

# Understanding Donor Behaviour: Actors and Processes in Disaster-Relief Decision-Making

## Comprendre le don : acteurs et processus dans la prise de décision pour l'aide en cas de catastrophe

Aaida Mamuji

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Article abstract

Two of the largest natural disasters that hit in 2010 were the January earthquake in Haiti and the flooding in Pakistan which followed seven months later. Unlike Canada's disaster-relief intervention to the earthquake, the response to the Pakistan floods has been argued to be comparatively minimal relative to the extent of damage sustained. Through a series of interviews with bureaucrats affecting Canada's disaster-relief responses in both 2010 disasters, this paper asks, who (and what) really determines the scope and magnitude of international disaster-relief interventions? Through the development and application of a multi-level conceptual framework, donor behaviour is said to be affected by each of macro-institutional, meso-contextual and micro-foundational factors. The findings highlight the determinative role of political actors in shaping humanitarian assistance decisions.

# Understanding Donor Behaviour: Actors and Processes in Disaster-Relief Decision-Making

*By Aaida Mamuji*

## Introduction

Natural disasters have the potential to wreak havoc on the regions they affect. As a result of the death toll, destruction and displacement inflicted, governments often have no choice but to declare a state of emergency, requiring international assistance for disaster relief and reconstruction. Despite the frequency of natural disasters, however, only a small proportion gain enough attention to dominate international humanitarian channels. Those that do are considered to be “focusing events,” often finding easy entry to the public policy agenda of donor countries (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 2003). What is less predictable though, is the treatment of these disasters once on the agenda. The success or failure of a public problem bears no strong relationship to the number of people affected, the extent of harm caused, or to any other independent variable that is proposed to quantify importance (Hilgartner & Bosk 1988). Instead, mismatches are found to exist between measures of seriousness of a problem and the level of attention devoted to it by governments.

This paper attempts to understand donor behaviour in response to humanitarian crises. It develops a multi-level, conceptual framework that is used to answer the question “who (and what) really determines the scope and magnitude of international disaster-relief interventions?” It applies historical institutionalism at the macro level, recognizes the role of case-specific details and arenas at the meso level, and uses the logic of appropriateness to identify informal institutions affecting individual action at the micro level. The paper applies the framework to Canada’s responses to the two most catastrophic natural disasters of 2010: the January 12 earthquake in Haiti and the summer flooding in Pakistan that followed seven months later. Canada is a key donor of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and recent Development Assistant Committee (DAC) peer reviews of Canada’s whole-of-government model for responding to natural disasters abroad characterize it as an effective framework for action (Development Assistant Committee 2007, 2012).

The paper begins with a review of literature of conventional explanations for the actions of donor countries in humanitarian crises. It then develops a conceptual framework to holistically understand the determinants of donor decision-making, appreciating the role of each of structure, context and agency. After introducing the two case studies in more detail, findings are presented.

Using primary data<sup>1</sup> from Canada's 2010 disaster-relief responses, this paper emphasizes the important role that political actors have in shaping donor decision-making. Directly, political actors may bypass administrative guidelines outlined in formal policy frameworks developed to guide humanitarian responses. Disaster-relief recommendations by bureaucratic actors are also affected by their understanding of Cabinet's<sup>2</sup> disposition to assist, resulting in an indirect effect of political actors in shaping relief interventions.

### Understanding disaster-relief decision-making

International relations theory explains motivations of development cooperation through a continuum between realism and idealism. In the realist perspective, decisions taken by governments prioritize the needs of the donor country (Tisch and Wallace 1994). Aid-giving is very much a political decision that is shaped by strategic geo-political, economic and security objectives, amongst others. Decisions taken are not governed by a desire to meet the needs of the most underprivileged in the affected region, but rather to ensure that the donor country's interests are maintained as the highest priority (Opeskin 1996). Contrarily, in idealism, decisions taken reflect moral and ethical tendencies, shifting the motivation behind aid towards concepts of equality, humanity and justice (Tisch and Wallace 1994; Opeskin 1996; Pankaj 2005). It is recognized that rich states have a moral obligation to assist poor states, or their inhabitants, by transferring resources to them through a pluralist paradigm. In idealism, the political conditionality that is imposed on development aid is of secondary importance.

Scholars on Canada's foreign aid policies have noted that over time, Canada's aid objectives have been moving away from "humane internationalism" – more altruistic provision of aid where priority is the interests of those for whom the aid is intended – towards "internationalism realism," where domestic gains, be they diplomatic, trade, or security related, form the priority of aid intervention (Pratt 2007). Brown (2011) attributes Canada's development assistance to a preoccupation with prestige and commercial self-interest.

In a comprehensive study of humanitarian assistance allocation, Fink and Redaelli (2011) analyzed the determinants of international emergency aid by assessing aid disbursements of over 270 rapid-onset calamities from 1994-2004 by Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) donor countries. They found that political and strategic factors play a critical role in emergency

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<sup>1</sup>For this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted between June 2011 and March 2012 with representatives from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Department of National Defense/Canadian Forces (DND/CF), Privy Council Office (PCO), Department of Finance, Natural Resources Canada, and the Canadian Public Health Agency. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim; respondents are quoted directly in this paper. Access to information requests were used to obtain standard operating procedures, lessons learned documentation, internal memos, and assessment reports pertaining to the 2010 disaster-relief operations. Unless otherwise stated, all information provided was obtained through these primary sources.

<sup>2</sup>In this paper, reference to 'Cabinet' refers to the Prime Minister and the relevant ministers involved in Canada's responses to natural disasters abroad, namely the ministers of Foreign Affairs, National Defence and International Cooperation.

aid allocation, such that smaller, geographically closer, and oil-exporting countries are provided with more aid. Affordability, past policy decisions and bilateral relationships with recipient countries have also been found to affect the policy options considered on the decision-making table (Pratt 2000). Olsen *et al.* (2003) found that the volume of emergency assistance that a humanitarian crisis attracts is determined primarily by the degree of political interest that donor governments have from a security perspective. They also argue that the strength of humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations present in the disaster-affected country at the time of onset affect a donor's disaster-relief decisions. When the international community is looked at holistically, donor countries are found to bandwagon on the disaster-relief actions of major donors (Fink and Radaelli 2011). Greater aid is also provided to former colonies and countries that are politically less aligned (Alesina and Dollar 2000; Fink and Radaelli 2011). Rioux (2006) shows that Canada provides more aid to members of the British Commonwealth or the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), than it does to military alliances.

With respect to the actual composition of post-disaster assistance, the choice of channel – be it bilateral or multi-lateral – and the type of disaster assistance – cash or in-kind – is mainly determined by humanitarian aspects, strategic interests and institutional quality (Raschky and Schwindt 2011). The allocation of aid is also dependent on public awareness of the disaster. International natural disasters of great magnitude reach the agenda primarily through media propagation of news and symbols of the event (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Referred to as the 'CNN-effect', media (particularly television) is arguably able to influence the foreign policy agendas of western governments (Eisensee and Strömberg 2007; Olsen *et al.* 2003; Robinson 2002). Birkland (1997) explains that most bureaucratic and political actors believe that media coverage of dramatic events shape mass and elite opinion. The degree of attention received by a policy problem from political actors shapes successive steps of the policy process (Birkland and Lawrence 2009). The different nature of the natural disasters have also been found to affect intervention.

Natural disasters are generally characterized as sudden-onset – such as earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis – or slow-onset – such as climate change, flooding and drought. The International Red Cross notes that “sudden dramatic disasters like volcanoes or tsunamis are intensely newsworthy whereas long drawn-out crises (difficult to describe, let alone film) are not” (IFRC 2005). The difference in images of human suffering and infrastructure destruction caused by sudden versus slow-onset disasters is said to contribute to variable news coverage, resulting in different levels of attention paid by the public and officials to the problems. Some consider that this amounts to an over-financing of sudden-onset disasters, in contrast to under-financing and repression of slow-onset disasters (Van Wassenhove 2006).

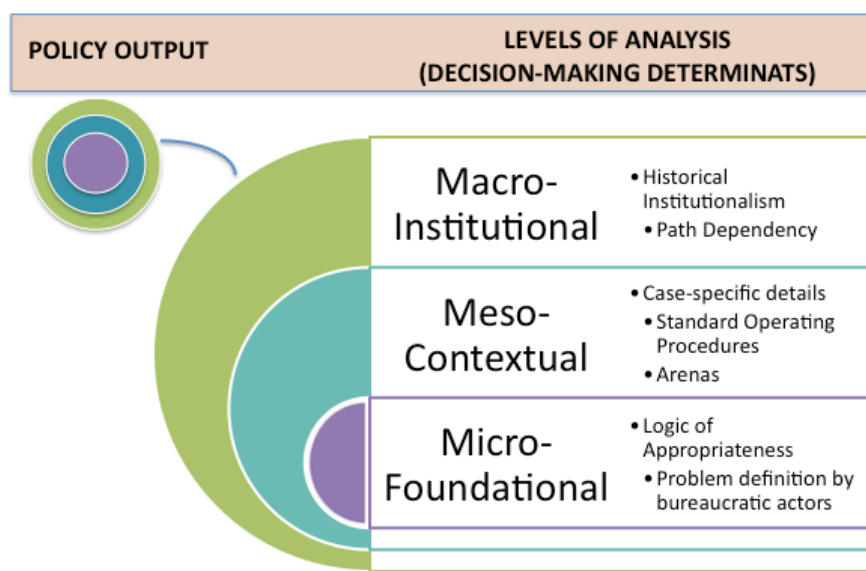
As highlighted in this brief survey of literature, patterns of donor-assistance are primarily understood through broad philosophical perspectives and historical trends, and as a result of contextual factors, including media coverage. In order to organize and augment these explanations, the following section develops a conceptual framework for understanding donor decision-making in humanitarian crises.

### Conceptual framework

While different studies and angles of focus begin to grapple with the complexity of public policy decision-making processes in different ways, the conceptual framework introduced herein favours

“multiple levels of reality” for analytical effectiveness (Hollingsworth 2000: 600). Taking into consideration the role of structure, context and agency in affecting decision making, donor behaviour is understood at three levels respectively: macro-institutional, meso-contextual and micro-foundational (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework and Research Design**



### *Macro-institutional*

In the public administration literature, institutions are acknowledged for guiding behaviour and stabilizing expectations. Historical institutionalism is concerned with explicating the structuring capabilities of the state as a result of past institutional trends and decisions (Hall and Taylor 1996). It recognizes that it is the formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions which are embedded in institutions that both influence and shape the behaviour of different political actors, the decisions taken, and the outcomes that result. When trying to understand donor-behaviour, factors such as donor-recipient relationships can be analyzed through the application of an historical institutional lens. Inherent in historical institutionalism is the understanding of path dependency, where “what happened at an earlier point in time will affect the possible outcomes of a sequence of events occurring at a later point in time” (Sewell 1996: 262-263; see also Pierson 2000). For the given cases, it is important to consider Canada’s historical ties with each country, both geopolitically and amongst the Canadian public, in order to shed light on the macro-level patterns of aid giving.

While historical institutionalism is a method apt for measuring “Big Structures, Large Processes, and [making] Huge Comparisons” (Tilly 1984), it falls short of being able to take into account the role of contextual factors and individual action in affecting decision making (Hall and Taylor

1998). The proposed model argues that embedded within a broader macro-institutional paradigm is a meso-contextual level that takes into account the effect of factors such as domestic political environments and the role of media, on decision making.

### *Meso-contextual*

Problems are matters of interpretation that are viewed through a frame of reference of reality based on the language and symbols held by actors (Dery 2000; Stone 2002). Furthermore, symbols attached to policy problems provoke different responses, causing various interested parties to perceive the problem differently, affecting how they explain, articulate and even quantify their significance (Rochefort and Cobb 1994). The collective definition of focusing events is understood by considering the ‘arenas’ where social problem definition evolves (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). These are the ‘environments’ where social problems compete for attention and grow; their success is measured by the amount of attention devoted to them. Arenas include the executive and legislative branches of government, the news media (television, magazines, newspapers and radio), political campaign organizations, social action groups, the public arena, and direct mail solicitations, amongst others. In addition to case-specific details and the effects of arenas in affecting the understanding of the disaster scenarios, the impact of agency on decision making cannot be neglected.

Olsen (2007) highlights the challenge of providing “better understanding of the processes that translate institutionalized rules into political action and consequences, and of the processes that translate human action into rules and institutions” Olsen 2007: 4). While political actors may face considerable stability at the macro level, they do have some degree of autonomy at the meso and micro levels. Analysis at this level lends deeper insight into systemic decision making through narrative process tracing, a methodology that seeks to map how initial conditions were translated into outcomes (see George and Bennet 2005). It requires a thorough understanding of the procedures that actors adhere to administratively, most often articulated in formal policy frameworks or operating procedures.

Simply focusing on macro and meso-level determinants of decision making only provides a truncated understanding of decision-making determinants. In order to further explicate the role of political agency in shaping policy outcomes, the proposed model applies the logic of appropriateness framework at the micro-level.

### *Micro-foundational*

In their theory of logic of appropriateness, March and Olsen (1989, 2004) highlight that human action is governed by institutional rules for what is proper behaviour for oneself at any given time. The way in which a person acts is based on what they perceive to be the most suitable action in a specific circumstance, highlighting the importance of situational recognition, identity, and rules and norms in shaping human behaviour. Acting appropriately is to proceed according to the “institutionalized practices of a collectivity, based on mutual, and often tacit, understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good” (March and Olsen 2004: 4). Rules are followed because they are perceived to be adequate for the task at hand and to have normative validity (Goldmann 2005; Olsen 2008).

In the logic of appropriateness framework, when faced with a situation, a person poses the following question to her or himself: What kind of a situation is this? What kind of a person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this (March and Olsen 2004; Olsen 2007, 2008)? This kind of questioning inevitably bears on the way actors perceive a problem that they are faced with, thereby influencing their actions moving forward. The following section details the cases on which this multi-level conceptual framework will be applied.

## The cases

On January 12, 2010 an earthquake of magnitude 7.0 on the Richter scale hit Port au Prince, Haiti, causing an estimated death toll of 220,000 people, displacing around 1.5 million, and resulting in extensive infrastructure damage to the country (Development Assistant Committee 2010). Canada immediately launched a large-scale disaster-relief response effort, which saw interdepartmental collaboration across government, and included financial aid disbursements of over CDN\$ 400 million; provision of relief supplies; deployment of experts; set-up of a fund to match donations by the Canadian public;<sup>3</sup> application of special immigration and adoption measures; as well as the use of a variety of military assets (DFAIT 2012). The military component, Operation Hestia, resulted in 2050 Canadian Forces (CF) personnel on Haitian soil. Seven months later, Canada responded to the devastating flash floods that hit southwest Pakistan.

Following its onset on July 21, 2010, the massive flooding which struck Pakistan resulted in the death of approximately 1,500 people, more than 20 million people displaced, and caused detrimental economic effects to the country (UN Dispatch 2010). Canada responded with approximately CDN\$ 70 million in aid, which included the matching of donations by members of the Canadian public – a policy tool reserved for catastrophic natural disasters (Canadian International Development Agency 2010a). Although the flooding in Pakistan killed fewer people than the earthquake, the extent of damage based on the number of people displaced, the risk of infectious disease from contaminated water, and the basic infrastructure damage far exceeded the devastation caused by Haiti’s quake. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted the number of people affected as being greater than “the entire population hit by the Indian Ocean tsunami, the Kashmir earthquake, Cyclone Nargis and the earthquake in Haiti – combined” (UN 2010).

Canada has a structured approach to guide the needs assessment and implementation of Canada’s disaster-relief policy (Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade 2011). When a country faces a catastrophic natural disaster and invites international assistance, Canada’s Stabilization and Relief Task Force (START), a branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT),<sup>4</sup> commences the Interdepartmental Taskforce on Natural Disasters Aboard (taskforce) within hours of the disaster. Through a whole-of-government approach, DFAIT works hand-in-hand with representatives from the Canadian International Development

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<sup>3</sup> First introduced during the involvement in the 2004 Indian Ocean basin earthquake/tsunami, Canada has established a matching fund mechanism whereby it commits to matching, dollar-for-dollar, the donations that the Canadian public makes to eligible charities and international organizations participating in international natural disaster-relief efforts.

<sup>4</sup> In March 2013, the Government of Canada announced that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) would be folded into the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), renaming the organizations as the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD; Parliament of Canada 2013). There are five ministers working out of this department, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Cooperation. Both ministers participate directly in decision making related to Canada’s humanitarian relief efforts. This merger minimally affects Canada’s framework for response to natural disasters abroad, except that some bureaucratic actors may be required to engage in dual reporting to ministers. As such, the original titles of the agencies are used throughout this paper.

Agency (CIDA) and the Department of National Defence (DND), amongst others, to develop and execute Canada's disaster-relief strategy. The taskforce is designed to ensure that Canada's response is swift, efficient and well-coordinated.

The standard operating procedures (SOPs), of which DFAIT is custodian, form the foundational reference for responding to international natural disasters. Although it is a thin manual, the SOPs have proven to be extremely powerful for facilitating Canada's disaster-relief interventions through structural and ideational coherence, and joint decision making (Mamuji 2012). The SOPs "are designed to streamline standard actions in response to a major crisis and to anticipate turn over in staff amongst the various stakeholder units and organizations" (DFAIT 2005: 59). Amongst others, the SOPs include pre-assigned individuals required to carry out specific tasks, reporting templates, authority structures, and step-by-step processes to be undertaken. The whole-of-government approach has been identified for its ability "to help match resources to needs, and to ensure a transparent process ... based on a clearer definition of response thresholds and firmer reliance on evidence of the severity of a crisis" (DAC 2007).

In this approach for responding to natural disasters abroad, referred to as the "whole-of-government framework" herein, there is a general chronological sequence to how information is to be processed during disaster-relief efforts. A distinction is made between the role of bureaucratic actors and political actors. At disaster onset, bureaucratic actors that make up the interdepartmental taskforce that processes accounts of developments in the affected region, consults with bilateral actors, and conducts needs-assessment analyses. With this information, they develop a list of recommendations for what Canada's disaster-relief intervention may look like. These recommendations are then provided to political actors, i.e., Cabinet, for discussion and final approval.

In order to comply with principles of good humanitarian donorship, donor countries in humanitarian operations are required to allocate resources on the basis of, and in proportion to, needs. They are also supposed to respond to humanitarian crises in ways that are fair, impartial and independent (see Hilhorst 2005; Walkers 2005). While welcome, Canada's response to the Pakistan floods has been argued to fall far short of what may reasonably be expected from a donor that responds on the basis of needs given the magnitude of the disaster, especially when compared to its response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake (see for instance *Guardian* 2010; The Canadian Journalism Project 2010; *The Star* 2010). This paper applies the developed conceptual framework to answer "who (and what) really determines the scope and magnitude of international disaster-relief interventions?"

### Macro-institutional findings

Haiti is the highest recipient of Canada's official development assistance (ODA) – flows of official financing contributed by OECD member countries with the main objective of promoting the economic development and welfare of developing countries (CIDA 2011). Canada and Haiti share a rich history of diplomatic relations, and Canada has spearheaded a myriad of development, security and political operations in the country. Canada's deep engagement in Haiti falls within Canada's priorities for the Americas and focuses on prosperity, security and democratic governance. Similarly, Canada has provided socio-economic development assistance to Pakistan for more than forty years (GOC 2008). CIDA programming in Pakistan has been focused on education, healthcare, gender equality and governance. With approximately CDN\$ 140 million, Pakistan was the sixth highest recipient of Canadian international assistance in 2009-2010 from all channels (CIDA 2011). However, Canada-Pakistan relations are primarily in the area of trade and investment, as well as regional security and counter-terrorism.



In 2001, there were approximately 82,000 Canadians of Haitian origin, and it is estimated that this number has risen to 100,000, with a strong concentration in Quebec (Statistics Canada 2007). Canada's former Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, is also of Haitian origin and was in office at the time of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. The concentration of Canadian-Haitians in Quebec contributed to strong provincial support for intervention, resulting in the Quebec government donating CDN\$ 3 million for relief efforts from its own funds (CBC News 2010). In contrast, with more than 300,000 Canadian-Pakistanis across the country, Pakistan is among Canada's top five sources of immigrants, but there is no strong concentration in any one particular region of Canada (GOC 2008).

While differences in Canada's relationship with Haiti and Pakistan, both geopolitically and considering their respective diaspora communities, can provide useful information to help explain Canada's variable disaster-relief in either country in 2010, a macro-institutional perspective alone provides a truncated understanding of donor decision-making. This is particularly evident when considering those cases that Canada's Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) has been deployed overtime. DART is Canada's rapidly deployable stabilization tool, able to provide specific medical, water purification, engineering, logistical and security services soon after the onset of a disaster (DND 2012).

The deployment of DART corresponds to Canada's largest disaster-relief interventions (Mamuji 2012). Path dependent factors, however, cannot explain why the magnitude of Canada's aid is not always comparable when Canada responds to natural disasters in Haiti and Pakistan. There have been cases in the past where DART has not been deployed when natural disasters have hit Haiti, and where DART has been deployed to Pakistan in response to natural disasters.

In 2008, four separate hurricanes: Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike, led to the deaths of more than 800 people in Haiti, destroyed about 60 percent of the country's harvest, rendered cities desolate and uninhabitable, and impacted the lives and livelihoods of up to 800,000 people, all within the span of 30 days (CIDA 2008; *The Telegraph* 2010). That year, Canada responded by contributing 15.8 percent of all humanitarian aid from OECD-DAC donors to Haiti, ranking it amongst the highest donors, second only to the United States. Canada did not send DART, however, despite media reports and speculation that it would (CBC News 2008), and despite Canada having deployed DART to Honduras in response to Hurricane Mitch in 1998. And, on October 8, 2005, northern Pakistan was hit with a catastrophic earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale (The World Bank 2013). The official death toll according to the government of Pakistan was 75,000. Canada responded quickly with approximately CDN\$ 130 million for earthquake relief and reconstruction efforts, contributing 10.4 percent of all humanitarian aid from DAC donors to Pakistan that year. In response to that natural disaster, it was decided that Canada's disaster-relief should include the deployment of the DART (DND 2012).

These counter-examples indicate that while historical institutionalism may provide important background information, it alone is not sufficient to explain donor decision-making in response to humanitarian crises. The following section assesses meso-contextual determinants of decision-making.

### **Meso-contextual findings**

At the meso-contextual level, differences in relief aid are attributed to case-specific details, including domestic politics, the nature of the natural disasters, media and administrative processes followed. The 2010 Haiti earthquake resulted in the collapse of the Haitian Parliament and rendered the political arm in Haiti's government defenseless. The Haitian government put out a

request for international assistance immediately. In Pakistan, however, immediate disaster-relief efforts were coordinated by Pakistan authorities through the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). Reports of the NDMA requesting United Nations (UN) and international assistance only appeared in situation reports (SitReps)<sup>5</sup> in Ottawa as of August 1, 2010. It was at this time that the Government of Canada, through CIDA, announced a contribution of CDN\$ 2 million as an initial response to the floods in Pakistan. Not only is it more expensive for Canada to coordinate relief efforts in Pakistan (which is not “in our backyard” as one respondent explained about Haiti), but further, Canada did not have the same freedom in its provision of disaster-relief in Pakistan as it did for Haiti.

When DART was sent to Haiti, each Canadian Forces (CF) official was fully armed. An email dated August 20, 2010 from a representative in the Pakistani High Commission to a DFAIT official, however, explains that while “Pakistan would welcome in principle, a Canadian DART to participate in relief activities ... it is advised that the DART may avoid taking arms and ammunition with it. The Government of Pakistan would be responsible for the safety and security of DART personnel during their stay in Pakistan.” Furthermore, some respondents explained that there was speculation that authorities in Pakistan were controlling which areas would receive urgent medical care, raising concerns that those victims with the most acute needs were unable to be reached. These contextual factors are likely to have impacted Canada’s relief efforts.

Furthermore, unlike the cooperation offered by the Haitian government, frustration with the Pakistan government’s treatment of the disaster was also expressed. An August 10, 2010 SitRep from the Canadian High Commission in Islamabad states that “President Zardari returned home today from his official visits to a hostile reception. *Apparently not in a hurry*, Zardari met with President Assad during a ‘technical stop-over’ on his return Monday” (emphasis added). The lack of urgency reflected poorly on Pakistan authorities, both domestically and internationally. Whereas 38 percent of Canadians believed that donations to Haiti would be used to help people, only 28 percent believed the same for the contributions to Pakistan (Angus Reid 2010). Differences in the actual nature of the disasters are also telling.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Situational reports (SitReps) outline all important information regarding the evolving situation in the disaster affected country. These include updated assessments of the needs, and steps taken by both the host government and international actors in response to the event. The taskforce receives SitReps from the mission in the disaster-affected region, and they are also distributed by START across relevant government departments.

<sup>6</sup> Contextual differences in Canada during both disasters are also relevant. As Governor General during the earthquake in Haiti, Michaëlle Jean delivered numerous emotional appeals for assistance and support to the people of Haiti. Furthermore, at the end of 2009, the Canadian Prime Minister’s decision to close the House of Commons resulted in a turbulent internal political situation in Canada. It was also at this time that the Government of Canada was dealing with the unveiling of documents confirming the torture of Afghan prisoners of war, resulting in weakening of public support for Canadian involvement in Afghanistan, and decreasing approval ratings of the party in power (Mason 2011). Inevitably, Canada’s rapid response to the catastrophic earthquake shifted news media coverage away from domestic affairs to covering the disaster-relief efforts, an ideal opportunity to showcase Canada’s leadership globally and perhaps to “regain” the “trust” of the Canadian public. The Government of Canada did not face similar pressures during the

Given that the earthquake was a sudden-onset natural disaster, there was a clear start-time for the Canadian disaster-relief system to kick into gear. In fact, mobilization of the whole-of-government community involved in Canada's natural disaster responses occurred only minutes after authorities received news of the Haiti earthquake (Mamuji 2012). With flooding, however, it is harder to pinpoint when the situation moves from being bad to serious. One CIDA respondent explained about the flooding in Pakistan:

*... It didn't have a particular moment in which it happened ... it's just like this endless, incredibly peaceful looking thing – at least in Punjab and Sindh. It didn't look like anything bad. It just looked like water as far as you could see as opposed to broken up buildings and all that kind of stuff. It was just very unusual.*

The location of both disasters was also different. Whereas in Haiti the earthquake hit the capital, Port Au Prince, in Pakistan, “no one would have been able to tell that there was a catastrophe in the country from the capital, although this is where the coordination was occurring”, explained a DFAIT respondent. These differences contribute to explanations for why there was a slower response to the Pakistan natural disaster. Other case-specific factors affecting decision making explored at the meso-contextual level included the actions of political actors.

Hackman (2009) shows that political leaders have an important communication role in decisive intervention outcomes through public engagement. Once Cabinet had made it apparent that they would engage in a robust response to the flooding in Pakistan, they pushed for extra media coverage to ensure that their efforts were well publicized (Mamuji 2012).

Following the onset of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the Canadian Prime Minister, the Governor General and relevant ministers engaged in an active communications strategy to keep the public abreast of Canada's disaster-relief response. Within three days of the earthquake, almost 20 press conferences and public statements were made. Furthermore, on January 14, 2010, the Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the Haitian community in Montreal – one of several meetings that involved Cabinet members and senior officials from the whole-of government engaging with the Haitian diaspora. This level of engagement with the Canadian public did not follow the Pakistan response. The Prime Minister did not put out an independent statement with respect to the escalating situation there. Rather, on August 13, 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued a statement to mark the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Pakistan's independence, in which he extended sympathies to Pakistani-Canadians whose relatives or friends had been affected by the flooding (Harper 2010).

The Prime Minister also made a direct effort in ensuring that earthquake relief efforts would be covered extensively in Canadian media lines. According to data received through the *Access to Information Act*, as of January 25, 2010, only thirteen days after the earthquake, 45 Canadian

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Pakistan floods. The floods took place during the summer when the House of Commons was not in session. Also different is the general perceptions of both countries amongst members of the Canadian public (see The Canadian Journalism Project 2010).

journalists were already on the ground in Haiti, housed in the compound of the Canadian Embassy. Information received from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) shows that television coverage across Canada included 660 items for Haiti in the one month following the earthquake, amounting to over 70 hours of airtime. This was also the time period in which the Haiti Matching Fund was opened. Contrarily, only 128 items were aired on CBC TV holdings across Canada on the Pakistan floods between July 21 and October 3, which are the dates from disaster onset to the end of the Pakistan Matching Fund period. Total airtime for the Pakistan floods were 4 hours and 48 minutes.

Lessons-learned reporting and respondents have both raised issues with the fact that media representatives were sent to Haiti on military flights at a critical time (see Mamuji 2012). Although journalists are generally free to report at their own will, a recent study on the coverage of the earthquake indicated that on average the CBC's online coverage printed nine separate articles on Haiti per day, with reports of Canada's "gift" of foreign aid overshadowing information about the earthquake's damage and suffering (Mason 2010). Media coverage on the Pakistani floods, however, raised speculation that relief contributions could be used by fundamentalist groups, leading to further perceptions of destabilization and de-legitimization of the Pakistani government (Brookings Institute 2010). One CIDA representative explained:

*... I don't think the media was being fair either. I don't think they were fairly characterizing Pakistanis who were affected from that crisis. I mean they were ... you would rarely see an article that didn't also mention the Taliban or Al-Qaeda.*

Whether through the amount of press releases, or through the decision to send journalists to Haiti, the decision on the part of Cabinet to robustly communicate the Canadian response occurred in parallel with a decision to provide increased military assets in Haiti. Similarly, the direct role of Cabinet in shaping Canada's disaster-relief configuration is also evident when considering its treatment of the matching fund in either relief operation.

On January 14, two days after the earthquake in Haiti, the Minister for International Corporation, Bev Oda, announced the creation of the Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund, while at the same time announcing that charitable donation for relief-efforts in Haiti between January 12 and February 12 would be doubled by the government. While an initial cap of CDN\$ 50 million was set, this was soon removed based on the discretion of the Government of Canada. CDN\$ 220 million was raised by the public during this time (DFAIT 2012).

While a matching fund was established for Pakistan, external pressure affected Cabinet's treatment of the tool. On August 22, 2010, almost a month into the onset of the flooding, the government announced it had established the Pakistan Floods Relief Fund, for the period between August 2 and September 12 (CIDA 2010a). Having only been announced on August 22, the fund would be applied retroactively by almost twenty days. Contributions from the public were slow. On August 30, 2010, Frank Valeriotte, a member of Parliament of the Liberal Party, wrote to the Minister of International Corporation providing explanations for the slower public reaction: this "may also include (and I believe it does) that fact that our government did not present the more robust response to incentivize contributions it demonstrated with Haitian relief," he explained (Valeriotte 2010). A request was put forth for an extension of the matching fund; an extension was granted to October 3 (CIDA 2010b).

Cabinet treatment of media and the matching fund mechanism reiterates the importance of political actors in shaping the configuration of disaster-relief packages. In addition to this, especially in response to the earthquake in Haiti, political actors appear to have had a role in diverting processes away from those outlined in the Framework.

The earthquake in Haiti struck at around 16:45 on January 12, 2010. Reflective of the immediacy of the need, START announced its first taskforce meeting three hours later, bringing together over seventy people from across government. The first SitRep following the earthquake was circulated on Wednesday, January 13, at 01:41 a.m., less than nine hours following disaster onset. Within twelve hours of the earthquake, the Interdepartmental Strategic Support Team (ISST)<sup>7</sup> and DND reconnaissance team were en route to Haiti.

Internal memos retrieved through the *Access to Information Act* indicate that DART received a warning that it may be deployed by 18:00 on the same day that the earthquake hit. “Ottawa doesn’t react that fast without someone giving direction” explained a representative on the ISST. A DND respondent explained:

*[w]hen my boss sent me an email that was the first thing that was out of the ordinary – and that was about 10 after 5:00 [almost 25 minutes after the onset of the earthquake]. All his email said was ‘Haiti earthquake’ which means to me that something was up. About just over an hour later I got an email from my higher headquarters saying, ‘be prepared to go’.*

With respect to this higher-level engagement, the After-Action Report on Canada’s response in Haiti indicates:

*What is not clear is the extent to which some parts of the Canadian government were already mobilizing prior to the receipt of the ISST report and recommendations, and the agreement by ministers. While it is inevitable that some departments will have a more forward-learning planning stance, this should not be allowed to dictate the shape of the Canadian response.*

Echoing this concern, it is not unlikely that the Cabinet determined the magnitude of Canada’s intervention prior to receiving complete taskforce recommendations. This calls into question whether Canada provided a “supply-driven” versus a “needs-based” response.

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<sup>7</sup> The Interdepartmental Strategic Support Team (ISST) is Canada’s interdepartmental reconnaissance and assessment capability. Made up of a small team of a minimum of four members, it must include one representative from DFAIT and CIDA each, and two CF personnel. Through collaboration with the host government, the local embassy, and international humanitarian actors present on the ground, the ISST is the first unit to provide relief recommendations for the taskforce to consider (DFAIT 2011). According to accepted procedures, the ISST must be deployed and provide a positive recommendation prior to Canadian military assets being used for disaster-relief efforts in the affected region.

Contrarily, the speed of Canada's response to the natural disaster in Pakistan was much slower. Following the July 21, 2010 onset, Ottawa issued its first SitRep on the Pakistan floods on July 30. The taskforce arranged for its first meeting on August 9, almost twenty days following the onset of flooding. Prior to the ISST being launched to Pakistan, an email from the mission in Islamabad to a member of the ISST in Ottawa, dated August 10, states, "I sense a great reluctance from DND to get involved in this. They did not extend any support to this mission, including information and frankly, I do not find this acceptable." In fact, the decision to send the ISST to Pakistan seems to have been triggered as a result of external pressure rather than as a result of needs on the ground.

On August 11, 2010, media reports claimed the Pakistan Consul General for Toronto, Sahebzada Khan, had requested Canada to send DART (Godfrey 2010). On August 18, DFAIT staff met with the Pakistan High Commission in Ottawa to discuss response options based on a request for information from them. The High Commissioner agreed to feed this information back to Pakistan Headquarters and relay any additional information regarding a potential ask for the deployment of DART back to taskforce members. Notes from the 12<sup>th</sup> taskforce meeting, held on August 26, state that media reports were reporting that the Pakistan High Commission indicated a formal request for the DART would be coming (CBC News 2010b). According to a senior member of DFAIT, it was these media reports that triggered the deployment of the ISST, which eventually arrived in Pakistan on August 29. One respondent explained:

*I think there might have been some pressure to do something at the government level. I was just as surprised as everyone else that okay there has been flooding in Pakistan for a couple of weeks now, and we are not doing anything. 'Okay it's too late to send us', and then all of a sudden, I was on leave actually, and I got recalled from leave to deploy on the [ISST].*

Given that this decision did not come from taskforce members, a CIDA representative explained, "by the time we deployed it was a bit late and really, I would argue, CIDA, for our own programming, we didn't need to send an ISST on the ground."

Further highlighting the direct effect of political actors in shaping disaster-relief interventions is the fact that decisions appear to be taken through informal caucuses involving the Prime Minister and relevant ministers. Due to the immediacy of focusing events, rather than a full Memorandum to Cabinet process, if "there is a need beyond the need in the coffers," as one respondent from the Privy Council Office (PCO) explained, the minister will simply write directly to the Prime Minister. This was the process followed in order to launch the matching fund in both the cases of Haiti and Pakistan, as well as when it was decided that military assets should be deployed to Haiti.

Additional explanations into determinants of the scope and magnitude of international disaster-relief interventions are also obtained through analysis at the micro-foundational level. The following section applies the logic of appropriateness to actors involved in Canada's disaster-relief process.

### Micro-institutional findings

In Canada's disaster-relief intervention process, bureaucratic actors can be considered to be the prime gatekeepers to David Easton's (1957) cybernetic model of decision making,<sup>8</sup> especially given their role of processing information from the disaster-affected region and providing recommendations for Canadian intervention to Cabinet. Applying the logic of appropriateness framework to bureaucratic actors at the micro-foundational level provides a unique perspective into the role of agency in affecting the configuration of disaster-relief intervention.

In their theory of logic of appropriateness, March and Olsen (1989, 2004) highlight that human action is governed by institutional rules for what is proper behaviour for oneself at any given time. An individual's awareness of themselves contributes to the production of their lived experiences in the policy process. Actors are believed to behave in accordance with appropriate procedures ingrained in culture and through learned routine. When faced with a situation, the logic of appropriateness model explains that actions are based on similarity and congruence to situations that the actor may have faced in the past, and the suitability of their actions based on this (March and Olsen 2004; Olsen 2007, 2008). Micro-foundational analysis in this paper focuses on how bureaucratic actors seek to fulfill the obligations and duties encapsulated in all three areas: rules and norms, situational recognition and identity, as they act within the whole-of-government framework.

According to some interviewees, it was apparent very early on that the Government of Canada aimed to provide a robust response in Haiti. For members involved as part of the taskforce, most respondents implied that they "just knew" that Canada would be forward moving for this disaster. One DFAIT respondent explains:

*... my crude way of saying it was like the political level gave us carte blanche – sort of said go forth, and respond, and then we came up with okay this is how we think we should respond ... It was very much sort of – kind of like here is your blank check; we will pay for it when you get back, just go.*

Another respondent explains: "there was the expectation that there would be a robust Canadian engagement drawing on all of our tools." In fact, a DND presentation indicates that the Chief of Defence Staff of the Canadian Forces, second in command to the Governor-General, gave the order to "Go fast, Go Big" when it came to responding to the earthquake in Haiti (DND 2010).

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<sup>8</sup>One of the first decision-making models in public administration literature is David Easton's (1957) cybernetic model of decision making. According to Easton (1957), policies are outputs that emerge from a 'black box' which represents decision-making processes in government. Since the black box is left obscure, the model relays the importance of inputs to explain the nature of policy. Policy actors and institutions act as 'gatekeepers' that filter demands into a tightly sealed political black box. While the model has been criticized for its overly rationalistic conception of the policy process, it serves as a good heuristic tool in highlighting the important role that bureaucratic actors play in the policy process, particularly in the whole-of-government framework.

Contrarily, with respect to the mission in Pakistan, one DND representative explained:

*Pakistan was in slow motion, and Pakistan was – it was almost like the government did not want us to go, and we ended up going to do the recce [reconnaissance] because there was pressure for us to do – for the government – to do something.*

In addition, the fact that the ISST was deployed with the DART reconnaissance team for the Haiti response while this was not the case for the intervention in Pakistan, also raised speculation within the whole-of-government community about the scope of Canada's disaster-relief intervention. One DND respondent described, "when the decision was made to send the ISST only, I started to question, why are we sending ISST only? I knew we wouldn't be going in." From a situational recognition perspective, it is likely that bureaucratic actors sensed the reluctance of political actors in providing a military response even before the needs-based assessment was complete.

In fact, while three out of five members of the ISST were the same in both disasters, the nature of their reports appear different. Reports coming out of the Haiti response were filled with recommendations of what it is that Canada should do. One respondent explained, "in reality the report that was submitted was rubberstamping a decision that had already been made." On the other hand, reports coming out of Pakistan were more focused on what other like-minded nations were doing, and were more cautious on the tools that Canada could offer. The focus is primarily on what Canada could not do rather than could do. The argument put forth is that the perception of Cabinet's wavering interest in responding to the flooding in Pakistan could have resulted in a smaller range of intervention alternatives being suggested by the ISST. While there is no way to measure this barring thorough psychological analysis, an understanding into how bureaucrats identify themselves *vis à vis* their political masters is telling.

The SOPs indicate that "the government's response to a disaster should be in keeping with the principles of good humanitarian donorship (MHD)", requiring that humanitarian responses be needs-based, fair and impartial. In light of this, respondents explained that certain procedures have been put into place in order to make Canada's model for disaster-relief as objective as possible. Members of the ISST explained that they use a calibration table that proposes possible recommendations depending on the nature of the disaster and the extent of damage caused, limiting subjectivity in their suggestions. While not an exact science, the calibration table is said to "take out a lot of guess work" when making recommendations, as explained by a member of the ISST. Similarly, the ISST and taskforce members assess Canada's global burden share based on UN and consolidated flash appeals when developing initial recommendations. There is an attempt to ensure that Canada's contribution remains within a pre-identified and agreed range. While these measures are in place to try and manage the Canadian response in such a way that it is as objective as possible, the logic of appropriateness explains that an individual poses the following question to themselves, "what kind of a person am I?" (March and Olsen 2004; Olsen 2007, 2008). In answering this question, actions are based on an internalized acceptance of obligations and duties, shedding light on the subjectivity inherent in the policy process.

The SOPs do not discuss the relationship between the taskforce and Cabinet. However, respondents perceive a clear divide between what it is that members on the interdepartmental taskforce do, and what the role of Cabinet is. When asked about their role, the 'gatekeepers' to Canada's disaster-relief decisions-making understand their role as: "informing"; "reporting";



“information sharing”; “organizing”; “coordinating”; “executing”; and “programming”, amongst others. They describe day-to-day tasks such as “reviewing proposals”, “answering technical questions” and “attending meetings”. While these bureaucratic actors understand themselves to be the doers offering “technical” expertise, there is a general sense amongst respondents that they are inconsequential when it comes to the final decision-making processes. One CIDA representative involved in Pakistan disaster-relief efforts explained “at the end of the day, I’m not elected to do anything. That’s kind of their [Cabinet’s] job.” What happens “up there” is not always clear. When asked about how Cabinet decisions are taken, one respondent from PCO explained: “How do I say this? You are barking up the wrong tree. There isn’t much in terms of processes that comes through the centre for disaster-relief nowadays ... you are asking about things that don’t exist.”

Findings at the micro-foundational level shed light on how bureaucratic actors understand problem definition. The way in which bureaucratic actors understand ‘needs’ during a given disaster-relief effort is larger than simply through a technical lens. Instead, their conception of needs is also affected by their understanding of Cabinet’s disposition to assist.

## Conclusion

When the Canadian response to the 2010 flooding in Pakistan seemed slow and small as compared to the magnitude of the needs in flood-affected areas, speculation was raised as to why this was the case. It was hard not to make comparisons to Canada’s quick and robust response to the earthquake in Haiti that had struck only seven months earlier. To explain the variable response, commentators attributed Canada’s behaviour to external factors linked to differences in the nature of the disasters, in Canada’s relationship with both countries, and in the domestic situations in the affected countries. Turning an eye inwards, this paper applied a public administration lens to the research question. The multi-level conceptual framework presented has argued that in order to understand donor decision-making, all of macro-institutional, meso-contextual and micro-foundational decision-making determinants must be considered.

Despite Canada’s existing policy framework for response to natural disasters, and the articulated imperative to respond based on the needs on the ground, decisions are highly dependent on the actions of political actors. While there is a formal policy framework in place for response to natural disasters, certain decisions are taken without adherence to stipulated guidelines. Furthermore, bureaucrats are influenced by their expectations of the government in power, as well as how they view their own role *vis à vis* Cabinet. Conversations with bureaucratic actors involved in Canada’s responses to the two most catastrophic natural disasters of 2010 have thus revealed how political actors are able to exert influence, both directly and indirectly, on final disaster-relief interventions.

When asked about the recommendation for the use of military assets in Canada’s response to the earthquake in Haiti, one CIDA representative shared:

*There was a decision made to go over on what we thought was ... what we said was, ‘we certainly see the need for the DART, and then possibly other military assets being used’. But then there were decisions made to send additional military assets without our direct input type of thing.*

Similarly, commenting on the recommendation made to not send DART to Pakistan, one member of the ISST said, “in my opinion the recommendation that I made for Pakistan is different than it

would have been if I had made it two or three weeks earlier, because by the time we deployed, the Pakistan government had kind of sorted itself out.” A respondent from the Department of Finance implied that financial strain, especially given that the flooding came after the Haiti earthquake, did not contribute to the smaller response package provided to Pakistan: “there was a lot of funding given for the Haiti crisis, but what I can say is that it wasn’t – I mean there was a strain, but I don’t think that the strain in financial systems put in place was a major contributor to what we did in Pakistan.” In either of the cases, alternative courses of action were possible.

*Aaida Mamuji is a doctoral candidate in Public Administration at the University of Ottawa. Her research interests include foreign aid, humanitarian assistance, and interdepartmental collaboration. Ms. Mamuji was awarded the 2013-2014 Cadieux-Léger Fellowship award by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Canada. Her previous work has been published in the Canadian Foreign Policy Journal.*

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