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Chapter 9

Applying humanitarian principles in disaster relief: a case study from Zimbabwe

Chris McIvor

Introduction

There is often a substantial gap between the endorsement of a legal principle or international standard on the one hand, and its implementation in practice, on the other. This is as true for the key elements of humanitarianism as it is for other areas where human rights are applicable, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.¹

This paper will present some of the challenges experienced by Save the Children (UK) in applying and adhering to international laws and standards during relief operations in Zimbabwe. It will further explore how some of these challenges were dealt with and what recommendations are offered for the future to improve humanitarian practice in terms of adherence to these principles.

A recent workshop in Zimbabwe brought together officials from government, donors, local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and representatives from different United Nations (UN) departments. The aim was to seek a consensus around key international standards in emergency relief. However, there was some divergence of views as to their exact interpretation.

Thus for the purposes of this paper, it is useful to flag in advance a list of the key principles and their definitions used by the Save the Children programme in Zimbabwe.² Some of these were documented in agreements signed between Save the Children (UK) and local authorities in geographical areas of operation prior to distributing relief assistance. Other principles have been formed in working standards and good practice guidelines for development programmes that predate this emergency.

The **principle of impartiality** stipulated that need would be the sole criterion for targeting beneficiaries, and that issues such as race, ethnicity, religious or political affiliation would not be permitted to influence the selection of beneficiaries eligible for assistance.

Related to this, a statement on the **proper attribution of aid** indicated that communities would be informed that food was being provided as a charitable donation, independent from

government. This differed from the principle of **impartiality** which ensured that aid was not targeted towards beneficiaries on the basis of an existing political position, whereas proper attribution sought to ensure that aid was not used to encourage people to adopt a particular political standpoint. At a time in Zimbabwe when the two main political parties were actively trying to win votes in forthcoming elections, the inclusion of this statement was designed to ensure that no mileage could be made by either party from a humanitarian programme.

The **principle of neutrality** indicated that aid would be provided by the organization with no political intent or desire to further any religious or other cause.

The **safety of humanitarian personnel** was also guaranteed in written agreements, with an obligation placed on the authorities to ensure that the staff was protected in the discharge of their duties.

The **commitment to local capacity building and respect for culture and custom** had several dimensions. A close working relationship was to be established with local authorities, traditional leaders and community representatives so that the design and implementation of the relief programme did not undermine existing structures. At the same time, staff in the relief operation were to be employed from local communities, where possible. These same communities were to participate actively in beneficiary selection and subsequent monitoring of the programme.

The **principle of accountability** was also designed to ensure that the humanitarian effort reflected an attitude of openness and transparency, where beneficiaries were to be informed as to their exact entitlements. Mechanisms were created to act as a channel for complaint if it was felt that these had been infringed.

Within the above set of activities, particular emphasis was also placed on the **principle of gender equity**. This sought to ensure that community structures were sufficiently representative of women's interests so that their needs were not bypassed, either because of bias on the part of traditional leaders or by our own programme staff.

Finally, the organization adopted a policy on **zero tolerance of child abuse**. Contracts were drawn up with programme staff stipulating that any exploitation of children, due to their vulnerability in the current crisis, could lead to criminal charges and instant dismissal from the organization if sufficiently grave. Furthermore, mechanisms were put in place to ensure the adequate inclusion of children in relief distributions.³ This came at a time in Zimbabwe when many households headed by children, were invisible to planners, and were often ignored by the structures set up to represent community interests.

Each emergency situation provides a very specific and unique context within which good practice needs to be negotiated. However, it is the contention of this author that the lessons learnt from experience in Zimbabwe can prove instructive in other locations. Whether a disaster is classified as natural or man-made, simple or complex, the application of humanitarian principles runs up against a series of cultural, political and economic obstacles.

It is unfortunate that very little of this practical experience has been documented, analysed or made available for learning elsewhere. Field based practitioners working for relief organizations in Zimbabwe, for example, have lamented this absence. While material on the theoretical body of humanitarian law, codes of conduct and other instruments seems fairly widespread, there is an insufficient body of detailed, objective and critical information on how these are implemented in complex situations. This paper hopes to provide a modest contribution towards filling this gap.

Operating a humanitarian programme in Zimbabwe

Humanitarian interventions in Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s did not give rise to any significant tensions or conflicts whereby a debate and consensus around the importance of humanitarian principles and standards was seen as necessary. However, in the wake of the political and economic turmoil that has beset the country since parliamentary elections in March 2001, Zimbabwe's international relations with donor countries that previously supported emergency relief have steadily worsened.

This has meant that relief assistance has been channelled much more strongly through international and local NGOs. In order to deal with the suspicions of the Zimbabwe government, on the one hand, and the conditionality required by donors, on the other, humanitarian organizations have been forced to create and promote an appropriate humanitarian space within which they can operate professionally.

When Save the Children (UK) began its humanitarian intervention in the Zambezi valley in October 2001, these political tensions and conflicts were already visible. This was heightened by the imminence of local council elections in areas of operation, which in turn meant that both the government and opposition party were actively engaged in seeking support from the residents of these areas. Partly in order to preempt any chance of the relief operation being caught up in politics, the organization decided to formalize its agreement with the local authorities in a written document.

Over and above a description of the modalities of delivering assistance, this document reiterated the organization's commitment to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, attribution of aid, independence and security of staff. A clause was inserted indicating that an infringement of any one of these principles could lead to the suspension of the programme. These written agreements were signed by the director of Save the Children (UK) in Zimbabwe and the registered authorities representing local government in the two areas of the Zambezi valley where food aid programmes were planned.

At the same time as Save the Children humanitarian operations commenced in the Zambezi valley, other organizations were also engaged in providing relief in various other parts of the country. In order to share experience around operational issues and to ensure proper coordination of activities, a forum was convened comprising the heads of emergency NGOs working in Zimbabwe.

As political tension and conflict continued to escalate in the country and in anticipation of possible difficulties that might be faced by relief operations, this group began to discuss its collective position around the promotion of humanitarian principles and adherence to international standards. A meeting was convened, which included a senior representative of the ministry tasked with coordinating emergency relief, to discuss and emphasize the commitment to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, proper attribution of aid, safety of personnel and local capacity building, as well as the protection of children in emergencies.

In September 2002, after a year of satisfactory operation, the national authorities suspended the humanitarian and development programmes of Save the Children (UK) in the Zambezi valley. This was done with a clear indication that programmes could not resume until a new agreement was concluded to regularize the terms and conditions of the operation of Save the Children (UK) in the country.

The factors that precipitated the government's decision seemed to have included a general deterioration in government-NGO relations in the intervening period and an escalation in the war of words between Zimbabwean authorities and the British government, which in turn impacted on Save the Children as a UK-based organization.

At the same time, the population of one of the areas where the organization had delivered food assistance voted strongly for the opposition party in rural council elections, prompting accusations by some ruling party activists that the Save the Children food aid programme was implicated in influencing this vote.

The resolution of this particular problem took several months, during which the population of that area received no humanitarian assistance, despite a further worsening of the food security situation. This raised a considerable international outcry around the fact that people who were deserving of humanitarian assistance were being deprived.

In the end, through a process of negotiation and discussion with national and provincial authorities, the mediation of the UN and donors, as well as pressure exerted by officials within and outside government in support of neutrality, professionalism and a long history of work in Zimbabwe, an agreement was signed that allowed activities to resume. This agreement reiterated Save the Children's organizational commitment to the key working principles, as well as describing an intended programme of action over the forthcoming period.

What is of particular interest for the purposes of this paper is the fact that, despite written local agreements enshrining humanitarian access⁴, neutrality, impartiality, independence and other principles, a major humanitarian programme was suspended. At the same time, the previous advocacy work conducted by some NGOs to try to improve the operational space within Zimbabwe, whereby key principles were understood and respected, was also seen to have been ineffective in this particular instance.

What lessons can be derived from this experience, in seeking to establish consensus and conformity amongst government, donors and NGOs with respect to humanitarian principles

and standards? What recommendations can be drawn to try to ensure that the same does not occur in the future?

Challenges to enacting humanitarian principles in Zimbabwe

Lack of familiarity with humanitarian principles by all stakeholders

One of the obstacles relating to the concrete implementation of any legal principles or standards is ignorance of their key provisions, either by those tasked with implementing them, or among those they are designed to protect. The adherence to humanitarian principles in Zimbabwe has run up against a similar challenge. Part of the problem arises from the absence of any necessity to use them in the past.

Humanitarian interventions in Zimbabwe, particularly the major drought of 1992, did not raise the question of adherence to key principles of neutrality, impartiality, access and independence. This was because of a different political environment in the country, where most aid from donors, NGOs and others was channelled through government structures.

Few conflicts or tensions arose to promote a debate around the importance of international and legally recognized standards. Whether at national, provincial or district level, Zimbabwean authorities, as well as the constituencies they represent, have had little exposure to principles that underpin humanitarian aid and the rights enshrined within them.

Conflict with local culture and custom

A second impediment to operating in accordance with the key principles of neutrality and impartiality in Zimbabwe has been encountered at the community level. One of the major concerns of organizations working in Zimbabwe had been to avoid politicization of food aid. This has two components. Firstly, everyone, regardless of their political affinity, who is in need of assistance, should receive it. Secondly, no political mileage should be made out of humanitarian aid deliveries by implementing NGOs, local authorities, national government or others.

Yet in several of the communities in Zimbabwe where organizations were engaged in humanitarian activities, these principles conflicted with local tradition.⁵ In some communities it had been the tradition that the gift of food to people in need was the prerogative of the chief. The act of feeding hungry people was not only a gesture of charity delivered by the chief towards his population, but was also seen as a key mechanism for cultivating patronage and future support, and for reinforcing the status of the traditional leaders in the eyes of the population.

Consequently, removing food deliveries from the jurisdiction of traditional authorities had the effect of minimizing the political or religious mileage that could be gained by a local leader or

select group through the distribution of aid. It could also be seen by some as undermining a cultural and traditional norm.

Conflicts with tradition are also evident in other areas, though more covert. The practice of child marriage and pledging of girls in exchange for food for the family continues to exist in several parts of the country that are prone to periodic food shortages. During times of drought, child labour also becomes more prevalent, as does the drop out of children from school in order for them to contribute to family survival. This can also include girls exchanging sex for food or money.

In a survey conducted by Save the Children in the Binga area of the Zambezi valley it was noted that, in the wake of food shortages, there was a noticeable rise in numbers of women engaged in prostitution, as well as a reduction in their use of condoms, for fear of deterring potential clients. Anecdotal evidence from the same part of the country also indicated a rise in the numbers of children pledged in marriage during the crisis period.

In some cases, the principle of upholding the rights of women and girls in a humanitarian crisis, as well as promoting the care and protection of children from abuse and exploitation has raised opposition and claims of interference with local culture. Even if some community members do not openly state that they are opposed to upholding the rights of children to such protection, the above practices continue.

Conflict at a local level can also occur concerning the principle of accountability. When an organization seeks to uphold the practice of transparency and openness in its operations and thereby make itself accountable to the population it wishes to assist, it may well be introducing a practice that sits uneasily within social systems that are based on hierarchy and control. In order to promote accountability, beneficiaries of aid need to be made aware of their entitlements and be provided with a mechanism to react if these are infringed.

This may arouse suspicion among those who are more familiar and comfortable with a culture of acceptance of hierarchy and control. Some people may believe that such a practice encourages a habit of democracy – a short step from the community seeking better representation from its local, provincial and national representatives. There was also evidence of concern on the part of some traditional leaders in Zimbabwe when the entire community was included in targeting and selection of beneficiaries and the monitoring of programmes. Where children were included, this proved even more contentious.

Perceived interference with sovereignty

A third element relates to national government authorities and explains some of the reluctance and hesitation that has greeted the arrival of humanitarian aid in the country. The ability, whether real or perceived, of state authorities to dispense aid to people in need is seen as a key mechanism of reinforcing their legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

At a time when that legitimacy is under scrutiny, as it was in Zimbabwe during the political controversy surrounding elections and other issues, the state was even more sensitive in seeking

to protect its reputation. In this regard, the highly visible assistance delivered through non-state actors and their insistence that no political benefits should be gained from deliveries of food and other services, created tensions. One local official indicated off the record: “We welcome the contribution of your own and other agencies. But each bag of maize you distribute undermines our status and reputation in the eyes of our people.”

Sensitivity around issues of national sovereignty can also play a part in fuelling the concern of host governments about international humanitarian interventions. The experience of Somalia has left a legacy of some suspicion around what a humanitarian imperative can legitimize – including armed intervention in situations where a state is perceived by the international community as being either unable or unwilling to protect the rights of its citizens.

Thus, considerable controversy arose in Zimbabwe last year in the wake of comments by one donor government official that humanitarian aid might have to be delivered whether or not permission from the national authorities was forthcoming. Predictably enough, the state-controlled media characterized such a statement as indicative of a lack of respect for Zimbabwe’s territorial and sovereign integrity. In this environment of acrimony and recrimination it can be difficult for international NGOs to overcome suspicion and convince a skeptical national authority that the principle of neutrality is not a smokescreen for a covert political agenda.

Donor familiarity with key principles

The promotion of key humanitarian principles is not just a question of directing advocacy and lobbying towards national government, local government and traditional authorities. Donors also need to be made aware of these principles and their implications for aid programmes.

An issue has surfaced in Zimbabwe, for example, around the provision of humanitarian assistance to resettled farmers, who are seen by many as being responsible for much of the disruption caused to agricultural productivity in the wake of the land reform programme. A recent vulnerability assessment in Zimbabwe concluded that resettled populations in drought-affected former commercial farming areas are, in some cases, just as vulnerable to the loss of livelihoods as some of the current beneficiaries of food aid programmes.

Thus, on the grounds of vulnerability, a proportion of resettled farmers may well be deserving of inclusion in humanitarian relief. Several donors, however, have indicated some reluctance to engage with this section of the population, which in turn conflicts with the principle that need, irrespective of political, religious or ethnic affiliation, should determine the delivery of assistance.

Problems of coordination and practical obstacles

A final obstacle in terms of the delivery of humanitarian assistance relates to the coordination of effort between local and international NGOs, donors, the UN and the host government. Joint action, coordinated planning and unified strategies were hard to find in the emergency, partly because of the hostility and suspicion that, in recent years, characterized relations between state and external actors in Zimbabwe. This is evident in a number of ways.

NGO food aid distributions are based on the principle that they should not undermine efforts at local sustainability nor duplicate government provisions in any one area of the country. Yet the authorities have been extremely reluctant to provide details of government imports through the Grain Marketing Board, in particular where, how and when imports of grain have been distributed and who is classified as a beneficiary.

Lack of transparency in this area has not only meant that agencies cannot be sure that they have adequately prioritized communities in need, but has also fuelled considerable international speculation of politicization of state controlled deliveries of maize and other essential commodities.

While several ministries are involved in the process to ensure a smooth flow of aid into the country, communication and consultation between them is less than ideal. There is no single way of resolving operational difficulties that organizations may face. These obstacles may include delays at border posts in processing deliveries because of confusion as to the required papers; slow processing of work permits for key humanitarian staff; and delays in the delivery of supplies due to lack of procedures to quickly process vehicle permits, resulting in transport being blocked on either side of the border with South Africa.

Further lack of coordination was evident in the safeguarding of the continuum between emergency relief and recovery. The key ministries involved in planning and coordinating recovery programmes, namely agriculture, water and sanitation and local government, rarely participated in the emergency forums established by the UN and NGOs to alleviate the crisis. This lack of joint planning effectively meant that NGO delivery of seeds and fertilizer to promote recovery in the wake of the drought was severely compromised in terms of timing, appropriateness and prioritization of need.

Lessons learnt and recommendations

Improved dissemination of principles

As mentioned previously, Zimbabwe has both ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and has an impressive body of national legislation to enforce some of its key provisions. Yet at local community level much of the CRC is unknown or barely understood. Child protection provisions are continuously undermined by early marriages, excessive child labour and discrimination against girls in the areas of access to education and health care.

In promoting the practical acceptance of the provisions of the CRC at community level, Save the Children realized that much more needed to be done to disseminate CRC knowledge to all sections of the community, including chiefs, family heads, teachers and children themselves. This needs to be done in the relevant local languages and in a format that is clear, simple and concise.

A similar programme of dissemination needs to be conducted around the key standards for the delivery of emergency programmes, such as the provisions of the Sphere Project Humanitarian

Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.⁶ This information needs to be shared not only with government authorities at the national and local levels, but also with councilors, traditional leaders, community members and intended programme beneficiaries.

On reflection, the formulation of the kind of agreement signed between Save the Children and local authorities in the Zambezi valley was a useful exercise. But little attempt was made to discuss its provisions, to explain the international codes that underpinned it, or to provide a rationale as to why it was important to win support from the people tasked with enforcing it.

Lack of knowledge has meant that the insistence by NGOs that the various principles be respected has been interpreted by some local authorities as imposed conditions, rather than a process of conforming to international standards that most humanitarian organizations have adopted.

Sensitivity to existing community practices

While knowledge and familiarity with legal provisions and international standards are undoubtedly important, it is not the whole story in terms of seeking support for their application. Again, the experience of Save the Children in promoting the CRC may be instructive.

At the community level, appeals to international conventions and national law have not been particularly effective in promoting a culture that respects the rights of the child. At the same time, community elders have on occasion, reminded human rights activists that the law, in a general sense, is regarded with considerable suspicion, particularly in parts of the country where it has been used to deprive people of their rights.

For example, as recently as the 1970s, the law in Rhodesia (former Zimbabwe) was used to dispossess people of their land. Thus, utilizing legal arguments as a means of promoting conformity to a key principle may win few friends in situations where skepticism is prevalent.

In terms of achieving greater respect for child rights, much more mileage has been achieved through seeking arguments that appeal to local cultural norms and traditions. And through practical demonstrations of the concrete benefits that accrue to communities, families and children themselves through adherence to CRC objectives.

A similar approach could be used in building consensus around key humanitarian principles in operational areas in Zimbabwe. For example, within rural communities there is still a vibrant tradition of charitable works called 'Zunde Ramambo'. This is a mechanism whereby the chief allocates land for communal cultivation, the benefits of which in turn go to orphans and other families in need.

The distribution of benefits is based on a clear identification of the most deserving in the community, a process that involves discussion, local decision-making and the possibility for families to present themselves as entitled to assistance. When key provisions of the Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter or of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and

Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief are directly related to already accepted and local practices, it begins to clarify what for many is little more than an abstract principle imported from elsewhere.

There is a dilemma, however, as to whether we should endorse these more pragmatic, utilitarian arguments to achieve respect for a humanitarian principle, at the risk of undermining appeals to morality and basic human rights law.

At a launch of a food aid programme conducted by Save the Children in Zimbabwe, a government official listed some practical benefits that would accrue to traditional leaders in the community through adherence to the key principles of neutrality and impartiality. These benefits included stability within the community, the perception by the people that traditional leaders were fair to everyone regardless of political persuasion, and a willingness of donors to further invest in a location that was seen to respect these principles.

Such arguments appear to conflict with the strong ethical viewpoint that it is a human right of any individual to be fed regardless of the benefits it might bring to those dispensing food. Denying assistance to a needy person merely because an individual or community can gain no specific advantage runs counter to moral intuition.

Nevertheless, in circumstances where agreement and consensus around moral principles is not clear, then these pragmatic arguments may need to be marshalled if support is required from those who influence decisions about the allocation of aid.

Increasing awareness of rights and entitlements

If adherence to humanitarian principles and international standards is better served by appealing to the rights of individuals rather than charity, then much more needs to be done to inform beneficiaries about these standards and their rights. To date, very little has been done in Zimbabwe to inform emergency relief recipients about their entitlements.

There is scant awareness of standards to which international NGOs should aspire, including minimum ration levels, prior information about distribution schedules, transparency around allocation, and community involvement in decision-making. Unless communities begin to press for these standards to be realized, it will depend on the goodwill of organizations to enforce them.

An example of this was observed in parts of rural Zimbabwe where communities waited for hours for food in locations without shelter and clean water, for distributions that sometimes never arrived. There may be reasons why a standard might not be achieved in a particular situation. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that there will be a consistent and uniform adherence to these standards unless communities are made aware of what they are, and are provided with an opportunity to give feedback about their implementation.

Very few organizations in Zimbabwe have set up a feedback mechanism for benefactors of emergency programmes, where a simple, clear and transparent method of reporting a

complaint can be received. The ability of NGOs to promote conformity to principles and standards is severely undermined if there is no compliance within their own operations.

Accountability with respect to abuse and exploitation

A similar campaign is needed to promote the protection of children from abuse and exploitation by humanitarian staff engaged in relief work. A working group has been set up in Zimbabwe, comprised of UN agencies, local and international NGOs, and government departments, to promote a zero tolerance policy on child abuse in the delivery of humanitarian interventions.⁷

To this end, a training programme has been delivered in Zimbabwe for senior managers of implementing agencies, operational staff, and local government officials. Other people that may have contact with communities in the delivery of food, such as truck drivers, security guards, police and community workers employed to register potential programme beneficiaries, have also received training.

These training and sensitization programmes are commendable in preventing the kinds of abuse witnessed by the UN and Save the Children in humanitarian programmes in West Africa. But it has not adequately included a strategy for informing children themselves, especially girls, about their rights and entitlements.

Nor have adequate mechanisms been set up for reporting any infringements of this key principle of child protection. The humanitarian personnel and local officials involved in food deliveries, those that are most in a position to abuse the power, are also expected to police their own behaviour.

A simple, independent and child-friendly mechanism for reporting abuse needs to be inserted in every area of humanitarian operations. This should also include a mechanism to ensure that children can contest their exclusion from emergency relief.

At a time when Zimbabwe is estimated to host around 600,000 orphans and households headed by children, there is some evidence to suggest that they have been excluded from community structures and remain invisible to aid planners. If this is the case, we should not assume that community-based targeting on its own can identify all relevant beneficiaries based on vulnerability. An independent mechanism needs to be set up to ensure that agencies do not collude by default in a situation where isolated and marginalized children have no voice in community decisions.

Improved solidarity in humanitarian affairs

While humanitarian organizations have made some attempt at discussing conformity to key humanitarian principles and international standards, no concerted action was taken when the Save the Children programme was affected. Similarly, no plan of action has been devised to respond to infringement of key principles if they were to occur. Part of the lack of coordination derives from the difficulty of envisaging what a collective response might be.

One possible course of action might be the suspension of a humanitarian programme in one area in order to register a complaint concerning what might be happening in another area. However, such a response infringes the inherent right of people to food if they are hungry. Withholding humanitarian aid must not be used as a tool to effect change elsewhere.

The delivery of a unified message from NGOs on the importance of humanitarian principles, and the expectation that they be upheld by donors, governments and communities, would reduce the isolation of an NGO facing difficulties in programme implementation. To achieve this, there must be greater clarity on the triggers for a collective response around infringement of a key principle; the minimum information and substantive evidence required to invoke such a response; and the type of collective action that would be most appropriate and useful for resolving the issue.

Improving coordination and building trust

A much closer interaction between government, donors, the UN and NGOs is required to help resolve poor coordination and enhance the commitment of humanitarian organizations to reducing aid dependency. Similarly, a single point of coordination and decision-making in one selected government ministry would be immensely helpful for improving the working environment and in uniting the disparate machinery of government needed to service a professional programme.

This would help avoid the common challenge of weeks being wasted in chasing up paperwork and documentation that has been split between different ministries. The creation of a joint government, donor and NGO forum that can agree on issues such as strategy, resolve operational difficulties, promote recovery and reduce dependency, will not succeed unless the suspicion and hostility between the state and external actors is addressed.

To this end, a programme to promote greater awareness of humanitarian principles is essential. In this way, the concern that NGOs have a subversive agenda can be tempered with the realization that humanitarian activities carried out to date actually conform to international good practice and agreed standards.

Conclusion

The situation in Zimbabwe is confusing and complex. Drought, economic decline, HIV/AIDS and confrontational politics all contributed to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis for the country. In this environment, key principles and standards have been difficult to attain. At the heart of the problem is a lack of awareness, knowledge and familiarity with standards and how to implement them.

This gap in knowledge extends throughout national and local government, as well as to donors, local and international NGOs and parts of the UN system. To this end the recent workshop convened to familiarize key decision-makers in all of the above institutions with basic humanitarian principles is an important step in the right direction.⁸

Yet it is the contention of this paper that professional, transparent and comprehensive disaster response programmes can never be safeguarded by the existence of laws and standards alone. Nor can they be safeguarded by the commitment to their realization by those responsible for ensuring compliance.

Unless such standards are known, valued and agreed to by those they are designed to protect, including vulnerable women and children, their implementation on the ground will always depend on the willingness of those who choose to provide assistance. One of the key challenges facing all those involved in humanitarian relief will be to promote the accountability of their programmes to the communities they are designed to benefit.

1. The convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/25 (20 November 1989) and entered into force on the 2 September 1990. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 34/180 (18 December 1979) and entered into force on the 3 September 1981.
2. When collating the kinds of standards that were felt to be applicable to the programmes of Save the Children UK, we utilised a variety of sources including:
The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements and NGOs in Disaster relief, Annex VI to the resolutions of the 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Geneva, 1995 (see Box 1.1).
The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (2000) (see Box 1.2)
Inter-Agency Standing Committee, Policy Statement and Terms of reference on protection from sexual abuse and exploitation in Humanitarian Crises, 9 April 2002.
3. These included the utilization of child welfare committees in areas of operation and out own program teams registering orphaned and vulnerable children in communities for food aid distributions and other program assistance, such as school fees and household items.
4. In conformity with the humanitarian imperative to save lives, access to communities in need would be a logical requirement. Aid cannot be delivered to communities if there is no possibility of reaching them.
5. On the issue of rights and culture, Save the Children adopts the view that "cultural considerations should yield to rights norms, for the best interests of the children. However, in the case of many other aspects of the CRC there is ample room for reflecting cultural considerations and local traditions in the ways in which children's rights are realised in a particular country or region." See <www.savethechildren.org.uk>.
6. The Sphere Project, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (2000).
7. "The Child Protection Working Group" is convened by UNICEF in Zimbabwe on a monthly basis, and comprises various NGOs, including Save the Children (UK), government departments and UN bodies involved with programmes targeted at children.
8. "Workshop to Review Humanitarian Principles and their Consequences in the Current Humanitarian Crisis in Zimbabwe", 1-4 April 2003, Harare. Convened by OCHA and UNDP.