

51 Lessons and Recommendations from Natural Disaster Evaluations

**A review of the views of ALNAP members on lessons
identified by twelve institutions**

**Based on a table prepared by the Independent
Evaluation Group of the World Bank**

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The 51 lessons

Summary

Humanitarian Evaluators were surveyed to find their agreement with lessons from a World Bank study of evaluations of natural disasters by 12 different institutions of which most were International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as development banks. The survey found that the respondents broadly supported the 51 lessons identified by the World Bank study (the ratio between responses supporting lessons to contradicting lessons was 9:1).

Support was weakest for lessons that specifically referred to IFI issues such as loan policy or where the meaning of the lesson was not very clear. Another area of weak support was lessons in controversial areas such as temporary shelter. However even the weakest supported lesson was supported by twice as many respondents as contradicted it.

Half of the top ten lessons (those attracting the largest numbers of respondents rating the lessons as very strongly supported by their experience) referred to aspects of disaster risk reduction.

Lesson No.		% of respondents rating lesson as very strongly supported
The top ten lessons in terms of being rated as very strongly supported		
16	Special attention should be given to reducing long-term vulnerability in those countries at highest risk	57
07	Prevention and mitigation deserve a higher priority than in the past	55
06	Customize response (tailor response to a country's specific needs)	50
43	(Rather than exclude recurrent events) emergency projects should recognize the likely recurrence of disaster and give more attention to identifying vulnerability and mitigating their effects	49
02	Donor coordination is especially critical to disaster relief and recovery because of the dynamic nature of the situation and/or because disasters typically attract the involvement of numerous donors	46
26	A pool of dedicated emergency funding needs to be available (nationally and internationally)	46
46	Hospitals not only need to be sited and built so that they are disaster resilient, but they also need to be assured of an uninterrupted power supply, a network of secure access routes, and secure provision of safe water and sanitation	46
03	Even in the difficult circumstances of a disaster response, beneficiary participation during the design and implementation stages is essential to success	45
01	The organization's long-term engagement with client countries needs to ensure continued focus on permanent vulnerability reduction	42
27	Reconstruction and vulnerability reduction take more time than allotted by the organization's policy	40

Given the generally broad support for the 51 lessons, it is suggested that where lessons have been contradicted by respondents' experience, that this is due to specific contexts, raising the general point that all such generic lessons need to be interpreted in the particular context of any disaster.

Introduction

In November 2006 the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group, with the collaboration of the Office of Evaluation and Oversight of the Inter-American Development Bank sponsored a Conference on taking disaster risk management lessons from evaluation. This took the form of a one day conference followed by a one day roundtable for evaluators.

During the conference the World Bank's IEG presented a table showing 51 lessons drawn from evaluations of Natural Disasters from 14 different institutions. This list was finally published in 2008, and is presented in an appendix. Given that the list was drawn mainly from the experience of international financial institutions it was decided to survey evaluators of humanitarian action about how well the lessons were reflected in their experience.

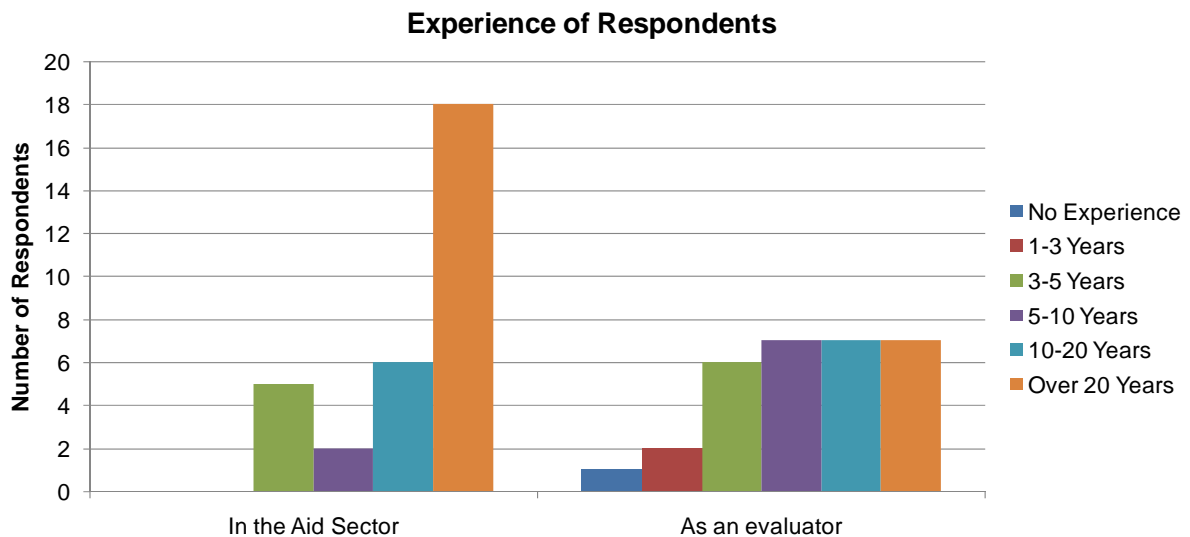
The 51 questions were sorted into three sets of 17 with the first group consisting of lesson 1, 4, 7, and so on to 49; the second group consisting of lessons 2, 5, 8 and so on to 50; and the third group consisting of lessons 3, 6, 9 and so on to 51. Each group of 17 lessons was then presented as an individual page in an on-line survey, with the question order randomly sorted in a different order for each user.

It should be noted that as the respondents to the survey were self selected rather than sampled, that the results are not necessarily indicative of the general views of humanitarian evaluators.

Responses

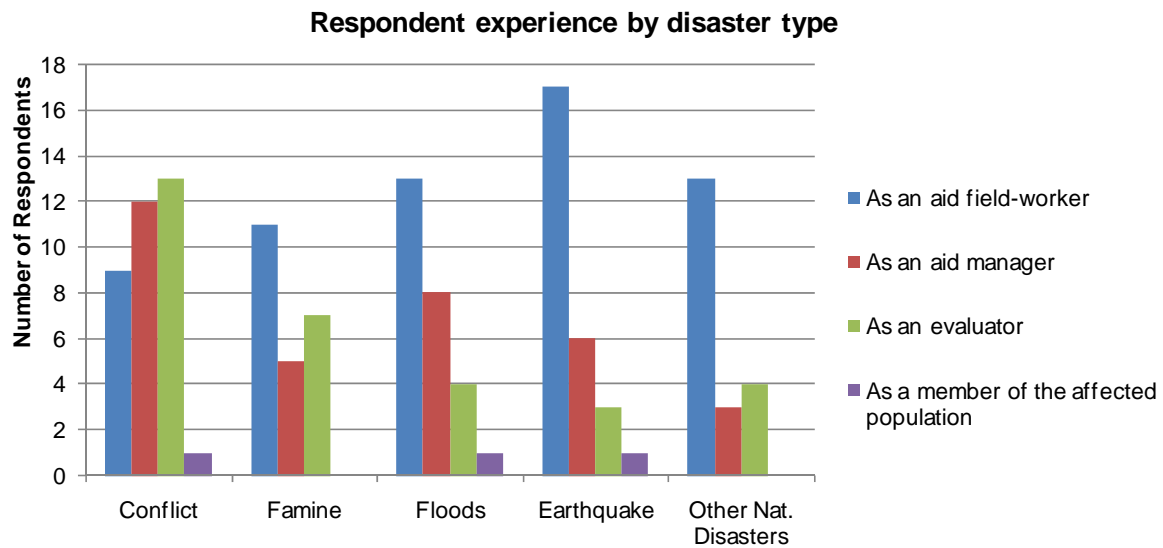
The survey was accessed by 51 people, but only of these answered no questions, leaving a total of 50 respondents. OF those respondents indicating their gender 42.5% were female.

The respondents were very experienced with 18 reporting more than 20 years experience in the aid sector.



Graphical analysis of scatter-plots and a number of statistical tests showed no statistically significant correlation between experience and the response to different questions. This is not surprising given the relatively small number of respondents.

Respondents also reported a broad range of disaster types.



The responses are presented below, grouped by the level of disagreement with the lessons.

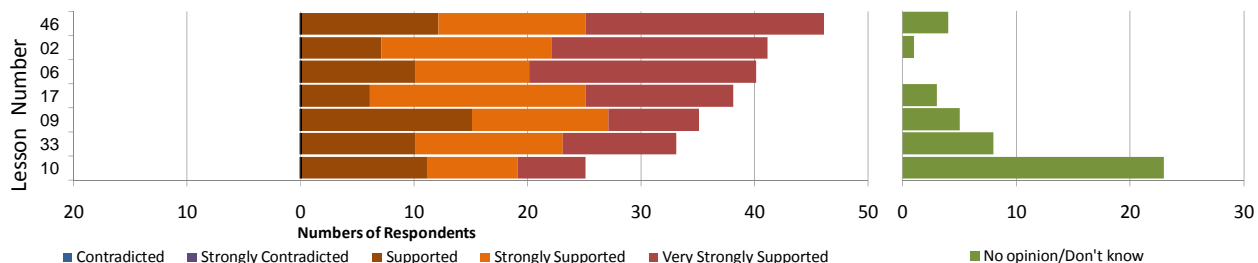
Acknowledgements

The author acknowledged the assistance of ALNAP in publicising the survey and of also Chris Piper for publicising the survey through the Australian Aid Resource and Training Guide.

Complete agreement

Seven of the lessons were not contradicted at all by the survey respondents.

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.



Lesson Number	Lesson and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Provention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
46	Hospitals not only need to be sited and built so that they are disaster resilient, but they also need to be assured of an uninterrupted power supply, a network of secure access routes, and secure provision of safe water and sanitation	✓											✓			2	0	46
2	Donor coordination is especially critical to disaster relief and recovery because of the dynamic nature of the situation and/or because disasters typically attract the involvement of numerous donors	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		10	0	46
6	Customize response (tailor response to a country's specific needs)	✓			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		8	0	50
17	Recovery for the poor requires more attention	✓			✓									✓	✓	4	0	34
9	Because hazard risk management takes place in a broad sectoral context, institutional development activities need to address the work of line agencies as well as to strengthen disaster-specific units	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	7	0	23
33	Procedure for project preparation, processing, and disbursing resources need to be further expedited	✓			✓			✓								3	0	30
10	Revise policy on emergency lending	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓								6	0	24

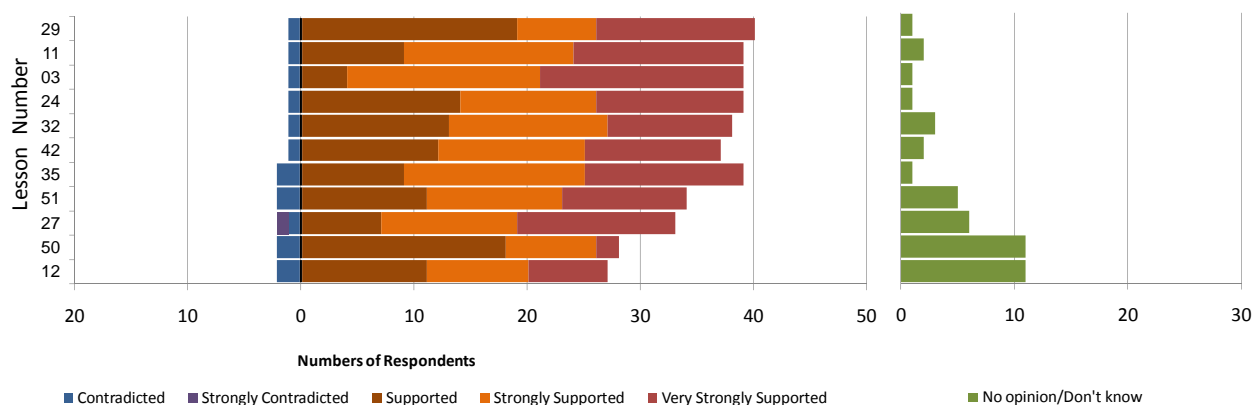
The need to customise the response to a country's specific needs (number 6) was one of the most strongly supported recommendations, with 50% of those responding saying that their experience very strongly supported this lesson.

Clearly as the respondents are largely from a relief background, almost half have no opinion on whether the policy of emergency lending should be revised (number 10).

Broad support

A further thirteen lessons were broadly supported with only one or two respondents who disagreed.

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.

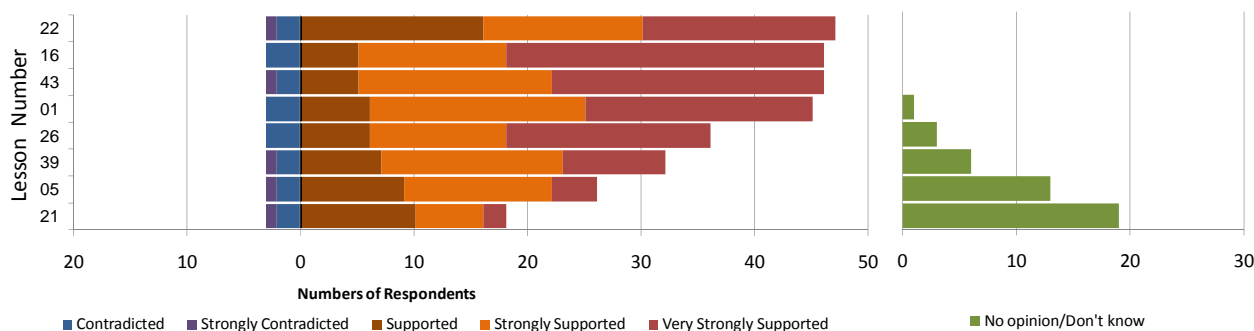


Lesson Number	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
29	✓	✓			✓		✓								3	2	34
11	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓						✓		6	2	38
3	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	9	2	45
24	✓											✓	✓	✓	4	2	33
32	✓			✓			✓								3	2	28
42	✓						✓								2	3	32
35	✓						✓						✓		3	5	34
51								✓							1	5	31
27	✓			✓									✓		3	5	40
50				✓					✓						2	5	7
12	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓					6	5	24

What is interesting here is that some respondents considered that their experience contradicted the idea that beneficiary participation was essential for success (lesson 3) or that that beneficiaries are often not provided with critical information (lesson 35). The first of these might be explained by operations in the acute relief phase when there is little beneficiary involvement in, for example, medical services or food distribution. It should be noted that the lesson on beneficiary participation was one of the top ten lessons, in that 45% of respondents regarded it as very strongly supported by their experience.

Very mild contradiction

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.



Lesson Number	Lesson and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Provention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
22	Natural disaster projects tend to achieve their objectives, but they may be short-term in nature and/or leave out important priorities and vulnerable groups that ultimately went unattended	✓			✓				✓				✓			4	6	34
16	Special attention should be given to reducing long-term vulnerability in those countries at highest risk	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓								5	6	57
43	(Rather than exclude recurrent events) emergency projects should recognize the likely recurrence of disaster and give more attention to identifying vulnerability and mitigating their effects	✓	✓													2	6	49
1	The organization's long-term engagement with client countries needs to ensure continued focus on permanent vulnerability reduction	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	12	6	42
26	A pool of dedicated emergency funding needs to be available (nationally and internationally)	✓	✓											✓		3	7	46
39	The development community should engage with disaster-stricken borrowers earlier and stay engaged longer	✓			✓											2	7	26
5	The organization needs the capacity to quickly gather and disseminate international experience to borrowers in an emergency	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		8	7	14
21	Scope of the organization's policy: natural disasters vs. conflict	✓	✓		✓								✓			4	8	10

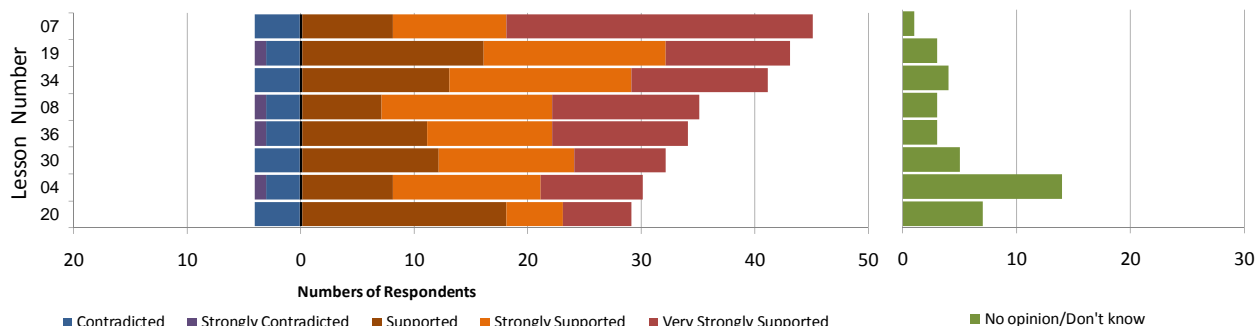
The need to reduce long term vulnerabilities in the countries at highest risk (number 16) was the most strongly supported lesson of all with 57% of respondents reporting that this lesson was very strongly supported by their experience. It is not clear why 3 respondents felt that their experience contradicted this lesson, unless they were concerned that such a focus might ignore countries at lower risk.

Again, lessons that apply less to the context of ALNAP members such as 5 and 21 generate the largest numbers of "no opinion/don't know" response. This is probably because most ALNAP members work in both conflict and natural disasters and have mandates based on need rather than on disaster type.

Mild Contradiction

Eight respondents considered that their experience contradicted the following lessons.

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.



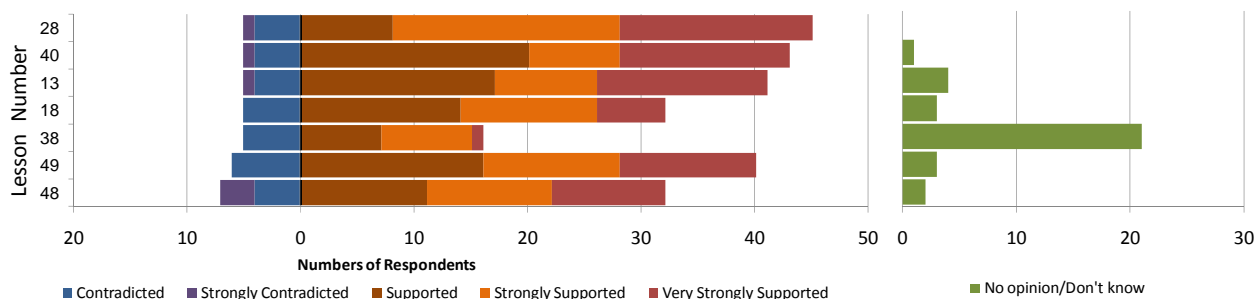
Lesson Number	Lesson and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
7	Prevention and mitigation deserve a higher priority than in the past	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		7	8	55
19	Flexibility is paramount during the reconstruction process	✓			✓			✓						✓		4	8	23
34	Ad hoc approach in international disaster response needs to be changed	✓						✓						✓		3	8	27
8	Increase the organization's capacity to respond to disasters and ensure that it can be mobilized quickly	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		7	10	33
36	Cash support or cash transfer can be vital to the recovery of the poor	✓												✓		2	10	32
30	Staff need more guidance on damage assessment	✓												✓	✓	3	10	22
4	The high concentration of risk (in hotspot countries) suggests that mechanisms are needed to finance those risks or transfer them	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓		8	8	26
20	A lack of maintenance has often been the main constraint on the sustainability of a natural disaster project	✓			✓			✓					✓			4	10	18

Again, what is most surprising here is that even four respondents do not think that prevention and mitigation need to be a higher priority (lesson 7). It should be noted that this was the second most strongly supported lesson of all with 55% of respondents holding that this lesson was very strongly supported by their experience.

Lesson 4 attracts a lot of don't knows because it is about issues that are more central to IFIs than to the general run of ALNAP members.

Modest contradiction

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.

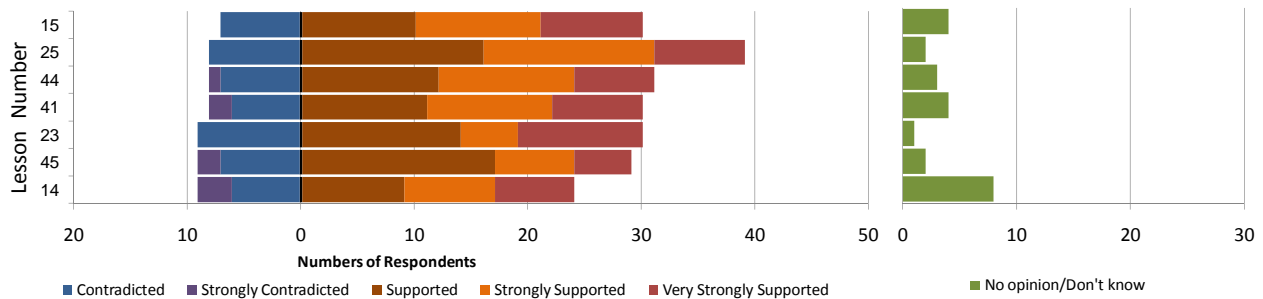


Lesson Number	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
28	✓	✓											✓		3	10	34
40				✓									✓		2	10	31
13	✓							✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	6	10	33
18	✓	✓		✓			✓								4	13	16
38	✓			✓											2	12	5
49	✓								✓						2	12	26
48	✓												✓		2	17	26

Again the IFI specific lesson (no 38 - about special emergency lending instruments) draws the largest number of “don’t knows” as well as only one “very strongly supported”. Lesson 48 (about the lack of correlation between implementation and communication skills) is contradicted by 7 respondents. However, this lesson reflects the dilemma faced by all funders that the agencies that are best placed to implement may not be the best at preparing project proposals and meeting administrative requirements.

Moderate contradiction

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.



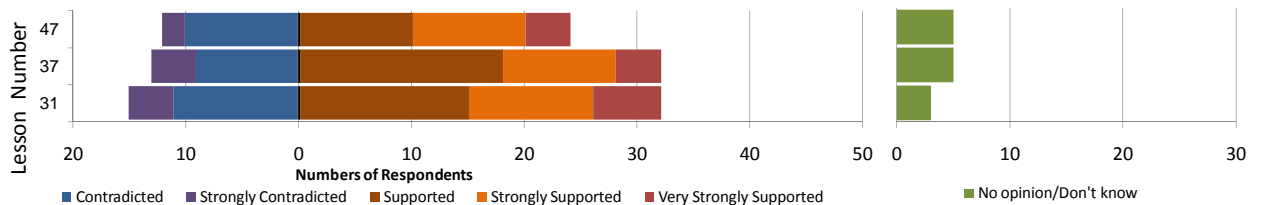
Lessons and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Provention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
15 Analysis of the performance of rehabilitation projects over time suggests an absence of a systematic use of results and lessons learned	✓	✓		✓		✓							✓		5	17	24
25 Although rigorous cost-benefit analysis may not always be possible, "quick and ready" estimates should be provided				✓		✓	✓	✓							4	16	17
44 Frequent supervision/oversight/ review missions are required to deal with rapid changes on the ground	✓			✓											2	19	18
41 Reallocating resources from existing projects, a common approach following natural disasters, affects the ability to attain long-term development goals and may be less effective than specific reconstruction lending	✓	✓													2	19	21
23 Accountability is too weak in quality control, tracking and reporting							✓				✓	✓	✓		4	23	28
45 Accreditation system for agencies and/or staff needed	✓												✓		2	23	13
14 Since the mid-1990s prevention and mitigation have become higher priorities and in the most recent projects are the primary project objective	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓								5	22	21

Lesson 14 attracts the highest proportion of don't knows - possibly reflecting the ability of many respondents to comment on changes over the last ten years.

Most Contradicted

The following three lessons were the most contradicted by the respondents, but even for the most contradicted lesson, those supporting the lesson outnumbered those contradiction it by at least 2 to 1.

How well supported are the following lessons by your own experience?.



Lesson Number	Lessons and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
47	Temporary housing should be provided by the victims themselves or built to standards that allow them to become permanent (which too often happens)	✓											✓			2	29	11
37	Major institutional reform should not be a priority after a natural disaster	✓			✓											2	26	9
31	Staff not prepared to respond quickly to emergencies	✓						✓						✓		3	30	13

The lesson about temporary housing needing to be built in a manner that allows it to become permanent (no 47) was supported by 24 and contradicted by 12. This was the most controversial finding in that it had the highest ratio of respondents considering that their experience contradicted the lesson to those whose experience supported it. This probably reflects the broad divisions about transitional housing, and whether it should be used at all, in humanitarian circles.

The lesson about major institutional reform (no 37) is also somewhat controversial in that the disaster can provide a window of opportunity for reform. And the lesson about staff not being prepared for disasters (number 31) may be contradicted because of the investment of some agencies in disaster preparedness measures.

Appendix

The following table shows the original data from the World Bank summary, with the addition of a column showing the percentage of responses for each lesson which considered that the lesson was contradicted by their experience. The list is shown in the original order with the lessons being ranked by the number of studies which supported them.

Lessons and Recommendations	World Bank	IDB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
1. The organization's long-term engagement with client countries needs to ensure continued focus on permanent vulnerability reduction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	12	6	42
2. Donor coordination is especially critical to disaster relief and recovery because of the dynamic nature of the situation and/or because disasters typically attract the involvement of numerous donors	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		10	0	46
3. Even in the difficult circumstances of a disaster response, beneficiary participation during the design and implementation stages is essential to success	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	9	2	45
4. The high concentration of risk (in hotspot countries) suggests that mechanisms are needed to finance those risks or transfer them	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	8	8	26
5. The organization needs the capacity to quickly gather and disseminate international experience to borrowers in an emergency	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	8	7	14
6. Customize response (tailor response to a country's specific needs)	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		8	0	50
7. Prevention and mitigation deserve a higher priority than in the past	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						✓		7	8	55
8. Increase the organization's capacity to respond to disasters and ensure that it can be mobilized quickly	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓		7	10	33
9. Because hazard risk management takes place in a broad sectoral context, institutional development activities need to address the work of line agencies as well as to strengthen disaster-specific units	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	7	0	23
10. Revise policy on emergency lending	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓								6	0	24
11. Use disaster-resistant techniques in infrastructure reconstruction	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓					✓		6	2	38
12. The institution has not been sufficiently strategic	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓					6	5	24
13. Too often, local governments were not included in decisions that had major impacts upon them.	✓						✓	✓				✓	✓	6	10	33
14. Since the mid-1990s prevention and mitigation have become higher priorities and in the most recent projects are the primary project objective	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓							5	22	21
15. Analysis of the performance of rehabilitation projects over time suggests an absence of a systematic use of results and lessons learned	✓	✓		✓		✓						✓		5	17	24
16. Special attention should be given to reducing long-term vulnerability in those countries at highest risk	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓							5	6	57
17. Recovery for the poor requires more attention	✓			✓								✓	✓	4	0	34
18. A focal point for natural hazards within an organization is important	✓	✓		✓		✓								4	13	16
19. Flexibility is paramount during the reconstruction process	✓			✓		✓						✓		4	8	23
20. A lack of maintenance has often been the main constraint on the sustainability of a natural disaster project	✓			✓		✓						✓		4	10	18
21. Scope of the organization's policy: natural disasters vs.	✓	✓		✓								✓		4	8	10

		World Bank	IDB	EIB	ADB	CAF	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Provention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)	
Lessons and Recommendations																			
	conflict																		
22.	Natural disaster projects tend to achieve their objectives, but they may be short-term in nature and/or leave out important priorities and vulnerable groups that ultimately went unattended	✓			✓				✓				✓			4	6	34	
23.	Accountability is too weak in quality control, tracking and reporting							✓					✓	✓	✓	4	23	28	
24.	Experience shows that the provision of livelihood opportunities can be especially effective for the poor	✓											✓	✓	✓	4	2	33	
25.	Although rigorous cost-benefit analysis may not always be possible, "quick and ready" estimates should be provided				✓		✓	✓	✓							4	16	17	
26.	A pool of dedicated emergency funding needs to be available (nationally and internationally)	✓	✓											✓		3	7	46	
27.	Reconstruction and vulnerability reduction take more time than allotted by the organization's policy	✓			✓									✓		3	5	40	
28.	Actions taken during the first weeks and months after a disaster have a major impact on the recovery process that is to follow, and they need to be planned and implemented accordingly	✓	✓											✓		3	10	34	
29.	Preparation of a strategy or action plan is required	✓	✓		✓			✓								3	2	34	
30.	Staff need more guidance on damage assessment	✓												✓	✓	3	10	22	
31.	Staff not prepared to respond quickly to emergencies	✓						✓						✓		3	30	13	
32.	Simple project design more important when activities to be implemented are urgent	✓			✓			✓								3	2	28	
33.	Procedure for project preparation, processing, and disbursing resources need to be further expedited	✓			✓			✓								3	0	30	
34.	Ad hoc approach in international disaster response needs to be changed	✓						✓						✓		3	8	27	
35.	Too often beneficiaries not provided with critical information	✓						✓						✓		3	5	34	
36.	Cash support or cash transfer can be vital to the recovery of the poor	✓												✓		2	10	32	
37.	Major institutional reform should not be a priority after a natural disaster	✓			✓											2	26	9	
38.	The organization has (increasingly) used a special emergency lending instrument in responding to disasters even when other instruments may be more appropriate	✓			✓											2	12	5	
39.	The development community should engage with disaster-stricken borrowers earlier and stay engaged longer	✓			✓											2	7	26	
40.	More efficient use of resources is needed in post-disaster operations				✓									✓		2	10	31	
41.	Reallocating resources from existing projects, a common approach following natural disasters, affects the ability to attain long-term development goals and may be less effective than specific reconstruction lending	✓	✓													2	19	21	
42.	Emergency project design needs more careful consideration	✓						✓								2	3	32	
43.	(Rather than exclude recurrent events) emergency projects should recognize the likely recurrence of disaster and give more attention to identifying vulnerability and mitigating their effects	✓	✓													2	6	49	
44.	Frequent supervision/oversight/ review missions are required to deal with rapid changes on the ground	✓			✓											2	19	18	

	World Bank	CAF	ADB	EIB	IDB	CDB	CEB	GTZ	MFA	DG- ECHO	IFRC	ALNAP	TEC	Prevention	Total Number	Contradiction (%)	Strong Supp (%)
Lessons and Recommendations																	
45.	Accreditation system for agencies and/or staff needed	✓											✓		2	23	13
46.	Hospitals not only need to be sited and built so that they are disaster resilient, but they also need to be assured of an uninterrupted power supply, a network of secure access routes, and secure provision of safe water and sanitation	✓											✓		2	0	46
47.	Temporary housing should be provided by the victims themselves or built to standards that allow them to become permanent (which too often happens)	✓											✓		2	29	11
48.	Skills in communication are not necessarily well correlated with skills in implementation	✓											✓		2	17	26
49.	Gender issues are often neglected in disaster risk management	✓							✓						2	12	26
50.	Handle safeguards parallel to implementation so as not to slow project approval		✓						✓						2	5	7
51.	There is a gap between general policy statements and the real policy priorities of governments and donors							✓							1	5	31
<p>Source: World Bank IEG. (2008). <i>Disaster Risk Management: Taking Lessons from Evaluation: Proceedings from the Conference on November 20, 2006 and the Evaluators' Roundtable on November 21, 2006 (IEG Working Paper 2008/5)</i>. Washington: World Bank Independent Evaluation Group. Last viewed on 30 September 2007. URL: http://inweb90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoclib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/50CB58565D1096B8852574A6006EFD73/\$file/disaster_risk_man.pdf</p>																	