

Foreword

In April 2000 the full members of ALNAP approved the launch of the Annual Review series. They did so in the belief that an annual summary of evaluation findings, coupled with an assessment of the overall quality of evaluation reports, would provide significant added value to their work and efforts to improve the international humanitarian system's performance. This first Annual Review confirms that belief.

It draws together the principal findings of 49 evaluations of humanitarian action published during 1999 and 2000. The findings highlight areas where the performance of the humanitarian system was judged to have been satisfactory and where poor. The fact that findings are drawn from a large sample of reports gives them considerable force, and they deserve a role in the reflections and dialogues that set the agenda for improving the system's performance.

Synthesising the findings of so many separate evaluations inevitably raises questions about the standards used for assessing performance, and the quality of the evaluation reports themselves. The Annual Review, therefore, combines a synthesis of the evaluations' main findings with a meta-evaluation of the quality of reports, showing us where evaluation practice deserves emulation and where it needs strengthening. By applying a quality proforma developed by ALNAP, the Annual Review has established a precedent. It is not the last word on what constitutes quality, and there will be further debate. However, in providing a systematic basis for assessment, it promises to be an important tool for monitoring the progress of efforts to improve the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation of humanitarian action mechanism.

I firmly believe that this annual opportunity for the humanitarian system to reflect on its performance, and, for those involved in the commissioning, undertaking and use of evaluation to reflect on practice and quality, will prove invaluable. This is a positive addition to the system's growing repertoire of instruments for measuring performance, enabling it to feel proud of its successes and admit to the continuing challenge to improve.

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