

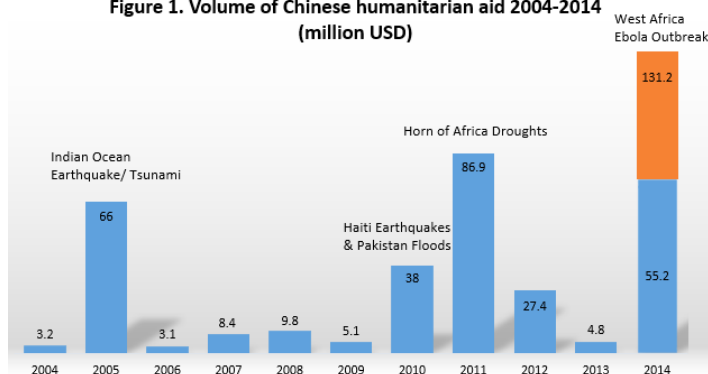
## CHINA'S HUMANITARIAN AID

On April 25, a devastating 8.1-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, causing massive destruction and casualties. China was among the first countries to respond by sending rescue teams, medical staff and three batches of goods and materials worth 140 million RMB (US\$22.6 million<sup>i</sup>). As a country prone to natural disasters itself, such as earthquakes, floods, droughts and typhoons which have affected on average 400 million people per year over the past decade,<sup>ii</sup> China's overseas emergency response capacities have developed out of its domestic experiences. The recent two decades have seen China's growing humanitarian engagement in line with its rapid economic growth and expanding global role.

### Facts and figures

Since 2000, China has remained one of the top five largest humanitarian aid providers among non-Development Assistance Committee (non-DAC) countries.<sup>iii</sup> According to the 2014 White Paper on China's Foreign Aid, China provided 1.5 billion RMB (US\$241 million) worth of humanitarian aid to more than 30 countries in 2010-2012, accounting for 1.7 percent of its total aid,<sup>iv</sup> while DAC countries' average was 8.7 percent of total official development assistance over the same time period.<sup>v</sup> The scale of China's humanitarian aid depends on a number of factors: the seriousness of the crisis itself; the host country's needs; and China's bilateral relationship with the affected country.<sup>vi</sup> This is evident from the fluctuating trend of the volume of humanitarian aid provided over the past decade. For example, China contributed US\$62 million in response to the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004/2005, making it the seventh biggest bilateral contributor in this single event and the biggest among developing countries. During 2011, China contributed a record high US\$86.9 million, 80 percent of which was allocated to Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, the four countries in the Horn of Africa affected by severe droughts.

Figure 1. Volume of Chinese humanitarian aid 2004-2014 (million USD)



Source: Financial Tracking Service (FTS), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). It is noted that China's official humanitarian aid figures are higher than those reported to the FTS mainly due to different reporting methodologies. Therefore, the 2014 figure in this graph has been adjusted by taking into account China's officially announced contributions to Ebola, US\$123 million, making the total annual figure reach US\$131.2 million.

In terms of forms, China's humanitarian aid mainly consists of relief materials, food aid, cash aid, and the dispatching of rescue and medical teams. The 2014 White Paper shows that in 2010-2012 China not only provided short-term emergency responses to the affected countries, but also supported them in post-disaster reconstruction and capacity building for disaster prevention and relief, ensuring longer-term sustainable development. This is in line with non-DAC countries' broader understanding of humanitarian aid where greater importance should be attached to transition, reconstruction and development aid following emergency relief. Major Chinese NGOs that work in the field of humanitarian aid have also incorporated post-disaster reconstruction and training into their programming.

### How does it work?

Most DAC countries have formulated specific humanitarian aid policies, such as the US, UK, Australia, Japan and France. However, like most non-DAC countries, China does not have a humanitarian aid policy document. This is mainly due to the decentralized nature of humanitarian aid decision-making and administration in China. For instance, funding for humanitarian aid comes from various sources such as the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Health and Family Planning Commission and NGOs. Similarly, the delivery of humanitarian aid is also decentralized, which can lead to competition between ministries and agencies, and make it difficult to track the overall humanitarian spending.<sup>vii</sup>

In an effort to strengthen coordination and improve effectiveness, the Chinese government formally established a response mechanism for international emergency humanitarian relief and aid (人道主义紧急救灾援助应急机制) in September 2004. One of the main characteristics of this mechanism is the collaboration between the government and the military: the Ministry of Commerce is responsible for the coordination and funding management while the People's Liberation Army (PLA) prepares and transports goods and materials, or dispatches medical and rescue teams. The PLA has been engaged in international disaster relief since 2002, with a noticeable growing role in China's overseas emergency response and rescue support. For example, in 2009, the PLA Navy launched one of the world's most advanced hospital

### China's response to the Ebola outbreak

How much? – **750 million RMB (US\$ 123 million)**

What? – Cash, relief materials, food, laboratories, treatment center, medical and health experts

Where? – **13** affected countries and multilateral organizations including the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund and Africa Union

ships, the “Peace Ark”, which has performed a number of humanitarian medical missions overseas. The deployment of military in international humanitarian response is a common practice of DAC and many non-DAC countries.

Other ministries also deliver humanitarian aid within their own mandate. The National Health and Family Planning Commission, in response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, dispatched medical teams to support the international efforts. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, which is in charge of disaster responses at home, also sends experts to other developing countries to support disaster resilience building, including in partnership with UNDP. Other state agencies such as China Earthquake Administration, the General Administration of Customs, the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine are also involved in providing support as necessary.

### Trends in China’s humanitarian aid

#### *Increasing NGO participation in humanitarian aid delivery*

For DAC countries, NGOs are actively and deeply collaborating with their governments in humanitarian aid consultation and implementation; they either receive substantial funding or hold joint simulation exercises with the government. Key NGO partners are working closely with field counsellors, which allows them to become focal points on the ground, sharing information and supporting funding requests. While China’s humanitarian aid is mostly provided to host countries through government channels, Chinese NGOs have begun to increase and deepen their international humanitarian engagement, not only in financing and delivery but also in providing training support. For example, the Red Cross Society of China is one of the major Chinese NGOs that deliver humanitarian aid. Since 2011, it has delivered humanitarian aid amounting to 234.64 million RMB (US\$38.0 million) in response to major disasters in other countries, and trained more than 330 humanitarian workers from 70 countries.<sup>viii</sup> The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation has also been a major channel since 2005 when it donated 44 million RMB (US\$5.5 million) worth of medicine for the Indian Ocean Tsunami relief. It has also mobilized financial support and goods and material for major disasters in other countries over the past decade. For the Nepal earthquake, Chinese civil rescue teams such as the Blue Sky Rescue Team, provided timely support for emergency relief. China recognizes the important role NGOs play in delivering humanitarian aid, and is seeking to learn from other major aid providers’ experience in working with NGOs with a view to further encouraging and improving Chinese NGOs’ participation in humanitarian aid.<sup>ix</sup>

#### *Increasing multilateral collaboration with the UN system*

It is estimated that over the past five years, DAC providers have channelled 60 percent of their humanitarian funding to multilateral organizations, mainly UN agencies, compared with 44 percent for non-DAC providers. Over the period of 2008-2012, non-DAC providers channelled on average 31 percent of their humanitarian aid through the host governments, compared with just 10 percent by DAC providers.<sup>x</sup> For China, with its strong emphasis on partner country ownership, this figure is estimated at 79 percent for the same period.<sup>xi</sup> However, since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami for which China channelled donations through various UN agencies for the first time, China has gradually enhanced multilateral collaboration, especially with the UN system. Most recently, for the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, China provided US\$6 million to the World Food Programme for food relief,<sup>xii</sup> US\$2 million for the World Health Organization,<sup>xiii</sup> and an additional US\$6 million to complement UN emergency efforts through the UN Ebola Response Multi-Partner Trust Fund.<sup>xiv</sup> Besides financial

contributions, China is also an active member of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination network, as well as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. In partnership with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, China has established one of the most advanced Search and Rescue teams certified by the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, which has strengthened China’s emergency response and coordination capabilities globally.

China has also strengthened its support to the protection of civilians through UN peacekeeping contributions. For example, in January 2014, following a renewed outbreak of conflict, the Chinese police contingent of the UN Mission in South Sudan set up an emergency camp to provide shelter for 10,000 refugees fleeing armed conflict.<sup>xv</sup> In Mali’s conflict-affected areas, Chinese engineering and PLA medical detachments constructed two field hospitals and provided emergency medical care to the local population as part of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.<sup>xvi</sup>

### Conclusion

China has become a major contributor to international emergency relief efforts over the past decade, building on its domestic experiences. China not only focuses on short-term emergency responses but also post-disaster reconstruction and capacity building to ensure longer-term sustainable development. In the absence of a humanitarian aid policy, an internal government response mechanism has been established which involves the military and other ministries, in order to more rapidly and effectively respond to international emergencies. More importantly, China’s humanitarian aid practices are increasingly converging with those of major humanitarian aid providers, with deepened NGO participation and increasing cooperation with UN coordination and response agencies. These trends indicate that China will continue to play a major role in international humanitarian affairs, and work with other non-governmental and multilateral actors in an increasingly inclusive way.

This Issue Brief forms part of a series to promote understanding of Chinese foreign aid and encourage the sharing of development experiences between China, other developing countries and the donor community. Thanks to the South-South Policy Team, especially Ms. Christine Han, Mr. Hillel Loew and Mr. Ye Xuan for their work on this Issue Brief. For more information, please contact the South-South Policy Team at: [southsouth.cn@undp.org](mailto:southsouth.cn@undp.org).

<sup>i</sup> UN historical exchange rates are applied throughout the text.

<sup>ii</sup> Figure calculated from data provided in Ministry of Civil Affairs’ annual reports for natural disasters situation from 2006 to 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> Kerry Smith, “Non-DAC Donors and Humanitarian Aid”, Global Humanitarian Assistance Briefing Paper, July 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> The 2014 White Paper shows that humanitarian aid represented 0.4% of China’s total aid for 2010-2012. The Ministry of Commerce confirmed that the 0.4% only includes cash aid and the dispatching of medical and rescue teams, not goods and materials. The total amount of humanitarian aid during 2010-2012 is 1.5 billion RMB, all forms included.

<sup>v</sup> DAC countries’ humanitarian aid commitments to developing countries in 2010-2012, Creditor Reporting System.

<sup>vi</sup> 李小瑞, 中国对外人道主义援助的特点和问题. 现代国际关系, 2010年第2期. (Li Xiaorui, “The Characteristics and Problems in China’s Humanitarian Aid to Foreign Countries”, *Contemporary International Relations*, 22 (2), 2012.

<sup>vii</sup> Harmer A and Cotterrell, “Diversity in Donorship. The Changing Landscape of Official Humanitarian Aid”, HPG Report 20, September 2005.

<sup>viii</sup> Data from the presentation by Dr. Zhao Baige, former Executive Vice President of the Red Cross Society of China, on August 26, 2014 at UNDP China, Beijing.

<sup>ix</sup> Philippa Brant, “China’s humanitarian assistance: sign of improvement?”. *The Interpreter*, January 29, 2014.

<sup>x</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2014. The China figure is calculated by the author based on the data provided by the Global Humanitarian Assistance.

<sup>xi</sup> Based on the data sheet on China’s humanitarian aid from Global Humanitarian Assistance. Available from: [here](#).

<sup>xii</sup> FTS, UNOCHA, accessed on January 20, 2015.

<sup>xiii</sup> FTS, UNOCHA, accessed on January 22, 2015.

<sup>xiv</sup> UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office please find [here](#).

<sup>xv</sup> “China provides humanitarian aid for S Sudan,” *China Daily*, January 3, 2014. Available from [here](#).

<sup>xvi</sup> “Helping to keep the peace in West Africa”, *China Daily*, November 1, 2014. Available from [here](#).