

# HPG Background Paper

**Canada's international  
humanitarian assistance  
programme: policy oversight  
mechanisms**

Margie Buchanan-Smith and  
Natalie Folster

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## 1. Introduction

This paper describes the formal and informal policy oversight mechanisms governing the international humanitarian assistance of the Canadian government. It provides background information for a comparative study of upward accountability mechanisms in the administration of humanitarian relief in Canada, the UK and Denmark. Previous research by the ODI has identified a number of issues for further investigation in the area of donor accountability in the administration of humanitarian aid:

- The apparent 'bilateralisation' of the humanitarian response, with a trend among donors towards bypassing multilateral channels in the disbursement of emergency relief.
- The assumption by a number of bilateral aid donors of a more direct role in managing and implementing humanitarian operations in the field.
- A lacuna in upward accountability mechanisms concerning the monitoring and evaluation of actions taken by donor agencies, and the outcome of these actions. While aid recipients and the relief organisations that are funded by bilateral agencies are increasingly being asked to account for their use of aid funds, the decision-making processes and actions of donors are subject to rather little scrutiny.

This paper maps accountability mechanisms and identifies the oversight mechanisms – both formal and informal – at the policy-making, programming and resource allocation stages of the aid process in Canada. As recognised in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)'s Results Based Management approach, and stated in the Agency Accountability Framework, as a donor Canada is accountable for the results of its aid interventions in other countries. The Framework outlines CIDA's accountability for results at two levels:

*For actual development results achieved, defined in terms of actual changes made to human development through CIDA's development initiatives; these results reflect the extent to which CIDA's objectives are met;*

And:

*Accountability for operational results – that is, for the administration and management of allocated resources (financial, human, physical, and organizational) aimed at achieving development results through decisions and actions taken by CIDA staff which will ultimately determine the effectiveness and efficiency of CIDA as an organization and its capacity to achieve its objectives in fulfilling its mandate.<sup>1</sup>*

Given CIDA's new-found focus on results, this paper also outlines the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating humanitarian interventions; and for holding decision-makers to account for the outcomes of their actions. In preparation for this mapping exercise, a brief overview of trends in Canadian international humanitarian assistance is presented. This is followed by a discussion of the various policy documents and programming guidelines which govern the allocation and administration of resources; and statements of the criteria against which aid interventions are assessed.

The various formal mechanisms for policy oversight within the Canadian government will then be described: the role of Parliament and parliamentary committees; the Office of the Auditor-General of Canada; and CIDA's internal accountability framework. The roles of non-governmental organisations and the media in monitoring government humanitarian aid policy are also discussed.

## 2. An overview of Canadian humanitarian assistance

Canada's international humanitarian assistance is managed by CIDA. A number of other federal government departments play a lesser role in humanitarian relief efforts. Within CIDA, emergency relief is administered through two programmes, both located in the Multilateral Branch: the Programme Against Hunger, Malnutrition and Diseases (formerly the Food Aid Centre) and the International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) programme. Canadian emergency food aid is administered through the World Food Programme (WFP). The Canadian government's international humanitarian assistance is delivered primarily through UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement and Canadian NGOs and their local partners. CIDA has no operational capacity in the field to deliver humanitarian relief.

Following an independent evaluation of the Canadian response to Hurricane Mitch, and the recommendations of an analysis of the IHA programme, both commissioned by CIDA in 1999, the decision was taken in 2000 to establish an emergency response unit at CIDA.<sup>2</sup> The unit was established to address perceived weaknesses in CIDA's ability to respond effectively to international crises. Prior to its establishment, the common practice in the event of an emergency was for all IHA staff members but one to drop what they were doing and organise the response to the latest crisis. Further, there is/was a feeling that neither CIDA's development assistance field offices nor the UN resident representatives knew enough about the humanitarian relief system (that is, who the local players are, and what their roles are supposed to be). Officials believed that CIDA was not always getting information in a timely manner necessary to decide what the Canadian response to a crisis should be. They decided that the agency needed a field presence at times, to make a rapid needs assessment and to develop an appropriate humanitarian response strategy.

The unit was established on a trial basis, and an interim arrangement was made for the Canadian Red Cross to manage it while the mechanism was being developed. With a staff of two, its purpose was to give the IHA division greater depth in responding to large rapid-onset crises. Its function was to collate information, make recommendations for action and dispatch a small team to do on-site needs assessments. This mechanism was formalised in 2001 as the Emergency Response Unit. The Canadian Red Cross won the contract to administer it. It will provide logistical support to a Canadian Humanitarian Assessment Team (drawn from a roster of Canadians who can be deployed on short notice – from within CIDA, the Department of Foreign Affairs

and International Trade (DFAIT) and NGOs); offer training to government staff working in disaster-prone areas and international humanitarian groups; and increase understanding on humanitarian issues among the Canadian public.

The establishment of this unit within CIDA became a point of conflict between CIDA and Canadian NGOs involved in international humanitarian assistance. Particularly contentious was the maintenance and direct disbursal by CIDA of a stockpile of emergency supplies, left over from Canadian disaster preparedness for Y2K. Some of these goods have since been delivered by Canadian officials in emergencies in Mozambique and El Salvador. The other source of contention is that participation by Canadian NGOs in government-led humanitarian assistance teams may compromise the perceived neutrality of Canadian NGOs working in conflict situations.

CIDA defends its actions on the grounds that it needs timely and high-quality information from the field in order to know how to respond. NGO participation on assessment missions is voluntary, and builds on consultations with NGOs in the field. Concerning operationalisation, CIDA says that its stockpile is very small, amounting to 30 tonnes of supplies worth \$200,000; enough for two planeloads. The policy now is to reserve this supply for immediate response to crises in the western hemisphere. There are no plans to increase the size of this stockpile. CIDA's rationale in maintaining it and its use in Mozambique and El Salvador is that the deployment of emergency relief supplies from Canada can have a positive humanitarian impact if they are delivered quickly, and if these stocks are not available locally to relief agencies. They also increase the visibility of the Canadian response, demonstrating to the Canadian public that their government is responding to international catastrophes on their behalf.

CIDA does not consider the establishment of the emergency response unit and the maintenance of the stockpile of supplies to be indicative of a trend toward the 'bilateralisation' of Canadian humanitarian aid. It sees its activities as complementary to NGO efforts, and has no plans to become involved in the direct delivery of emergency relief. It is suggested that there may be some 'bilateralisation' of Canadian funding for rehabilitation, as the geographical branches of CIDA, which administer long-term development assistance, assume responsibility in this area. CIDA's official policy is that a well-functioning multilateral system is the most effective means of addressing global problems. It is further suggested that the Canadian IHA programme is simply too small to be bilateralised; the overhead costs of field operations are beyond its means.

Table I in Appendix I outlines the allocation of funding through the IHA programme over the past decade. This shows that the sum allocated to Canadian international humanitarian assistance each year has declined in real terms over the past decade; down from \$111,092,000 in 1990–91 to \$99,616,921 in 2000–2001.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that this decline has occurred in the context of deep cuts to the overseas development assistance (ODA) budget

as a whole over the same period. Canadian aid has been reduced by close to 25% since 1993, and now comprises 0.25% of Canadian gross national product (GNP), far shy of the government's stated commitment to allocate 0.7% of GNP to aid.<sup>4</sup> To reverse this trend, Canada is now committed to doubling its ODA by 2010. The portion of this reduced budget spent on international humanitarian assistance has actually risen since the late 1980s, although it has maintained a fairly stable level over the past decade. In 1987, international humanitarian assistance represented 2% of Canadian ODA.<sup>5</sup> More recently international humanitarian assistance has increased to around 7–8% of annual ODA expenditures. However, Canada's share of global humanitarian expenditure has fallen from 6% in 1992–93 to about 2.5% today.

The amount of Canadian international humanitarian assistance channelled through the UN agencies has remained relatively stable at around 70%, although CIDA has played a strong role in advocating UN reform, to improve both efficiency and effectiveness in delivering aid.<sup>6</sup> However, in terms of earmarked funding for specific emergencies, there has been a shift, of about 5–8% from UN agencies to Canadian NGOs, although this fluctuates year to year. For example, 7.3% of funds were channelled through NGOs in 1990–91, 22.3% in 2000–2001 and 14% in 2001–2002. Funding to the Red Cross, CIDA's most significant partner in the administration of Canadian government-funded humanitarian relief, has increased slightly over the past decade, and currently accounts for 22.3% of the international humanitarian assistance budget.

As is evident in the table in Appendix 1, there are wide annual fluctuations in the resources allocated for each of the five primary funding categories:

- core funding for the international humanitarian assistance programme and its implementing agents;
- complex emergencies;
- natural disasters;
- disaster preparedness; and
- 'special projects.'

These broad fluctuations may be accounted for in part by the unpredictable occurrence of international catastrophes like droughts, floods, earthquakes and war. But as with most donors, fluctuations in funding are determined to a certain extent by a broader range of political and economic factors which influence a donor response (or lack thereof) to a particular crisis.

To the extent that it is possible to make generalisations from these figures, Table I reveals that relief in complex emergencies makes up the majority of international humanitarian assistance disbursements, ranging from a high of 76.7% of total international humanitarian assistance in 1990–91 to a low of 45.9% in 1997–98, and making up about 50% of expenditures last year. What is discernible in these figures is that there has been an overall decline in the proportion of the international humanitarian assistance budget devoted to complex emergencies in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East; and a correspondingly sizeable increase in Canadian involvement in relief efforts in the Balkans since 1998–99.

The second largest international humanitarian assistance budget allocation is for core funding, ranging from 16.5% to 47.2% annually over the past decade. Table I shows a gradual increase in the portion of funds allocated to relief efforts in response to natural disasters, and to disaster preparedness programmes, although in both of these areas, levels of funding has fluctuated over the years.

### 3. How budget allocations are made

The terms and conditions for Canadian humanitarian assistance are set out in a CIDA/IHA programme framework document, given in Appendix IV. The IHA programme is a responsive fund, making grants based on requests from eligible relief organisations. These are experienced Canadian NGOs and international appeals made through the UN and the International Red Cross. CIDA does not provide emergency relief directly to other governments. The eligibility criteria are set out in Appendix IV. The IHA programme funds humanitarian assistance to alleviate human suffering caused by natural disasters and conflict. This includes assistance for the maintenance, repatriation and reintegration of refugees; mine clearance; peacebuilding; and disaster-preparedness programmes. These guidelines state that funds may be used for 'activities which support the application of the principles of International Humanitarian Law, particularly in situations of political tension and armed conflict so as to prevent or mitigate human suffering'. In allocating resources, CIDA relies on its NGO partners, the Red Cross and the UN to assess needs and prioritise their requests for relief funds.

In contrast to Canadian long-term development assistance, which is heavily tied to the procurement of Canadian goods and services, Canadian humanitarian assistance is fully untied.<sup>7</sup> This is significant, as it minimises one powerful influence on the allocation of aid resources: the Canadian commercial sector. Much academic research has been done in Canada which has demonstrated that the contents and results of Canadian development assistance have been shaped to a significant degree by the interests of the commercial sector in using aid contracts to develop overseas markets.<sup>8</sup> A number of respondents interviewed for this paper indicated that the Canadian commercial lobby has pressured the government to tie Canadian relief channelled through the UN to the purchase of Canadian goods and services, but this has thus far been resisted by CIDA.

Like other CIDA programmes, international humanitarian assistance is allocated a certain portion of the ODA budget each year (roughly 3.5% in recent years). This figure is based on programme costs in the previous year, policy guidelines established by CIDA in consultation with the Department of Foreign Affairs and current government funding priorities. The budget is negotiated with the Treasury Board, and approved by Parliament in two separate votes which encompass all proposed ODA expenditures: one vote for CIDA's annual operating expenditures, and another to cover planned grants and contributions. These budget allocations are set out in two documents: the annual *Report on Plans and Priorities*, and CIDA's *Departmental Performance Report*. CIDA's

internal programming documents outline Indicative Planning Figures for a five-year period, to guide managers in planning over the long-term. As of a few years ago, these indicative planning figures no longer have to be approved by Cabinet.

In deciding how the international humanitarian assistance budget will be spent, the Director-General of the IHA Division has the authority to approve expenditures of up to \$1 million. The Vice-President of the Multilateral Branch can approve projects worth up to \$3.6m. Beyond that level, approval must be obtained from the Minister. In responding to international humanitarian crises, CIDA has some flexibility in reallocating resources from elsewhere within the agency to international humanitarian assistance, when its allocated funds have been depleted. However, for net additions to the ODA budget in response to an international humanitarian emergency, CIDA must submit a request to the Treasury Board for approval by Cabinet. The approved sum will then be recorded in the Supplementary Budget Estimates presented to Parliament after the fact.

In addition to the policy guidelines for the allocation of international humanitarian assistance funds contained in Appendix IV, the Canadian IHA programme is governed by several other policy documents. These are outlined in the next section.

### 4. Canadian international humanitarian assistance policy

One significant difference between the Canadian aid programme and UK ODA is that there is no legislated mandate for the former. CIDA was established by an Order in Council in 1968 (no. 1968-1760) with its intended purpose set out in a memorandum to Cabinet. Thus, apart from the statutes cited below which deal primarily with staff administration and financial reporting, CIDA is not legally bound to act in accordance with the objectives stated in its policy documents. Nor does its mandate of applying aid resources to relieve poverty and suffering in developing countries have any legal protection from the sometimes conflicting objectives of DFAIT and other federal ministries like Fisheries and Agriculture, i.e., the advancement of Canadian interests abroad. DFAIT has ultimately authority over all aspects of Canadian foreign policy, including humanitarian assistance policy. (In effect, DFAIT has been a strong supporter of IHA within CIDA as humanitarian assistance is an important component of human security, a cornerstone of Canada's foreign policy.)

The most recent statement of official Canadian foreign policy is contained in the 1995 policy document *Canada in the World*.<sup>9</sup> This document was the end-product of public hearings held across the country in 1994 by a special joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate. The new Liberal government's decision to hold these public consultations in advance of formulating a new foreign-policy statement was in large part the result of widespread and vocal public and parliamentary criticism of the Conservative government for consulting neither Parliament nor the

electorate before making what was perceived to be a major reorientation in Canadian aid policy to serve more blatantly commercial objectives in the early 1990s; and the decision in 1993 to terminate Canadian ODA to several LDCs in Africa.

Canadian foreign policy as presented in this document is framed in the context of the promotion of human security. According to this policy statement, the government will pursue three primary objectives through its foreign policy: the promotion of prosperity and employment for Canadians; the protection of Canadian security within a stable global framework; and the projection of Canadian values and culture.<sup>10</sup> There is a chapter on International Assistance, making the connection between this and the three goals of foreign policy. It outlines the objectives of the Canadian aid programme in general terms:

*The purpose of Canada's ODA is to support sustainable development in developing countries, in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous world.*<sup>11</sup>

Programming priorities for Canadian aid are stated as: basic human needs; women in development; infrastructure services; human rights, democracy and good governance; private sector development; and the environment.<sup>12</sup>

Of relevance to a discussion of the role of Parliament in overseeing government policy is the government's stated intention to give a larger role to Parliament in shaping foreign policy.<sup>13</sup> It also commits itself to improving aid effectiveness; and to 'better reporting of results to Canadians'.

Prior to this, the last comprehensive statement of Canadian ODA policy from CIDA was issued in 1987 in the *Sharing Our Future* policy document.<sup>14</sup> The objectives were based on the recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, which was charged with making a thorough review of Canadian aid policy.<sup>15</sup> The committee had been tasked with reevaluating the aid programme in the aftermath of the Ethiopian famine and the unprecedented level of public response to appeals for assistance for its victims. This policy statement conceived of international humanitarian assistance as a response to natural disasters, with no reference to the conflicts and complex emergencies which dominated the subsequent decade and a half.

In 2001, CIDA embarked on its first comprehensive review of ODA policy since *Sharing Our Future*. In June 2001, with a new President and a new Minister at the helm, it released a discussion paper entitled *Strengthening Aid Effectiveness*, which formed the basis of public consultations on the aid programme.<sup>16</sup> The discussion paper comments directly on the 'bilateralisation' of humanitarian assistance, saying that it is 'worsening prospects for coordination, coherence, and impact'.<sup>17</sup> It argues that 'Emergency response is a specialized area of operations in which no single bilateral donor can maintain an independent, global operating capacity', and says that there is a need to strengthen the overall capacity of the international humanitarian relief system.<sup>18</sup> This discussion paper also identifies the politicisation of relief as a matter of international concern:

*Clearly, humanitarian assistance should not and cannot substitute effective political action. However, humanitarian aid often constitutes the bulk of the international response, and with the 'CNN effect,' there has been much skewing in the allocation of relief dollars – e.g., in 1999, donors provided US\$225 for every person in need in Kosovo, US\$18 per head in Sierra Leone, and US\$11 in Somalia. The humanitarian principles – of independence, impartiality, and neutrality – are increasingly being questioned and need to be defended.*<sup>19</sup>

With respect to international humanitarian assistance, the following ideas are put forward for discussion in public hearings:

- While arguing in favour of an international relief system, it is suggested that there is a need to reform multilateral institutions. To improve the effectiveness of the multilateral system, Canada should focus a greater share of its resources 'on organizations that are performing well rather than continuing what is essentially a burden-sharing approach'.
- There should be a review of the barriers between humanitarian aid, rehabilitation, and long-term development; and
- a review of the role of food aid in bridging the gaps.<sup>20</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the section 'Assessing Accountability' in the administration of ODA focuses on downward accountability; that is, on the performance of contracted implementing agents and recipient organisations.<sup>21</sup>

CIDA's annual *Report on Plans and Priorities* to the Treasury Board outlines the agency's current priorities and objectives, and the strategies by which it aims to fulfil them. As an example, the 1999–2000 report states that one objective of the Multilateral Branch (which has responsibility for the IHA programme) is to 'ensure that Canadian humanitarian assistance and food aid to developing countries are appropriate, timely, and effective'.<sup>22</sup> The report also states that 'the need for optimal performance/effectiveness by multilateral development and humanitarian institutions requires the Multilateral Branch to [among other things]:

- Maintain Canada's influence and credibility despite financial constraints.
- Overcome resistance to reform from within multilateral institutions and among member states ...
- Manage the complexity and risks associated with humanitarian crises through improved coordination and activities which lessen relief dependency'.

Among the strategies identified for meeting these objectives are:

- Encouraging multilateral partners to adopt RBM and report on results, including those related to international targets and humanitarian objectives.
- Timely emergency relief to victims of natural disasters and conflicts.<sup>23</sup>
- Supporting the care, maintenance, repatriation and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons.
- Rapid peacebuilding support to conflict-affected countries.

As examples of expected results, the report cites:

- Lives saved, and human suffering and malnutrition reduced through emergency assistance and development food aid.
- Progress toward internationally agreed development targets and humanitarian objectives by multilateral organisations.
- A more effective multilateral system to meet global needs.<sup>24</sup>

The above provides a bare-bones overview of the policy-making, programming and resource allocation process in the IHA programme, and the guidelines that have been established for it. We now turn to an examination of the mechanisms which have been installed in the Canadian government system to oversee the implementation of these policies and the management of the resources allocated to international humanitarian assistance.

## 5. Parliamentary oversight of international humanitarian assistance

The ODA programme, of which humanitarian assistance is a part, falls under the purview of two committees of the House of Commons and their counterparts in the Senate. The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee is responsible for monitoring all government expenditures including overseas aid. It is the only parliamentary committee chaired by a member of the opposition. The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT), and its sub-committee on Human Rights and International Development, is the forum for discussions of international assistance policy. Except in the context of two or three Special Joint Committees with the House, the Senate committee has rarely concerned itself with aid policy in the past. The Foreign Affairs Committee meets regularly. The Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development was first established in the mid-1980s, was reconstituted in 1991 and again lapsed into dormancy. It has been active since 1994, and the minutes of these meetings and those of SCFAIT are posted on the parliamentary website.<sup>25</sup>

The Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Affairs is responsible for reviewing the annual Budget Estimates submitted by CIDA to Parliament each year. Part III of the Estimates contains CIDA's planned allocations for the coming year, and an overview of its current programming priorities and the strategies it will employ to achieve its stated objectives. In response to criticism from the Auditor-General that the information supplied to parliamentarians was inadequate to allow them to perform their duties in monitoring aid policy, in 1997 CIDA (along with the rest of federal government) adopted a new method of reporting on its activities to Parliament. Its submission of Part III of the Estimates was split into two reports. The *Report on Plans and Priorities*, referred to above, is submitted to the Treasury Board in the spring each year, and an annual *Departmental Performance Report* is tabled in the autumn.

In addition to its routine review of CIDA's budget estimates, SCFAIT and the sub-committee on Human Rights and International Development hold hearings on selected topics.

These topics are chosen by a Sub-committee of each on Agenda and Priorities. Since reforms introduced in 1988, parliamentary committees have been allowed to choose their own topics of discussion without reference to the minister. A review of the issues addressed by the Human Rights and International Development sub-committee in the last Parliament suggests that they are largely dictated by current international events. The committee has never examined international humanitarian assistance in particular, nor any specific Canadian relief effort.

A review of the minutes from recent meetings suggests that both SCFAIT and the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development serve primarily as a forum for briefing MPs on various international issues and on the current political situation in one country or another. Expert witnesses are invited to appear before the committee to give their testimony and to be questioned by MPs. These witnesses are generally identified and invited by the Research Branch of the Library of Parliament, which serves as the primary source of information for the committees.<sup>26</sup> Library staff prepare briefs on policy issues for MPs, can suggest issues that the committee should consider, and prepare whatever reports the committee undertakes to present to parliament. The most recent committee report which addressed ODA policy was the *Report of the Special Joint Committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on Canadian Foreign Policy*, which summarises the findings of the public consultations held in 1994. This report did not deal with international humanitarian assistance policy in any detail.

The most recent examination of aid policy prior to the 1994 foreign policy review was conducted by the Foreign Affairs committee in 1987. The Weingard Committee was originally tasked with examining Canada's response to the Ethiopian famine of 1985. Its study expanded beyond this to a review of the aid programme as a whole. The final report, in fact, had very little to say about Canadian emergency relief. It focused rather on the efficacy of CIDA's long-term development assistance.

The functioning of parliamentary committees as effective mechanisms of policy oversight for IHA is inhibited by several factors. In fact, it is argued by some that Parliament as a whole has become largely irrelevant in terms of policy-making and oversight.<sup>27</sup> Some observers point to a concentration of power in the Prime Minister's Office and a corresponding weakening of the role of Parliament in governing.

With respect to the aid programme and humanitarian relief, the only documentation on aid policy and its implementation that Parliament is required to consider on a regular basis are CIDA's annual *Performance Report* and *Report on Planning and Priorities*. As self-assessments of CIDA's activities, these documents have obvious weaknesses as tools for monitoring the aid programme.

In addition, beyond the consideration of the annual budget estimates, the Foreign Affairs Committee has a very broad agenda, and this is a significant factor in what shows up on the parliamentary radar. Aid policy has rarely been a priority

issue among elected officials, who have traditionally been much more preoccupied with domestic issues. The committees are also constrained in their activities by strong party discipline, which hinders critical analysis of government policy by the committee as a whole, and the possibility that the committee will agree on and recommend policy changes to the government.

The government is required to respond to reports tabled by committees. Until the 1990s, these have generally contained a consensus of views and recommendations on the matter under discussion. However, there has been a trend in recent years for various factions in committees to submit minority reports opposing the main committee report. It is suggested that this has weakened the committee system's utility as a forum for serious policy negotiation between government and opposition members.

Committees are in general further weakened by frequent changes in their membership. The main body of the SCFAIT in its current composition is considered an exception in some ways to this trend. It is regarded within parliamentary circles as a prestigious committee on which to serve, and is composed primarily of senior parliamentarians. This, observers suggest, results in a higher calibre of discussion in the committee relative to others. The same does not hold true for the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development, the membership and chair of which have changed frequently over the past decade. In contrast to the main SCFAIT, membership in the sub-committee is not especially coveted by MPs. However, officials argue that the formation of the subcommittee did not signify the relegation of international development issues to secondary status. Inside observers suggest it was originally established in the mid-1980s to give a prominent Conservative MP a committee chairmanship.

Nevertheless, it is significant that most of the members of the sub-committee (including the chair) are not members of the main committee. Although discussion of aid policy has traditionally taken place in the sub-committee, its workload and that of the parent committee are not necessarily coordinated, and there is no clear division of labour between the two. In fact, although the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development is responsible for reviewing the annual estimates for Canada's ODA, including IHA, the chair of the committee in October 2001 seemed unaware that humanitarian relief fell under this category, and therefore under the purview of her committee.

It is worth noting that the former chair of the SCFAIT (and as of last spring, Canada's Foreign Minister) is a former professor of international law, and that both the Commons and Senate Committees contain members very knowledgeable of Canadian commitments under international agreements and of the subject matter which falls under the purview of the Foreign Affairs committee. As such, it is expected that they are aware of International Humanitarian Law, though perhaps not of particular accountability initiatives within the humanitarian aid sector, such as Sphere.

However, the significant point here is that Canadian humanitarian assistance has never been subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and therefore actions and outcomes have not been assessed against any criteria. It falls within the mandate of the SCFAIT and the Sub-Committee on Human Rights and International Development to study Canadian humanitarian interventions, but it has never exercised this authority or responsibility. One possible explanation for this may be that international humanitarian assistance comprises a very small portion of the ODA budget, and that ODA as a whole, being very far from the day-to-day concerns of Canadian tax-payers, receives very little parliamentary attention.

Further, were the parliamentary committee to devote some attention to the international humanitarian assistance programme, it is questionable what impact it could have on policy decisions. This conclusion is based on a detailed examination of aid budget cuts in 1993, where unanimous opposition to the cuts voiced in the committee failed to have any influence on the government's actions.<sup>28</sup>

## 5.1 The Office of the Auditor-General of Canada

The Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) has the mandate and responsibility to review the activities of all federal government departments and programmes. It makes an annual report to Parliament on its findings. This report is made public, and generally receives prominent coverage in the national media. It is important to note that neither CIDA nor any other government department is under legal obligation to comply with the recommendations of the OAG. However, over the past decade CIDA has embarked on significant reform of agency practice in response to criticisms contained in the Auditor-General's reports.

In its examination of CIDA's activities, the OAG acts independently of CIDA management, reporting directly to Parliament. The guidelines for its audits of the aid agency (and all other departments) are set out in the Auditor-General's Act, which charges the OAG to report to Parliament as to 'whether CIDA is functioning with due regard to economy and efficiency'. Officials from the Auditor-General's office note that the OAG is not mandated to comment on the *effectiveness* of Canadian aid resources administered by CIDA in meeting its stated objectives. The OAG only has the authority to examine the extent to which CIDA can account for its use of public funds in accordance with Canadian law. They note, however, that the OAG can and has addressed the question of the extent to which CIDA itself knows how effective its aid is.

Further, OAG officials and other observers in Ottawa note a significant trend in Canadian politics over the past decade; one which has enhanced the authority of the OAG and the influence of its annual reports in shaping public discourse and government policy. With the demise of the federal Conservative party and the advent of several small regionally-based parties in the Canadian Parliament, parliamentary opposition to the Liberal government has become very weak. It is suggested that the OAG has, to a certain extent,

stepped in to fill the void created by the lack of a viable opposition. The OAG reports have become one of the primary tools for requiring the current government to account for its actions to the Canadian public.

The OAG reports are tabled in the House of Commons and referred to the Public Accounts Committee. A letter is also sent from the OAG to the Standing Committee responsible for the department which has been audited. It is not required to respond, and both it and the Public Accounts Committee may or may not opt to hold a hearing on the report. The Public Accounts Committee then writes a report to the House containing its recommendations in response to the OAG report. As an example, the 2001 OAG Report was examined only by the Public Accounts Committee, whereas the 1993 Report triggered meetings of both the Public Accounts Committee and the SCFAIT. Although the OAG has examined CIDA several times since then, the SCFAIT has not held hearings on any subsequent reports, except for one hearing on a coal-washing plant supported by CIDA. As of April 2002, departments will be required for the first time to respond formally to the OAG Report on their activities.

The criteria against which CIDA is assessed in OAG audits are: how effectively and efficiently it has managed ODA resources in pursuit of the stated objectives of its various programmes and projects; and in terms of the overall goal of reducing poverty in aid recipient countries. The OAG defines an effective, efficient and economic operation as follows:

- *An effective operation (or system, practice, and procedure) is one that achieves the results expected of a specific activity;*
- *An efficient operation is one that provides results, at lowest cost and at adequate or required levels of quality and service;*
- *An economical operation is one that gets the right amount of the right resources – financial, human, physical; and information – at the right level of quality, at the right time, in the right place, and at the right cost.<sup>29</sup>*

According to the OAG, Canadian government departments or programmes are selected for audit according to a systematic schedule of review devised to cover the whole of the government at regular intervals. A representative from the OAG also sits on CIDA's Agency Performance Review Committee, which sets priorities for and determines an annual plan for CIDA's internal monitoring and evaluation of its policies, programmes and projects. In selecting programmes to examine itself, the OAG concentrates on areas that pose the greatest risk to the efficient management of public funds; possible fraud; patronage; or other irregular practices. For this reason, offices responsible for contracting and grant-making receive the most attention. Officials note that departments where payroll makes up the bulk of the budget are unlikely to attract as frequent attention as agencies like CIDA, which are responsible for the allocation and management of a large discretionary budget.

Officials note further that in drawing up the OAG schedule of audits, they are cautious in consenting to a request from Parliament. Their perception is that such requests are often

politically motivated, designed primarily to embarrass the government. The OAG responds more readily to requests made jointly by all parties in the House. There is a wariness in the Auditor-General's office of its heightened influence in Ottawa and a corresponding sensitivity to staying within the boundaries of its legislated mandate to preserve the neutrality of the Office. The official stated that the OAG 'Can't be seen to be a bullet in the Opposition's gun'. Nevertheless, he claimed that in the 1993 report on CIDA, the OAG came as close as it could within the perimeters of the Auditor-General's Act to saying that Canada's foreign aid policy is just not working. The official added, however, that since that time there has been little pressure emanating from Parliament for the OAG to examine the aid programme. 'CIDA is just not on the radar' of parliamentarians.

Although various aspects of CIDA have been scrutinised over the past decade, the IHA programme has never been examined. Officials attribute this to several factors. Firstly, they say, auditing CIDA is expensive because 'you have to get out there and kick the tyres'. For this reason, in selecting areas of CIDA's work to examine, the OAG looks for 'the biggest bang for its buck' – big projects which absorb a lot of tax-payers' money. Canadian international humanitarian assistance is a very small programme. Further, the view within the OAG is that CIDA must be allowed some slack in its administration of aid funds in emergency situations, where many factors are beyond its control, and for this reason an audit of emergency relief has not been a priority.

Although the Canadian aid programme was established in 1950, and CIDA was created as a separate agency in 1970, its operations were first examined by the OAG in 1977, then again in the mid-1980s. Since that time, CIDA has been a frequent target of OAG audits. There were reviews in 1993, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2000. These reports have generally been very critical of the agency's management of the ODA programme.

The OAG has addressed issues of accountability in CIDA as a whole, and in the federal government more generally.<sup>30</sup> The Auditor General's Report of 1993 examined the practice of programme evaluation in the federal government and the operation of performance evaluation units in individual departments. It noted that the systematic establishment of these units in each department dated from a government initiative in 1977 to formalise and standardise internal monitoring of government programme performance (1993:8.1). In examining the activities of these programme evaluation units, the OAG found that

*Development of the function over the past ten years has fallen short of expectations set for it ... Our audit found that the story of program evaluation in the Government of Canada is one of high expectations and great potential that have been only partly fulfilled. (1993:8.4)*

The OAG concluded that the programme evaluations conducted in various government departments were 'often not timely or relevant'; that the practice was uneven across departments; and that many large-expenditure programmes had never been evaluated. Further, it concluded that 'The

government's use of program evaluation studies often is difficult to demonstrate' (1993:9.3).

CIDA was one of the government agencies selected for a comprehensive audit in 1993, and the OAG's report contained harsh criticism of its management practices. The report noted conflicts in the aid programme's stated objectives, and argued that the lines of accountability in the administration of ODA needed to be clarified. It stated that the agency needed to be more transparent and its activities opened to public scrutiny. Of CIDA's internal performance review capacity, the OAG said 'The benefit of audit and evaluation as a tool for wider learning in the Agency is not being maximized. Greater interaction, outreach and sharing of examination results are needed' (12-102). Further, and in accordance with observers of aid practice internationally, the OAG argued that in assessing its performance, the agency needed to shift its focus to an examination of aid outcomes, rather than its success in providing inputs. 'If internal audit is to play its role in the new accountability regime at CIDA, it needs to be focussed systematically on the issues most significant to achieving results' (12.102-3).

This 1993 Report of the Auditor General was taken very seriously at CIDA, and provided the impetus behind the introduction of a Results Based Management approach at the agency in 1996. Subsequent OAG reports have examined CIDA's progress in addressing the concerns outlined in the 1993 report.<sup>31</sup> The OAG 1998 Report found that 'Progress is evident', if somewhat slow (OAG, 1998: 21.2). The report noted that CIDA was in the process of preparing new programming frameworks for each aid recipient country. These programme framework documents outline CIDA's objectives, proposed activities and expected results in each country. 'However,' the OAG claimed, 'the expected results are not compared with actual results, one of the key means of assessing performance ... Projects are not systematically monitored after funding ends to determine whether the results expected have been achieved' (OAG, 1998: 21.4). Despite this persistent weakness, the 1998 Report concluded that:

*CIDA's actions have addressed the main concerns raised in 1993. The agency now needs to keep up its momentum in implementing management for results. It has much of the supporting framework in place. To close the accountability loop, it needs to continue working on the measurement and reporting of development results.* (1998: 21.6)

The OAG 1999 Report focused on financial control within the agency, as part of the OAG's examination of this issue throughout the government. These studies were done in preparation for an examination of consultant selection practices and performance review and monitoring within CIDA reported in October 2000. This report was again highly critical of CIDA management practices.

Approximately 30% of all Canadian ODA and more than half of international humanitarian assistance is not managed directly by CIDA, but channelled through multilateral agencies. The 1991 OAG Report scrutinised the administration of Canadian contributions to the international

financial institutions and regional development banks. Again, the focus was on Canadian management and financial reporting of the contributions, rather than the end result of their application or misapplication in international programmes.

The OAG has never been asked by Parliament as a whole to examine the financial management practices of the various international organisations of which Canada is a member, such as the UN. Canada's participation in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is a much more controversial issue in Canada, and the OAG often gets requests from the public and opposition parties to examine its activities. However, the position of the OAG is that Canada's role in the WTO is a *policy* issue, not an issue of financial accountability, and therefore falls under the purview of Parliament and outside the mandate of the OAG.

The OAG of Canada is the official auditor for UNESCO (Canada lobbied for this and got it), but this unit functions separately from the other activities of the OAG.

## 6. CIDA's internal accountability mechanisms

Ultimate responsibility for the administration of the ODA budget, which includes humanitarian relief, rests with the Minister of International Cooperation. This is a cabinet post, but subordinate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ministerial authorities in terms of areas of responsibility and in the allocation of resources are set out in the Department of External Affairs Act; the Annual Appropriations Act; and the International Development (Financial Institutions) Act.

The President of CIDA has the status within the federal government system of a deputy minister, a bureaucratic post equivalent to a Permanent Secretary in the UK. As set out in the *Agency Accountability Framework*,<sup>32</sup> the President is accountable to the Minister and ultimately to Parliament for:

- the results of Canadian aid interventions;
- decisions and actions taken in pursuit of the stated objectives of the aid programme as outlined in the non legislated policy guidelines outlined above.
- the allocation of resources given to CIDA for ODA purposes.
- policy formulation (in concert with DFAIT); and
- strategic planning.<sup>33</sup>

The President of CIDA is accountable to Parliament under various other statutes: to the Treasury Board and the Public Service Commission for personnel matters under the Financial Administration Act and the Public Service Employment Act; and to the Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Privacy Act and the Access to Information Act. None of these appear to have a direct bearing on the administration of the international humanitarian assistance programme. The lines of accountability for the implementation of the aid programme extend downward

from the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Minister for International Cooperation to the President of CIDA, the Vice-Presidents of each branch, Directors, Programme Coordinators and Project Officers.

It is important to highlight an inherent conflict in this line of authority: both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Cooperation are cabinet posts, but the Foreign Affairs portfolio is the senior of the two. Foreign Affairs is ultimately responsible for all aspects of Canadian foreign policy, including aid. Yet CIDA is responsible for the programming, management and disbursement of a budget far in excess of that controlled by DFAIT. The sometimes divergent objectives of the two agencies have hindered the development of a coherent aid policy. This conflict also hampers effective policy oversight, as it raises the issue of which department is ultimately responsible, and therefore accountable, for aid policy decisions.

The *Agency Accountability Framework* states that CIDA is fully accountable for: setting objectives; formulating policies [though it should be remembered that it shares jurisdiction over aid policy with the Department of Foreign Affairs]; developing strategies; the selection of development initiatives and projects, partners and implementing agents; the identification of expected results; and for monitoring selected activities (7.13). Significantly, the *Framework* qualifies CIDA's accountability for the results of its initiatives undertaken in partnership with NGOs (including those that administer international humanitarian assistance funds). It claims that in such cases, CIDA's accountability is 'less intense than that of government to government initiatives, given the lesser degree of CIDA's involvement in the planning and implementation of the development initiatives.' (7.1.2) The extent of CIDA's accountability is determined by three factors (but is nevertheless unquantifiable), each of which relates to the degree of involvement and control which CIDA exercises within the partnership. These are: the funding approach used (cost-sharing, programme or core-funding); the number of partners involved; and the degree of CIDA's involvement in the selection, planning and implementation of the initiative in relation to the involvement of the other partners. (7.1.1)

## 7. CIDA's policy for performance review

CIDA's Executive Committee, composed of the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Director-General of Performance Review, and a representative from the Treasury Board, with the addition of a representative from the OAG, serves as the Agency Performance Review Committee. This committee sets priorities for, and approves an annual plan for, reviewing selected aspects of CIDA's operations. The Performance Review Branch of CIDA is charged with carrying out this programme of monitoring and evaluation studies.

CIDA's Performance and Evaluation Branch has not to date evaluated any aspect of the international humanitarian assistance programme. The IHA division itself has commissioned a small number of independent evaluations

of its activities.<sup>34</sup> According to CIDA, the rationale for undertaking these studies was to improve CIDA's performance, rather than as a means to hold its partners to account.

In evaluating its own activities, the international humanitarian assistance programme administered by CIDA is subject to the agency-wide *Policy for Performance Review* introduced in 1994.<sup>35</sup> The introduction of this document was at least in part in response to the Auditor-General's criticisms in the previous year.

The 1994 *Policy for Performance Review* committed CIDA to improving its performance review and reporting capacity, citing this as 'an urgent requirement'. It notes that the 1987 *Evaluation Policy* that it replaced 'was silent on the need for external reporting on aid effectiveness', and that CIDA had been criticised by the OAG on this point. The 1994 document states that:

*Currently neither the framework nor the necessary review information is available in the Agency. In order to provide credible information to Parliament, our partners and the public, it is essential that the Agency be able to aggregate, analyze and synthesize project, institutional support, program and policy results along thematic and business lines.*<sup>36</sup>

This policy document states that CIDA will endeavour to develop performance indicators at programme, policy and corporate levels. Efforts to do so were underway at CIDA in late 2001 with the preparation of a *Results Based Management and Accountability Framework*.

The Results Based Management (RBM) approach was launched at the agency in 1996 in response to criticisms from the Auditor-General in 1993. The objective was to shift the focus of planners and managers from project inputs to expected outputs and outcomes. Senior CIDA officials report that almost ten years later, the agency is still struggling to implement the concept. Outside observers are largely dismissive of the impact of RBM on agency practice, suggesting that the changes it has brought are largely cosmetic; i.e., the type of paperwork aid officers are required to fill out for the projects they manage. CIDA officials acknowledge a feeling within the organisation that the concept has lost some of its substance over the past decade. However, RBM is still perceived by CIDA to have utility not only as a management tool, but also for public relations. Having the capacity to identify the results achieved by Canadian aid is viewed as essential to maintaining public support for the enterprise. Further, officials argue that RBM has been relatively effectively applied at the project level, though less so at the programme or country level. CIDA management is now struggling with how to scale up its application beyond the identification and measurement of the objectives and results of individual projects to the programme and corporate level.

The *Results Based Management and Accountability Framework*, now in draft form, will be in force agency-wide. It will outline the range of things for which CIDA will be held accountable, and the criteria for assessing performance. It

will also enumerate conditions required in the programming of aid that will maximise the chances of success: i.e., sufficient budget allocations, staff training, IT capacity.

With reference to humanitarian assistance in particular, the impact of RBM on this area of programming has been minimal to date. However, in an effort to adapt the concept of RBM to the peculiarities of emergency relief, CIDA/IHA launched, in April 2002, its own Performance Framework for Short-Term Responses.

One of the most important findings of the evaluation of CIDA's response to Hurricane Mitch was that 'Although experiences in the field of disasters generate valuable lessons learned, there are limited ways of sharing information throughout the agency'.<sup>37</sup> This echoes criticisms made of agency practice in general. Evidence that the agency has begun to recognise this problem was the launch last year of a Knowledge Management Initiative. This initiative included the establishment of internal professional networks focused on different programme areas (for example, poverty reduction and gender issues) and improvements to the agency's computerised databases. The objective is to make the lessons of experience accessible to aid officials so that they may be applied in improving future performance.

One objective of this research was to determine the extent to which Canadian officials are aware of the precepts of International Humanitarian Law and codes of conduct for emergency relief efforts, and the degree to which these codes are considered both in planning interventions, and in assessing Canadian actions. While it should be clear at this point that CIDA rarely evaluates any of its aid projects or interventions after the fact, it is equally clear that Canadian officials responsible for the IHA programme are well versed in international law and codes of conduct, and that they are considered in planning interventions. In fact, CIDA offers training courses for its NGO partners on Sphere.

Likewise, DFAIT officials claim a heightened awareness of humanitarian law among officials in that department as a result of Canada's lead role in the negotiation of the international agreement on landmines. DFAIT has also instituted the practice of preparing a written record of 'Lessons Learned' through its experience in recent international humanitarian crises.

In 1996, the Canadian government established a National Committee on Humanitarian Law, an interdepartmental committee of senior bureaucrats chaired by the Department of Foreign Affairs. Its purpose is to review Canadian legislation to ensure that it is in accordance with International Humanitarian Law, and that Canada is honouring the international agreements and conventions to which it is a signatory. CIDA, the Department of National Defence, Justice and the Solicitor-General form the membership of the committee, which meets at least once a year. The Canadian Red Cross serves as its secretariat.

## 8. Informal accountability mechanisms: NGOs and the news media

A well-organised lobby of NGOs involved in international development and relief work play a role in monitoring the Canadian aid programme, but have in the past only been able to exert limited influence on government policy in this area, either through direct consultation with decision-makers, or by mobilising public support through the media for a particular course of action. As an example of how public pressure can shape Canada's international humanitarian assistance programme, Rand cites the government response to the earthquakes in Taiwan and India. She attributes the more generous response of the Canadian government to the disaster in Taiwan to a vocal and well-organised lobby on behalf of Taiwan in Canada such as did not exist for India.<sup>38</sup> Making case studies of the Canadian response to particular humanitarian crises might offer some insight into the significance of public opinion, special-interest lobby groups and media coverage in the allocation of humanitarian relief funds.

A number of significant and unpopular policy decisions in the early 1990s prompted criticism from NGOs that CIDA was not consulting adequately with other stakeholders in the aid programme. In response to these charges, CIDA instituted a formal mechanism for consulting with representatives from NGOs, the commercial private sector and the academic community on a regular basis. The current round of public consultations on *Strengthening Aid Effectiveness* is illustrative of the extent to which CIDA has become more open in its policy-making processes.

However, within the NGO community there are criticisms of the consultative process. The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC), an umbrella group composed of NGOs involved in international development work, is critical of a trend in the consultation process towards seeking consensus among all stakeholders on policy directions, rather than determining what course of action would be most effective in fulfilling the stated objectives of the aid programme. It is argued that in employing a consensus-building approach, CIDA is seeking to accommodate the interests of the commercial private sector, which may be contrary to the interests of the intended beneficiaries of aid. One observer of the CIDA-civil society consultations process suggests that it is losing its meaning as more and more diverse 'stakeholders' are invited to participate. The observer remarked that the annual consultations have assumed the air of a trade fair rather than a forum for serious debate on policy options.

NGOs and other civil-society groups have other channels through which they monitor and attempt to influence ODA policy. They may seek a hearing or be invited to appear before the parliamentary committees that deal with aid policy. Well-established organisations and researchers like the CCIC, the North South Institute (NSI, a research institute focused on Canadian policy in developing countries), and various NGOs do so regularly. However, it was suggested in talking to representatives from these groups that they have more success in influencing policy decisions when they meet with

the Minister directly, echoing a general consensus that the parliamentary committee system is largely ineffectual as a means of influencing and monitoring government policy. One NGO representative remarked that parliamentary committee members listen to the presentations made to them, but do not pick up on humanitarian relief issues for further action.

The focus of the advocacy and lobbying activities of the CCIC is ODA in general. In 1998, a group of Canadian NGOs decided that they needed a forum for discussion of international humanitarian assistance in particular, and through which they could lobby the government on policy issues. They formed the Policy and Advocacy Group for Emergency Relief (PAGER), which includes observers from CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs. This is an informal committee which deals with policy issues as they arise, and has formed working groups to deal with training, public awareness and CIDA's establishment of an emergency operations centre. Its focus is primarily information-sharing, rather than problem-solving.

While NGO members downplay its significance and stress its informal, *ad hoc* nature, the individual members of PAGER have invested a lot of time and energy in making it a rare example of sustained cooperation between CIDA, DFAIT and the NGO sector. One NGO representative observed that the small IHA Division is an 'outsider' within CIDA, operating on a different timeframe and with different objectives than the large geographic branches, which administer long-term development assistance. For this reason, the informant suggested that it had closer ties to the NGO community than to the other parts of CIDA. Further, CIDA/IHA depends on the larger NGO community to generate and maintain public interest in international humanitarian relief efforts.

However, it is apparent from conversations with CIDA and DFAIT officials and with various members of the NGO community that there remains a wariness between them (more so on the part of NGOs), and gaps in the inter-organisational flow of information. PAGER sometimes meets without government officials in attendance. An issue on which NGOs have lobbied is the proportional allocation of international humanitarian assistance funds between multilateral agencies and NGOs. The official Canadian government position is to strengthen the multilateral system, and a substantial portion of Canadian ODA is channelled through international organisations. Canadian NGOs argue that more should be channelled through them as they feel they are more effective than the UN agencies in the field.

It would be a mistake, though, to characterise the NGO community in Canada as a unified block confronting or cooperating with the government. In their attempts to influence Canadian government policy, NGOs involved in international humanitarian assistance are not unanimous in the policy directions they advocate. Likewise, in their informal capacity as monitors of government actions, these organisations have differing concerns. This is demonstrated by the contrasting positions of the two founding members of PAGER, CARE Canada and Médecins Sans Frontières

(MSF), with reference to CIDA's establishment of a rapid-response assessment capacity.

CIDA's assumption of a more direct role in the field has become a point of contention between the government and NGOs. The establishment of the emergency response unit at CIDA was vehemently opposed by some NGOs like MSF on the grounds that it jeopardises their access to affected populations. They feel that the neutrality of Canadian NGOs is endangered by their perceived association with the Canadian government in the field.

Officials from CARE Canada, on the other hand, downplay the significance of CIDA's new Emergency Response Unit, suggesting that it will not have much of an impact on international field operations. In fact, CARE Canada submitted a bid to administer the unit on behalf of the Canadian government, but lost out to the Canadian Red Cross. These divisions of opinion within the NGO community demonstrate the variety of objectives pursued by these organisations, and consequently the diverse standards against which they assess current government policy. Canadian NGOs as a whole have performed a useful role in scrutinising CIDA's international humanitarian assistance programme. However, as a means of ensuring accountability, this informal mechanism by definition lacks a uniform and institutionalised set of standards against which government policy might be assessed. It might also be noted that in CIDA parlance, the agency, the organisations which deliver aid, and the intended beneficiaries are referred to as 'partners'. However, one NGO official observed that in the era of 'accountability-mania', CIDA has developed many means of holding the NGOs it funds to account. NGOs have little real power to hold CIDA to account for its actions.

## 9. Conclusions

The machinery for effective policy oversight appears to be in place in the parliamentary committees; the Office of the Auditor-General; and the Performance Review Branch at CIDA. However, it has not been used to examine the international humanitarian assistance programme.

Several explanations for why this is so are suggested by this and previous research: competing priorities for discussion in Parliament; successive budget cuts over the past 15 years, which have significantly reduced the resources available for all aid activities, including performance evaluation; the lack of incentives for doing so, and of sanctions for failing to do so; and the difficulty in identifying suitable criteria against which to assess the success of Canadian interventions in crisis situations. Lines of accountability are blurred, and humanitarian interventions have adopted objectives beyond providing emergency food, shelter and medical attention. In effect, the goalposts for successful interventions are constantly shifting.

Parliament and parliamentary committees are currently very weak mechanisms for policy oversight of the international humanitarian assistance programme. In the area of humanitarian assistance policy, effective committee oversight

is compromised by a crowded agenda in the main committee; frequent changes in membership in the sub-committee which deals with international development, prohibiting meaningful and sustained examination of complex issues; and an erosion of the power of committees to influence government policy due to the concentration of control in the Prime Minister's Office. While demands for the government to act and questions about what it is doing to help sometimes dominate Question Period in the House of Commons at the outbreak of an international humanitarian crisis, Canada's humanitarian assistance policy has received scant attention from Parliament.

Effective accountability mechanisms include incentives to improve performance, and sanctions for ignoring evidence of policy failure. In the policy oversight mechanisms for the international humanitarian assistance programme in the Canadian government system, the primary sanctions for failing to comply with policy guidelines or for failing to achieve stated objectives are public exposure and embarrassment – in the DAC peer review; in the Auditor-General's Report; or through negative press coverage. Parliament has largely ignored the humanitarian assistance programme.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> CIDA, *Agency Accountability Framework*, 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> Universalialia, 1999; Rand, 1999.
- <sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all figures are given in Canadian dollars.
- <sup>4</sup> CIDA, *Statistical Overview*, 1999.
- <sup>5</sup> Weingard, 1989; CIDA, 1987.
- <sup>6</sup> Rand, 1999; interviews.
- <sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Canadian food aid is 90% tied.
- <sup>8</sup> This literature is reviewed in Folster, 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> Government of Canada, 1995.
- <sup>10</sup> Government of Canada, 1995: i.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*: 42.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*: 48.
- <sup>14</sup> CIDA, *Sharing Our Future*, 1987.
- <sup>15</sup> House of Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, *For Whose Benefit?* 1987. Commonly referred to as the Weingard Report. The committee was renamed the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade when the name of the department changed in the 1990s.
- <sup>16</sup> CIDA, June 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*: 26.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*: 27.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid*: 26.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*: 27.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*: 35-36.
- <sup>22</sup> CIDA, 1999 – *00 Estimates : A Report on Plans and Priorities*, 1999.
- <sup>23</sup> At the risk of being pedantic, it is observed that the objective of the humanitarian relief programme and the strategy identified for achieving it are the same.
- <sup>24</sup> CIDA, 1999 – *00 Estimates : A Report on Plans and Priorities*, 1999.

- <sup>25</sup> See [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca).
- <sup>26</sup> Until 1995, the Parliamentary Centre, an Ottawa-based non-profit research and training institute also assisted in the work of the committee. In that year, all contracts for external research assistance to Parliamentary committees were cancelled.
- <sup>27</sup> Simpson, 2001.
- <sup>28</sup> Folster, Chapter 4.
- <sup>29</sup> CIDA, July 1994.
- <sup>30</sup> OAG, 1991–2000.
- <sup>31</sup> OAG 1995; 1996; 1998; 1999.
- <sup>32</sup> CIDA, *Agency Accountability Framework*, 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*: Chapter 6.
- <sup>34</sup> Rand, 1999; Universalialia, 1999.
- <sup>35</sup> CIDA, July 1994.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>37</sup> Universalialia, 1999: 12.
- <sup>38</sup> Rand, 1999.

## Appendix 1

### CIDA/IHA funding, 1990–2001

|                              | 1990–91  | 1991–92  | 1992–93  | 1993–94 | 1994–95 | 1995–96 | 1996–97 | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–00 | 2000–01 |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>Organisation</b>          |          |          |          |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| UN                           | 71.6%    | 70.5%    | 68.8%    | 70.0%   | 64.4%   | 63.0%   | 54.2%   | 65.0%   | 46.7%   | 51.5%   | 56.7%   |
| Red Cross                    | 21.0%    | 19.9%    | 21.7%    | 16.8%   | 23.1%   | 25.3%   | 26.9%   | 21.9%   | 30.7%   | 25.5%   | 22.3%   |
| NGOs                         | 7.3%     | 9.4%     | 9.2%     | 13.2%   | 12.5%   | 11.7%   | 18.9%   | 12.9%   | 22.0%   | 21.7%   | 20.5%   |
| Other government departments | -        | -        | -        | -       | -       | -       | 0.1%    | 0.3%    | 0.9%    | 0.2%    |         |
| Others                       | 0.1%     | 0.2%     | 0.3%     | 0.0%    | 0.0%    | 0.0%    | 0.0%    | 0.1%    | 0.3%    | 0.4%    | 0.3%    |
| <b>Funding type</b>          |          |          |          |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Core                         | 17.9%    | 18.3%    | 18.3%    | 23.7%   | 25.5%   | 36.8%   | 33.8%   | 47.2%   | 17.7%   | 16.5%   | 33.6%   |
| Complex emergencies          | 76.7%    | 72.2%    | 62.3%    | 69.9%   | 70.5%   | 56.3%   | 60.6%   | 45.9%   | 67.1%   | 74.0%   | 49.6%   |
| • Africa                     | 38.8%    | 36.8%    | 35.3%    | 35.8%   | 43.6%   | 34.6%   | 44.7%   | 30.7%   | 43.6%   | 19.4%   | 23.1%   |
| • Americas                   | 3.8%     | 4.0%     | 6.4%     | 8.6%    | 7.6%    | 4.4%    | 2.2%    | 1.8%    | 4.0%    | 2.4%    | 1.5%    |
| • Asia                       | 16.1%    | 15.5%    | 15.8%    | 17.4%   | 13.4%   | 11.3%   | 10.7%   | 10.8%   | 7.1%    | 8.5%    | 6.3%    |
| • Balkans                    | -        | -        | -        | -       | -       | -       | -       | 3.0%    | 4.3%    | 7.1%    | 15.9%   |
| • Middle East                | 18.0%    | 15.9%    | 4.8%     | 8.1%    | 5.9%    | 6.0%    | 3.0%    | 2.6%    | 9.4%    | 0.0%    | 2.8%    |
| Natural disasters            | 2.3%     | 4.1%     | 15.1%    | 2.0%    | 1.1%    | 3.5%    | 0.7%    | 3.0%    | 10.4%   | 4.2%    | 12.8%   |
| Disaster preparedness        | 1.1%     | 1.8%     | 2.5%     | 2.9%    | 1.3%    | 1.1%    | 2.6%    | 2.5%    | 3.8%    | 2.5%    | 2.6%    |
| Special projects             | 2.0%     | 3.7%     | 1.8%     | 1.5%    | 1.6%    | 2.3%    | 2.2%    | 1.3%    | 1.1%    | 2.7%    | 1.4%    |
| <b>Total (\$m Canadian)</b>  | \$1111.1 | \$1111.5 | \$1118.3 | \$90.6  | \$105.7 | \$73.5  | \$73.9  | \$93.2  | \$73.6  | \$103   | \$99.6  |

Source: CIDA/IHA

## Appendix 2

The terms and conditions for Canadian humanitarian assistance

### 3.4 International Humanitarian Assistance

#### Description

To help ease human suffering resulting from conflicts and natural disasters in developing countries by providing an appropriate, timely and effective Canadian response to proposals and appeals from eligible organizations. The main program objectives are:

- a) to fund the provision of emergency relief and humanitarian assistance including care, maintenance, repatriation and reintegration programs for refugees, returnees and displaced persons;
- b) to fund non-food elements of natural disaster response and activities to enhance preparedness for natural disasters;
- c) to promote Canadian foreign policy objectives and interests, to provide policy guidance, to forge alliances with other donor countries in pursuit of common humanitarian goals, and to monitor key policy and management issues in multilateral agencies;
- d) to support initiatives which encourage conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, including mine action;
- e) to monitor the delivery capacity of humanitarian and emergency agencies, enhance that capacity where needed, promote effective coordination amongst delivery mechanisms, and ensure, in cooperation with other donors, that agencies operate from a sound policy base; and
- f) to support initiatives that build indigenous capability for mine action, consistent with the principles of the "Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on their Destruction", primarily in the areas of mine clearance, mine awareness and assistance to victims.

Humanitarian assistance activities include emergency relief, humanitarian assistance, promotion of the principles of International Humanitarian Law, and disaster preparedness. It also encompasses activities aimed at strengthening the management and delivery capacity of humanitarian agencies. Peacebuilding and mine action activities refer to actions that promote peace and stability.

The following describes Humanitarian Assistance in greater detail:

- a) Emergency relief is generally defined as a response initiated shortly after a disaster which has caused human suffering or potential denial of the means of survival. Emergency relief provides for basic needs in health, nutrition, shelter and other necessities. This is achieved through the supply and distribution of commodities, goods and services appropriate to meet the specific circumstances of disaster situations;
- b) Humanitarian assistance refers to identifiable programs or projects having the same basic objectives as

emergency relief but over an extended time frame, including the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons;

- c) Disaster preparedness refers to a country's institutional or community-based capacity to deal with sudden emergencies. Disaster preparedness activities include disaster management training, development of emergency telecommunications plans (including related training and testing), technical workshops, simulation exercises and community based activities to enhance preparedness;
- d) Support for the application of the principles of International Humanitarian Law may include activities such as the dissemination of information and building awareness of these principles on the part of communities, political authorities, armed forces or combatants, the public and media. It encompasses activities aimed at monitoring peace accords, human rights or application of International Conventions. Activities such as visits to places of detention of prisoners and tracing whereabouts of persons missing as a result of political tension and armed conflict are also included;
- e) Peacebuilding signifies strengthening the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decreasing the likelihood of violent conflict. It may involve conflict prevention, conflict resolution, as well as post-conflict activities (including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants). It focuses on the political and socio-economical context of conflict, rather than on the military or humanitarian aspects. Peacebuilding should serve to support, not supplement, local initiatives toward the consolidation of peace. Peacebuilding, as envisaged under International Humanitarian Assistance, is comprised of targeted, rapid response activities in ODA countries, countries in transition, or regions which will help to promote a sustainable peace;
- f) Mine action may include activities that help to build indigenous capacity: to clear anti-personnel landmines, including mapping and marking minefields, training local mine action personnel, conducting surveys to analyze social and economic impacts and providing technology and other assistance for demining. Activities may serve to increase mine awareness amongst affected populations, including through curriculum development, information dissemination, training of teachers and community educators, and institutional strengthening. It also aims to assist victims of landmine explosions, including through strengthening health systems, vocational rehabilitation, social and economic reintegration, and provision of prostheses.

#### Eligibility

The following are eligible for grant and/or contribution funding:

- a) International organizations, organizations of other donor countries, United-Nations (UN) institutions and Red Cross organizations for that part of their mandate which deals with humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding or mine action activities as defined above.
- b) NGOs, including universities, not-for-profit organizations, institutions, associations, institutes and

research centres at the local, regional and international levels which have the legal personality and which meet the following criteria:

- i. possess experience, expertise and proven delivery capacity in humanitarian, peacebuilding or mine action activities as defined above;
- ii. possess strong networking, partnership and coordination skills as evidenced by existing relationships with local NGOs in developing countries and/or experience of cooperation with UN organizations and local government, as needed; and
- iii. demonstrate satisfactory performance with CIDA in respect of financial management, project implementation and reporting.

The following are also eligible for contribution funding:

Private sector firms or individuals that are eligible for contributions towards peacebuilding or mine action, and meet the following criteria:

- i. do not include a profit element in the contribution;
- ii. possess proven expertise and delivery capacity in effected country; and
- iii. have established linkages within the area of activity.

Authority [...]

Emergency relief may be provided, in cases of natural and man-made disasters, to any developing country, including those normally excluded from Canadian assistance, where specific approval is given by the Minister responsible for CIDA.

#### Program Considerations

Programs, projects and activities should normally reflect the priorities of the eligible recipients concerned and should be consistent with their overall humanitarian, peacebuilding or mine action mandates and objectives.

Programs, projects and activities supported will be consistent with the overall economic and social development objectives and priorities of the beneficiary developing country or region. Programs, projects or activities excluded under this authority are:

- a) Long term development, except special rehabilitation projects associated with refugees and returnees and displaced persons;
- b) Food aid, except for therapeutic feeding; and
- c) Research activities, search and rescue operations, independent experts and transportation costs for unsolicited new or used goods.

#### Financial Considerations

Payments, including contribution advances and grant installments, made in respect of approved programs, projects and appeals will be scheduled according to the cash flow requirements of the recipient organization. Contribution advances may not be made in one fiscal year for periods that will include more than three months' financing in the following fiscal year.

Grants may be paid in advance of cash flow requirements when required by Canada's overall foreign policy interest and the principles of multilateralism. Where the total contribution for a project, program or appeal in any fiscal year is \$500,000 or less:

- a) an advance payment of up to 95% of the total may be made on signing of the agreement;
- b) advances may not be made in one fiscal year for periods that will include more than three months' financing in the following fiscal year;
- c) and the final payment will be subject to receipt and acceptance of the final report.

## Appendix 3

### Individuals consulted

Norman MacDonnell, International Humanitarian Assistance Unit, Multilateral Branch, CIDA.  
 Manfred Kuhnappel, Office of the Auditor-General of Canada.  
 Gerald Schmitz, Senior Researcher, Library of Parliament (Canada).  
 Lai-Ling Lee, Programme Manager, Médecins Sans Frontières, Ottawa.  
 Jean Daudelin, Senior Researcher, Conflict and Human Security, the North-South Institute.  
 Brian Tomlinson, Policy Director, Canadian Council for International Cooperation  
 Nicole Mendenhall, former Director-General of Performance Review, CIDA.  
 Duff Conacher, Democracy Watch.  
 Yves Boulanger, Director-General of Performance Review, CIDA.  
 John Hitchinson, Office of the Auditor-General of Canada.  
 Susan McCoy, CIDA.  
 Hunter McGill, Director-General of the International Humanitarian Assistance Unit, CIDA.  
 Elisa Golberg, Department of Foreign Affairs.  
 Robert Miller, Director, The Parliamentary Centre, Ottawa.  
 Anne Bordé, Director-General, Policy Branch, CIDA.  
 Jim Lee, Library of Parliament.  
 Paul Lerosé-Edwards.  
 Nancy Gordon, Vice-President, CARE Canada.

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