

## SMART DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

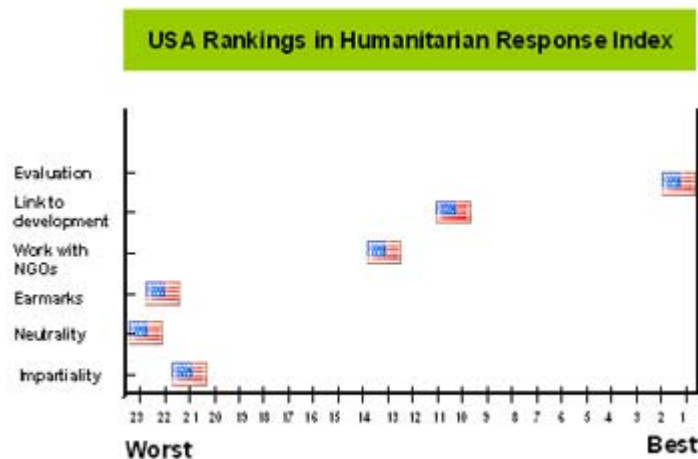
# The Humanitarian Response Index

## Where we stand

In the aid reform debate, there's been a lot of talk about making our long-term development aid more effective, but relatively little talk about reforming our emergency response aid—or “humanitarian aid.” At a conference in Sweden in 2003, major aid donors including the US and Europe agreed on a set of principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD). The intent was for the GHD principles to be the benchmark that the international community uses to measure humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup> In 2007, the Spanish group DARA produced the first [Humanitarian Response Index \(HRI\)](#), which measures each donor's annual performance against these GHD principles.

### How well did the US do last year?

Overall, the US ranks 16th out of 23 OECD countries in the HRI.<sup>2</sup> But the full story is more complex: the US shines in some areas and needs improvement in others.



### Where the US performs best:

1. Promoting learning and accountability. The US evaluates its humanitarian aid rigorously to make sure it produces concrete results for people who are suffering.
2. Integrating humanitarian relief and development. The US is good at linking humanitarian relief to the long-term development that is crucial to reducing future vulnerability to disasters.
3. Working with civil society organizations. The US performs respectably in relying on the expertise of local partners to guide its humanitarian efforts.<sup>3</sup>

### Where the US needs improvement:

1. Providing flexible funding. US funding is inflexible because of a high amount of earmarks and a low amount of funding that is not tied to US goods and services.<sup>4</sup>
2. Respecting the humanitarian principles of neutrality (not choosing sides between conflicting parties).
3. Maintaining impartiality (allocating resources solely according to need).<sup>5</sup>



USAID workers cleaning up after the tsunami in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, in 2005.

Jacob Simkin / Photoshare.

### Next steps

Although our humanitarian aid receives high marks in some areas, it is hurt by earmarks and “tying.” To get help quickly to the people who need it most, the US must work in partnership with other donor countries, make its funding more flexible, and above all, use our aid to respond to needs rather than to achieve non-humanitarian political and security goals.

Be sure to see where the US has improved in the [2008 HRI report](#), due out Nov. 19!

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<sup>1</sup>. “Background to GHD,” Good Humanitarian Donorship, [www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/background.asp](http://www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/background.asp).  
<sup>2</sup>. Silvia Hidalgo and Augusto López-Claros, “The Humanitarian Response Index 2007: Measuring commitment to best practice” (Madrid: Development Assistance Research Associates, 2007), 28–29, [www.daraint.org/web\\_en/hri.html?lang=en](http://www.daraint.org/web_en/hri.html?lang=en).

<sup>3</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>. Ibid., 22.

<sup>5</sup>. Ibid., 19.