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INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD MANNING

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CHARLES HODSON: Presenter

Well, the scale of the aid operation across South East Asia is vast. It's vital that emergency supplies quickly reach those who need them most, but what about long-term help? The OECD Development Assistance Committee has extensive experience in this area. I'm joined now by the group's chairman, Richard Manning.

Richard, you look at some of the more long-term... the systemic, as you put it, the systemic problems. Presumably, if you look at the operation and what has been attempted at the moment, there must be many systemic problems?

RICHARD MANNING: Chairman, Development Assistance Committee, OECD

Indeed. I think this is... first of all, this is a very, very large disaster, so seeing how the international community co-ordinate and organise themselves to do it is going to be very important. One job that might well be done internationally, I think, is conducting an evaluation of how the disaster response actually works in this case and to look at it over time and see what lessons we can draw.

CHARLES HODSON:

Well, earlier in the programme we had the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan saying actually people have pulled together remarkably well and there's been no quarrel about leadership, and bureaucratic obstacles have been there but they're not that bad.

RICHARD MANNING:

No, I think that, from what I've heard - I was just listening to a report on Sri Lanka on the way up - that there is obviously good progress in some places, but at the same time it's a big challenge, and it's a big challenge also to donors because this is taking... this is going to cost a lot of money. The international response is running at about two billion already. International humanitarian assistance has typically been about five billion a year in the recent past, so this is a big increment and I'm sure the numbers will rise further. That

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money has got to come from somewhere, a lot of aid agencies will have exhausted their contingency reserves. It's very important, I think, that we don't take money out of some of these long-term development issues in order to finance this. So we're going to watch very closely - what are the impacts on individual donors of the huge contribution they're having to making to this very important emergency?

CHARLES HODSON:

Just actually while we've... while we've been talking, we've had news in from Berlin that the German cabinet has agreed that Germany is actually to become the single largest donor: \$660m. I mean, that's an enormous amount of money. Germany proportionally again very badly hit in terms of the numbers of tourists. Money, large swathes of money like that, are they the answer? They certainly help, don't they?

RICHARD MANNING:

Well, it's important but then you have to look at how to do it and I think here a key conclusion... pretty useful work has been done among the humanitarian community on what would constitute a good humanitarian response, and a key part of that I think is to ensure that the beneficiaries have a real say in what happens to them. In the immediate relief phase, you've got to deliver things to people, but immediately after that people have their own plans. We need to build on what people actually want to do in these communities, what governments, civil society and the rest of them, how they want to organise their future, and I think that puts a lot of pressure on donors to be responsive to local needs rather than saying we're going to come in and do this, that or the other. You've got in the medium term to build a rehabilitation programme which makes sense locally, respects the way that the local society is organised, takes account of increased vulnerabilities - for example, if sea levels are going to be an increasing issue in the future, where do you put your settlements? All those issues need to be dealt with and it's very much... donors need to be responding in a co-ordinated way to the real demands that are made by the local people and the local authorities.

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CHARLES HODSON:

Now that is really... that's the long-term aspect of this. Do you fear that having put their hands in their pockets, people round the world, governments round the world and aid agencies round the world will go on to the next big disaster, whatever that is, because we know inevitably it will happen, and they'll forget about the enormous long-term consequences that people in these South East Asian nations will continue to face?

RICHARD MANNING:

Well, it's very important that doesn't happen and I think we do need to keep a focus on these longer running emergencies and certainly we'll do our bit to try and monitor this. But in general I think this one is such a large-scale situation for the people concerned that it's very likely there will be a strong concentration in those areas that have been most heavily affected. But the international community needs to gear itself up, not only for the relief phase but to deliver reconstruction assistance over a much longer period.

CHARLES HODSON:

Richard Manning, thank you very much indeed.

RICHARD MANNING:

Thank you.

CHARLES HODSON:

That was Richard Manning of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development there, Development Assistance Committee.

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