THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION.
EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSPARENCY, RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN POST-EARTHQUAKE GUJARAT, INDIA.

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Acknowledgments.

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A. INTRODUCTION

"We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.(…) All our dealings with donors and beneficiaries shall reflect an attitude of openness and frankness."

Point 9 of the Red Cross and International NGO Code of Conduct (1994).

The Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) is a two-year action-research project to

- ✍✍Test out practical approaches at field-level to enhance the transparency, responsiveness and accountability of those providing aid and protection to people affected by conflict or disaster
- ✍✍Advocate, at structural level, for greater organisational and inter-agency efforts to be more transparent, responsive and accountable to people affected by conflict or disaster, and to research possible approaches to make this part of national and international disaster management and humanitarian response.

A field trip was undertaken to Gujarat, India, in the first two weeks of May to

- o Understand if and how the questions of transparency, responsiveness and accountability presented themselves in that context, three months after a devastating earthquake that caused damage and destruction in over 7600 villages and towns, killed some 20.000 people, and affected an estimated 15,5 million people;
- o Identify what local approaches to strengthen transparency, responsiveness and accountability were being proposed or pursued;
- o See whether and how the HAP could learn from them and subsequently, if invited, support them.

Whom is this report for? In the first place for all those individuals and organisations, Indian or foreign, that are working on disaster management in Gujarat state, India. In the second place for those who are interested in the question of how relief and recovery support can be made accountable to people affected by disaster. The latter may wish to also read the endnotes which contain cross-references and elaborate certain perspectives.

The complexity of the context, the diversity of perspectives and the limited time spent listening to a number of local actors, mean that this report can only claim to be exploratory. It identifies issues and initiatives, explores ideas and raises questions more than providing definite answers. But often the first step to a good answer is identifying the right questions.

Most consultations held were with representatives of local Gujarati organisations or Indian national NGOs. Only a limited number of people affected by the earthquake and

drought were directly interviewed. More in-depth inquiry should devote more time to consulting with affected people. Due to time constraints no government officials could be met. It is accepted that a Government of Gujarat perspective is not sufficiently captured in this report. Feedback is invited to rectify this weakness.

The content of this report needs to be kept in context. The visit occurred during a time of uncertainty, when the Government of Gujarat (GOG) and national and international agencies were trying to make the transition from 'relief' to 'reconstruction'. The biggest challenges looming were the reconstruction of private houses damaged or destroyed in the earthquake, and the simultaneous need for drought relief, also in districts less or not affected by the earthquake. The situation, and the accountability challenges, may well be different in a few months from now. Transparency, responsiveness and accountability are context- and process-sensitive issues, and we can expect that the specifics of it will change over time and between different locations.

Feedback on this report is welcomed, preferably with arguments and examples. But more than getting a better document, it is hoped that the questions of transparency, responsiveness and accountability can be actively taken further, by those working in Gujarat, in meaningful and effective ways.

B. SETTING THE SCENE.

1. Vulnerability to Disaster.

Gujarat, particularly the coastal area in the west, and that bordering Rajasthan to the north, is vulnerable to a number of natural disasters: cyclones, drought, flash floods, and earthquake. The earthquake of 26 January 2001 hit an area that had already suffered from a super-cyclone in 1998, followed by two consecutive years of severe drought.

2. The Actor-Configuration.

A number of actors that played an important role during the rescue and relief period immediately following the earthquake, do probably less so now in the reconstruction phase. This would include the Indian Army, the many private Indian citizens (including so-called 'Non-Resident Indians' living abroad, often with a different nationality) who mobilised and distributed relief or came to help as volunteers, international search and rescue teams, and some international humanitarian organisations (such as MSF-France) which left after the acute relief phase. Others remain important players: the GOG, the Federal Government of India (FGOI), a variety of local non-governmental or civil society organisations, including the Indian Red Cross, a number of international NGOs, some foreign governments that provide aid for relief and reconstruction. Other actors are coming more to the foreground in the reconstruction phase, among them the World Bank, UNDP and Indian private companies.

3. People's Priorities.

At the time of consultation, everybody, villagers and agency staff, agreed that the then top priorities were housing and drought relief. (In practice, we cannot stay with such generalisations, as specific groups of people, or even individual families, may have additional or other top priorities). Income-generating opportunities and access to educational and health services are less frequently mentioned, and the urgency of need for them is likely to vary more. So if these are the needs, and the demands, then who has the responsibility to respond?

When asking people and local non-governmental or voluntary agency staff, who has the primary responsibility for the reconstruction, the answer is quite clearly the GOG because, as they point out, this has been mandated, through a democratic process, to administer the State.

C. PRIORITY CONCERNS: RE-HOUSING, DROUGHT AND LIVELIHOODS.

1. Re-housing: are there options?

a. Government of Gujarat policy.

Initially, the GOG suggested a policy under which the populations of all seriously affected villages and towns would be relocated. Strong negative popular feedback indicated that people by and large want to rebuild their homes where they stood. So the policy was changed to relocation for heavily damaged villages and towns only (local people differ in their understanding, whether the threshold is 50% or 70% destroyed?).

Earlier, there was growing restlessness while people were waiting for the GOG to announce its 'package', restlessness that led to mobilisations with marches to the state capital Gandinaghar, to pressurize the GOG. [i](note more recently also package for farmers who lost other functional farm buildings).

The GOG policy offers financial 'compensation' for reconstruction of the houses to those in villages and neighbourhoods that do not relocate.[ii] For the villages and towns to be relocated, the GOG proposed the 'adoption' of villages or neighbourhoods, in a public-private partnership. (see e.g. Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority, 2001) Under this scheme, the private partner would take responsibility for the implementation of rebuilding of homes, but also all additional public infrastructure, such as roads, water supplies, electricity grids etc. The GOG would assess the costs,

and co-fund 50% of the bill. Various non-governmental organisations did not feel comfortable with this proposal, because they do not have the expertise, or the resources, to build public infrastructure. They prefer to design their own programmes, more around social issues, in which they feel they have a distinctive competence, and not avail themselves of matching GOG funds.

Among those affected, there have been, and remain, concerns and disagreements over the financial 'compensation scheme'.

b. Lack of clarity and complaints.

There is unhappiness and sometimes dispute over the 'fairness' of the financial compensation offered. The financial compensation is decided on the basis of a damage assessment of each individual housing unit, by a government assessor, and proportionate to what 'category' (different categories represent different degrees of damage) the unit is placed in. The complaints include:

- ?? That the government assessor came, assessed and disappeared without any further information, so that villagers do not know how their houses have been assessed;
- ?? That the assessment underestimated the level of damage, and would therefore lead to insufficient financial compensation;
- ?? That the assessment was superficial rather than structural, and failed to take into account that walls still standing had cracked, and were expected to crumble and collapse in the next monsoon rains;
- ?? That the assessment failed to take into account the nature of the building materials of the damaged house, and that the value of a house of, for example, reinforced mud, cannot be the same as that of one which had been built with a lot of cement;
- ?? That the level of financial compensation offered was perhaps based on past values of building materials and houses, but does not represent the current cost of construction or repair;
- ?? That tin sheets, or a cash amount, provided by the GOG during the relief phase to those whose houses had collapsed or had been severely damaged, would apparently being deducted from the financial compensation (which had not been clear at the time, and people might have used the cash for other purposes and sold the tin sheets, which by and large were inappropriate);
- ?? That there are long-time residents in the affected areas, who have not been officially registered, and therefore cannot claim or obtain any relief or compensation from the GOG.

There is also a level of confusion and unhappiness about the 'adoption scheme', particularly strongly voiced by local voluntary organisations:

- ?? Empowerment-oriented local voluntary organisations have protested the use of the term 'adoption', which suggests that people are helpless 'orphans' and have no capacities;

?? On the surface however, the procedure is an empowering one: a private actor indicates to the GOG that it wants to 'adopt' a certain village, but then has to go and get the formal consent of the village concerned, after which the 'relationship' is confirmed by the GOG. The requirement to get formal consent from those concerned is an improvement over a not uncommon scenario in many places in the world, where aid agencies unilaterally decide which villages they will cover.

?? In practice however, the procedure is perceived as not being sufficiently transparent and responsible. The perceptions are that: First there is insufficient distinction in the GOG records, between 'stated intent' and 'confirmed adoption', so that it looks as if villages are confirmed to have been 'adopted' while in reality the agency has not yet obtained the formal consent of the villagers. The result is that other agencies will no longer consider certain villages, in the belief that they are already 'taken'. Secondly, certain agencies are putting down their 'intent', and even getting the formal consent, without necessarily being certain that they have mobilised the resources they themselves have to put in. Sometimes the villagers are not even aware that an agency has listed its 'intent'. Thirdly, there is the perception that the ultimate decision remains with the GOG, which, if correct, could weaken the relevance of the dialogue and agreement between non-governmental agent and the affected group.[iii]

?? There is a perception, or suspicion, of political interference in the 'adoption' process, with state-level politicians 'adopting' villages (for reasons of political patronage and vote-buying). Also private for-profit companies are proposing to 'adopt' villages, supposedly out of charitable intent, but it is feared that they are driven by longer term commercial/political calculations.

?? There is also concern that agencies 'adopting' villages do not have the in-depth knowledge of the village dynamics. Given that many are new to Gujarat, or to that part of rural Gujarat, the concern is probably valid.

?? There is also concern about the amount of land that will be made available under a relocation scheme. Will individual plots be large enough for example, to allow for the large courtyards that are part of a traditional building type, and an important social and economic space (outdoor kitchen, playground, animal compound….)? And how far will the distance be from the productive land?

?? Then there is concern about how the GOG will 'calculate' its 50% contribution to the total cost of reconstruction. Will, for example, the value of the land granted for relocation, be part of the GOG 'input', thereby reducing the cash component, with possible negative impacts on implementation?

?? There are also situations where the opinions of those sharing a socio-residential space are divided: part of the local population wants to relocate, another part does not, and how to reach consensus? This can translate into a dispute over how the village or urban neighbourhood as a whole was assessed and classified. Also, there is a perception that the wealthier village inhabitants may prefer the financial compensation package rather than a public-private or purely non-governmental reconstruction programme, because they would calculate that they

can exercise more influence, for their personal benefits, over government officials than over non-governmental ones.

c. Operational, programmatic, financial and 'competitive' concerns.

Local and international agencies willing to get involved in re-housing, have their own operational, programmatic and 'comparative' concerns:

- ?? Operationally, there is the question of technical competence in construction. This is not a classical sector of work for aid agencies so that they may not have the in-house knowledge they have, for example, on water and sanitation, savings and credit, health and nutrition etc. [iv] Can one acquire a level of knowledge and competence in a short time? Secondly, there are concerns of the availability of essential inputs at critical times: if the drought continues there will be a shortage of water for essential uses, let alone for construction; if on the other hand the monsoon comes this year, labour will have to be invested in agriculture and not be available for house construction. The alternative may also happen i.e. that agriculture suffers because the agricultural labourers are engaged in the construction sector (see Aubrey 2000:215). Under any scenario, will there be enough skilled labour given the scale of reconstruction to be undertaken? How can the anticipated rise in prices of building materials be controlled? The GOG has acknowledged a role and responsibility here, and construction materials will be stored and made available at subsidized prices. Affected people however are concerned that the quality of materials therefore will be inferior. And what technical and social quality controls are there, can or should there be, on the private construction companies, who obviously see great business opportunities in Gujarat?

- ?? Programmatically, there are tensions and dilemmas between the scale of need and the speed with which work is to be carried out, and the need for appropriate and equitable re-housing. Some assistance providers believe that speed is crucial, to provide shelter because of the monsoon, so as not to prolong people's 'agony' and to show 'visible' results. This argument can be reinforced by the pressure to spend donor funds. Other assistance providers hold that 'housing' is more than 'shelter': a house, and a wider habitat, is also a social and cultural space, the appropriateness of which is important to people's social and mental well being. 'Housing' understood as a shelter programme, like education or public health can be more 'generic' or 'general'; understood as providing a 'home' it may have to be more individualised. A pragmatic interim solution is 'monsoonisation' (cfr. the 'winterisation' of damaged houses in the Balkans): the rapid reconstruction of at least one secure and inhabitable room prior to the monsoon, with the rest of the house awaiting further work at a later stage. But vulnerability and equity questions need also addressed in the re-housing programme: The earthquake, for example, has not only killed but also wounded and disabled. There are people whose limbs were amputated, others who became paraplegics. Will their houses be adapted to their special needs? And although the earthquake may have affected rich and poor alike, will the agency reconstruct the original bigger house of the wealthier villagers or urban dwellers

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and a small one for the poorer neighbour? [v]The 'appropriateness-equity' approach is more open to participatory methods of working, giving people more of a say in the policies and designs for their re-housing, acknowledging the differences between villages and neighbourhoods, and the individuality of housing. The 'equity' question also indicates that individual preferences will have to be weighted against other criteria. This will require skilful negotiation and the provision of clear information on the agency's policies, procedures and criteria. The dilemma is that such approaches take more time, and aid providers are concerned that they will not have enough time.

?? By May 2001, financial considerations were beginning to impact negatively on programme decisions for at least two reasons:
- the need to spend 'relief ' funds before the deadline imposed by the donor
- the temptation to design 'big' expenditure programmes, not because of their 'appropriateness', but simply because there is so much money available.

It is a public secret that government departments everywhere in the world operate according to the logic that they must always spend their budgets, irrespective of whether all the money can really be usefully spent, for fear of not being given a budget of at least similar size the next fiscal year. The same logic transfers to operational aid agencies that manage official funds. It is quite remarkably that this often-powerful 'administrative logic' has not yet been picked up in recent debates on 'quality assurance' of humanitarian aid.

?? 'Competitively' there is a concern that if an agency adopts a certain approach with the initial consent of the target group, that subsequently, the latter's consent may disappear if they believe that another village or neighbourhood, in which another agency is providing re-housing, gets 'a better deal'. Common sense would therefore recommend that some common norms are agreed upon, for comparable types of work.

2. Drought Mitigation.

"*The drought got buried under the earthquake.*"

Whereas the international attention has focused on the earthquake, as already mentioned, Gujarat, particularly its districts in the north and west, is vulnerable to a wider range of natural disasters. The earthquake hit part of the area that has been suffering from severe drought since 1999.

There is a well established governmental response to drought in India, which is susceptible to being influenced by media and political dynamics (see Sainath 1996: part)
In the summer of 2000, the Disaster Mitigation Institute in Gujarat and School for Desert Sciences in Rajasthan conducted a round of interviews with government and NGO officials, and with villagers, on the quality of drought relief (Bhatt 2001)

This intended to feed into the Action Planning for drought preparedness and, if the monsoons fail again, drought relief, in 2001. One of the conclusions was that official drought relief should start earlier than April, by which time people in the affected areas are already under stress. Ideally then, in 2001, drought relief might have been initiated as early as January, were it not for the earthquake, that for months dominated everybody's attention. [vi]

As a result this year again, it is only by late April-early May, that the prospect of ongoing drought is re-appearing on the agenda:

    ✍ People with animals are voicing more loudly the need for fodder and water;

    ✍ Local organizations working in districts affected by drought but not by the earthquake, are raising their voices.

But as in earlier years, the official response will be late and the question remains how much extra resources and capacity the GOG can mobilize. Of course there are now more international funds available for Gujarat. But constraints are imposed by some international donors who allocated funds for the earthquake response, but hesitate to allow the operational agencies to use these funds (also) for drought relief. [vii] Particularly were funds have been raised through public appeals, the question can be raised for what purpose but also in which 'spirit' donations: would the general public really object to money raised for the earthquake response being spent on drought relief in the same area?

3. Livelihoods.

The earthquake impacted far less on livelihoods than, for example, the super-cyclone of October 1999 in Orissa. The cyclone also injured and killed people, and damaged or destroyed physical infrastructure, but in addition livestock was killed, crops, productive trees and fishing vessels were destroyed, and soils and water sources were contaminated with salty water. The market took longer to re-establish itself in Orissa than in Gujarat.

Still, some livelihoods will have been directly (for example where collapsing buildings destroyed the production tools of artisans) or indirectly (for example through increased household debt) affected by the earthquake in Gujarat. If the drought continues, it will have further impact on livelihoods. Whereas some local organizations, such as the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)[viii] have experience with the protection of livelihoods in disaster through craftwork, the embroidery skills found among women in Kuch district, are not as developed among Gujarati women in other districts.

Many poorer and marginal sections of the community tend to employ a variety of livelihood strategies that will have to be understood in specific detail, by those who want to support them. This can only be done through close consultation. [ix] The physical reconstruction will of course provide many income-opportunities, but the question will

be who will get access to these opportunities, and whether people's skills will be used, and/or developed. Inevitably, aid providers will now have to go beyond damage- and needs-assessment, and engage in more detailed analysis of poverty, marginalisation, and of vulnerabilities and capacities. [x]

D. MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE: THE CHALLENGE OF DIVIDED COMMUNITIES AND A DIVIDED AID COMMUNITY?

1. Social structures.

It is common practice, certainly for international actors, to imagine 'communities'. But concepts like 'communities', 'villages' or 'neighbourhoods' are a shorthand for what are often heterogeneous and divided social environments, the true dynamics of which need to be discovered rather than assumed.

Those more intimately knowledgeable about Gujarat, know however that the villages and small towns are divided by wealth, occupation, social identity and religion. There are subtle social distinctions between, for example, Hindus, Jains and Muslims, traders, shopkeepers, craftsmen, farmers, fisherfolk, cattle owners, unskilled casual labourers, seasonal migrant labourers, Dalits etc. The physical 'community' therefore is a 'social' space, that often will manifest a social stratification and degrees of inclusion or exclusion. It must be assumed that there is structural violence, but sometimes also open violence. [xi] This is a socially and politically sensitive reality, that takes time to understand and care in handling. [xii] These subtle social distinctions can express themselves in the residential separation of various groups. In the post-cyclone reconstruction work in Orissa for example, some aid organisations therefore took the 'hamlet' or 'social-spatial clusters' within the village or neighbourhood, as the programming unit. The risk is that, unintentionally, this will undermine the legitimacy of the 'panchayat' structure, which is, after all, a recognised building block for democracy and local governance (see IMM Ltd. 2001:24).

2. Formal structures for participation.

There are existing formal structures of participation, in the administrative organisation of state governance: the first one is the 'Gram panchayat' or village committee, then there is the 'taluqa panchayat' or 'block (a grouping of villages) committee', and then the district panchayat.

The village committee, chaired by an elected 'sarpanch', in principle represents the village to the larger world, but will also be one forum in which village politics is being played out.

The three, in principle 'bottom-up' 'panchayat' levels are matched by government administrative ranks, whose executive logic however is the reverse and top-down. Hence the key figure is the District Collector, followed by the block administrators.

Where a village panchayat is not functioning because its mandate has expired and no new committee as yet elected, the government may appoint an 'overseer' for one or more such villages. Such overseer ('vayvatdar') tends to be a well-known figure in the area, but is not necessarily resident in the village(s) concerned. He is not a government employee.

Several interlocutors, familiar with village realities, pointed out that often the problem is absence of consensus:
- There are villages and neighbourhoods, where some people want to relocate, while others don't.
- There is also a concern that the wealthier and socially superior members of a 'community' will get more benefits, or will get the benefits of assistance first, as may have already happened with relief distributions.

'Consensus' can be developed, with outside facilitation. But this is a process, that requires time, understanding, and the building of trust and relationship. Local organisations that were already working in the villages and towns prior to the earthquake, can rely on the 'investments' made in previous years, but newcomers who want or need to implement quickly, will be tempted to take shortcuts, ignoring that this may create or exacerbate social conflict.

3. Relief and its impact on people's attitudes.

It were the consulted 'sarpanch' or village headmen (all interlocutors were men), who mentioned two negative impacts of the relief provisions in the previous months:
- relief distributions that bypassed the gram panchayat undermined the villager's respect for it, and for the 'sarpanch';
- ongoing relief distributions were also creating expectations of further free assistance provision, and, among some villagers, calculations on how they could get most out of it. As one interlocutor put it: some people came to portray disaster as a great opportunity for material benefit: "*Give us an earthquake every 6 months.*" There was therefore concern that people would come to expect free relief, and no longer be prepared to engage in food- or cash-for-work.

Care has to be taken however, not to generalise such comments, as other interlocutors repeatedly referred to the fact that affected people, out of a sense of dignity and self-respect, for example refused to queue for relief hand-outs, even if they were entitled to them. But the issue signals that the dialogue with people affected by disaster needs to touch upon, not only the responsibilities of the aid providers and the rights of the affected, but also the responsibility of the local population groups (cfr. Lingayah 1999:36).

4. Uncoordinated and Competitive Aid.

If developing a meaningful dialogue with people affected by disaster requires moving towards some consensus within 'communities', it certainly also requires moving towards some 'order' in the aid community. This is not simply a question of 'coordination' per se. Coordination in Gujarat remains problematic. This causes problems for individual aid organisations. That by itself may not be cause for concern, as long as aid is being provided. Where coordination becomes a responsibility, and an accountability matter, is where the lack of it negatively impacts on the people affected by disaster.

?? Assessment over-kill? Every aid provider, from individual Indians organising their one-off relief distribution to the large and specialised organisations, claims to build its distributions or recovery programmes on the basis of an assessment.
- But is there a central record of all the various assessments?
- Is there a monitoring of the quality of the assessments? [xiii]
- Have those who have been 'assessed' received feedback on the outcome of the assessment?

It would be worthwhile testing what percentage of villages or neighbourhoods have been 'assessed' repeatedly (by different prospective aid providers), and whether repeated assessments might have created confusion within the 'community', complicated the relationship between a community and an aid provider, and between different providers of aid to the same community? Too many uncoordinated assessments can lead to confusion or disturbed relationships, but such impacts would not show up in the agency reports or accounts, or in most evaluations that are not participatory.

?? Multiple distributions? One specific instance was mentioned of a locality where three international agencies would successively have distributed shelter materials, allegedly without coordination, thereby providing the same people repeatedly with similar relief items. Again, conflicts within and between communities, can result from such uncoordinated distributions. This is not something that would not normally show up in agency's self-reporting or most classical evaluations.

?? The politics of 'occupied territories'? There is a tendency among a number of especially non-governmental aid providers, to want to establish themselves in a particular geographical territory, or in a certain technical sector of work. The policy of 'adoption' obviously reinforces, not just a geographical concentration but also a geographical monopoly. The competition between agencies over geographical or sectoral territory, seldom looks at the best interests of the intended beneficiaries, or invites their views on the matter.

- The example has already been given of agencies 'staking out their claim' to a certain geographical territory, by registering their intent to adopt a locality.

- But another type of scenario is that of governmental and non-governmental actors coming into villages and urban neighbourhoods, and offering relief or reconstruction packages without being aware of an existing prior working relationship between the 'community' and a local GRO or NGO, or without inquiring into the nature of that relationship. Yet it seems quite inevitable that the approach adopted by the 'newcomer' will impact on the existing working relationships. Alternatively, one may also expect instances of a local GRO or NGO with a long-standing working relationship in a given locality, trying to keep out any newcomers, even if they themselves in fact might not have the resources and competence to seriously assist all the reconstruction efforts. Again, this is not something that is likely to show up in the more traditional ways in which agencies account for their actions and decisions.

5. Achieving Dialogue: Mind the gatekeepers.

And what about the "gate-keepers", i.e. those people that control access of outsiders to a wider population, and its viewpoints, and obtain power from that control. It is not uncommon for aid workers to express their concerns, and doubts, about the 'representativeness' of 'elected' or not-so-elected 'representatives' of local populations. But they are less perceptive about their own physical and psychological gate-keepers: physical distance or separation (closed off in compounds), aloofness and impatience, guards. For local people, access to many aid providers and their decision-makers can be equally difficult, and they too may feel that they have to negotiate the "pattawala" (the person in offices in India who 'receives' visitors and (decides to let) lets them into the room of the person-in-charge).

E. PARTNERS-IN-ACTION?

1. Civil society in Gujarat.

a. An active and diverse civil society.

Gujarat has a strong indigenous tradition which is a source of pride and self-confidence. The British coloniser did not establish a strong hold on Gujarat and, with people like Gandhi and Sardar Patel, Gujaratis played an important role in the Independence movement. It also has its own historical maritime trade and industrial traditions.

The state today has an active civil society. The voluntary sector exhibits both the charitable tradition with more delivery-oriented organisations, and empowerment-oriented organisations. Several of the rights-based organisations work with poorer or more marginal sections of society, such as the saltpan workers, tribals, city-slum dwellers etc. The discourse of the latter turns around rights, bottom-up approaches,

transparency and accountability. The anti-corruption movement of 1974, which forced the then state-government to resign, generated new leadership. As one observer pointed out however, the leadership, also of the empowerment-oriented organisations, is not made up of members of these poorer and more marginal sections of society.

The Gujarati Red Cross, before the earthquake, was not perceived as among the stronger branches of the Indian Red Cross, but now receives large scale attention and support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It's ties to the GOG are probably closer than that of most other local voluntary organisations.

There are others who mobilised on a large scale to provide assistance to those affected by disaster. For example
- ?? the Swami Narayan movement, which is a religious sect within the Hindu framework. With a strong presence also in the Gujarati diaspora, for example in the USA and the UK, it managed to mobilise large amounts of money. Whereas welfare and educational activities are part of its normal workings, its members and volunteers may not have technical and managerial expertise in all aspects of relief and reconstruction work;
- ?? the Rashriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is a membership-based Hindu-nationalist organisation.[xiv] With its cadres and strong organisational structure, the organisation mobilised thousands of volunteers immediately after the earthquake, which reportedly worked in a fairly coordinated manner;
- ?? labour unions, which are also membership-based, and close to or perhaps affiliated with political parties. The leadership of some of them may be monitoring government policies and performance, and they may try to influence or pressurise the GOG through negotiation or even mass mobilisation and direct action.

b. Diverse and dynamic relationships with the GOG.

The various civil society organisations may position themselves somewhat differently towards the GOG. This positioning becomes clearer, and perhaps stronger, as the initial cooperative effort to provide immediate relief, is now giving way to the 'politics' of reconstruction.

Over the years, disaster management in Gujarat, as in other states in India, has increasingly become a political issue, but this can be interpreted, and pursued, in two different ways:
- ✍ as a 'governance' issue: civil society actors may see their relationship with government here as one of 'critical partners': they will criticise if they feel it is needed, but they also recognise that they cannot replace government and that 'good governance' is a shared responsibility;
- ✍ as a 'party-political' issue: here the focus is not on the quality with which the 'state government' manages disaster in Gujarat, but on the performance of the ruling party or ruling coalition – with the opposition trying to get advantage from the perceived or proclaimed weaknesses or failures in the GOG response.

There certainly seems to be a fairly widespread perception that individual politicians, and political parties, are trying to use the disaster response, and the resources for reconstruction, as a means of increasing their political influence and power.

In principle it is not a bad thing that disasters and crises become a 'political' issue. Disaster management is a responsibility of the state authorities. The key question is how that responsibility is being exercised: Do politicians try to get electoral support from an effective performance for the general public good, or do they try to 'buy' votes through 'patronage' and 'high visibility' projects of limited use to those most in need?

People in Gujarat are in no doubt that they have a right to assistance, and that the primary duty-bearer to provide that assistance is the GOG. Some felt that the only way to influence the GOG would be through political party mobilisation, while others felt that the GRO working in their village should intercede on their behalf (the issue is undoubtedly more complex that is given the impression here: in practice people may seek to get their claims across through various means and channels, depending on the issue and the opportunity).

2. Disasters, Relief and Civil Society.

<u>a. Disasters: an organisational opportunity or threat?</u>

Several interlocutors commented on the earthquake as an opportunity, or as a threat:
- ✍ It is an opportunity:
  - to highlight the structural backwardness and vulnerabilities in north-west Gujarat, thus changing the common picture of Gujarat as one of wealthiest and prosperous states of India;
  - to generate a new focus, new motivations and energy among local organisations;
  - for local organisations to increase their capacity, gain more visibility within Gujarat, and take on more important roles, with the help of the additionally available financial resources, and sometimes technical expertise, of national and international origin. Objectives which previously might have felt out of reach, might now look more achievable.
- ✍ It is a threat:
  - because organisations may accept a level of resources that they cannot absorb and /or engage in types of programmes for which they do not have the social, technical or managerial competence. The 'opportunity' that is being pursued is mainly the opportunity to promote the organisational self-interest: 'growth' and 'visibility' rather than 'scaling up' in a meaningful sense. In this sense local organisations can be 'tempted' or 'pushed' by Indian donors as much as by international ones.

<u>b. Community-oriented organisations, disasters, and the 'partnership' with 'communities'.</u>

The indications are that local community-oriented (not necessarily community-based) organisations have or are continuing to face some dilemmas in their relationship with affected communities, for example

- membership-based organisations need to decide whether to provide assistance to members first, or members only (on the basis that they have a longer-term relationship with them, which may include a form of risk insurance) or to all affected? Is it also acceptable to them that people would suddenly want to become member of the organisation, primarily to access the relief and reconstruction benefits?;
- organisations not oriented towards disaster, such as rights-oriented or livelihood-oriented organisations, can hardly avoid getting involved in relief activities. But they do not necessarily have the resources and especially the competence;
- organisations involved in community-based disaster planning may find themselves overwhelmed by the scale of this disaster, and subsequently by the influx of new players, which in turn may not be aware of previous disaster preparedness planning with communities, or willing to invest in building relationship and engaging communities intelligently for the reconstruction work.

b. <u>Local capacities, disaster and the international 'partnership'.</u>

"We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities."

Point 6 of the Code of Conduct for the Red Cross and NGOs in disaster relief.

Although some of the leaders of local organisations expressed the enhanced international involvement as an opportunity, there was also significant unease and critical questioning of the quality of the relationship with international actors. Some of the perceived problems or sources of irritation were:

- 'Information-asset stripping': Some local actors have come to resent the demands for their local knowledge, from staff of international organisations that are not willing to fund their programme proposals, and who do not share their own evaluation and lesson-learning reports with local organisations;
- Lack of context-understanding: Most foreigners are seen, not only as not investing in developing understanding of the local society, but as simply not interested in it. [xv] *"The social dynamics of these*

communities are too complex for them. So they close their eyes to it, and limit their attention to what they understand."

- Inflexibility: The international agencies are seen as rigid. This shows for example in restrictive conditions on their funding which can prevent them from seriously investing funds raised for earthquake response into drought relief, but also in their 'specialisation': a large international organisation for example will do 'public health', not because it is a priority, but because that is what it is 'specialised' in. [xvi]

- Incentives to competition: "*Donors ask us: why should we fund you, we are already funding this and that other local organisation? So we are forced to emphasise our differences, which makes it more difficult to coordinate and collaborate.*"

- The international bureaucracy: "*The international agencies impose a heavy bureaucracy on us, and all accountability is turned upwards: the emphasis is on project and finance management, with little or no attention to or interest in values, trust, partnership with local communities, responsiveness to local people.*"

- Event-driven: International relief operations are superficial: they focus on events, rather than on deeper structural issues. For many their only perspective is that of earthquake response, only for some is it wider disaster preparedness. In contrast, a number of local organisations have a long-term societal project. [xvii]

Some of the perceived potential or actual negative impacts mentioned were:

- Inflation: The readiness of international organisations to pay way above the local market prices for resources and services such as transport, office space, certain supplies etc., creates inflation, and puts these resources out of reach of local actors;

- Impact on self-respect: Criticism was raised regarding the habit of international organisations to always put foreigners in charge even if there are many capable nationals; regarding the import of relief goods that were readily available on the local market ("*Hundred years ago we had to buy clothes from Manchester, now we have to receive their buckets...*"); and regarding arrogant and even racist attitudes among foreigners [xviii];

- Weakening local organisations: "*The same agencies that in previous years were funding us and telling us to keep our staff salaries down, now have gone operational and hire away our best staff with much higher salary offers. We have invested in these people's training, but are not compensated for that loss. Instead of hiring our best people away, in time of crisis they should be seconding experienced staff to us*".

- Corrupting local organisations: *With their money and bureaucracy they corrupt the values of local organisations, compromise their*

ways of working, and turn them into subcontractors and delivery agents".

Whatever the overall attitude, there is no doubt that local organisations are very conscious of the quality of partnership, and question the terms under which international 'support' is being offered, and the power relationship involved. Some are confident enough to refuse terms of engagement where they see the benefits as too one-sided: *"we are not in a hurry to become your partner. If you urgently want partners, go and see someone else"*, or *"No, I can't give you an appointment to brief you on aspects of the local situation, because I don't see your organisation showing interest in a real partnership"*.

Yet there are different experiences: some local organisations have long-term partnerships that date from before the earthquake and are not necessarily disaster-focused, which also worked well during the earthquake response. Other collaborative relationships have come about in the course of the earthquake response, with less substance to them.

The issue of partnership and local capacity strengthening, is a principle that many international relief organisations 'subscribe' to, but do not necessarily practice well. In recent years many have invested heavily in strengthening their technical, logistical and managerial capacities, to the neglect, and sometimes detriment, of their ethics and values.

International organisations come not only with resources and expertise, but also import their particular bureaucracy of narrative and financial proposals and reports, and project and programme design formats. Ostensibly justified as rational management tools, they very often serve the purposes of the donors more than those of the grassroots-implementers. Smaller local organisations may not be able to spare the time to fulfil all the reporting requirements of donors. A constructive approach would then be fore the donor agency to provide someone who can help the partner write the required reports.

Underneath there may be a confrontation in working cultures: 'trust' is an important dimension of Gujarati relations, including working relations, yet the whole international bureaucracy is very much geared to 'management control', that, when it comes to the working relationships with national staff or local organisations, may also come to express a basic 'distrust'.

While there is full justification for management systems and control, the international personnel sometimes does not make many conscious efforts to build relationship and develop mutual confidence and trust. This is in stark contrast with the often wide ranging authority and autonomy of decision-making accorded international staff members. At the same time, members of local organisations should not simply criticise what they see as an 'imposed bureaucracy', but try and make constructive proposals about how management controls and transparency can be achieved in mutually acceptable ways.

Yet local organisations need to take their own responsibility for the balance they maintain between community- interest and organisational self-interest, and maintain a critical eye on their own values. As a local activist put it: "*we ourselves need to examine our ethics and our role, and question to what degree we as local NGOs have ourselves become a 'special-interest group...NGOs first replaced the credit-unions, now they are replacing the political parties, and soon they will be replacing the people themselves....*"

3. And the Private Sector?

The roles, relationships and responsibilities of the private sector regarding disasters, relief and recovery, are still little explored and debated. Globally, there is of course substantive work on the social and environmental responsibilities and accountability of the corporate sector. The potential role and responsibility of the corporate sector in conflicts is also coming under increasing scrutiny, especially in the context of natural resource (diamonds, oil, valuable timber…) extraction and international trade.

Buildings collapsing in earthquakes while those next door remain standing, as was the case for example in Ahmedabad, inevitably raise questions about the quality of construction, and accusations against the 'construction maffia'. Will the builders be held accountable for the poor quality of their construction work? This is within the remit of the judiciary, and can be taken up by 'citizen action' and 'consumer rights' organisations, and possible of Gujarati voluntary organisations. But it will be perceived by international relief and rehabilitation agencies as outside their remit.

The private sector, and certainly the construction sector with it extensive network of suppliers and subcontractors, will play an important role in the rehabilitation of the affected areas in Gujarat. This presents a legitimate 'business opportunity', but also one that can be abused. So what would be a 'responsible' role for the private sector in reconstruction in Gujarat, how can the private sector become a 'partner' in the overall effort, and who would control for 'abuse' or 'unfair practices'? Perhaps this is a relevant topic for public debate in Gujarat?

F. ACCOUNTABLE RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION: MANY QUESTIONS, MANY APPROACHES?

What do we mean when we talk about accountability, specifically ways of working that make us accountable to the populations affected by disaster, here earthquake and drought?

There are four basic components of accountability: informing, responding, performance evaluation and follow-up. These are related but not identical. Actions can be

undertaken to strengthen one or the other component, and the quality of each can be monitored separately.

Transparency is a central aspect of accountability and applies to all four. Inform people about their rights, entitlements, your plans etc.; listen to their feedback but then subsequently inform them again about what you did, or did not do with what they told you; let them participate in the evaluation of your performance, or let them know how your performance is being evaluated, and what you did with the outcomes of that evaluation.

1. Informing.

Informing in the first place means giving people relevant, understandable and timely information about what you (plan to) do or will/cannot do, regarding their needs, concerns and demands. The moral, but sometimes also legal, basis for this can be that people have a 'right to information' about those things that will significantly affect their lives. [xix]

In early May people were in need of, and demanding, information, especially regarding the re-housing and drought relief. The information required related to policies, procedures, 'compensation' entitlements and the basis on which these were calculated (damage assessment or vulnerability assessment?), who had proposed to adopt a village/neighbourhood, what procedures to follow for those with a grievance or complaint etc.

But information not directly related to disaster response can be equally relevant. There are, for example, existing governmental social welfare schemes that people, whose situation or status has changed as a result of the earthquake (for example women who have become widowed)) now become entitled to. They need to made aware of this, and perhaps helped with accessing these new entitlements. [xx]

The responsibility to provide such information lies in the first place with the GOG. But that does not absolve other actors from their responsibility to also provide information to those concerned, about their plans and decisions. Box 1 contains an anecdotal example of how this also applies to local organisations with an established relationship with a 'community', while also signalling the need for outsiders to be very careful and disciplined in their 'assessments' of what is going on.

Some (there are undoubtedly more) of the ways in which information is being disseminated are:
- newspapers: reportedly however the information on GOG policies, packages and procedures did not appear in a complete or understandable form in the newspapers
- radio broadcasts: is the information broadcast at times that people are likely to be listening to the radio, is it in understandable language…?

- specially printed booklets or leaflets, from both the GOG and non-governmental sources
- direct meetings with community representatives or the community members as a whole.

A practice that did not seem commonly pursued in Gujarat, but tried successfully in other parts of the world, is the public posting of relevant information, for example the results of a village survey, records of relief distributions, a proposal to 'adopt' a village etc. As usual, currently public signboards tend to signal which agency had provided a certain amount of relief items, or was working on reconstruction in a certain locality. Such displays are more to the benefit of the agency ('visibility') than that of the affected people in the locality.

There are other approaches contemplated or being implemented:
- information and advise centres, notably the 'SETU' or 'BRIDGE' centres run by Abhiyan, a grouping of now 21 local NGOs in Kuch district (see Box 2);
- Providing intended beneficiaries with information about the budget the aid-provider has available, and how it is being spent; [xxi]
- bringing survivors from the 1993 Maharashtra earthquake to Gujarat, to share their experience with the Gujaratis, and increase the latter's awareness about important attention points, what they might expect, and what they might have to mobilise for.

Was there, is there, a clear 'communication' strategy of the GOG and other aid providers, and is its effectiveness being monitored and tested?

BOX 1. AN OUTSIDER'S ENCOUNTER WITH INSIDER DIALOGUE

The village is visited in the early afternoon. A staff member of a local grassroots organisation, with a membership basis, accompanies the outsider. That staff member herself however is not familiar with the village and the GRO's relationship with it. An engineer, brought in by the GRO, is just leaving when the other visitors arrive.

A conversation develops in a house with about 15 to 20 local women. The conversation is conducted in Gujarati, and led by a Gujarati woman. Three to four local men are present, but sit at the background. Although they occasionally contribute, they do not dominate the conversation. According to the women, the village consists of some 50 houses, many of which suffered damage to or partial collapse of the tiled roofs. They also point at walls that have cracked at structural points, and argue that these walls will crumble under the monsoon rains.

The villagers claim that a government assessor came to carry out the damage assessment, but then they never heard or saw anything of the results. They state that they rely on the GRO, with which they have a working relationship since many years, to follow up for them. Reportedly, the GRO engineer requested information from the 'taluqa' officers, but did not (yet) receive any reply.

The village is also vulnerable to drought, and the bunds of two ponds would need repairing. But as the village is fairly small and many able-bodied men migrate to find work, they claim they cannot constitute a work party of 50 people, the requirement to get a government-sponsored food-for-work or cash-for-work public works programme.

The village people also portray an unfinished dialogue with their GRO. According to them, the GRO had signalled an intent
- ?? to repair only 17 or 19 houses, which they feel would create tensions in the village
- ?? to rebuild rooms but on a smaller size than the villagers would want
- ?? to repair the roofs as they existed i.e. as tiles on a timber lattice. The villagers however had suggested that flat roofs be build. This to them looked a safer option, given that the area is also vulnerable to cyclone, and in cyclone conditions tiles get ripped off and become a danger. They argued that such cyclone-proof flat roofs could be constructed at the same cost as the tiled ones. However, according to them, the GRO had first accepted their suggestion, but then, for reasons they claimed they were unaware of, gone back on that acceptance, and returned to the tiles option.

All in all, the villagers, who spoke with calm confidence but without arrogance, felt very strongly that they were not getting precise information, not from the government nor from the GRO with whom they had a long association.

The ignorant outsider, spending about 1,5 hour in this village of which he knows nothing, now has a certain *impression, based on the conversation*. But to that impression must be added some rapid observations. At first sight, the village does not seem to contain 50 houses, but less. Although some damage to roofs and walls is indeed visible, several houses from the outside do not appear much damaged. There are also two new houses, with still fresh cement, which, upon inquiry, villagers confirm had been planned before the earthquake, and were build thereafter, with the owner's own private funds. In short, the *superficial* observations do not immediately correspond to the picture constructed from the conversation, so it is clear, that this cannot remotely be considered a proper 'assessment', and that further inquiry would be needed.

Only later, and *by coincidence*, does the outsider learn that a another local NGO in 1999 had conducted an extensive community-based action planning exercise in the village, and that the improved access road to the village was already one tangible outcome of this.

To be responsive to local peoples perceptions, priorities, concerns, grievances but also constructive proposals, you have to listen. And then do something with what you heard. There are many ways of doing this, and useful insights, and learning, can come through focused questioning, but also unexpectedly in the course of a casual conversation. Some individuals are attentive listeners. But there is also a need for organisational initiatives to listen to local people, to invite them to voice their opinions, and to register what they say. This then has to go together with an organisational readiness to change what is being proposed or being done, or the way in which it is being done, on the basis of what is heard.

Non-governmental interlocutors actually gave concrete examples of responsiveness in the GOG, such as the review of its initial policy on relocation of earthquake affected communities, and the decision that children, orphaned in the earthquake, should stay within their community, and not be uprooted twice.

But there were also examples of failures to consult and to listen in the relief operation:

- Both the GOG and NGOs handed out corrugated iron sheeting as shelter material, and some non-governmental organisations are even building temporary housing with extensive use of tin-sheets for the roof and walls. Local people are clear that this is highly inappropriate material. Not only does it make the dwelling unbearably hot inside, but tin sheeting is also considered a high-risk in an area vulnerable to cyclone: the winds rip them off and they become flying razor blades;
- An international organisation built latrines in a school compound where people whose houses had been destroyed were camping. It was an Indian staff member who took notice when people complained over the latrines, and who noticed that they were not being cleaned and quickly had become unusable. The foreigners had failed to realise that people of different social status will not share a latrine, and that the cleaning of latrines will only be done by members of a certain caste. It would not have taken much consultation to identify these factors.

The question is how the GOG and many different types of 'civil society' organisations listen to affected people, and whether, or to what degree, they respond to that in their programming and practices. What can and must be done, organisationally, to establish and maintain a meaningful dialogue with the people for whose intended benefit so many activities are undertaken?

Some ways in which the voice of people can be sought out and transmitted more widely, the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of different aid providers monitored, and greater responsiveness 'encouraged' where needed, are:

- Agency-focused social audits: practiced by an individual agency (see ActionAid India nd, and Lingayah et al. 1999)
- The media: send out journalists or Indian students of journalism to the affected localities, to get stories from the grassroots for publication; investigative journalism

✍✍Civil society advocacy through a media-centre, with perhaps its own 'newsletter'[xxii]

✍✍'Advise' and 'facilitation' centres: another function of the 'SETU' centres set up by Abhiyan is to provide advise and help people with the follow-up of their specific case (see Box 2);

✍✍Population-wide social audits: covering the whole affected population, with sentinel communities, questionnaires, focus groups discussions and interviews with various types of leaders [xxiii]

✍✍'Real-time evaluations': the deployment of one or more agency staff members in an early stage of programme design or implementation, tasked with listening to the views and concerns of various stakeholders, including those affected by disaster, to feed into the programme design and management;

✍✍'Community construction watch' teams: a practice from the 1993 Latur earthquake rehabilitation, such teams of local people would address day-to-day problems occurring in the construction work, but also monitor and tackle problems such as delays in disbursements, access to materials coupons, corrupt engineers etc. (Gopalan 2000:211);

✍✍Direct action protests: Although perceived as 'confrontational' they are usually also an indication of the absence, or breakdown, of quality dialogue and of a responsiveness of whom local people perceive as the duty-bearers;

✍✍Legal aid: send out Indian law students to the affected localities to record indicative 'cases' and help local people follow them through; legal aid services;

✍✍Public interest litigation: perhaps a matter of last resort, but pursued in the context of the 1993 Maharashtra earthquake rehabilitation programme (Krishnadas 2000)

✍✍Political voting: in a functioning democracy, people can also express their views on the perceived quality of the government's disaster management through the ballot; the ruling BJP party lost seats in previous local elections, a loss that is attributed to its perceived failure to manage the drought.

MEETING THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION: ABHIYAN AND THE 'SETU' CENTRES.

'ABHIYAN' is a grouping of local voluntary organisations in Kuch district, that was founded after the 1998 cyclone. Currently there are 21 member-organisations, working in different sectors. Prior to the earthquake Abhiyan had prepared 'drought-proofing ' actions in many villages. Following the earthquake they mounted their own relief operation, either pooling relief materials and distributing them through their relief distribution centres each covering 15 to 20 villages, or providing associated organisations with the information about unmet needs. In order to ensure appropriate relief, a quick demand-survey was first carried out. However ABHIYAN decided to stop its relief work, less than a month after the earthquake, to start concentrating on recovery. ABHIYAN identified the demand for information related to re-housing and drought relief, and decided to transform its relief distribution centres into information and advice centres. By mid-May 26 'BRIDGE' centres were functioning, although not all of them at full capacity yet.

What are the intended functions for the SETU centres:
- Provide relevant, complete and accurate information to the affected people, in the first place on government policies, procedures, funds available, and the criteria for entitlement;
- Develop a communication strategy and communication materials to get the information out, in a format that is accessible and understandable for all;
- Work with co-residential groups to develop reconstruction plans, and how best to utilise the funds that become available to them;
- Act as a 'help-desk' where people collectively or individually can seek advice or bring grievances, and facilitate/encourage a response from aid providers to particular complaints or grievances;
- Be a major meeting point for affected people and aid providers;
- In their physical structure be a model of cyclone and earthquake resistant construction.

What is the underlying goal:
"The goal is to ensure that people develop the ability to negotiate from a position of strength. Making informed choices would be possible if people have access to information and space to analyse and discuss it within the community." (Abhiyan 2001)

Who staffs the centres:
- Initially ABHIYAN did not look for staff with a specific profile, but then moved towards a more defined team composition of
- A centre coordinator or information manager, 2 engineers, 2 social workers, a retired government official who is familiar with the government administration and its culture, and an accountant. Ideally, each centre would also have 2 village outreach workers to support the social workers, and a health worker.

What are the challenges for the SETU-initiative:
- For the time being finance is not an issue, because international organisations such as UNDP and Save the Children Fund have agreed to co-finance the initiative;
- A bigger challenge has been getting the acceptance, of local populations and some ABHIYAN members. Indeed, local people initially questioned the value of the initiative: they wanted tangible relief, not 'talk'. Some member agencies also expressed doubts about the value of the centres;
- An equally big challenge is finding enough of the right staff: people with the skills, the motivation and the dedication to perform the tasks intended.

Should this be a non-governmental initiative? Observers have divergent views on this:
- Some believe that the government has the obligation to provide quality information, and that the SETU centres dilute the government's sense of obligation;
- Others believe that the centres should not be run by the government, as the quality and objectivity might get compromised.

It is too early to judge their merit, and clearly users' perspectives should be considered as very important in the review and evaluation of the approach.

Performance evaluations tend to be conceived as the formal 'evaluations' commissioned and conducted after a project or programme, or a major phase of it, has been completed. Although given much prominence, the relevance of this type of evaluations must be questioned. On the one hand, by the time they are completed, it is too late to make adjustments i.e. to respond to the insights gained about what can or should be done better. Secondly, recent research suggests that many evaluations may not be widely disseminated and acted upon, even within the organisation commissioning it. (van de Putte 2001) From a 'responsiveness' point of view, frequent, participatory, performance and impact reviews, which can be used to improve ongoing activities, are more important.

Six key questions need to be addressed:
- o What will be reviewed, and who decides this?
- o What 'data' or information is relevant?
- o Who will do it?
- o Against what criteria is the performance judged?
- o How are the results disseminated, especially to the affected populations?
- o Who will monitor whether anything is being done with the insights gained?

<u>What do you want to review?</u> As a local activist pointed out: being accountable requires much more than disseminating narrative and financial reports. Aid is no longer judged simply by its good intentions, but it can also not simply be judged –as is still commonly the case- by its activities and expenditures.

✍✍ *The transparency and responsiveness of aid providers.*

Rare is the review or evaluation that actually inquires into the transparency and responsiveness of aid providers: what do people think about the information they received (or not), have their views been invited, what do they think about the responsiveness of the aid providers to their suggestions and concerns? [xxiv]

If evaluators would give more attention to these questions, and be given the time to pursue them with affected people, we would undoubtedly also learn that people can have a much wider range of concerns than only those related to the 'quality of assistance'.

In Gujarat, various approaches related to this issues, were already being planned or implemented, and some additional ones can also be suggested.

Possible approaches:
- ✍✍Eliciting of people's perceptions of the quality of aid, and consolidated presentation in report cards format. [xxv]This can be undertaken, perhaps, by a grouping of Gujarati organisations;
- ✍✍The 'SETU' centres of Ahbiyan keep track of the problems, concerns, grievances and complaint cases being brought to them, for comparative

analysis, and of how they were resolved – or not. Periodic reports are made public;

?? Public hearings, in selected sample communities, about the quality of aid received, but also the ways in which aid providers interacted with those affected by disaster (the quality of the dialogue and the relationship, their transparency, responsiveness), and the perceived impacts. The public hearings can be conducted by a mixed team of GOG and Gujarati civil society organisations, and/or members of the Gujarat State Assembly, and/or retired judges of the Supreme Court;

?? 'Social accounts': individual agency narrative reports that also include, and fairly represent, how its key stakeholders perceive its performance;

?? Internationally commissioned evaluations write extensive consultation with disaster victims into their terms of reference, select consultants with the required experience and knowledge of Gujarat, and provide them with enough time in the field to carry out the consultations. The consultants are attentive to questions of aid provider transparency and responsiveness;

?? Indian social scientists do a comparative study of the approaches followed by different types of civil society organisations for example the RSS, Swami Narayan, a membership-based GRO from Gujarat, an Indian NGO (possibly affiliated with an international one) with no prior working experience in Gujarat, and elicit people's perspectives on them.

?? *Impact on people's lives.*

But ultimately the most relevant focus for substantive reviews and evaluations, would be the question of what impacts the aid provided has had, on the lives and well being of the people that were affected by disaster. [xxvi]

Although in recent years the evaluation of humanitarian aid has become more common and more rigorous, it is still extremely rare that any impact assessment is being attempted (see Riddell et. al. 1997). Impact assessment is methodologically not easy (see Roche 1999, ch. 4). Impact assessment requires extensive document and data-study, but also extensive consultation and discussion directly with the people concerned. There is therefore a 'cost' to it, especially in terms of people's time. This concerns not only the time input of those asking the questions, but also the 'costs' for those from whom we seek the answers (see Goyder & alii 1998:1).

The majority of today's evaluations actually allow the evaluators very limited time 'in the field'. Consequently, most evaluators talk mostly with aid agency personnel, rather than with the local people whom the former claim to have been their 'beneficiaries'. Evaluations will not be able to address the question of impacts in a more serious way, until ways are found to overcome this fundamental limitation.

No plans for impact assessments were heard during the field trip, but the question must be put to all the local, national and international actors, engaged in Gujarat, how they will assess the impacts of their efforts?

Whereas the impacts on the lives of those affected by disaster is the core issue, it is also possible to review and evaluate more 'structural' challenges, and demand accountability around those:

✍ ✍ *'Developmental' accountability*.

'Rehabilitation' is not the same as 'relief', although international funding for rehabilitation activities often comes from the humanitarian budgets. 'Rehabilitation' however immediately has social, economic, political and environmental impacts, and therefore must be planned, monitored and judged against different criteria than relief. [xxvii] This applies at local, and at macro-level. At local level, key 'impact' objectives should be self-reliance and 'equity'. Rather than blaming people affected by disaster for becoming 'dependent', relief actors should examine why and how their own practices stimulate such perceived 'dependency':

"…intervention can wipe out the development efforts of indigenous organisations almost instantly. One of the primary goals of development efforts is to encourage self-reliance on the part of the people. Yet a massive relief programme that does not take development questions into consideration can create disincentives to self-reliance, can establish dependencies on outside organisations, and can foster doubts on the part of the people about their own ability to control their lives and destinies. The chaos left behind when interveners do not fully consider the implications and impact of their programmes can delay, and in some cases even inhibit, further development work. Following the 1977 cyclone in Andra Pradesh, the development organisations coming into the area reported difficulty in developing economic and agricultural programmes due to the animosity resulting from the ways various relief programmes had been conducted." (Cuny 1983:92).

Secondly, people may be equally affected by the same disaster, but they do not constitute 'homogenous' or for that matter 'equitable' communities, except in the rhetoric of outsiders for whom the concept of 'community' is a convenient programming simplification. The second key question therefore is how programmes impact on equity, between men and women, and between people with different social, economic/occupational and religious status and identities?

But the question of wider 'developmental' impacts can also be asked at macro-level: tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars have been raised for those affected by the earthquake. This constitutes a massive 'direct foreign investment'. But the earthquake happened in a less developed and disaster-prone area of Gujarat. Will the many millions be used to address the deeper structural vulnerabilities and inequalities, or will they remain an ultimately superficial 'international welfare largesse', that did not affect the status quo?

Ensuring more structural positive impacts requires a more coordinated and strategic use of funds. Would it not be a sensible idea to pool funds in a 'strategic recovery facility', with a funding and expenditure tracking system and governed, perhaps, by a mixed Board with the Indian government and key international donors on it (see Forman and Patrick 2001). This is certainly something that the Government of India, the GOG, and the big international governmental and multi-lateral donors should take a responsibility for?

Possible approaches:
- ✍✍A mixed team of Indian and foreign evaluators, compile baseline data and key indicators, and identify a number of 'sentinel communities' for monitoring over time. One year or 15 months after the earthquake, they conduct an (first?) evaluation of the developmental impact (or lack thereof) of the expenditures on reconstruction. The team is supervised by a Steering Committee involving the World Bank, members of the Indian Federal and Gujarat State authorities, and of Gujarati civil society organisations.

✍✍ *Partnership accountability.*

Given that international relief and reconstruction aid does have an impact on the identity, objectives, practices and capacities of local organisations (governmental and non-governmental), whether it works through them or goes directly operational, it seems only valid that those impacts too are reviewed, evaluated, and accounted for.[xxviii]

Possible approaches:
- ✍✍The terms of the partnership relationship, and the evolving partnership experience are regularly reviewed together;
- ✍✍Local organisations concerned about negative impacts on their identity, practices and capacities, create a platform for discussion with international actors;
- ✍✍A mixed team of Indian and foreign evaluators carry out a comparative review of the relationship between some Gujarati GRO or NGOs and their international 'funders'/'partners'

✍✍ *Equitable disaster-response?*

Is it a valid question to ask whether, on a per capita basis, there has been a more generous response, in financial terms and in terms of organisational mobilisation, for the victims of the earthquake in Gujarat, than, for example, for the victims of the 1999 super-cyclone in Orissa. If so, why? And would this then be 'fair', given the lower level of socio-economic development, and therefore the poorer vulnerability-capacity

equation, of Orissa? Is it the case that internationally, not only the general public, but also official aid providers, are more generous when it comes to certain types of disaster, such as earthquakes, than others, and if so, should this not be questioned? [xxix] Who takes up this questions, and in what fora?

<u>What data or information would be relevant?</u> The most commonly used sources of information are assessment-, activity- and review reports of single aid organisations themselves, and their basic financial reports. These are useful but not enough. What is also required for a serious review or evaluation would be:

  - more in-depth financial and market analysis
  - institutional analysis, especially decision trails
  - perception-data on how those affected analyse the impact of the disaster upon their lives, how they perceive the various aid providers, and the impact of the aid received on their lives.

Many reviews and evaluations do not pay in-depth attention to financial data.

  - Interestingly, there are Gujarati civil society organisations that have access to public expenditure information from the GOG, and that will conduct a public expenditure review. But given the enormous amount of international funding for Gujarat, raised privately or provided as official aid, why would there not be an expenditure review of that international funding?
  - Expenditure reviews should look not only at the proportional allocation of resources, but also at
    - the timing of disbursements in relation to situational requirements. For example, are funds allocated for compensation payments actually disbursed, and quickly enough so that people can make use of them to recover? Or are funds spent in a hurry, in order to meet spending deadlines?);
    - the programmatic activities of the range of actors. For example unnecessary duplication would not reveal itself from the simple study of single agency accounts) (see Van Brabant 1999);
    - the relationship of certain expenditures to the wider context, notably the market (how do the prices paid for services contracted relate to market prices, or how do the wages paid in cash-for-work schemes relate to the cost-of-living).

Possible approaches:

  - GOG public expenditure review;
  - Financial management audit (rather than an accounting audit) of major bilateral and multilateral donations through Indian governmental structures;
  - Financial management audit of a sample of non-governmental international and local organisations.

Institutional analysis would pay attention to how key decisions are made, when, by whom, and on what grounds. This is notoriously difficult as in many institutions there is not an easily retrievable decision-trail. Yet is it is an important exercise, both for institutional learning and for wider accountability. A problem with most international evaluations of disaster responses is that they may reveal important shortcomings, but never identify who might be responsible for them. [xxx] Given that in some international relief organisations individual staff members may actually be given great freedom to take major programme or project decisions, this 'authority' should go together with greater accountability.

Possible approaches:
> ✍✍Independent Indian political scientists track key government decisions, who made them when and why;
> ✍✍Evaluations of international agency responses, as part of the wider evaluation of the appropriateness and timeliness of aid, also track key decisions, who made them when and why.

<u>Against what criteria do you judge a performance?</u> It is easy to be critical, but criticism also has to be fair. Currently in Gujarat there is, for example, criticism of the GOG, for not having responded quickly and effectively enough immediately after the earthquake. But this was an unexpected disaster on an unprecedented scale, for which few governments anywhere in the world would be fully prepared. So what can be a valid reference to compare its overall performance against the:
- quality of the response by the GOG to previous disasters? But are slow-onset droughts for example, comparable with sudden-onset earthquakes?
- quality of its response compared to that of other State governments in India, faced with an earthquake, for example that of Maharashtra?
- quality of its response compared to other countries in the world, that have suffered major earthquakes such as Armenia, Turkey, Japan?
- underlying, structural vulnerability of people in northwest Gujarat, physically in terms of constructions that are not earthquake resistant, and socio-economically in terms of their ability to cope with and recover from such disaster?

For more specific aspects of the performance of any actor, there is a range of references and benchmarks that can be used, depending on what particular aspect of a performance (or failure to perform) is under scrutiny. Some have a stronger legal basis than others, some are Indian, others international. These include for example, political, administrative and legal Indian references that spell out the duties and responsibilities of the State authorities and the Federal Authorities with regard to disaster management. Some international references like the Rights of the Child Protocol would also apply (if it has been ratified by the Indian government).

For international and Indian voluntary agencies, the following references can be used:
> ✍✍ their value, mandate and mission statements,
> ✍✍ internal agency policy and practice guidelines or directives,

- the Red Cross and NGO Code of Conduct, for those who have signed up to it (Network paper 7 at www.odihpn.org/publications) [xxxi],
- national 'codes of conduct' applicable also to the local government agency or to voluntary agencies only, [xxxii]
- perhaps the Guidelines for Working with the Elderly in Disasters, developed by HelpAge International (www.helpage.org/emergencies),
- the Sphere project references, which repeatedly call for consultation (www.sphereproject.org),
- the learning gained from evaluations of earthquake and drought responses in India and elsewhere.

There will in any case be no simple answer: each actor will be found to have done well on certain counts, and less well on others. Part of the debate, in Gujarat, and elsewhere, will be to establish what are essential or priority areas for good practice and effective performance, and what are desirable additional ones.

Coordinating reviews and evaluations, and centralising and consolidating the reports? A lot will be written about the earthquake and drought responses in Gujarat. The various possible approaches, mentioned or suggested in this report (which by no means need be the best or only possible ones), would already produce significant amounts of paper. The amount of time, energy and money that will be invested in a variety of monitoring reports, reviews and evaluations, needs to be made cost-effective.

It seems very advisable, that in Gujarat a central focal point be created, where different actors intending to carry out reviews or evaluations register that intent, but can also inquire into other review work, planned, in progress or completed. The purpose being to coordinate, to a degree, the various efforts, so that where possible they complement and build on each other. Final reports, and possibly copies of key documents used in a review, would also be centrally deposited with that focal point. It seems important, and only correct, that also international agencies (are required to) deposit copies of their review and evaluation reports in Gujarat, in a place accessible to the GOG and to civil society actors. Otherwise local actors in Gujarat are deprived of the learning that can be derived from those exercises, while their potential accountability function to people in Gujarat would certainly not be fulfilled. [xxxiii]

How are the results disseminated? Review and evaluation work is only useful for learning purposes if the insights gained from the analysis are followed up within and between the organisations concerned. Review and evaluation work is only useful for accountability purposes if the analysis is put in the public domain, in an accessible and understandable format, not only in foreign capitals or offices in Delhi, but more widely in Gujarat. That will require a variety of dissemination approaches that could include, among others, the creation of a dedicated website in India, combined with reports in the local press (written, radio, TV), and with wider outreach into diverse communities, through leaflets, feedback and discussion groups, etc.

4. Following Up on Performance Evaluations.

Research indicates that evaluations, no matter how rigorous and instructive they are, often end up on a shelf or in a drawer, rather than being used to improve organisational learning and organisational practices (van de Putte 2001). In each organisation that has been involved, one or more persons have to be given the management responsibility to follow up on the outcomes of substantive reviews or evaluations. Where major shortcomings in the exercise of duties are detected, there have to be consequences: perhaps for individuals responsible, or for the organisation as a whole. If people as a consequence of the failure to act responsibly, have suffered unnecessarily, they are entitled to redress.

Follow up is also required in Gujarat in a wider sense, to improve overall disaster preparedness and future disaster response. A State Disaster Management Authority has now been established, but follow up should take place also within and between non-governmental organisations and in the Indian Army (which played a major role in the immediate rescue and relief phase). The Gujarati actors undoubtedly will be able to suggest other appropriate fora and mechanisms.

The learning points that can be identified, and that will have to be incorporated into future practice, can also feed into the debate on disaster management in the wider Indian context, a debate that has already been stimulated, among other factors, by the recent India Disasters Report (Parasuraman & Unnikrishnan 2000) and the consultations with NGOs of the High Powered Committee on national disaster management, that was created in 1999 by the Prime Minister's Office (see e.g. Bhatt & Krishnaswamy 2000).

H. ACRONYMS

GOG: Government of Gujarat
GRO: Grassroots organisation
NGO: Non-governmental organisation.

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J. ENDNOTES.

[i] Reportedly, since then the GOG has also developed a compensation package for those who had other than residential farm buildings damaged or destroyed.

[ii] 'Compensation' as used in this context is not meant to imply liability of the Government. Although the notion of 'culpable inaction' with regard to state liability is entering Indian jurisprudence, it is not normally invoked in the context of natural disasters. Changing analyses, away from disasters as an 'act of nature', to the structural vulnerability that may determine their impact for certain groups of people, in future may lead to different interpretations (see Ramanathan 2000).

[iii] Nor does the GOG always follow this 'good practice' itself. The reconstructed town of Dudhai for example was officially opened by the Chief Minister, with much publicity about the speed of reconstruction. The standardized square and unfriendly houses however are a repeat of those built after the earthquakes in Maharashtra (India) and Kobe (Japan), that were experienced as a very depressing environment by the survivors who came to live in them.

[iv] Serious problems with re-housing programmes were identified in evaluations of international NGO responses to Hurricane Mitch in Central America (see e.g. Grunewald et al. 2000). International NGOs have been heavily involved in re-housing in the Balkans, but many still need to analyse, consolidate and incorporate their learning from those experiences.

[v] Following negotiations, a number of NGOs agreed to fund 50% of a standard amount for each house irrespective of the value of the damaged property. The GOG would then pay the remainder to the total amount of the compensation as calculated in function of the damage assessment.

[vi] A national Indian NGO, part of a global NGO, had been implementing developmental programmes in Gujarat for several years. This included drought mitigation in areas vulnerable to drought. Although it had no prior programme activities in Kuch district, it rapidly mobilized financial, material and human resources to respond to the earthquake. All the staff and energies of its Gujarat office became totally re-oriented towards the earthquake response, to the degree that the developmental programmes elsewhere were completely suspended. Although the people in the other project areas understood, it also meant that planned drought mitigation activities got delayed by at least three months.

[vii] Fortunately, monsoon rains broke in the early summer, which is good for the land but then again not good for those still without adequate shelter. The situation highlights the difficulty of planning for two or three, equally plausible scenarios, on a large scale.

[viii] On the basis of its experience, SEWA proposed the creation of a Livelihood Security Fund, to provide sustainable income through women, as a long term and drought proofing measure (Ahmedabad, The Economic Times, 10 August 2000).

[ix] "The knowledge that the poor have about their lives and livelihoods is often the most comprehensive and accurate information available after a cyclone." IMM Ltd. 2001, p. 16. This also applies to post-earthquake situations.

[x] "Emergency relief projects always have an impact on local people's capacities and vulnerabilities, either positive or negative. …..Since emergency relief aid has an extraordinary potential for promoting or undermining local capacities, monitoring and evaluation of projects should take account of its impact on both capacities and vulnerabilities – that is, on development." (Anderson&Woodrow 1998:93-94, see also IFRC 1999)

[xi] See for example Tully, M. 1992: chapter 8 on communal riots in Ahmedabad, or Human Rights Watch 1999: Broken People. Caste violence against India's "Untouchables" & 1999: Politics by Other Means. Attacks against Christians in India, New York (www.hrw.org)

[xii] Some Gujarati interlocutors advised that foreign individuals or organizations should not overtly engage with issues of caste and religion, given the sensitivities around them, and leave it to local actors. That does not mean however, that foreigners should not be aware of the existence of these social dynamics, and consider them in their programming. This understanding has to go beyond awareness that there are 'outcastes'. There is also inequality, marginalisation and sometimes structural violence within the caste system.

[xiii] Evaluations of French and British NGO responses in Central America after Hurricane Mitch, point at the continuing need, even after so many years of experience, to improve the overall quality of assessments (see Grunewald et al. 2000:28).

xiv The RSS or 'Association of National Volunteers' was founded in 1925. A militant organization first against the colonial power, it subsequently opposed the secular pluralism of Nehru's India, and, with other similar nationalist movements, seeks to create a Hindu vote and to Indianise the minorities. Although perceived as close to the BJP which currently controls the Gujarat state government, over the years its attitude to the BJP has also been critical as the latter moderated its ideology and tactics in order to appeal to the mainstream of voters.

xv International organizations sometimes claim that they work in an 'information-poor environment'. This is correct, but it is often also a state of affairs that becomes self-perpetuated, as they make no efforts to learn about their environment.

xvi Sometimes an agency's technical expertise may be made 'relevant' by changing circumstances. For example, if there is a good monsoon in Gujarat, there is likely to be an increase in for example acute respiratory infections and malaria, to which a public health programme then can respond.

xvii But this is also a problem of the Indian media and the way they report on disasters, see Sainath 1996:260 and Bhatt 2000.

xviii Racist comments and attitudes are more frequently encountered among particularly white Western staff, than would be expected from people in this type of work. When a case is reported, it is often shrugged away, and excused as a symptom of 'stress'. This complacency stands in marked contrast with the efforts to combat racism in public administrations, the army and for-profit corporations in Western countries, efforts often stimulated by voluntary organizations.

xix "Right to accurate and appropriate information is also central for any rehabilitation activity to be a success. Information on the government response, compensation and entitlement are important." Oxfam India 2001, under Observation 7.

xx In the 1990s in Serbia for example, Swiss Disaster Relief, together with UNHCR, ran a major legal information and legal aid programme for those who had fled to Serbia from Croatie, Bosnia and Kosovo, to help them access the governmental social welfare schemes to which they were entitled.

xxi A representative of a national Indian NGO normally involved in developmental work in Gujarat, confirmed that, until now, the intended beneficiaries had not asked the agency for budget information, but expected that such demand would start coming up in the near future. He felt that the demand was legitimate, and should be met. "*After all, transparency and accountability are a requirement to empower people, and empowerment is a requirement for sustainability*."

xxii Following the 1998 cyclone, a number of Gujarati non-governmental organizations formed the People's Coalition for Cyclone Relief and Rehabilitation. One of its tasks was analyzing the press for how they covered the impact and the relief and rehabilitation work. Another, the publication of a forthnightly newsletter 'Vavazodu' providing the stories and views of affected people, and reporting on the rehabilitation policies and practices. The experience highlighted the value of training field staff in 'getting the story' and writing it up, and the need to work with the media for better informed disaster and development journalism. (see Bhatt 2000)

xxiii This method of 'public consultation' for advocacy and feedback, has been developed by CIET and applied around a variety of topics in various countries. (see www.ciet.org)

xxiv An exception is the first national 'social audit' of the relief efforts in Nicaragua, following Hurricane Mitch in 1998 (CIETinternational & CCER 1999)

xxv The report card method, in which people give a score for the perceived quality or performance of, for example, public services or relief, through its blunt presentation, can be particularly effective in drawing attention to a problem.

xxvi This report argues for more impact assessment, in full awareness of the fact that impact-assessment is not so easy in practice. A useful discussion of the topic, with practical guidance can be found in Goyden et alli 1998, and Roche 1999.

xxvii "It is critical to begin to apply developmental criteria to the evaluation of relief projects, as well as judging their efficiency in delivery of goods. They are never *neutral* in their developmental impact." Anderson & Woodrow 1998:93

xxviii The issue is consistently diagnosed, but rarely properly evaluated. See e.g. Stubbs 1997, Vukovic & Hertanu 2001 (Telford evaluation)

xxix "A recent study of donor response to Federation appeals has shown that, while population movement appeals attract 103 per cent funding and earthquakes attract 92 percent relief funding, the average donor response to drought is only 29 per cent and the response to socio-economic crises only 52 per cent. These

statistics either define a lack of confidence in the Federation as an appropriate organization to respond to such disasters or define a more general problem with donor humanitarian aid responses to such types of disaster." IFRC 2000:7

[xxx] "These weaknesses themselves allow the inference of yet greater problems – namely, no transparency, little if any sense of accountability, and a tendency to submerge all and any criticism of performance in someone else's absence of political will. Indeed, the report itself disappoints at this juncture: no one is identified save by post or acronym, credit and criticism fall indiscriminately, and one may well emerge with the feeling that, though a lot went wrong, no one ultimately was responsible." (Goodwin-Gill 2000:34)

[xxxi] The biggest problem with this code is the absence of a monitoring and governance mechanism. Although over 150 organisations have signed up to it, it is hardly used as an active reference for strategic decision making or review, and many field staff are simply unaware of it. Even the signatory agencies will not pay much active attention to it, until the Code is made a practical reference for monitoring and evaluation (see Vaux and Bhatt 2001).

[xxxii] A first draft for a 'Code of Conduct for Disaster Management' has come out of the consultations of the High Powered Committee with NGOs in India. The different actors to which it will apply may wish to further debate and review its clauses. A key question however is who will overlook adherence to the Code? In Ethiopia, where voluntary agencies have adopted a code, this is the task of a Code Observance Committee. In its understanding of 'transparency and accountability' the Ethiopian Code on the other hand may not be sufficiently clear about the rights of those affected by disaster. (see www.crdaethiopia.org)

[xxxiii] The Active Learning Network on Accountability and Performance has created a database of evaluations, tries to encourage better coordination of the review and evaluation activities of various international aid agencies, and carries out synthesis studies of evaluations. But although that consolidated information is partially accessible through its website (www.odi.org.uk/alnap), much more effort is needed to provide local actors in the countries concerned with copies of the available information, and involve them in the discussions and debates that concern their country or situation.