

## HUMANITARIAN FUTURES: A POLICY PLANNING PERSPECTIVE

### -- A PROJECT SUMMARY --

#### At the core....

Rapid scientific and technological change will intensify over the next two decades, profoundly affecting the global economy, environment and demography as well as political and security structures around the world. Their unintended consequences may be an exponential increase in human exposure to disasters, emergencies and catastrophes. These in no small part may be the result of planners' inability to anticipate potential hazards and their significance, and decision-makers' inability to reconcile competing demands for resources. In developing a series of integrated, non-linear scenarios for the year 2020, the two year *Humanitarian Futures* project will explore the extent to which present policy planning mechanisms have the capacity to anticipate, mitigate and respond to the foreseeable future. The practical outcome of this project is a proposed methodology to enhance planning instruments and approaches in order to address potential humanitarian crises of the future.

#### Humanitarian Futures: the vision

- \_ to enhance the policy planning and decision-making capacities of organizations responsible for preventing, preparing for and responding to disasters, emergencies and catastrophes;
- \_ to enhance the overall strategic planning capacities of those governmental, inter-governmental and private sector organizations that have to deal with the broader consequences of rapid change and complexity;
- \_ to provide a tool for advocacy for all those concerned about the potential impact of longer-term trends upon human vulnerability.

#### Humanitarian Futures: the immediate objectives

- **types and dynamics of change.** To develop mechanisms for sensitizing policy-planners and decision-makers to the potential dynamics and longer-term consequences of rapid change and complexity. These mechanisms will be based upon three futures scenarios that will reflect and integrate key economic, demographic, environmental, security, scientific and political trends through the year 2020. Each scenario will mirror a particular global perspective, and each in turn will form the basis for analyzing broad human vulnerability trends, including those that could result in natural and technological disasters as well as in conflict-induced crises and societal collapse;
- **policy-planning capacities assessment.** To identify innovative ways to deal with information and "out-of-the-box" planning. A host of important innovations has already been made in governments, international organizations and the private sector to increase the coherence and adaptability of planning processes. These need to be assessed and their effectiveness analyzed to determine the extent to which they can be used to strengthen approaches for anticipating and mitigating humanitarian vulnerability and crises. The project will focus upon a representative number of innovative measures based upon separate initiatives

undertaken by three governments, two private sector corporations and two international organizations;

- **simulation tools and enhanced capacities.** To provide means for organizations to operationalise futures research and innovative planning methods. With substantial lesson-learned from the corporate sector, the world of simulation has opened up a range of new approaches and techniques that expand the depth and timeliness of communications, lead to effective transactional and collaborative models and intensify and inter-relate complex flows of information. Combining the three futures scenarios and the lessons-learned from the project's policy planning capacities assessment, prototypes of simulation exercises will form the basis for policy-planning tools for humanitarian futures.

### **Humanitarian Futures: process and methodology**

Scenario development, policy-planning capacities assessment and simulation prototypes will be the project's immediate objectives, and these will be reflected in the project's process and methodology in the following ways:

- **The Futures Group.** Consisting of approximately nine individuals regarded as leading experts in their respective fields, the Futures Group will provide substantive inputs as well as serve as an overall advisory panel for the project. To date, the designated fields include economics, science and technology, defence policy, demography and political science;
- **Interview programme and process.** An extensive interview programme will underpin much of the research. This interview programme will be essential both for the futures dimension of the project as well as its policy-planning assessment component. Interviewees will be identified from selected governmental, non-governmental, inter-governmental and private sector organisations;
- **In-depth institutional analysis.** Approximately six organisations – primarily concerned with humanitarian issues – will undergo in-depth analysis of their strategic planning capacities and the relationship between those strategic planning capacities and those organisations' decision-making approaches. Of the six organisations, two will be from governments, two from the non-governmental sector and two from the inter-governmental sector.
- **Complex phenomena models.** Computer modelling techniques will be used in parallel as well as in conjunction with other methods noted above to manipulate data to arrive at non-linear futures scenarios as well as to develop alternative strategic planning and decision-making models .

### **Humanitarian Futures: benefits and outputs**

The project is designed to make an active contribution to assist planners and decision-makers to anticipate and prepare for what might well be future humanitarian crises. Towards that end, there will be five inter-related outputs:

- **Simulation prototype programme.** This programme will be developed in order to provide a format and structure for organizations to assess their institutional adaptiveness and to enhance their capacities to deal with rapid change and complexity;

- **Feedback fora.** For the six organizations that will be part of the in-depth institutional analyses, the project will provide substantive briefings on the project's findings as they relate to the six individually, and where relevant, recommendations for enhancing overall strategic planning capacities;
- **Planning for the future: Alternative policy frameworks.** Edited volume exploring three *futures scenarios* and the means required by policy planners and decision-makers to deal with the humanitarian issues arising from the scenarios' consequences;
- **Training film series.** Series of training films that will focus on alternative ways to address complexity and change. Film series to be based upon project's problem-solving situations undertaken in an international organisation, in a private corporation and in four governments;
- **Web-based learning applications.** Based on standard information technology systems and in cooperation with established web-sites [eg, Relief Web], the training elements of the project would be posted on available IT sites. Still unexplored is the possibility that such sites might also be used to update the trends analysis developed by the Humanitarian Futures project;
- **Seminar and lecture series.** It is important to ensure that the project's conclusions spark interest and debate within as broad a community as possible. As part of this dissemination effort will be a series of seminars and lectures in Africa, Europe, the Far East, South Asia and the United States;

### **Humanitarian Futures: project structure**

The project is based at King's College's International Policy Institute/Centre for Defence Studies in London, and is directed by Dr. Randolph Kent, a Senior Research Fellow at King's College. Dr. Kent, who has published extensively on matters pertaining to humanitarian affairs, had been United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Rwanda, Kosovo and Somalia as well as chief of emergency operations in the Sudan and head of UNDP's disaster prevention and preparedness unit in Ethiopia.

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