month deployment of a HAP International Team; and efforts by the Communications for Disaster-Affected Populations (CDAC) in Haiti project to enable the population to give feedback to providers of assistance.

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14 See J. Burnett, ‘For Haiti, Some Neighborly Help from Next Door’ (National Public Radio, 20 January 2010); and M. Hirst, ‘Brazil in Haiti: The Challenges Ahead’ (Noref Report, Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre, 5 February 2010).

15 Non-DAC donors are donor governments that are not members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD.

Last, *no one has yet focused on understanding what national actors (including government, civil society) and recovery structures (such as the Interim Haiti Recovery Commission) have done well or less well.* Evaluations covering these actors are therefore not available. The need for evaluation efforts of international aid agencies to link up better with all of the above actors and initiatives is discussed in Section 6.

To date, ALNAP is aware of 40 separate evaluations of the international humanitarian response that have been completed or are being planned. These represent a mix of levels: organizational, project or programme, and sector or system-wide (see Table 1 for a break-down). An exercise was defined as an ‘evaluation’ if it was a ‘systematic and impartial examination of humanitarian action intended to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and enhance accountability’. In addition, by definition, an evaluation

- is commissioned by or in cooperation with the organisation (or organisations) whose performance is being evaluated;
- is undertaken either by a team of non-employees (external) or by a mixed team of non-employees (external) and employees (internal) from the commissioning organisation or the organisation being evaluated or both;
- assesses policy or practice or both against recognised criteria (e.g. the DAC criteria); and
- articulates findings, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.<sup>16</sup>

The 40 evaluations come from 34 separate agencies, donors or consortia. Of the 40 evaluations, in 27 the terms of reference is available in English or French, including eight for which the full report has

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16 This is the ALNAP definition. See ALNAP, *Evaluating Humanitarian Action Using the OECD-DAC Criteria: An ALNAP Guide for Humanitarian Agencies* (ALNAP, Overseas Development Institute, London, March 2006), p. 14.

been completed and shared.<sup>17</sup> Of the remaining 19 evaluations, approximately half are still underway, which demonstrates that the evaluative effort is still young. Some evaluations and terms of reference were not shared with the consultants because they were internal and deemed not for public consumption, while others required approval from senior management and could not be shared in time.

Of the 40 evaluations, 17 have been commissioned by NGOs, five by national Red Cross societies or the IFRC, five directly by government humanitarian donors, five by UN agencies, three by consortia which include both UN agencies and NGOs, one by an academic institution, and one by a branch of

17 This includes one evaluation which was shared with the consultant but was not posted on the ALNAP Haiti Learning and Accountability Portal.

government other than an aid directorate. Seven joint evaluations were commissioned by operational agencies working in coalition, such as consortia of agencies based in a particular country (e.g. the Humanitarian Coalition in Canada and the AGIRE group of Italian NGOs).

The large majority of evaluations are focused on an organisation's own response – at the project, programme, or organizational level – or a set of organisations' responses. The one known sector-wide evaluation is, a 'lessons and innovation capture' commissioned by the Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN) on nutrition.<sup>18</sup> Thus far, the only system-wide evaluations mandated by humanitarian agencies or donors are the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)-commissioned first phase Real Time Evaluation

18 Terms of reference are not available.

**Table 1: Evaluations of the Haiti response grouped by level of analysis**

| Programme or project evaluations (8)   | Organisational evaluations (18)   | Donor evaluations (8)   | Sector or system evaluations (5)   |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Red Cross</li> <li>• Action contre la Faim (ACF) (3)</li> <li>• British Red Cross</li> <li>• Chaîne de Bonheur/Swiss Solidarity</li> <li>• World Vision</li> <li>• Ushahidi</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action contre la faim (ACF)</li> <li>• Agenzia Italiana per la Risposta alle Emergenze (AGIRE)</li> <li>• American Red Cross</li> <li>• British Red Cross</li> <li>• CARE International</li> <li>• CARE International and Save the Children US</li> <li>• Christian Aid</li> <li>• Concern Worldwide</li> <li>• Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC)</li> <li>• The Humanitarian Coalition (4 Canada-based NGOs)</li> <li>• International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)</li> <li>• OCHA</li> <li>• Oxfam</li> <li>• International</li> <li>• Solidaridad Internacional</li> <li>• Tearfund UK and NL</li> <li>• WFP</li> <li>• UNFPA</li> <li>• UNICEF</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fondation de France</li> <li>• Norad/Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> <li>• Australian Government</li> <li>• Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)</li> <li>• DG ECHO</li> <li>• Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development and Foreign Ministry, Germany</li> <li>• Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs</li> <li>• UK DfID*</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency Nutrition Network (ENN)</li> <li>• French Ministry of Defence's Strategic Affairs Directorate</li> <li>• Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2)</li> <li>• Tulane University/DRLA and University of Haiti</li> </ul> |

\*A global review which includes the Haiti earthquake response

Note that totals do not add up to 40 because no information about the level of analysis was available for one evaluation.

(RTE), which was based on a field visit conducted three months after the earthquake, and a report for the IASC produced six months after the earthquake.<sup>19</sup> The team that worked on both IASC documents, Groupe URD, also conducted a review for the French Ministry of Defence's Strategic Affairs Directorate just weeks after the earthquake, which provided a detailed assessment of the humanitarian response as a whole. Several other evaluations commissioned by individual organizations have explicitly examined the overall response, notably a joint evaluation commissioned by CARE International and Save the Children.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, Tulane University's Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy (DRLA), in partnership with the University of Haiti, is undertaking a humanitarian aid evaluation in Haiti with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the 27 evaluation terms of reference and eight final reports, the consultant also reviewed a sample of other documents related to the Haiti earthquake response, including independent reviews and analyses and agency situation reports. These can be found in the reference list.

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## 2.2 Key findings from evaluations

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The aim of this report is to survey evaluation activity, rather than to synthesize the lessons from evaluations. A separate synthesis report should, at a later stage, formulate lessons learned based on what will be a larger set of completed evaluations. Nonetheless, a brief summary of the principal conclusions emerging so far is found in Box 1.

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19 F.Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges. 'Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation in Haiti: 3 Months after the Earthquake', draft 1. Produced for IASC by Groupe URD and GPPi, 14 June 2010; and IASC. 'Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in Haiti following the 12 January 2010 Earthquake: Achievements, Challenges and Lessons to be Learned'. (Haiti Earthquake Response 6-Month Report.) Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 14 July 2010.

20 P. O'Hagan, K. Love and A. Rouse, 'An Independent Joint Evaluation of the Haiti Earthquake Humanitarian Response' (CARE, Save the Children and the Emergency Capacity Building Project, October 2010).

21 This initial inception phase is now underway and will culminate with a stakeholder workshop in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in February 2011.

### Box 1. Key findings from evaluations and reviews of the international humanitarian response

1. Despite great personal losses, huge logistical challenges and a disaster of enormous scale, international donors and agencies quickly mobilized to deliver medical care, food, water, shelter and protection for people in need.
2. The quality of the initial response was hindered by
  - a ceaseless flow of often-inexperienced small NGOs and in-kind donations;
  - a limited understanding of the context, particularly the urban setting;
  - by-passing of local authorities and civil society groups;
  - insufficient communication with affected populations;
  - lack of attention to how assistance could better support coping strategies;
  - weak humanitarian leadership structures, including a weak relationship with military leadership; and
  - inadequate systems for data collection and analysis.
3. These weaknesses in the humanitarian response have had a negative impact on the speed and sustainability of recovery going forward. At the same time, the success of Haiti's recovery will primarily be driven by whether an effective and inclusive government-led plan for recovery and reconstruction exists.

*Source:* Based on IASC, 2010 and F. Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges, 2010, as well as other evaluation reports and reviews.

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## 2.3 A note on the role of evaluations

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Unlike in the development sector, which has the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), no baselines or agreed-upon definitions of performance exist within the humanitarian sector.<sup>22</sup> Data is not

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22 B. Ramalingam, and J. Mitchell, with J. Borton and K. Smart, 'Counting What Counts: Performance and Effectiveness in the Humanitarian Sector', in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action*, (ALNAP, Overseas Development Institute, London, July 2009), p. 3.

collected on a regular basis and no agreement can be found about what data should be collected.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, rapid changes in circumstance often impede the collection of data and hinder attempts to ascertain the effects of humanitarian interventions vis-à-vis other factors.<sup>24</sup> Finally, humanitarian performance should be measured not just in terms of its effects on those affected by crisis but also according to humanitarian principles, which adds an additional measurement challenge.<sup>25</sup>

Partly because of these systemic challenges, evaluation possibly has been over-relied upon as a tool to measure performance. Evaluation has the benefit of allowing for 'discrete application' and can be 'tailored to the needs of the agency concerned'.<sup>26</sup> But *evaluation is only one form of performance assessment*. Others include programme planning and monitoring, assessments of adherence to voluntary principles and standards (see Section 5.2), beneficiary surveys, financial and social audits, inter-agency coordination and learning consortia, media coverage, and feedback from donors or the public.

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23 Ibid, p. 3.

24 ALNAP, *Evaluating Humanitarian Action*, p. 15.

25 Ramalingam and Mitchell, 'Counting What Counts', p. 1.

26 Ibid, p. 80.

# 3 Main features of the evaluative response

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## 3.1 Increasing understanding of the operational context

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One major finding of the first phase of the IASC Real Time Evaluation was the need to better appreciate the local context. This has focused evaluators' efforts on understanding the operational environment. The background sections of evaluation reports and TORs have contained detailed and high-quality information. Evaluations have so far shown a good awareness of aspects related to the type of disaster (earthquake); the pre-existing situation in Haiti; the local, national and international response; and the areas affected.<sup>27</sup> This is likely because many agencies had worked in Haiti before the earthquake (however, many operated mainly outside Port-au-Prince, which limited the usefulness of their previous experience); a high level of access to beneficiaries was possible, compared with other disasters; and the media gave detailed coverage of the operational response.

Several evaluation teams increased their understanding of the context by conducting detailed desk reviews or literature summaries prior to undertaking field work. For example,

- the World Food Programme (WFP) produced a detailed annex of library and reference material included in the TOR for the evaluation of its country portfolio;
- ahead of its mid-term evaluation, the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (DG ECHO) commissioned a short paper that took stock of all of the main conclusions of the evaluations carried out by the international community to date; and
- the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) commissioned a desk study based on the work of its members and others, to see where it could best add value.

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27 See Cosgrave and Herson, quoted in Ramalingam and Mitchell, 'Counting What Counts', pp. 52–53.

Understanding of the operational context was further aided by the availability of important background literature, such as the ALNAP earthquake lessons paper and Haiti context analysis and evaluation framework paper.<sup>28</sup>

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## 3.2 Over-reliance on 'traditional' methodology

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As evaluation of humanitarian action is viewed as an increasingly valuable performance tool, much progress has been made in recent years in defining its scope and articulating good methodologies. Broad agreement exists on the usefulness of the OECD-DAC criteria (appropriateness or relevance, coverage, coherence, connectedness, efficiency, effectiveness and impact or outcome).<sup>29</sup> To these are often added cross-cutting themes which should be considered when using the DAC criteria: local context, human resources, protection, participation of primary stakeholders or beneficiaries, coping strategies and resilience, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and the environment.<sup>30</sup> These criteria are being used, in various adapted forms, to guide nearly all of the evaluations of the humanitarian response to the Haiti earthquake. Terms of reference for UN agency evaluations also clearly state that they will adhere to UN Evaluations Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation in the UN System.

The majority of evaluations thus far have adopted a similar methodology, described in Box 2.

While this 'traditional' methodology has advantages in terms of speed and familiarity, it also has serious

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28 See ALNAP and ProVention, 'Responding to earthquakes 2008'. See also Rencoret et al., 'Haiti Earthquake Response Context Analysis'. The latter paper was referenced in most evaluations and some TORs and was seen as valuable by most of those interviewed.

29 For an elaboration of the DAC criteria, see ALNAP, *Evaluating Humanitarian Action*.

30 Ibid, p. 19.

### Box 2. Typical methodology for evaluations in Haiti

- The team consists of one or more external consultants, and sometimes an agency staff member.
- The team spends five to fifteen days in country.
- The team meets with a wide variety of stakeholders, including staff from the agency in question, programme beneficiaries, national government representatives, donors, other agency staff, etc.
- Meetings with beneficiaries are often structured around a questionnaire or survey and focus on ascertaining the effects of or opinions about the intervention at hand.
- National staff may be interviewed as part of the evaluation, or they may be involved in translating or scheduling meetings.
- The consultant team is usually not involved in follow-up to the evaluation, and sometimes no plan is made for how recommendations will be taken forward.

drawbacks. The tendency is to fill the schedules with meetings with agency staff, since they are the most accessible, both practically and in terms of cultural and linguistic similarities. Open-ended discussions with beneficiaries concerning the aid response as a whole are unusual. National staff does not usually participate directly in carrying out the evaluation.

Opportunities exist to engage with local research efforts and civil society. The evaluation funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, involves a partnership between Tulane University (based in the US) and the University of Haiti. A joint CARE International–Save the Children US evaluation spent two days training 31 national staff to ask open-ended questions of programme beneficiaries and others.<sup>31</sup> These are also opportunities to consult beneficiaries in a more meaningful way. The CARE–Save the Children evaluation intentionally reduced the focus on the specific agency or project<sup>32</sup> and asked only four, open-ended questions (see Box 3).

### Box 3. Example from an atypical evaluation methodology in Haiti

Key informant questions used in joint CARE–Save the Children evaluation

Brief introduction on purpose of visit stating that we are part of an independent evaluation team seeking to capture learning and recommendations to improve current and future humanitarian response for CARE/SCF US and more widely. That this includes field exercises, key informant interviews and desk based review (said in uncomplicated language).

1. *What do you feel has gone well in the response in relation to the disaster response?*  
Further open and specifically focused questions based on their response with the DAC criteria in mind e.g. Why do you think things went well?
2. *What do you feel has not gone well in relation to the disaster response?*  
Further open and specifically focused questions based on their response with the DAC criteria in mind e.g. Why do you think some things did not go well?
3. *What do you feel could be improved in relation to current response?*  
Further open and specifically focused questions based on their response with the DAC criteria in mind e.g. How do you think things can be improved?
4. *Are there any recommendations that you feel we should make? (leave interviewee with the last word)*  
Closing and expression of appreciation for their time and contribution

Source: O'Hagan, Love and Rouse, 'An Independent Joint Evaluation', p. 44.

31 O'Hagan, Love and Rouse, 'An Independent Joint Evaluation', p. 2.

32 For a discussion of the approach that the CARE–Save the Children evaluation used to do this, see O'Hagan, Love and Rouse, 'An Independent Joint Evaluation', p. 12.

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### 3.3 A need for more joined-up evaluations

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A good evaluation seeks to answer the questions: ‘Are we doing the right thing? Are we doing things right?’<sup>33</sup> Or, ‘What happened? Why? So what? Now what?’<sup>34</sup> Evaluation seeks to help agencies to take a step back and ask critical questions about what they are doing so that they can adjust course accordingly – if not immediately, then the next time they are called to intervene in a similar setting. In other words, a good evaluation looks at the big picture.

In a mega-disaster such as the Haiti earthquake, the picture is filled with many actors. No single agency could have launched an effective response on its own. Overall, the system was especially fragmented in Haiti, with as many as 8,000 national and international humanitarian and aid agencies<sup>35</sup> operating with limited coordination. The scale of the intervention in such a dense urban context meant that most affected people in Port-au-Prince and nearby areas received aid from multiple sources. Distinguishing one agency from another is difficult, and many Haitians do not make the distinction, instead viewing agencies collectively.<sup>36</sup> Because of these contextual features, single agency evaluations of organizational (or programme or project) effectiveness and impact make less sense. Even if an agency takes pains to consider questions of relevance, appropriateness and coverage, separating the effects of one intervention from another is particularly tricky in this setting.

The scale of the disaster in Haiti produced a lot of pressure for accountability, which has led to a high demand for evaluations. But a plethora of individual agency evaluations can lead to duplication and wasted effort, as a single project can conceivably be evaluated many times over: by the agency, its donor, and in one or more multiple-agency evaluations (sector, consortia, etc.). The ongoing parade of evaluations can overwhelm staff in Haiti, who must organize evaluation team visits. Likewise it can frustrate the affected population, who are asked to provide their views multiple times without any immediate benefit.

On the whole, a series of disjointed, individual evaluations do not take advantage of opportunities for learning about broader impacts.<sup>37</sup>

While they can be difficult to organize, joint evaluations give agencies a wider perspective to learn from and a more complete understanding of what happened and what was done in response. They can also help build relationships that can be productive in the future.<sup>38</sup> At least seven joint evaluations of the Haiti response are completed or underway; eight donor-led evaluations, which are able to look more broadly because they are funding multiple agencies, have been completed. So far, more joint evaluations have been attempted than conducted. For example, a joint review of the sanitation response of three national Red Cross agencies was initially sought,<sup>39</sup> and another UN agency sought to undertake a joint evaluation with a similarly-mandated agency, but these were not possible. Another inter-agency NGO evaluation scaled back and included a smaller number of NGOs than was initially planned.

The need to carry out agency-specific evaluations will always exist, especially in order to look at internal organisational issues (management, supply chain, communications, staffing, etc.). But the risk is that evaluation can become too agency-centric. In the words of one evaluator, evaluation should not be a box-ticking exercise or one concerned primarily with protecting one’s reputation and funding. In order to be an effective means for learning, resulting in action for improvement, it should take into account the broader context, and it should ask difficult questions about whether people had their urgent needs met – not just whether a particular agency did the right thing given the limitations it faced.

Beyond joint evaluations, opportunities for ‘joined-up’ initiatives exist that are not being taken advantage of. Sector-wide evaluations (particularly shelter) would be valuable. Narrower, more-targeted evaluations could be undertaken around key themes, such as the

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33 Ibid, p. 3.

34 V. Fortune and P. Rasal, ‘British Red Cross – Mass Sanitation Module 2010 Haiti Earthquake Response, Post Deployment Learning Evaluation’ (2 August 2010), p. 3.

35 BBC as quoted in DARA, *Crisis Reports: Haiti*, p. 162.

36 O’Hagan, Love and Rouse, ‘An Independent Joint Evaluation’, p. 2.

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37 UNEG, OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation and ALNAP, ‘Supporting Evaluation in Haiti’.

38 An excellent ‘how to’ guide for joint evaluations was published by the Emergency Capacity Building Project, *What We Know about Joint Evaluations*, draft, v5, (May 2010).

39 Fortune and Rasal, ‘British Red Cross – Mass Sanitation Module’. p. 3.

challenges related to an urban setting<sup>40</sup> or the social and economic impact of aid.<sup>41</sup> These could then be coordinated with other similar evaluations to produce a more coherent set of evaluations. Many of the TORs surveyed by the mapping exercise are arguably over-ambitious in what they seek to achieve: for example, one aimed to use all of the DAC criteria, focus on agency specific issues, consult with beneficiaries, review all the documentation and say something about the wider context – all in 20 days with 10 days in country and a team of two people. In some cases, framing questions more tightly and coordinating with other agencies to engage in joint accountability and learning that together looks at the big picture might be more efficient.

The two system-wide reviews which have been initiated by operational humanitarian agencies via the IASC have added great value and have helped to shape the evaluation agenda going forward. However, how the recommendations from these will be taken forward remains unclear, since no management response plan or country response plan has been produced following the IASC RTE.<sup>42</sup> Another system-wide evaluation examining the role of humanitarian agencies in the recovery and transition would undoubtedly be very useful. While system-wide evaluations play a key role, they also have a tendency to re-state the same problems plaguing the international humanitarian response 'system'. More dynamic and specific learning exercises are also critical.

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40 For example, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), a consortium of 13 British agencies, chose to focus its lesson learning study on the issues related to an urban response.

41 UNEG, OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation and ALNAP, 'Supporting Evaluation in Haiti'.

42 The lack of a response plan is due in part to the rapid deployment of the evaluation team, which operated without logistical support in a very resource-constrained setting.

## 4 Issues to focus on for real time learning

Numerous issues exist that evaluations should cover going forward. These are well outlined in the ALNAP evaluation framework.<sup>43</sup> Two particularly salient, overarching issues that merit attention and system-wide reflection are speeding up recovery and supporting Haitian capacity.

### 4.1 Speeding up recovery

More than one year after the earthquake, the streets of Port-au-Prince and many surrounding areas are filled with uncleared rubble. Hundreds of thousands of people are living in tent camps.<sup>44</sup> Since the IASC Real Time Evaluation was completed, cholera has broken out in a country where it was previously not endemic.<sup>45</sup> In just four months, over 100,000 people have been infected and nearly 4,000 people have been killed.<sup>46</sup> Presidential elections held in November were marked by allegations of fraud, controversy and violent protests. A hurricane in November also caused flooding and further dislocated at least 10,000 people.<sup>47</sup> Although Haiti was a country filled with desperately poor people before the earthquake, the situation has reached new lows.

The international humanitarian response is still very much ongoing; at the same time, it has been fiercely criticized for not doing enough. Leading up to the first anniversary of the earthquake, pressure mounted from Haitians,<sup>48</sup> the international media<sup>49</sup> and international aid actors themselves<sup>50</sup> to explain and account for the results of aid efforts in Haiti. As described in the joint CARE–Save the Children evaluation,

Eight months after the disaster, the initial positively received humanitarian response is now receiving a very mixed reception. ... Haitians (and) the humanitarian community increasingly feel that the humanitarian community and Government are not meeting people's expectations. They feel that humanitarian activities and programs are financially unsustainable and are not helping Haitians to achieve their own goals so that they can move forward from a state of emergency.<sup>51</sup>

And an October 2010 report from Refugees International stated,

Despite all the cluster meetings and UN strategic planning sessions and governmental task forces, the majority of Haitians believe that nothing is happening. People's lives are not improving, and for most, their circumstances are deteriorating.<sup>52</sup>

International aid actors are not primarily to blame for the slow pace of recovery. The government and

43 Rencoret et al., 'Haiti Earthquake Response Context Analysis'.

44 M. Rowling, 'AidWatch - Humanitarian System: Trying Hard But Could Do Better?' (AlertNet, 28 January 2011).

45 Several early reports noted that 'there have been no outbreaks of disease or epidemics so far', citing this as evidence that humanitarian action had averted a post-earthquake crisis. See UNICEF, 'Children of Haiti: Three Months after the Earthquake - Progress, Gaps and Plans in Humanitarian Action Supporting a Transformative Agenda for Children', 2010, p. 10 and F.Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p. 1.

46 Associated Press, 'Clinton Heads to Haiti to Mediate Political Crisis' (30 January 2011).

47 UN OCHA, 'Haiti Hurricane Tomas Cholera Situation Report #15' (6 November 2010).

48 UNEG, OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation and ALNAP, 'Supporting Evaluation in Haiti', p. 1.

49 See, for example, *The Economist*, 'The Year of Surviving in Squalor' (6 January 2011).

50 Oxfam International, *From Relief to Recovery: Supporting Good Governance in Post-earthquake Haiti*, 142 Oxfam Briefing Paper (6 January 2011).

51 O'Hagan, Love and Rouse, 'An Independent Joint Evaluation', p. 3.

52 Refugees International, *Haiti: Still Trapped in the Emergency Phase* (Washington, DC, 6 October 2010), p. 3.

other national actors, as well as international donors to the reconstruction efforts, play the most pivotal roles. At the same time, a central lesson from previous earthquake responses is that recovery must begin immediately. The very first sentence of an ALNAP 2008 lesson learning paper on earthquake response stated that

Agencies need to focus on the recovery phase even from the start of the operation as there is no gap between relief and recovery, and recovery is the biggest challenge in sudden-onset natural disasters.<sup>53</sup>

A tendency exists within the international aid system to see ‘recovery’ as a separate phase following the emergency relief phase. The aid architecture (including donor funding) as well as the internal structures of many agencies typically have separate relief and development channels. While this separation may be appropriate in slower-onset or conflict settings, distinctions between relief and recovery are ‘irrelevant to [earthquake] affected households.’<sup>54</sup>

Evaluations conclude that international aid agencies were, among other things, too focused on providing emergency assistance to displaced people in Port-au-Prince at the expense of assisting communities outside the capital, which contributed to people migrating in order to maximize livelihood strategies.<sup>55</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people left Port-au-Prince for their provinces of origin, and many have returned with their families, because of a lack of economic opportunities and basic services in these hosting communities.<sup>56</sup>

Although arguing for a delay in further system-wide evaluations until recovery can begin in earnest is tempting, the slow pace of recovery signals that system-wide reflection may be necessary now, to understand why this is the case and what can be done. This would be usefully accomplished by initiating the

second phase of the IASC Real Time Evaluation.<sup>57</sup>

A risk exists that evaluations take place largely in the capital, because that is where programs were implemented, missing an opportunity to look at how the coping strategies of people who fled the city could have been better supported.

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## 4.2 Supporting Haitian capacity

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Several evaluations have focused on a related shortcoming of the response: international humanitarian actors’ insufficient engagement with Haitian civil society and government authorities. The IASC six-month report notes that ‘Had this been achieved in a more systematic manner, it would have significantly improved the humanitarian community’s understanding of the operating context, and contributed to a more sustainable provision of assistance, as well as local and national capacity-building.’<sup>58</sup> Another review of evaluations notes that ‘Haitian participation in decision making processes [is] a major concern and obstacle to building individual, household, community and national resilience.’<sup>59</sup> The government, which was itself severely affected by the earthquake, required (and requires) more support by the humanitarian community in Haiti so that it can lead the reconstruction efforts.<sup>60</sup>

Listening to, supporting and communicating effectively with Haitian people remains a serious shortcoming of the continuing international humanitarian response. A recent report notes that ‘the communication gap is huge. ... People’s frustration is increasing, leading to security incidents and more demonstrations against international NGOs.’<sup>61</sup> Greater

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53 ALNAP and ProVention, ‘Responding to earthquakes 2008’, p. 3.

54 Ibid, p.3. The first phase of the IASC RTE notes that ‘mainstreaming ... early recovery remains an uphill struggle’, F. Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p. 49.

55 F. Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p. 24 and O’Hagan, Love and Rouse, ‘An Independent Joint Evaluation’, p. 4.

56 IASC, 14 July 2010, pp. 19 and 21, and O’Hagan, Love and Rouse, ‘An Independent Joint Evaluation’, p. 4.

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57 In addition, the drastic changes in circumstances in Haiti since it was completed, the first phase IASC RTE also suffered from recognised shortcomings in terms of consultation with agencies, due to extremely tight timeframes and logistical challenges.

58 F. Grünewald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p. 6.

59 University of Haiti and Tulane University’s Disaster Resilience Leadership Academy. ‘Haiti Humanitarian Aid Evaluation Structured Analysis Summary Report’. January 2011, pp. 29–30; the project reviewed 94 documents, all of them reports on humanitarian performance and data which could reveal humanitarian outcomes.

60 Ibid.

61 Refugees International, October 2010, pp. 2–3.

efforts to support government, consult beneficiaries and work with indigenous civil society groups would lead to more sustainable recovery.

Going forward, opportunities may arise for joint learning exercises between the government and international agencies that examine and seek to improve the working relationship between the two entities. If done well, this could be a useful exercise to build the capacity of both sets of actors in this regard and improve recovery and reconstruction efforts.

## 5 Issues to focus on when looking back

Continuing to take stock of what happened in the initial months of the response will be necessary, so as to learn for future disasters. For this ‘looking back’ learning (i.e. learning that has less direct relevance for Haiti in the near term), three issues emerge, which have not received significant attention by the evaluative effort so far: the cholera response, the role of standards and principles, and the take-up of previous ‘lessons learned’.

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### 5.1 Cholera response

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The response to the cholera epidemic will need to be examined as a component of the overall humanitarian response to the earthquake. Questions will also need to be asked by the broader international community about if and how the outbreak could have been prevented. This is particularly the case since a previous lesson learned from earthquake response was that ‘disease is unlikely’ and overstating the risk of disease could lead to the misallocation of resources and promote needless fear.<sup>62</sup>

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### 5.2 Role of standards and principles

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Assessing an intervention against standards such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Code of Conduct and Sphere standards is widely considered good practice in evaluation. Indeed, these standards were mentioned in about half of the evaluations’ terms of reference examined. Only one evaluation so far, however, provides any specific information on whether these

standards were upheld.<sup>63</sup> The terms of reference for the first phase of the IASC RTE seeks to know ‘the humanitarian system’s level of commitment and compliance’<sup>64</sup> to a range of international standards, but these are not discussed in the final RTE report, most likely due to the limited information available. One donor notes in its evaluation that it receives very little information from the UN and other organizations it supports regarding ‘actual adherence to “do-no-harm principles” and “sphere standards” in the relief assistance’.<sup>65</sup>

Taken together, this evidence indicates that probing more deeply as to the role of such standards in assessing ongoing humanitarian performance in Haiti may be useful, including whether other types of performance measurement approaches are being used, or could be used. Whether the challenges are related to difficulties with collecting and analyzing data within organizations or between organizations (or both), or whether there is a lack of commitment to adherence to the standards and principles is unclear.

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62 ALNAP and ProVention, ‘Responding to earthquakes 2008’, p. 11.

63 An evaluation of the British Red Cross sanitation response notes that standards were amended in country by the cluster to differ from the Sphere standards: instead of 20 to 50 persons per toilet, the WASH cluster agreed that ‘a maximum of 100 people use each toilets and the toilets are hygienic’ was a realistic initial target. See Fortune and Rasal, ‘British Red Cross – Mass Sanitation Module’, p. 4.

64 F. Grünwald, A. Binder and Y. Georges (June 2010), p.72.

65 Norad. ‘Norwegian Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters: Case of Haiti Earthquake January 2010’. Commissioned by Norad/MFA Section for Humanitarian Affairs. Norad, July 2010, p.30.

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### 5.3 Take-up of previous ‘lessons learned’

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Many of the key findings emerging from evaluations of the Haiti earthquake response have a familiar ring to them: Begin recovery earlier; listen to Haitians; support local initiative; work better with the government. These are all previously learned lessons, which have prompted some to ask why the international humanitarian community has not truly internalized these lessons.<sup>66</sup>

All 27 of the terms of reference examined for this report mention ‘lesson learning’ as an objective, but only 10 TORs mention that the evaluation should look at how past lessons were taken up during this response. Agencies may find an examination of the practical methods by which they take forward the lessons learned from previous disaster responses to be useful. One NGO, for example, produced a three-page lessons learned summary paper shortly after the earthquake struck, for dissemination to those involved in the response.<sup>67</sup>

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66 See, for example, Simon Levine, ‘Learning the Lessons from the Humanitarian Response to Haiti Shouldn’t Take Long. . .’, ODI Blog, 19 October 2010; and DARA, ‘Dara: Haiti one year on – a word from Ross Mountain’, PreventionWeb, 10 January 2011.

67 IRC, ‘Haiti Earthquake 2010: Lessons learned and essential questions’ (International Rescue Committee, January 2010).

## 6 Conclusion: Forging more effective partnerships for learning

The heartbreaking devastation produced by the Haiti earthquake generated a massive outpouring of assistance at all levels: from friends and family, relatives abroad, diaspora churches and organizations, neighbouring countries and countries halfway across the globe. The assistance that came through from international actors in the early months was only one small part of the overall response, which continues to this day. Nonetheless, it was a critical component, because it helped to shape the recovery efforts going forward. That recovery effort is still moving much too slowly for many Haitians, who are feeling increasingly frustrated that they are not being consulted and supported in the right ways.

Over the next year or two, international aid agencies will continue to try to understand – through evaluation – what they could have done better, and what can be still be changed going forward. Looking at the mapping of currently planned evaluations, however, one is not left with a sense of optimism that high-quality learning will necessarily take place. Several areas need attention:

1. **Expanding the range of methods being used.** This could include longer field missions, more engagement with national staff and local partner organizations, more open-ended dialogue with

beneficiaries, and more links to programmatic and policy development.

2. **Exploring partnerships to evaluate national actors.** The scope for joint evaluations between international agencies and government or civil society groups may exist, so that attention is given to how the two ‘sectors’ worked together in the response and how national actors can be better supported.
3. **Linking up with longer-term monitoring and learning efforts.** Aid monitoring will continue for years to come, and the evaluation of humanitarian assistance should link up with these longer-term initiatives, in an iterative process which builds on the advantages of each.
4. **Considering making evaluations more targeted and specific,** while working in partnership, so that teams can more realistically cover subjects in depth, and the overall case load of evaluations is more coherent and comprehensive.

Above all, evaluations should focus on how national actors can be better supported to recover faster and truly ‘build back better’. This learning should take place both from key Haitian stakeholders, and alongside them.

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# Annex 1. Interviews

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