

## Thematic Evaluation of the Finnish Humanitarian Assistance

*AUTHOR: Klaus Nyholm et al.; COWIconsult, Denmark*

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**Subject Description:** Official Finnish humanitarian assistance, as a component of development co-operation activities, is an integral part of Finland's foreign policy. Humanitarian assistance is guided by the general strategy for development co-operation as well as by strategic guidelines.

**Evaluation Description:** It was decided that an evaluation should be carried out in order to provide independent and objective review and analysis of the Finnish humanitarian assistance in the light of its strategies and principles; to point out the key lessons learned; and to make recommendations for the future orientation of the humanitarian aid. The evaluations had two points of departure; the realities of the situation in Finland and the changing international humanitarian scene.

**Major Findings:** The Government of Finland's Humanitarian Assistance programme has been a long-standing and valuable feature of the country's commitment to international co-operation. It has performed well in terms of strengthening the international response capacity, and in serving the concern of the Finnish public for the plight of disaster affected populations. The programme has allocated resources in response to humanitarian needs in an efficient way, and avoided loss of life and suffering for the target populations. The government offices dealing with the issue are well organised, informed and motivated.

The evaluation has identified two key weaknesses which, even if they do not affect the overall positive assessment of the Finnish humanitarian assistance, place unnecessary limits on what could be achieved. These two weaknesses are first a less than proactive attitude in responding to the new challenges of humanitarian crises; and second an insufficient co-ordination and mobilisation of broader Finnish capacities than those currently to be found in the limited circle of actors. The resources at the disposal of the Department for International Development Co-operation are too few, both in relation to the global needs, and in relation to the resources of some other donors, to exert a distinctive influence on the international scene. In areas where Finland has actively promoted conflict resolution and human rights, there is evidence that the response has been reactive, based on requests presented by agencies, rather than on a careful analysis of the situation. Finland's humanitarian programme performance suffers from the limits and inertia of the international system as a whole to respond to the challenges it faces.

**Lessons Learned:** To improve what is already an effective programme of humanitarian assistance does not require much institutional change or management reform. It requires instead the development of a policy of prevention and response to crisis, and a new level of national co-ordination and mobilisation. There is a need to refine the use of different strategies and elucidate their complementarities and incompatibilities. Permanently fragile regions around the globe may still grow in number, and the ability to move quickly between multilateral and bilateral aid, emergency and development, conflict management and reconciliation, is essential. The linear notions of development and modernisation must be replaced by flexible and multidimensional

approaches, articulated on a unifying preference of outcomes. To define this preference in purpose is the challenge facing Finland in its search for a stable world, respectful of the norms of international law.

