



Global Forum
for Improving
Humanitarian Action

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This paper was written by Paul Knox Clarke and Alice Obrecht.

Suggested citation

Knox Clarke, P. and Obrecht, A. (2015) *Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action results and analysis*. Global Forum Briefing Papers. London: ALNAP/ODI.

© ALNAP/ODI 2015. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial Licence (CC BY-NC 3.0).

ISBN 978-1-910454-35-0

Contents



Introduction	5
Part I: Design of the Global Forum	9
Part II: Key actors and recommendations by context	15
Rapid-onset natural disasters	19
Conflict	29
Urban crises	39
Mega disasters	49
Recurrent crises	59
Protracted crises	67
Part III: Adapting the system	77
Part IV: Reflections on cross-cutting themes from the Global Forum	93

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A large number of people from across the ALNAP network generously gave their time and expertise to support the Global Forum.

The ALNAP secretariat would particularly like to thank:

- Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and their colleagues at Humanitarian Outcomes for their work on The State of the Humanitarian System 2015, which was a key input to the event
- Urvashi Aneja, Francesca Bonino, Dayna Brown, Scott Chaplowe, Richard Garfield, Manu Gupta, Charles-Antoine Hoffman, Alex Jacobs, Simon Levine, David Loquercio, Luz Saavedra, and Tendik Tynystanov for comments and improvements to the background papers
- Annabel Mitchell, the staff and students of Oxford Brookes University Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP), and the staff of Oxfam (GB) Humanitarian Department for support in the design of the Forum process and exercises
- Urvashi Aneja, Christina Bennett, Wendy Fenton, Richard Garfield, Francois Grunewald, Loretta Hieber-Girardet, Alex Jacobs, David Loquercio, Sean Lowrie, Daniel Maxwell, David Sanderson, Carrie Santos, Kevin Savage, Anne Street, Sophia Swithern, and Bertrand Taithe for facilitation and provision of content expertise at the Forum
- Degan Ali- Executive Director, Adeso, Ambassador Dr. Badre Eddine Allali (Assistant Secretary General, League of Arab States), Stephen O'Brien (United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator), Ambassador Samantha Power (United States Ambassador to the United Nations), Claus Sørensen (Director General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection – ECHO), Hansjoerg Strohmeyer (Chief – OCHA Policy Branch), Joshua Tabah (Counsellor on Humanitarian Affairs – Permanent Mission of Canada to the UN), and Ambassador Hesham Youssef (Assistant Secretary General, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), for addressing the Forum
- the Red Zebra team for their facilitation
- our partners in the delivery of the Forum – Mia Beers, Andrew Kent, Anita Malley, and all of their colleagues at USAID/OFDA who worked tirelessly to make the Forum a success
- Jemilah Mahmood, Natasha Kindergan, Andrea Noyes, and all of the members of the WHS Secretariat and WHS Effectiveness Thematic Team for their generous support to this event.

We would also like to thank all of the participants at the Forum, who engaged so openly with the fundamental issues around improving humanitarian action.

We would finally like to thank Transparency International Kenya and the International Organization for Migration in Tacloban for hosting us during production of the films presented at the Forum itself, and the ALNAP Steering Committee for their constant support.



Introduction

The scale and scope of international humanitarian action¹ have increased significantly in the past two decades. Humanitarian action now covers a wide range of activities, conducted in a variety of contexts: from conflicts to natural disasters; in urban and rural environments; from long-term 'protracted' to shorter 'rapid-onset' crises. There have been repeated calls for general improvements in international humanitarian action and, recently, for clarification on how such action can become more effective in the various contexts in which it occurs.

The Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action, held in New York on 4-5 June 2015, sought to explore current concerns and bring greater clarity and progression to thinking around context and its impact on humanitarian action. Specifically, the aim of the Global Forum was to:

- Produce a set of quality recommendations to improve humanitarian action in a variety of different response contexts; and
- Identify propositions to make the international humanitarian system more adaptable, in order to support more effective humanitarian action across different response contexts.

This report details the key findings from the Global Forum.

Part I describes the design of the Global Forum, including the key questions it sought to answer and how it dealt with the issues of context and flexibility. It includes descriptions of each of the six contexts discussed at the Forum.

Part II presents the findings for each of the six contexts, including the top-pollled recommendations by participants for improving humanitarian action in each context.

Part III presents recommendations to make the international system more flexible and adaptable.

Part IV concludes with an analysis of the crosscutting issues from the Global Forum. It answers the question ‘Is context relevant for humanitarian effectiveness?’ and identifies key lessons for the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) emerging from the Forum on content and process.

1 By which we mean here humanitarian preparedness and response activities as well as related activities such as disaster risk reduction and early recovery, conducted by a loosely related and organised set of agencies including the UN, the Red Cross/Crescent family and international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), largely funded by donations from governments and private actors outside the country where the crisis has occurred.

The **Annex** – which is published online as a separate document – presents all recommendations selected and written by participants at the Global Forum, with polling data, as well as areas of disagreement from the discussion sessions.

The Global Forum for Improving Humanitarian Action was an official consultation for the WHS. As such, it drew on recommendations made through previous WHS regional consultations as well as the work of the WHS Thematic Teams. The Forum was in part dedicated to further distilling and prioritising these recommendations. The results of the Forum will be shared with the WHS organisers for incorporation in its final report to the UN Secretary-General.

The aim of the Global Forum was to produce a set of quality recommendations to improve humanitarian action in a variety of response contexts and to identify propositions to make the international humanitarian system more adaptable.



PART I: **Design of the Global Forum**

The aim of the Global Forum was:

- to produce a set of quality recommendations to improve humanitarian action across different response contexts; and
- to identify propositions to make the international humanitarian system more adaptable, in order to support more effective humanitarian action across different response contexts.

This section describes how the Global Forum was designed to achieve this aim, in particular focusing on how quality was considered and how the meeting defined and used issues of context and flexibility.

ACHIEVING QUALITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Four elements of the Global Forum's design aimed to ensure the highest quality and relevance of recommendations:

1. Linking the recommendations to evidence

Prior to the Global Forum, the ALNAP Secretariat, rather than creating a new set of recommendations, undertook a review and synthesis of:

1. Evidence and research describing the current state of humanitarian action and identifying major constraints to effective action. The main source for this research was the ALNAP State of the Humanitarian System report 2015, itself the product of an extensive three-year programme of research. A number of additional sources were also included in the review.

2. Existing recommendations to improve the humanitarian system. Over 750 recommendations, from the WHS regional consultations and from written submissions to the WHS website, were reviewed and synthesised.

The ALNAP Secretariat then 'matched' synthesised recommendations² against the problems identified in the research, to identify the degree to which recommendations matched and addressed all of the key problems. The resulting short papers were provided to all participants prior to the Global Forum.

At the Global Forum, participants were asked to focus on the synthesised recommendations and to identify those that would have a significant impact on the main problems of humanitarian action in each context. Where necessary, participants were encouraged to elaborate on these existing recommendations, to make them more effective.

² These synthesised recommendations reflected work done at previous consultations rather than a new set of recommendations. The draft recommendations from the WHS Thematic Teams, developed at the Thematic Teams Meeting in Bonn in April 2015, were also presented and highlighted alongside the synthesised recommendations.

2. Decreasing bias

International humanitarian action has a large number of different types of stakeholders: affected people and communities; the governments of states affected by crises; those agencies – national and international – that respond to humanitarian needs; and international donors. Increasingly, non-humanitarian actors, such as the private sector and the military, are engaging in humanitarian responses. All of these groups have different perspectives and priorities. A frequent criticism of humanitarian policymaking is that it is largely the preserve of the main donors, the UN and the large NGOs, and as a result policy tends to reflect their positions.

To lessen the challenge of bias, the Global Forum was designed to have a wide range of participants, all with extensive knowledge of humanitarian action but coming from a range of stakeholder groups. Twelve constituency groups were identified: the UN; donors; the private sector; international NGOs (INGOs); national and local NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs); national disaster management agencies (NDMAs); regional organisations; academics; umbrella/network organisations; Red Cross/Crescent Societies; diaspora communities; and the military. Invitations sought to achieve a weighted balance across these groups, in order for to accurately reflect the broader humanitarian system at the Global Forum.³

At the Global Forum, participants took part in three working sessions, each designed to answer a question:

1. *What recommendations will bring about the biggest improvements to humanitarian action in each crisis context?*
2. *What are the relative roles of international and national actors in different crisis contexts?*
3. *What key recommendations will help international actors become flexible enough to support effective humanitarian action in each context?*

The first two questions were designed to explore the importance of context to humanitarian action. In the sessions that addressed these questions, participants were separated into six different context groups. For the final session, participants worked in five brainstorming groups, each dedicated to a different aspect of the humanitarian system. Recommendations from this final session were presented back to the audience in real time and polled to test the range of support.

³ The meeting organisers had originally planned to invite representatives of affected communities as a separate group. However, in the event it proved difficult to differentiate these representatives from the representatives of national and local CSOs, so the two groups were combined. Logistical and visa difficulties meant the final number of representatives of these groups was lower than planned.

3. Creating recommendations that are both challenging and achievable

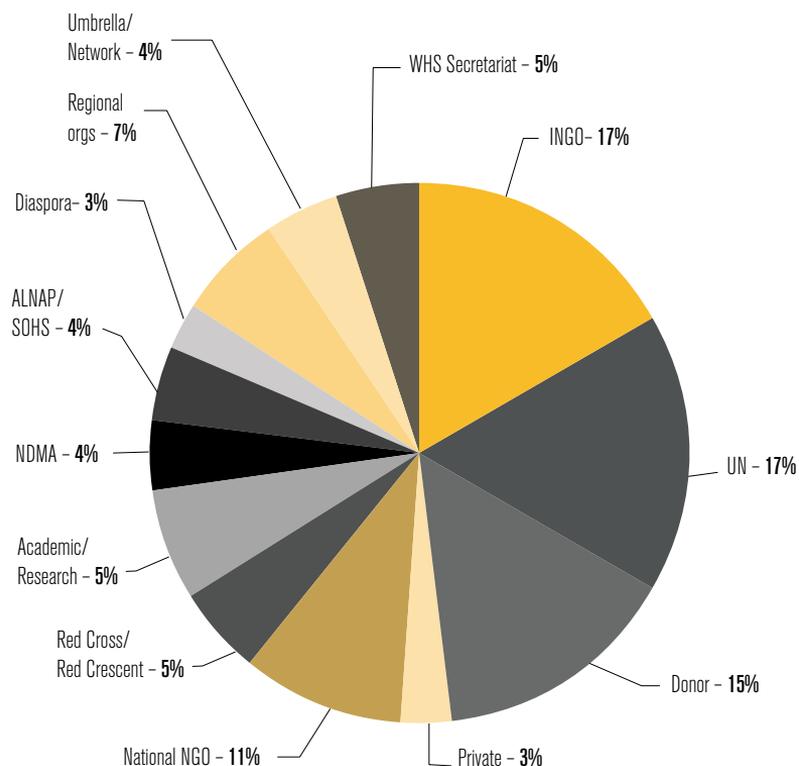
During Global Forum sessions, participants were asked to consider recommendations that would:

- Lead to the greatest positive impact in terms of addressing the obstacles to good humanitarian action; and
- Fit for the WHS (and the financial resources and political will that such a summit can harness).

Participants were also asked to try, in every case, to identify who should be the subject of each recommendation – that is, who would be responsible for carrying out each recommendation.

In this way, the Global Forum aimed to create/endorse ambitious recommendations that required significant change and would have real impact, but were achievable.

FIGURE 1. CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATION AT THE GLOBAL FORUM



4. Preventing ‘lowest common denominator’ recommendations

One potential challenge when identifying recommendations with a large number of diverse people is that the group gravitates to ‘the lowest common denominator’ – recommendations that are so general, or so bland, that everyone can agree on them. This is particularly the case when using a consensus-based approach to developing recommendations.

In order to address this, recommendations were polled among participants. While the polling methods used were informal, this provided an indication of the range of approval. The purpose of the polling was to provide an alternative to consensus, highlighting, rather than masking, areas of dissent and disagreement. Part IV discusses the extent to which the Global Forum succeeded in avoiding lowest common denominator recommendations.



PART II: **Key actors and recommendations by context**

There is a growing view that 'context matters' for humanitarian action. At face value, the importance of context may seem obvious: an earthquake is very different from a conflict or from a cyclical drought; similarly, a response in a democratic middle-income country can be expected to differ from one in a low-income country with unstable governance. Yet it remains unclear just how important context sensitivity is for improving the effectiveness of humanitarian action overall.

TESTING THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

The issue of context is central to any change or improvement process for humanitarian action. Some reform ideas may apply generally, such as those that seek to improve preparedness and logistics capacities, and could lead to significant gains in terms of reducing morbidity and mortality rates in crisis. Some reform ideas, on the other hand, may be more related to a specific context and may not lead to improvements in all contexts.

This points to two important questions around context and humanitarian effectiveness:

The ‘Does context matter?’ question: Are there reforms that apply generally to all response contexts, or must they be significantly modified to work in different types of context?

The ‘Which reforms apply to which contexts?’

question: If we conclude that (at least some) reforms are ‘context-specific’, which ones are they and to which contexts do they refer?

The outputs from the first session at the Global Forum can help us answer these questions and are summarised here. They are also analysed in Part IV of this report.

When weighing the importance of context to humanitarian effectiveness, it is, of course, important to define or categorise the contexts used. Each response context is shaped by a variety of in-country political, social, economic and cultural factors, as well as by the nature, cause and severity of the crisis and the capacity of the international humanitarian system to respond. Different approaches to understanding context have focused on different subsets of the above factors.⁴

⁴ In a think-piece prepared for the Montreux XIII Donors Retreat, ALNAP proposed a set of four models of humanitarian response, based on the dynamics of local/national actors and capacities (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2014).

In order to offer Global Forum participants a set of contexts tangible enough for them to be able to draw on their expertise, ALNAP sought to use context types readily identifiable by actors in the humanitarian field. We therefore looked at a core set of common causes for humanitarian crisis and crossed these with different types of political and economic environments. **The aim was not to produce an exhaustive typology covering all possible contexts but rather to use an indicative set of crises that showed the wide range of challenges, opportunities and expectations humanitarian actors face across different types of context and response.**

The remainder of this section presents the six contexts that were explored at the Global Forum and their results. Each subsection consists of:

- A brief description of the context, as was provided to Forum participants;
- The priority recommendations for improving humanitarian action in this context, as identified and voted on by participants: these are presented alongside the obstacles that these recommendations are intended to address;
- A list of the desired roles and responsibilities of different actors involved in humanitarian response in this context;
- A brief analysis of the context based on the results and the discussions that took place at the Forum.

The aim was not to produce an exhaustive typology covering all possible contexts but rather to use an indicative set of crises that showed the wide range of challenges, opportunities and expectations humanitarian actors face across different types of context and response.

RAPID ONSET NATURAL DISASTERS



These are crises associated with natural disasters such as typhoons, cyclones, Tsunamis or volcanic eruptions with a significant impact in terms of scope and scale, and that occur in lower middle income countries. In these crises access may be limited for logistical reasons, particularly to remote areas or due to destruction of infrastructure: the state may also deny permission for international actors to operate in certain areas. Generally, the state will have response capacity, and will expect to lead or coordinate the response, but also require additional resources in terms of funding and skills. Civil society organisations and the private sector will also generally have capacity, and be active in the response. There are likely also to be a number of international development actors in place.

Examples would include typhoons in the Philippines, tsunami in Sri Lanka, and hurricanes in Central America.

RAPID ONSET NATURAL DISASTERS: Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In situations of rapid onset natural disaster, and in (low/middle or middle income countries) where disasters of this type can be expected,

Governments should...

Improve preparedness by:

- ensuring the existence and resilience of critical infrastructure, in particular communications infrastructure
- building capacity in early warning, assessment and emergency management
- developing decentralised response structures and procedures
- developing preparedness plans (including the allocation of responsibilities to different actors)

After a disaster strikes, they should:

- Lead and coordinate the response.

Civil society should...

- Build their own capacity to respond.
- Provide information on the needs of affected people as part of government early warning and assessment systems.
- Create mechanisms to hold emergency response actors to account to the community.
- Engage civil society in the response.
- Respond within the overall framework of the government's response.

International development actors should...

- Engage with government-led DRR and resilience activities more fully than they do at present, as a way of defending development gains (humanitarians should not, necessarily, be involved in implementing DRR activities).

Donors should...

- Support the engagement of development actors in DRR and resilience activities.
- Expand the use of crisis modifiers to respond to natural disasters.
- Supply additional support and assets only as part of the government plan or at the government's request.

The Private sector should...

- Ensure that they have business continuity plans (as much of the private sector support in disasters will be around retaining infrastructure and services in the market, rather than specifically conducting 'humanitarian' activities).
- Consider areas where they have specific additional expertise that could be incorporated into government emergency planning.

International humanitarian agencies should...

- Map their capacities in advance and engage with governments to make them aware of these capacities for inclusion in preparedness plans.
- Engage with and support preparedness planning, including information around and advocacy for humanitarian principles.
- (Possibly) conduct advocacy around reduction of drivers of disaster.
- Support the development of civil society capacity.
- In response, fill gaps on the basis of unique capacities and resources.
- Identify and respond to omissions in national planning, if it does not align with humanitarian principles.

RAPID ONSET NATURAL DISASTERS: Analysis



Most of the obstacles and recommendations emerging from this group focused on who should be conducting the response rather than on new technical or operational approaches.

Rapid-onset natural disasters in lower-middle-income countries are contexts in which humanitarian actors perform relatively well, as they are largely unconstrained by challenges to access, they generally enjoy strong financial support and operations are conducted over fairly short, discrete timelines. Therefore, most of the obstacles and recommendations emerging from this group focused on who should be conducting the response rather than on new technical or operational approaches to improve the response. There were also a number of recommendations aimed at taking a 'longer-term view' of natural disasters, particularly around funding.

In general, participants agreed that preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters in this context should be planned and led by the state, with the support of civil society. The state should factor natural disasters into development planning, taking a developmental approach that reduces disaster risk and ensures preparedness. CSOs, as well as being important in implementing elements of the response, should ensure affected people are engaged in

planning and response and are able to hold government and other actors to account.

In this context, the role of international humanitarian actors should be limited to supporting capacity-building, if this is required, and providing limited support to fill specific technical 'gaps' in response, as part of the overall, government-led, response plan. International actors should also be prepared to advocate and support humanitarian principles in government-led response planning.

Participants recognised that this was often not the current situation, and that, in order to fully implement this model, there needed to be an open and realistic approach to the obstacles, including those that lie at the feet of national actors. As one participant explained, 'It's a two-way street: it is about the donor, the international community, let's say, having to surrender some power and be less risk-averse, but it's also about national governments, national civil society demonstrating the willingness to get involved and, in a sense, sometimes, to even put its own house in order.'

The main obstacles were felt to lie both in the structures and processes of international humanitarian actors and in the degree to which governments had developed effective legislation and structures for response. International actors are not aware of existing plans, do not have coordination mechanisms that include national actors and, in general, do not take account of national actors. These international organisations should change working practices and attitudes to follow a principle of subsidiarity, and should work more actively to identify and engage representatives of civil society in coordination activities. At the same time, governments should take concrete moves to strengthen disaster preparedness and to create action plans: interestingly, for some participants, the onus on analysing understanding local capacity was transferred, here, from international actors to the government.

Changes are also required in financing: donors should support state capacity-building for disaster preparedness, and should further

improve approaches to humanitarian and development financing, making the former less short in term and more flexible, and the latter more ‘risk-aware’.

There were lively discussions on the role of the private sector in response. Participants agreed that, in many cases, the private sector (international, national and local) is very involved in the response to natural disasters. Often, this involvement is not specifically in the provision of humanitarian assistance, but is important in facilitating and supporting it: through the clearance of rubble and the reconnection of communications. There was significant debate over how best to ensure private sector organisations that are engaged in this activity would adhere to humanitarian standards and principles. Some participants felt private sector organisations must be held to these standards and principles; others felt this was unrealistic and did not accurately reflect the way the private sector worked. One participant from the private sector commented,

The role of international humanitarian actors should be limited to supporting capacity-building and providing limited support to fill specific technical ‘gaps’.

People are ready for a step change in how the sector engages with, and is accountable to, affected people. However, there remains disagreement over how best to deliver on this.

'I'll tell you the truth, I'm not familiar with the list of international humanitarian principles, so I will have to know it really well before signing it off, but we're working usually [with] multinationals [...] so talking specifically about a multinational, we are tools to you and we provide services. We are not providers of relief, we are a provider of a service that you use. To me, what are these international humanitarian principles? Do you really have them on top of your mind[?]'

As in many contexts, in rapid-onset disasters people both inside and outside the humanitarian system are ready for a step change in how the sector engages with, and is accountable to, affected people. However, there remains disagreement over how best to deliver on this. The recommendations:

- 'Require a periodic, light-touch review of strategic and operational plans in light of affected people's view and government priorities', and

- 'Agencies (including donors) use a common high-level monitoring framework [...] (based on affected people's feedback)'

both received majority support in the polling, but also a moderate rate of disapproval. These more specific recommendations did not fare as well as the more general statements of support for accountability to affected people that other context groups put forward. This perhaps reflects that, while there is broad agreement that the system needs to move towards giving greater voice and accountability to affected people, there remain disagreements on how this should actually proceed.

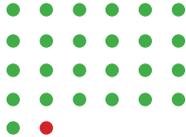


CONFLICT



These are crises associated with armed conflict between two or more parties, often with the direct participation of other countries. They may be interstate or intra-state. State authorities (army and possibly other armed groups) are combatant. The damage to infrastructure, population displacement and inability of some sections of the population to access areas 'across the lines' lead to major disruption of public services, and inability to access those public services that remain. This will tend to have a serious effect, as crisis affected populations, and particularly urban populations, have often been used to a fairly high degree of service provision. The engagement of the state as a combatant may lead to the denial of access to crisis affected people for humanitarian actors. States and non-state actors may not follow IHL. This type of conflict will often displace very large numbers of people, both internally and externally, as refugees. These crises will often have a high media and political profile, and donor states may be aligned with one or another faction in the conflict.

Examples would be the Syria, Iraq or Ukraine.

OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
 <p data-bbox="386 651 586 876">5. Good humanitarian action is apolitical and adheres to international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.</p> <p data-bbox="662 534 898 1010">Dialogue with parties is conducted very unevenly due to unclarity on counterterrorism measures, organisational policies and mandates, capacities, organisational identities etc. NB: Dialogue is a pre-requisite for better respect of IHL</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="942 419 1546 508">1. WHS to issue a clear statement on the need for dialogue with all parties as well as its goals and main modalities. <li data-bbox="942 537 1546 661">2. Exemptions to be incorporated in national counterterrorism legislations and international sanctions regime (e.g. Australia and UNSCR 2199). <li data-bbox="942 688 1546 749">3. Develop/strengthen consistency of organisational policies. <li data-bbox="942 776 1546 1032">4. Build a critical mass of humanitarian staff including at leadership level – that understand the need and modalities for interaction with all parties, including organisational policies to guide requirement and content of dialogue (this includes measures such as: training, coaching and mentoring, retaining experienced staff, access unit, etc.) <li data-bbox="942 1059 1546 1176">5. Establish mechanism for third states to engage with governments party to a conflict for the purpose of offering/delivering assistance, mediation, etc. 	<p data-bbox="1608 580 1755 607">25 ✓ 1 ✗</p> 

CONFLICT:

Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In situations of conflict,

Governments should...

- Actively seek political solutions to end the conflict.
- Ensure that government forces and government servants follow international humanitarian law (IHL) and relevant conventions, by inter alia providing training in these areas, incorporating into national legislation, and potentially establishing impartial overview mechanisms.
- Invest in service provision for the entire population.
- Facilitate humanitarian access, protection and assistance for both international and national humanitarian organisations.
- Allow humanitarians to dialogue with all parties to the conflict.
- Create policy frameworks designating lead responders.

Civil society should...

- Build capacity and engage in conflict prevention and mediation.
- Build knowledge around the legal framework applicable in conflict situations.
- Report violations of IHL, protection challenges and needs to international actors.
- Hold government to account for its behaviour in the conflict.
- Do more service delivery.

International human rights actors should...

- Take the primary responsibility for elevating human right abuses and for advocating on behalf of affected individuals and communities.

Donors should...

- Increase the amount of funding that goes to protection activities.
- Ensure that aid is impartial, possibly through a consensus or peer review mechanism.
- Consider and mitigate the effects of counter-terror legislation on humanitarian action.

International humanitarian actors should...

- Support capacity building of local NGOs (possibly through benchmarking for funds for capacity-building, or supporting benchmarks of funds to go directly to local actors).
- Take greater responsibility for the safety and security of local implementing partners.
- Possibly provide gap filling assistance based around local infrastructure wherever possible, where international assistance has a comparative advantage.
- Possibly advocate and campaign for political solutions to conflict, protection of civilians and adherence to IHL by parties to conflict.

CONFLICT: Analysis



Improving humanitarian action in situations of conflict is more about addressing well-known and long-running challenges in order to make the system work as it should.

Conflict is one of the main crisis types in which humanitarians respond, and poses significant challenges to how humanitarians operate. There was general consensus that the delivery of humanitarian aid and protection was becoming increasingly difficult and restricted in this context.

Many participants felt improving humanitarian action in situations of conflict was less a matter of making innovative and transformational changes and more about addressing well-known and long-running challenges in order to make the system work as it should.

Forum participants were clear that the primary role in providing basic services, assistance and protection to conflict-affected people lay with the state, and that civil society and the international community should expect and insist that the state fulfilled these responsibilities: the fact that the state is a combatant should not be seen as a reason to waive these responsibilities.

There was more disagreement, however, on the role of international humanitarian actors in recalling the state to these duties. Some participants felt the primary role of international humanitarian actors in this context should be one of advocacy both to the state and to donors. While there was general agreement that humanitarian aid cannot solve political problems, international actors, by virtue of their political connections and impartiality, could be well placed to collate information obtained from local partner organisations ‘on the ground’ and use this for advocacy purposes. Participants also noted that the state was not a single, homogenous entity, and that it was often possible to work with elements of government. Indeed, whoever conducted humanitarian response – government, national or international – should build on the infrastructure and service capacities that already exist, and that, in many cases, would be provided by the state.

Discussions on the conflict theme also highlighted the importance of local civil society taking a central role in responding to assistance and protection needs. The main obstacles to civil society playing a greater role were identified as lack of direct funding to national actors and limited understanding of the capacities and potential of civil society. In order to address these constraints, participants recommended increased direct funding to CSOs (some further suggested developing benchmarks for funding, although there were also concerns that this might lead to a counter-productive ‘target culture’); a general repurposing of the international system to become more ‘facilitative’; and the development of methods and approaches to better understand context, capacities and needs – which would also support a better understanding of the many different layers of government and also a better understanding of access challenges and opportunities. It was interesting, and perhaps surprising, to see that recommendations around civil

society involvement in situations of conflict were very similar to those in other contexts and, more broadly, to see how many of the recommendations – and particularly those related to ongoing assessment of context and needs – were similar to those arising in other contexts.

Some areas related to the actions of national civil society were more conflict-specific. In terms of the role and activities of civil society, there was an emphasis on the potential for civil society to monitor and report violations of international humanitarian law to relevant international bodies, as well as to provide assistance. In terms of the relationship between international and national organisations, there were specific concerns that this be not purely a form of ‘risk transfer’, and recommendations that any move to a more facilitative and capacity-building role for international actors should be done in such a way as to decrease the risks for local actors, either through advocacy around the root causes of risk or through maintenance of an active international presence on the ground.

The fact that the state is a combatant should not be seen as a reason to waive its responsibility to provide basic services, assistance and protection.

**Discussions focused
on the tension
between playing a
more ‘political’ role in
addressing underlying
causes and playing
an operational role:
‘staying and delivering’.**

When it came to the role of international humanitarian actors, discussions focused on the tension between playing a more ‘political’ role in addressing underlying causes and playing an operational role: ‘staying and delivering’. Many participants felt the ‘international humanitarian system’ should not withdraw from an operational role, but rather attempt to address current operational constraints to international action in situations of conflict – particularly constraints around access.

Key recommendations here were that the WHS issue a clear statement upholding the importance of humanitarians being able to enter into dialogue with all parties in a conflict, and that states consider exemptions to be incorporated in national Counter Terrorism legislations and international sanctions regimes, to allow dialogue with all actors (although this recommendation was not universally supported). Another recommendation that received support was that of establishing a mechanism for third states to engage with governments that were party to a conflict for the purpose of delivering assistance and mediation.

Many access constraints come from a sense that international actors are not impartial. International actors should address this by ensuring they do more than just ‘pay lip service’ to the principle of impartiality, and also strengthen organisational policies and recruit, train and retain staff with an understanding of impartiality, access and negotiation. Donors can do much to model impartiality through the way they provide assistance. However, not all donor representatives supported suggestions relating to donor peer review mechanisms and counter-terror legislation.

More broadly, the new operating environment humanitarians find themselves in within conflict settings, as well as an inability to gain recognition for a humanitarian space, also brings about access constraints. One participant commented that this has become less about security issues as traditionally understood and more about failure to understand the new contexts in which conflict takes place:

'You cannot convince Boko Haram, even ICRC can't, that you should do what we want to do as a neutral and impartial humanitarian position, so I think that's the issue. How do we actually deal with this new environment where principled action is really challenged? It is a[bout] stay and deliver, but I don't think actually our technology, our thinking has caught up with the environment really. We are not doing that sort of analysis well enough, fast enough.'

Many access constraints come from a sense that international actors are not impartial.

URBAN CRISES



These are urban areas with rapidly developing slums/unplanned growth, high levels of endemic poverty and malnutrition and limited access to basic sanitation and healthcare. There are also high levels of criminal violence, with direct mortality rates similar to those that would be experienced in armed conflict: the state – and particularly law enforcement agencies – are armed actors in these situations. This violence also leads to displacement (to and within the city) and challenging access conditions for state and for humanitarian actors to areas of the city with high levels of need. Large numbers of refugees, displaced persons and migrants, moving from conflicts occurring in surrounding countries and rural areas of the country, live in the city, largely in informal settlements.

Examples might include cities in South and Central America and Western and Southern Africa.



URBAN CRISES:

Top voted obstacles and recommendations

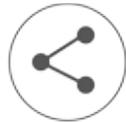


Participants had the opportunity to review all recommendations for all contexts at the Forum in a gallery polling exercise. Green circles represent approval and red circles represent disapproval. Recommendations were voted on in a 'package' with the obstacles they were intended to address. Disapproval 'points' were subtracted from approval points to get a total score for each package.

OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
Access to assistance and protection is constrained by lack of security for aid workers and people in need.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increase investment in strengthening rule of law in fragile urban environments through institutional development.2. Empower existing local networks.	27 ✓ 1 ✗
Specific vulnerable groups (such as migrants and displaced people) are not receiving humanitarian support and protection.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Create and enforce legal recognition of rights of migrants and displaced people.2. Support development of social safety nets and basic services and infrastructure.	31 ✓ 3 ✗



1. Good humanitarian action reaches everyone in need



2. Good humanitarian action meets the priorities and respects the dignity of crisis-affected people

OBSTACLE

Current approaches and delivery mechanisms of humanitarian aid decrease the agency of affected people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Use cash to support coping strategies and/or livelihoods and revitalise local markets – this should be supported through technology, smartphones (humanitarian agencies).
2. Prioritise rebuilding services and supporting the urban ecosystem to enable community-led response (host government, development actors).

VOTING

22 ✓ 0 ✗



URBAN CRISES: Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In situations of urban crises,

Governments should...

- Conduct thorough stakeholder analysis, identifying particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Create comprehensive strategic roadmaps to address issues of urban violence.
- Ensure that development policy and urban planning consider the challenge of urban violence and aim to decrease the 'pull' of informal urban settlements, make safer urban spaces and create livelihoods.
- Provide the private sector with incentives to engage with these policies, and to support creation of sustainable livelihoods.
- Enact judicial, policing and security sector reform where required to ensure the protection of population, prevention of corruption and the misuse of state systems for illicit activities.

- Ensure access to basic services, particularly for the most vulnerable.
- Conduct contingency planning for emergencies, and ensure that structures at all levels are in place and able to manage urban emergencies.

Civil society should...

- Conduct context analysis, risk and vulnerability mapping and assessment activities.
- Implement programme activities aimed at protection, livelihood development and education, especially for young people and women.
- Advocate for the needs of the urban population.
- Establish accountability mechanisms to hold government and other actors to account.
- Bring the voice, opinions and ideas of urban residents and civil society into the development of government strategy.

Regional organisations should...

- Share experience and knowledge around urban programming; support urban networks.
- Support the development of political solutions, where urban violence is related to cross-border/regional political tensions.

Donors and development actors should...

- Invest in development activities that aim to reduce causes of urban violence, such as livelihood development and security sector reform.
- Provide financing directly to government and civil society actors who are addressing urban violence.
- Harmonise development and humanitarian funding cycles and activities.

Private sector actors should...

- Invest in affected neighbourhoods.
- Provide technical support to the provision of services and humanitarian support (such as cash programming).

The media should...

- Disseminate free, fair and objective reporting; expose corruption.

International humanitarian actors should...

- Support continued international dialogue on the issue of urban violence, and the responsibilities of various parties with respect to urban violence.
- Support dissemination of the results of this dialogue, the legal framework with respect to urban violence and emerging principles.

- Advocate at national and international level for the protection of urban populations.
- Create impartial space to bring parties together and to provide humanitarian access (where local civil society is unable to do so).
- Fund local civil society organisations and support capacity building.
- Support government and civil society to map out risks and vulnerabilities.
- Fill gaps in implementation where local actors are unable to provide continuous services in an impartial manner, and international actors are able to do so.

Many humanitarian agencies are still in the process of identifying new ways of working that are better adapted to the urban environment.

Humanitarian engagement in urban environments can cover three areas: natural disaster response in an urban environment, urban refugees and conflict-level urban violence. While participants were asked to discuss the latter two, many felt better placed to comment on the first, and therefore the obstacles and recommendations pertaining to urban environments ended up spanning all three types of urban humanitarianism.

Given the network of structures, services and organisations that occur in urban settings, many recommendations in this context overlapped with those in the rapid-onset context in terms of their focus on building local capacity. However, the focus here was at the micro level, looking at municipalities and small, urban-based CSOs. Improving cash and rebuilding services were frequent topics of recommendations as examples of ways in which humanitarian actors can use approaches and delivery mechanisms that do not decrease the agency of affected people.

Many humanitarian agencies are still in the process of identifying new ways of working that are better adapted to the urban environment. Perhaps for this reason, many of the recommendations focused on addressing skills and expertise gaps in international actors. Examples of areas for improving the capacities and skills of international actors to respond in urban environments include focusing on leadership teams rather than individuals for decision-making and regionalising preparedness and response structures through area-driven Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)-type structures. Participants from NDMA and national NGOs particularly supported regionalisation.

Speaking directly to urban violence, there was little consensus on whether international humanitarian actors had a role to play in responding to such situations and what the nature of that role might be. Many saw urban violence as an internal matter – the domain of law enforcement, urban planning and development policy, of primary concern to national and local government and to civil society. They pointed out that international humanitarian law did not cover urban violence, and that for international actors to become involved was a challenge to the sovereignty of the state.

Others suggested that separating the consequences of urban violence (often including displacement, protection violations and mortality) from those of rural violence created a false distinction: all those affected by violence should receive assistance and protection, and in some cases the impartiality of international organisations may give them the

opportunity to provide humanitarian assistance where it is difficult for the state or for civil society to do so.

As one participant noted, the type of violence dictates the kinds of approaches that can be used, and thus determines which, between development and humanitarian actors, will have the comparative advantage:

‘You have to understand what type of violence you face. If this is a violence that is coming from the local community, because of lack of development, and so on. Then there is a need to involve the local community as the first responders. If this is a violence that is constrained [sic] on the local community by a gang that took over the local community to exploit the local community for its own purposes, there is a need for a much more neutral actor to enter into the game.’

There was little consensus on whether international humanitarian actors had a role to play in responding to urban violence.

While humanitarian actors might address the consequences of urban violence, the violence itself is fundamentally a challenge related to governance and development policy.

Joint planning with development and local actors was also a key theme in the urban context. While humanitarian actors might address the consequences of urban violence, the violence itself is fundamentally a challenge related to governance and development policy.

As with other contexts, participants at the Global Forum called on states and development actors to take a more active role in addressing the causes of human suffering. However, the urban context group differed in its more explicit focus on seeing the lack of state involvement as much as a matter of political will as a matter of capacity, both of which need addressing.

Currently, there are often ‘multi-mandate’ (development and humanitarian) agencies, national and international, already present in the city. For these agencies, the question of whether and how to respond to violence is not an academic debate but a constant operational challenge. In many cases, it is these agencies that are pushing for clarification on the role of external actors in these situations.

MEGA DISASTERS



These crises are of a regional dimension, affecting several countries, they tend to be of a rapid evolution and have significant impacts in the state structures in terms of disruption in the provision of services. Mortality and disease morbidity are very high, and there is significant economic damage to affected states. The emergency response capacities of affected states and the international humanitarian system together are unable to address humanitarian needs, and additional support is required. The scale and nature of the emergency may make access to affected areas difficult. This is a new type of disaster, and one for which the international system should prepare itself.

Examples would be the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and potentially other pandemics or massive natural disasters of rapid evolution and high mortality, technological failures or potential mega disasters affecting broad areas or densely populated areas.



MEGA DISASTERS:



Top voted obstacles and recommendations

Participants had the opportunity to review all recommendations for all contexts at the Forum in a gallery polling exercise. Green circles represent approval and red circles represent disapproval. Recommendations were voted on in a 'package' with the obstacles they were intended to address. Disapproval 'points' were subtracted from approval points to get a total score for each package.

OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
----------	-----------------	--------



1. Good humanitarian action reaches everyone in need

Humanitarian action is targeted on basis of ease rather than needs.

- 1. Build community capacity and information-flow mechanism to identify and report on population groups not being reached.
- 2. Develop coordinated multi-stakeholder mechanism to monitor action in response to information on excluded groups.

29 ✓ 1 ✗



OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
 <p>2. Good humanitarian action meets the priorities and respects the dignity of crisis-affected people</p>	<p>Humanitarians do not pay price for poor programming. Addressing this will facilitate more fit for purpose structures and processes for participation.</p>	<p>1. All humanitarian agencies should incorporate feedback mechanisms which assess humanitarian performance – to be mandatory requirements by donors the Emergency Relief Coordinator to hold Humanitarian Coordinators to account.</p> <p>29 ✓ 1 ✗</p> 
 <p>5. Good humanitarian action is apolitical and adheres to international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles.</p>	<p>Currently, the centrality of protection in humanitarian action is not affirmed and meaningfully applied as it should be.</p>	<p>1. Local actors should be more empowered in enforcing and advocating for the fulfilment of protection needs by being included in context analysis and decision making.</p> <p>2. Government officials and humanitarian leaders should be accountable for addressing in non-conflict situations.</p> <p>27 ✓ 0 ✗</p> 

MEGA DISASTERS: Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In preparation for and response to mega disasters,

Governments should...

- Build their own capacity for response: include disaster response in budgets and establish and strengthen NDMAs (including at sub-national and local levels).
- Conduct cross-sectoral vulnerability and capacity assessments.
- Establish disaster management plans (including roles and responsibilities for various actors).
- Establish legal frameworks to facilitate international response.
- Be prepared to integrate planning and response with international bodies, or at least to interface with international bodies.

Civil society organisations should...

- Build community capacity for rapid response.
- Implement response activities.
- Provide information on context and needs.

Regional bodies should...

- Conduct preparedness at regional level and planning and prevention activities.
- Promote standards and best practices.
- Facilitate international humanitarian access and response.

External militaries should...

- Coordinate with the international and national response.
- Work with the logistics cluster, where appropriate.
- Train with humanitarian actors in advance.

Donors and international development actors should...

- Review development plans to consider crisis modifiers.

The private sector should...

- Ensure business continuity by maintaining trade and infrastructure.
- Provide support on logistics.
- Use technological innovation, research and development expertise.

International humanitarian actors should...

- Support civil society capacity-building initiatives.
- Conduct assessments as part of government-led activity, where possible, but taking a lead role if required.

- Be prepared to lead and coordinate a response if governments are not able to do so; ensure articulation with government coordination mechanisms if these are functioning.
- Be prepared to conduct large-scale response activities.
- Set and adhere to standards.

MEGA DISASTERS: Analysis



Overall, there were more recommendations that generated disagreement for this context than for any other.

Mega disasters can be addressed primarily through better preparedness – specifically at the global and regional levels.

Mega disaster contexts are more difficult to consider than other contexts because very few reference points have occurred in recent memory. Overall, there were more recommendations that generated disagreement for this context than for any other, perhaps reflecting the difficulties in visualising how to improve the system's ability to deal with unexpected crises that completely overwhelm state, and in some cases international, capacity.

Mega disasters are characterised by the way they overwhelm existing systems and resources. As reflected in the recommendations, this can be addressed primarily through better preparedness – specifically at the global and regional levels – for such mega crisis scenarios as well as greater efficiencies in the system during a mega disaster in order to make the best use of overtaxed resources. Recommendations addressing the former included:

- a mechanism for global and regional preparedness based on risk assessment and capacity gap analysis;
- operationalising global facilities for demographic analysis of potential countries at risk;
- building more systematic and technologically contemporary systems for the collection, management and dissemination of data;
- and establishing national platforms to conduct assessments on risk and carry out multi-stakeholder risk analysis rooted in scientific and local knowledge.

Popular recommendations for this context targeted inefficiencies in the current mandated structure of the system and pushed for approaches to coordination and funding that would include a much more diverse range of actors. It was felt that greater effectiveness could be achieved by reorienting response in

a mega disaster to focus resources on actors based on their capacity to respond rather than on their mandate or status. However, these recommendations on mandate-driven inefficiencies also received a higher number of disapproval points in the gallery polling.

There was a lively debate within the mega disaster groups as to who was leading and coordinating in such crises: international humanitarian actors or the crisis-affected state. Some argued that, ultimately, it was the state that was still in charge, even in the face of an overwhelming mega disaster, as only the state can exercise legitimate authority:

‘Think of Haiti, the fact that immediately after the earthquake, the fact that the president was living in his car, it didn’t mean he was no longer the president, he was still the designated the authority, even though there was no capacity to function [...] The real authority should still remain with the elected national official...’

Others felt that, while ideally there is a desire to see the state in the lead, the reality, particularly in large-scale mega disasters, is other than the ideal:

‘The ideal, as you said that really we need the government to lead and to work with, but the practicality is really in many, many cases [it is] just the international NGOs, the clusters, the people who are really doing the hard job, and they coordinate all the work.’

These discussions point to the complexity of working in a mega disaster and the need to take a ‘calibrated approach’ depending on the specifics of the crisis. This might mean internationals coordinating the international element of the response, and ensuring it articulates successfully with national action, and it might, in some cases, mean taking on the overall leadership and implementation of the response. International actors would also be required to hold a normative accountability role, upholding standards and ensuring accountability for all actors. Where this is the case, international actors would need to exercise restraint by not assuming a long-term role for themselves post-crisis.

There was a lively debate within mega disaster groups as to who was leading and coordination in such crises.

International leadership and coordination mechanisms are not currently effective enough.

There is general consensus that, despite IASC efforts to empower humanitarian coordinators and strengthen country-level coordination architecture, international leadership and coordination mechanisms are not currently effective enough to play this role. A more fundamental consideration of how leadership and coordination are enacted in an atomised system of autonomous organisations is required.

For this reason, a focus on preparedness activities as well as relationship-building and outreach were key themes from the mega disaster context group. While localisation was a theme here as in all contexts, the mega group focused even more on how the humanitarian system could partner with actors outside the traditional sector, including the private sector, science and the military.

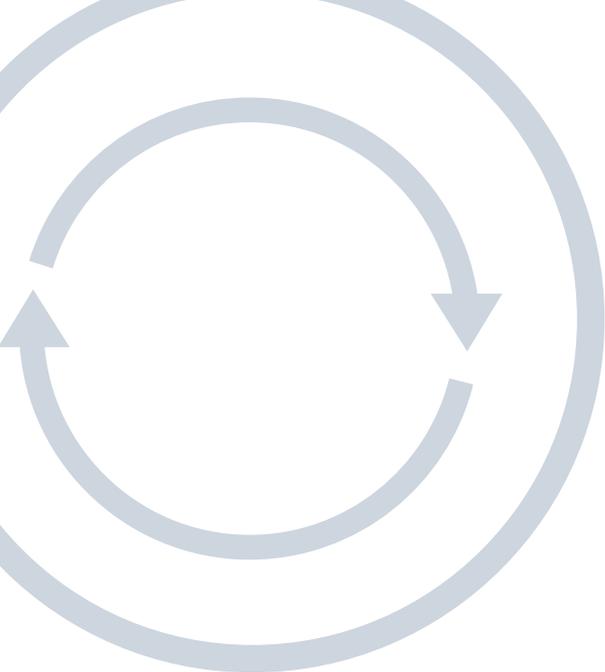


RECURRENT CRISES



These are crises that tend to happen cyclically in the same environment (similar crises every few years). They are generally associated with natural disasters such as droughts or floods, aggravated by man-made factors: the effects are generally felt most by populations who are already fairly impoverished. State actors and local authorities have some capacity to respond, although this capacity will often tend to be lower in the more remote/marginalised areas where these crises often occur. The national government will generally expect to lead the response. In these crisis there is a tendency to have a mixed presence of international actors: emergency response programmes and resilience/development programmes.

Examples would be Sahelian countries, arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya, and flood-prone areas of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Mozambique.



RECURRENT CRISES:

Top voted obstacles and recommendations



Participants had the opportunity to review all recommendations for all contexts at the Forum in a gallery polling exercise. Green circles represent approval and red circles represent disapproval. Recommendations were voted on in a 'package' with the obstacles they were intended to address. Disapproval 'points' were subtracted from approval points to get a total score for each package.

OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
 <p>4. Good humanitarian action is led by the state and build on local response capacities wherever possible.</p>	<p>Funding for capacity building of civil society is limited and approaches to capacity building have not always been effective.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reform international funding arrangements in order recognise and support the lead role played by local and national humanitarian actors in preparedness and response. Potential targets could be set.2. Reform current international funding arrangements so that x% of international humanitarian funding will be dedicated to strengthening the capacity of national and local actors. Allow local NGOs to determine their own capacity-building needs and support a results-based approach; invest more where capacity is built successfully.	<p>27✓ 0✗</p> 

RECURRENT CRISES: Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In situations of recurrent disasters,

Governments should...

- Ensure the provision of basic services, particularly to people/areas vulnerable to recurrent crises.
- Create development policies which include resilience and DRR.
- Build own capacity by establishing NDMAs where these are not present.
- Ensure that early warning and monitoring systems are in place.
- Communicate preparedness and response activities with population.
- Lead on and coordinate preparedness and response.
- Ensure a legal framework is in place to facilitate humanitarian response.
- Establish regulations for and maintain oversight of humanitarian programming.

Civil society should...

- Build their own capacity for DRR, preparedness and response.
- Implement humanitarian response (under government leadership).
- Ensure accountability to affected populations.
- Advocate for the rights of affected populations.
- Identify and target people most at risk, as part of planning and monitoring activities.

Development actors should:

- Take the lead in supporting governments with their DRR/Resilience plans and implementation.

Private sector actors should...

- Provide financial and technical support to the development of resilience activities.

Regional bodies should...

- Develop model policy frameworks.
- Play a coordination role, where activities are regional in nature.
- Mobilise technical, financial and human resources.
- Share best practice (for example, on early warning mechanisms).

International humanitarian actors should...

- Fill gaps and and deliver last resort response – including provision of basic services if necessary.

- Concentrate on humanitarian activities, and leave space for:
 - development actors to work with governments on resilience activities
 - political actors to lead on measures mitigating climate change effects.
- Develop and share global best practices for contingency and response planning.
- Support capacity development of local civil society.
- Support contingency planning, as required by the government.
- Facilitate access to resources.
- Fill gaps in the humanitarian response.

RECURRENT CRISES: Analysis



The most popular frequently mentioned issue focused on achieving greater respect, financing, capacity and control for national and local actors – states in particular.

For both recurrent and protracted crises, humanitarian actors are faced with a longer-term engagement in a given location, either intermittently (recurrent) or consistently (protracted) over a long span of time. This type of engagement presents particular challenges around how to deliver assistance in a way that supports, rather than inhibits, an elimination of humanitarian needs over time, as well as in the meantime defining the boundaries and responsibilities of humanitarian actors vis-à-vis development and peacebuilding actors. The most popular and frequently mentioned issue in the recommendations for the recurrent crisis context focused on achieving greater respect, financing, capacity and control for national and local actors – states in particular. The clear vision for recurrent crises is that the international humanitarian system should, in general, take a lesser role. This requires reforming funding mechanisms to strengthen national and local capacities and to support more flexibility to adapt to crises as they evolve; relying on local government

to ensure humanitarian actors are meeting standards; engaging in multi-risk analysis; and addressing the institutional and social barriers that hinder the inclusion of risk analysis in aid programming.

It was felt that recurrent crises should, in many cases, be seen as failures of development/resilience, and should be addressed primarily by the affected state and civil society in partnership with development actors. A greater emphasis on risk analysis and risk management, perhaps under the framework of ‘resilience’, over a more traditional model of crisis response is needed. However, some participants felt this may be the purview of development, rather than humanitarian, actors. Donors should support these efforts through the provision of funding that can move between development activities (in normal years) and more response-oriented activities (in bad years).

Governments should take the lead in monitoring the situation and in developing preparedness plans for crisis response.

Government actors should lead implementation of these plans, and they should be carried out by government, civil society and, where relevant, the private sector. However, there was some disagreement within the recurrent crisis groups as to the feasibility of relying on states in recurrent crises to take on these roles: while in some cases this is a matter of ‘can’t’, in others it is a matter of ‘won’t’, implying that the transition from an international- to a state-led response in recurrent crises may be further off than the recommendations assume. This will also take significant investments at the highest levels. As one participant said, ‘Subsidiarity does not mean only local action. It also means that, in many cases for recurrent crises, this will require adaptation of assistance, as well as high-level political action to address the underlying crisis and to find solutions to the cycle of crisis.’ It was felt that, overall, ideally in five years’ time, international humanitarian actors should be prepared to support surge capacities and to fill gaps in response where they have particular skills and abilities.

One of the emerging recommendations from the World Humanitarian Summit Thematic Teams’ work was discussed in depth in the Recurrent context. This recommendation was: ‘Agree on a compact between humanitarian and development actors that will herald a new system of collective crisis management. This is aimed at reducing the overall humanitarian caseload in protracted and recurrent crises.’ This received some of the strongest approval out of any of the recommendations for this context, particularly as a solution for addressing the lack of coordination and collaboration between development and humanitarian actors. However, when this recommendation was put forward for addressing obstacles around funding, participants in the polling gallery expressed a high degree of disapproval. This indicates that, while participants felt that such a compact will be effective in addressing coordination problems between humanitarian and development actors, its relevance for addressing obstacles in how recurrent responses are funded was less clear.

Donors should provide funding that can move between development activities (in normal years) and more response-oriented activities (in bad years).

PROTRACTED CRISES



These are crises of long duration. They develop and change over time. State and local authorities typically have limited capacity in terms of the provision of basic services, and international actors provide these services (health, education, WASH and so forth) for prolonged periods using humanitarian budgets. Human development, as measured by indicators such as mortality rates, life expectancy, education and literacy and income, will tend to be low – there is chronic poverty and needs associated with this poverty. There will often be endemic violent conflict and high rates of criminality, violence and impunity. Levels of conflict can increase rapidly. International peacekeeping or stabilisation forces are often present. Conflict and violence, as well as physical remoteness, may make it difficult for affected people to access humanitarian support. Protracted crises will tend to produce large numbers of internally displaced people and refugees.

Examples of this type of crisis would be the Democratic Republic of Congo and some areas of Afghanistan.

OBSTACLE	RECOMMENDATIONS	VOTING
----------	-----------------	--------



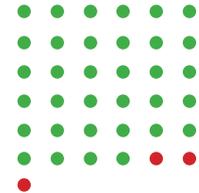
7. Good humanitarian action uses the best knowledge, skills and tools to achieve an effective humanitarian response

Humanitarian responses do not use the most effective approaches because of poor leadership and decision making.

Humanitarian staff lack adequate skills and training in best practices.

1. Focus on leadership teams (not individuals) as decision making for a ensure that locally recruited staff participate in these teams.
2. Identify skilled people from outside the humanitarian sector (private sector/academia) who can provide specialist partner capacity (e.g. urban response).
3. Establish training/learning opportunities at national/regional levels (especially for newer technologies and language skills). 'Pull people into the system'.

34 ✓ 3 ✗

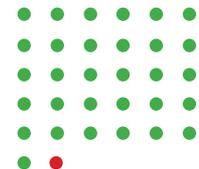


1. Good humanitarian action reaches everyone in need

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by a lack of security aid workers.

1. Make funding available, especially for local actors.
2. Need for greater respect of humanitarian principles.
3. Look to non-traditional actors for alternative solutions.

31 ✓ 1 ✗



PROTRACTED CRISES: Roles & responsibilities as identified by participants



In protracted emergencies,

Governments should...

- Take responsibility for developing and providing basic levels of service provision/welfare.
- Create an overall development strategy, with a strong resilience element (anticipating potential crises), in collaboration with national and international development actors.
- Lead (where possible) and deliver (or otherwise facilitate) impartial humanitarian action.

Civil society should...

- Support government in basic service delivery, and government/other humanitarian actors in humanitarian assistance in crisis contexts.
- Conduct assessments and provide information to governments or deliver humanitarian planning in crisis situations.

- Enable people to hold the government and other development and humanitarian actors to account.

Neighbouring states and regional organisations should...

- Provide active support to peacebuilding processes.
- Include refugee populations in their own development planning to support durable solutions.

International donors should...

- Use political influence in support of peacebuilding activities.
- Support much greater engagement by development actors in the problems of delivering basic services in protracted conflicts.

- Create financial conditions to allow more integrated humanitarian/development activity. This might involve more multi-year financing, although:
 - It is politically complicated for some donors because of legislative controls that restrict flexibility to this extent.
 - There are concerns that multi-year financing itself could become a new straight jacket, and needs to be complemented with other types of funding.
- Fill gaps in humanitarian support and protection under government leadership, to the degree that:
 - government allows for impartial action, and
 - government/civil society cannot meet all needs.
- (Possibly) engage in long term projects aligned to development plans.

International humanitarian actors, should...

- Mobilise resources.
- Support the capacity building of civil society organisations, potentially including the capacity to deliver services and to create mechanisms to hold governments to account.

PROTRACTED CRISES: Analysis



There remain significant challenges in getting agreement on the structural and behavioural changes needed to improve assistance in this context.

The most popular recommendations were around changes to funding structures.

Protracted crises are some of the most difficult environments in which humanitarian organisations operate; they also make up a significant proportion of the humanitarian caseload. While there is general agreement that the current international response structure for protracted crises is not optimal, there remain significant challenges in getting agreement on the structural and behavioural changes needed to improve assistance in this context. Protracted crises also point to the importance of getting the right people in the room in order for reform to take place: many Global Forum participants emphasised that, so long as the conversation about protracted crises takes place only among humanitarians to the exclusion of development organisations, these core challenges will remain unaddressed.

The recommendations for improving humanitarian action in the protracted group focused on:

- The relationship between humanitarian and development, local and/or national actors;

- Funding structures;
- Constraints to access;
- Protection; and
- The humanitarian principles.

The most popular recommendations were around changes to funding structures, including:

- Multi-year funding;
- Making funding more flexible and more available for local actors; and
- Creating funding mechanisms that provide greater coherence between humanitarian and development financing.

In the session on roles and responsibilities, donors were specifically called on to provide more predictable funding in the form of multi-year financing. However, participants from donor organisations offered caveats to this expectation, highlighting that home country politics could restrict them from being as flexible or predictable as they wished. Also, it was felt that multi-year financing itself could

become ‘a new strait-jacket’ and needs to be complemented by other types of funding based on the needs of the context.

With respect to the need for greater respect for humanitarian principles and principled action in protracted crises, one participant noted that,

‘[There needs to be] an honest discussion about the trade-off involved in deciding between different humanitarian principles, in particular deciding between humanity and neutrality, so when to stay, when to go and why those decisions are taken.’

Related to this, there was also a call to ‘Look to non-traditional actors for alternative solutions’, as non-traditional actors may be able to achieve access to populations when traditional humanitarian actors are unable to do so.

‘[There needs to be] an honest discussion about the trade-off involved in deciding between different humanitarian principles, in particular deciding between humanity and neutrality.’

The state should not be regarded as a monolith: there are many layers and structures in the apparatus of any state.

International development actors, in partnership with governments, should do more to address issues of basic service provision in protracted emergencies.

There was considerable interest in, and some disagreement over, the degree to which states might accept the principle of impartial humanitarian assistance in a protracted crisis, particularly when they are party to long-running internal conflicts. It is difficult to generalise about the optimum relationship between the state and humanitarian actors: this will depend on the orientation of the specific state. However, it is important to note that:

- The state should not be regarded as a monolith: there are many layers and structures in the apparatus of any state, and it would normally be possible for international actors to work with some elements of the state.
- Humanitarian engagement with the state – and particularly the degree to which international humanitarian actors work under state leadership and accept coordination by state structures in protracted crises – is closely related to the degree to which the state facilitates impartial humanitarian activity. While there could, conceivably, be some form of objective third party

measurement of the degree to which states allow impartial action, which would serve to help humanitarians make and justify decisions, it is more likely that states and international humanitarians will find the balance through direct negotiation.

There was general agreement that international development actors, in partnership with governments, should do more to address issues of basic service provision in protracted emergencies and that international political actors should do more to address peacebuilding and stability. However, there was a great deal of discussion around what exactly were the different roles of humanitarian and development actors and the appropriate relationship between them in protracted settings. While some participants viewed this as a short-term/long-term demarcation, others saw humanitarianism as defined by a specific type of vulnerability or need. As one participant put it,

'[...] I don't think we should generalise by saying that humanitarian action is about the short term. If a population is being systematically subject to grotesque mistreatment, year after year, after year, after year, it remains a humanitarian concern. I don't think anyone would say, you know, Syria, well it's entering the fifth year, it's time to hand over to the development actors.'

Another participant questioned how realistic 'handover' really was in a protracted crisis:

'I don't think it's a question of handing over [...] to think that humanitarians have to exit out because development folks come in, etc., it's just not realistic and it actually doesn't play out [...] We have to get out of this mind frame of saying "humanitarian to development". It should be very much "humanitarian and development". What can they do together, rather than a continuous link from humanitarian to development.'



PART III: **Adapting the system**

The Global Forum was developed on the hypothesis that the success of international humanitarian action depends, to a large extent, on the degree to which humanitarian activities are adapted to work in the specific context of the country and of the crisis. Currently, the humanitarian system tends to use a single 'one-size-fits-all' approach to crises. A more successful approach might entail working in different ways in different contexts, and being able to change ways of working in any given country as the situation evolves.

During the Global Forum, participants clarified ideal roles and activities of key actors in each context (see Part II). While there were many overlaps between contexts, the emerging portraits of the six contexts presented a wide range of functions and activities that international actors – namely the UN, INGOs and donors – would need to fulfil. The flexibility question then arises. What do the systems and practices of international humanitarian actors need to look like in order to fulfil the variety of different roles they will be expected to play across rapid-onset natural disaster, conflict, protracted, recurrent, mega and urban disaster contexts? What is the best design for a system that can address Syria, Ebola, the Central African Republic, the earthquake in Nepal, recurrent drought in the Sahel and many other emergencies at the same time?

Specifically, participants were asked to consider how to make the following five elements of the international humanitarian system more flexible and more able to address the needs of different contexts:

- **Financing:** The rules, mechanisms and procedures through which an organisation acquires and spends its financial resources;
- **Governance:** The mechanisms and structures by means of which the international system regulates itself, takes decisions, coordinates and assures quality;
- **Staffing and skills:** Organisational processes that determine the number of staff, and their professional quality and skills level. For humanitarian organisations this particularly includes built-in surge capacities for emergency response;
- **Programming:** How an organisation decides to do what it will do, and by what means;

- **Information and knowledge management:**

The tools and processes an organisation uses to collect, analyse, share and monitor information to inform its activities and decisions.

At the final session of the Global Forum, participants identified the recommendations they felt would best make the international humanitarian system more flexible and adaptable to support effective humanitarian action in all crisis contexts. These recommendations were immediately polled with all attendees, in order to gauge the range of support for each proposed reform. The recommendations receiving the highest support in each category are reproduced at the end of this section (See the Annex for the full list of recommendations and polling results from the final session of the Global Forum).

Generally, the recommendations reflected three types of change: adaptations to elements of existing structures and practices; the creation of new practices and sub-structures; and the significant overhaul or redesign of existing structures. Table 1 summarises the distribution of the recommendations against these three types of change.

Only two recommendations clearly called for a significant overhaul of existing structures: one asked to decentralise decision-making in the IASC; the second requested ‘a reform of UN agency mandates and roles to better meet the core humanitarian needs of affected people’. The latter recommendation received by far the greatest support out of any of the 19 polled recommendations, with 72% signalling ‘strong support’ for this recommendation.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF RECOMMENDATIONS AGAINST 3 TYPES OF CHANGE

TYPE OF CHANGE	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS
Adapting/improving practices and structures	10
Proposal of new practices and structures	7
Significant overhaul of existing practices and structures	2

The degree to which the WHS addresses significant overhaul depends on the kind of change process envisioned through the summit (see Part IV for reflections on how change happens). It should be highlighted that most of the recommendations did not call for overhaul; rather than this being a matter of 'lowest common denominator' recommendations, this may instead indicate that some of the clearest paths to tangible improvements lie in adaptations and the proposal of new practices or structures.

While the recommendations could all feasibly lead to improved humanitarian action, not all of them directly addressed the design of flexible systems and approaches. Many of the recommendations, and the broader discussion around flexibility, tend to view localisation, decentralisation and the inclusion of more diverse actors as the key means through which humanitarian action can become effective in each context. However, there is a difference between context-specificity and flexibility.

Context-specific humanitarian action refers to how well a response is adapted to the particular demands, capacities and needs of a single given context. This is distinct from flexibility, which refers to the ability of a single actor or system to 'move across' contexts, adapting to their different demands.

Many of the recommendations for 'adapting the international system' focused on localising the resources, decision-making and coordination powers for humanitarian action. While this may support a more context-specific response, it does not necessarily address the need for flexibility experienced by some international actors, such as donors, INGOs and the UN, which cross multiple contexts while remaining a single organisation. Not all aspects of financial management, programming or governance can be decentralised for an international donor or UN agency. Therefore, beyond the expressed support for enhancing the resources and power of national and local actors, the question still remains as to how these systems can be made more flexible to effectively meet the demands of every context, or of the same context as it changes.

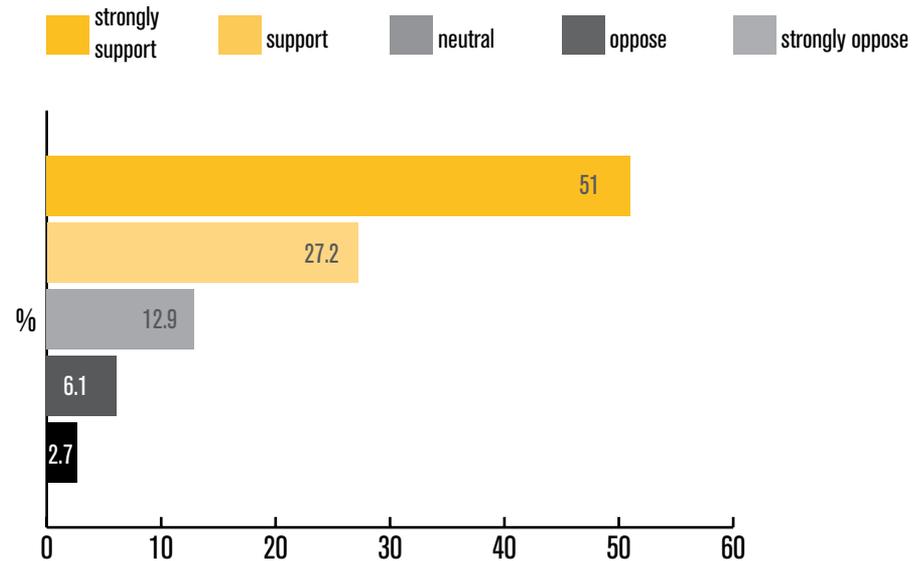
To this end, some recommendations prescribed new targets and benchmarks—while these may be useful for ensuring that international actors comply with certain aims, it is not clear that these would support flexible and context-responsive financing, governance, or programming. They appear to be more focused on improving humanitarian action than on making it more flexible. Other recommendations appeared to address the flexibility issue more directly, by calling for more platforms and practices around sharing and cooperation. This approach to flexibility may reflect the view that, in an international humanitarian ‘system’ – that is really more a constellation of actors than a centralised body – the path to greater flexibility lies in strengthening the linkages between different actors within the humanitarian system and better harnessing their collective capacity in different ways, in disparate contexts.

Some recommendations appear to be more focused on improving humanitarian action than on making it more flexible. Others appeared to address the flexibility issue more directly, by calling for more platforms and practices around sharing and cooperation.

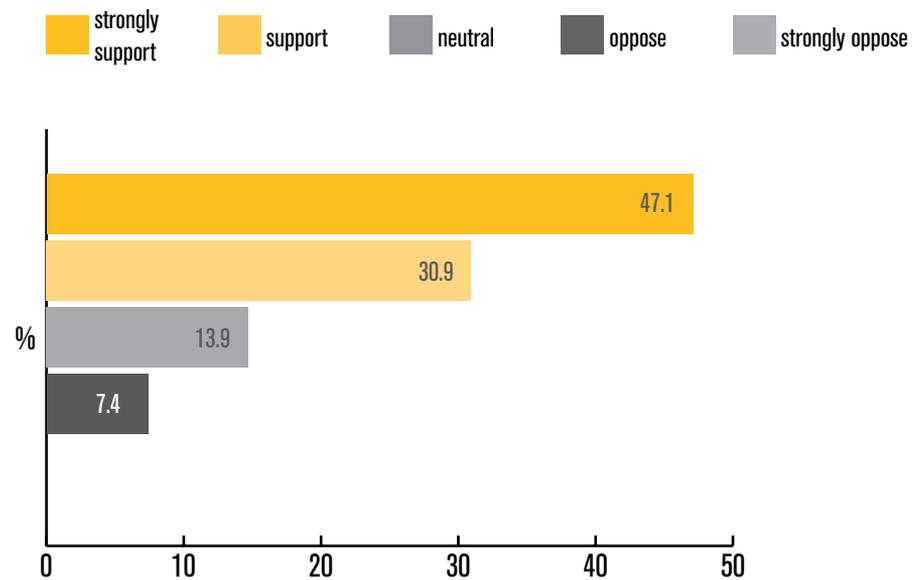
Most highly voted finance recommendations



Institutional, private sector and national donors should increase direct access to flexible and fast funding for frontline workers and national and local actors to x% by year (in areas of comparative advantage) with accompanying targets for investment in capacity building. Tools would include: pre-vetting; competitive bids for manage fund (rather than UN), independent results evaluations.



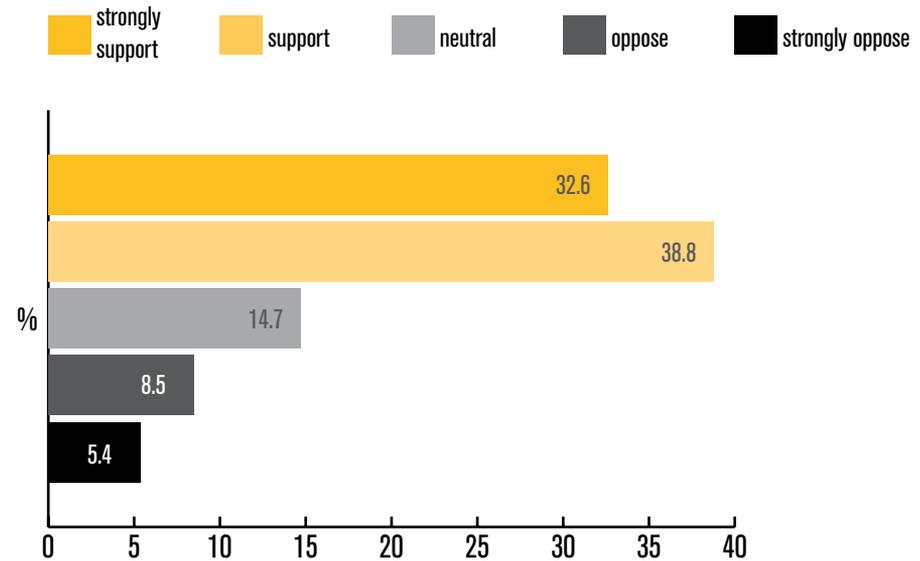
Donors should 1) provide more coordinated multi-annual funding options in relevant contexts, and 2) set ambitions benchmarks for the timing for disbursements from donor to local level.



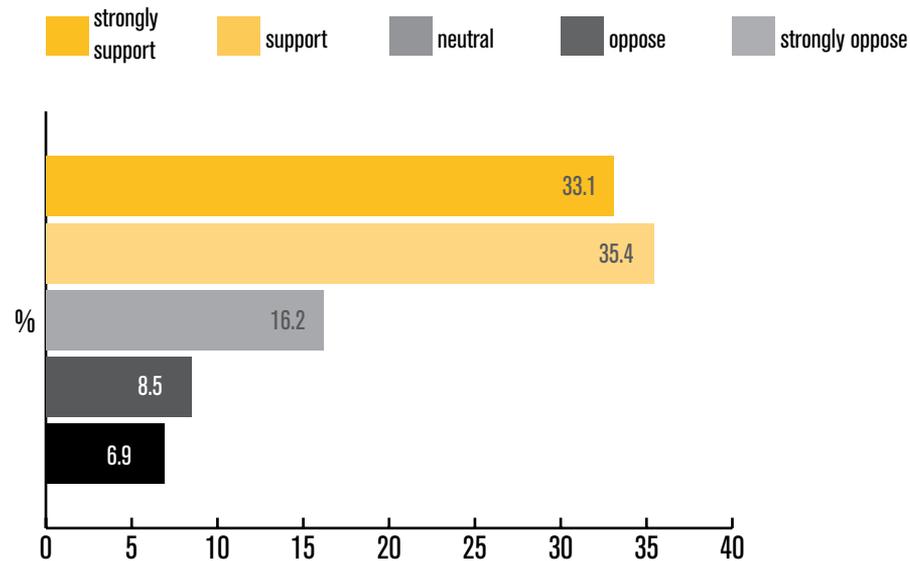
Most highly voted knowledge & information recommendations



All humanitarian assistance proposals will incorporate lessons learnt (donor funding will be conditional on this). The humanitarian system will support a mega portal/repository of crowd-sourced knowledge responses, which will comprise of untapped southern and northern community resources and academic institutions.



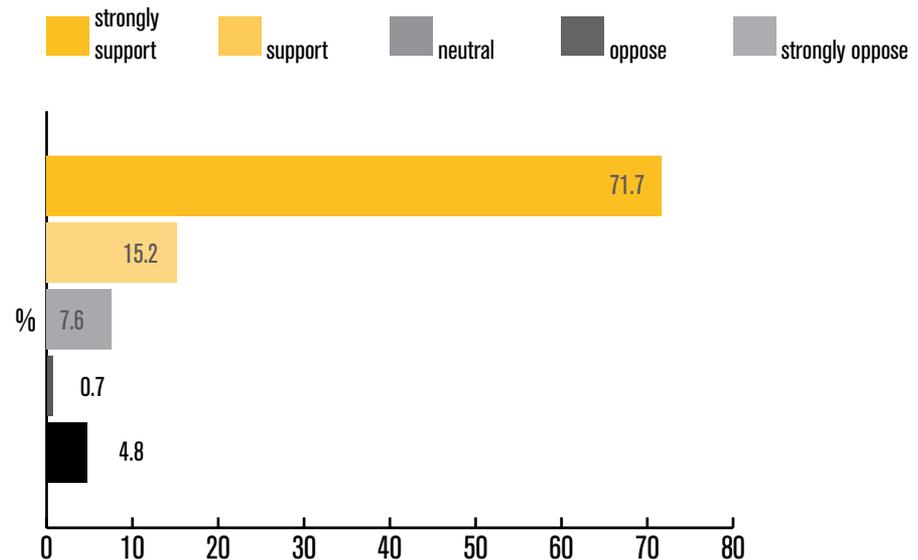
There should be a shared information platform of common code and data collection to which all agencies contribute. A new ecosystem or network of independent actors such as think tanks, academia, specialised NGOs (e.g. ACAPS), in-house KME, who on the basis of shared data systems (or knowledge base) can produce competing analysis to support decision makers.



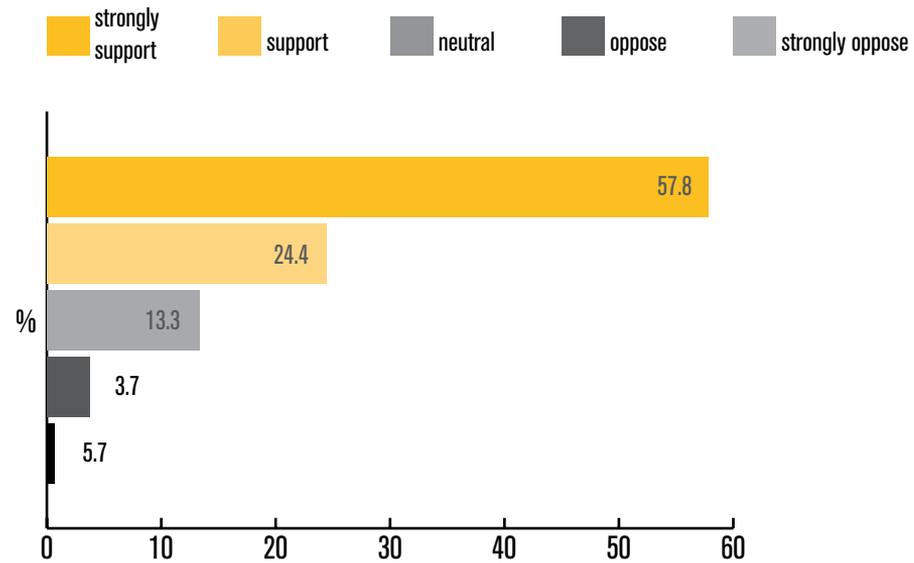
Most highly voted governance recommendations



There should be a more collaborative and complementary system with fewer agency overlaps, duplication and gaps. The SG should call for a reform of UN agency mandates and roles to better meet core humanitarian needs of affected people.



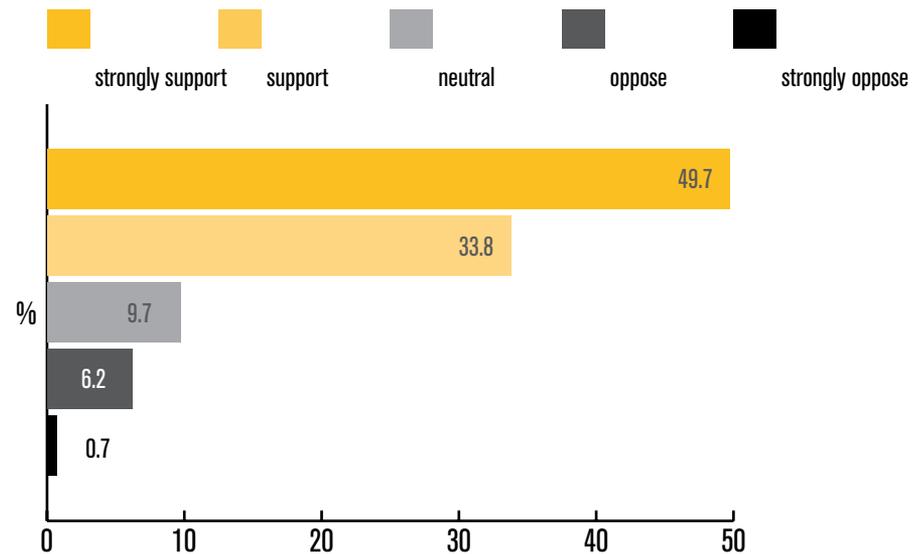
There should be an open platform for feedback from affected people on needs met in each crisis/context. This should be managed by an autonomous body.



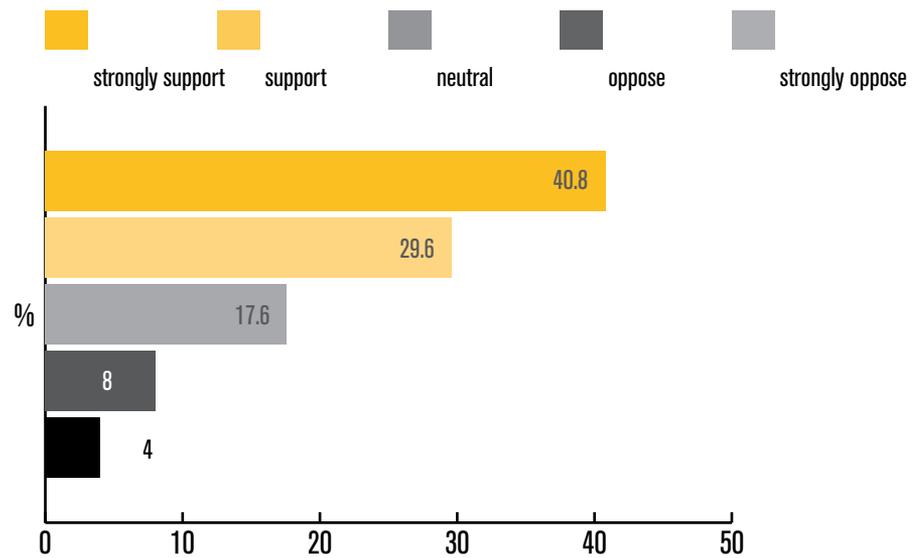
Most highly voted staffing & skills recommendations



Everyone who is providing humanitarian assistance should have the necessary training to do their job – those with current training capacities should open their training opportunities to others.



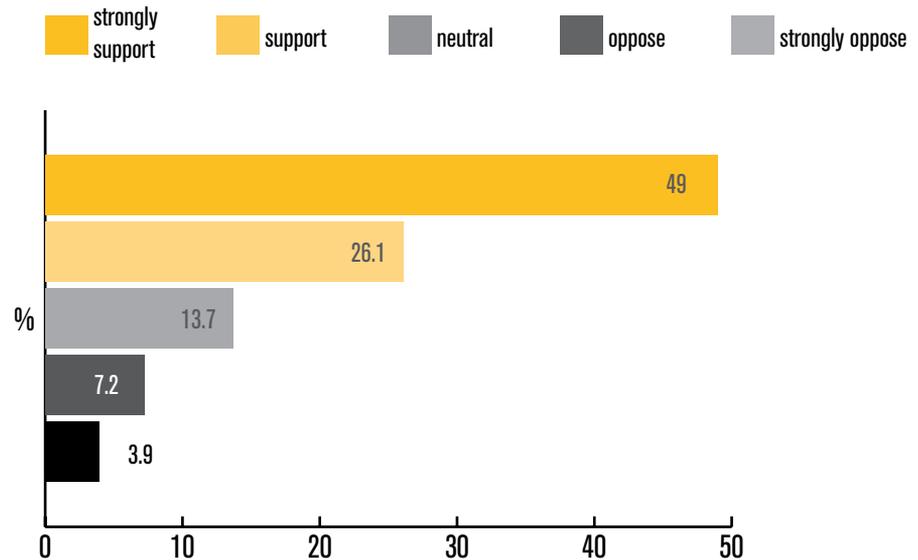
A transparent selection process where local staff with desired capacity and skill, should be in lead with decision making ability to deliver better in localised context.



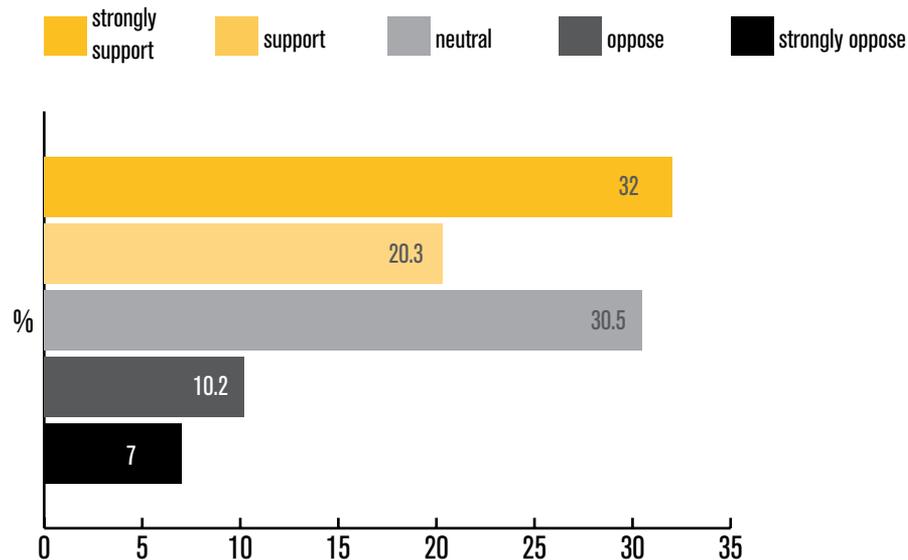
Most highly voted programming recommendations



Donors and UN agencies incentivise enhanced communications within and between organisations, reciprocal learning and devolved decision-making authority for greater ability to continuously identify and respond to shifting multi-dimensional realities, needs and priorities of affected communities.



Donors and senior managers in operational agencies adopt a new standard 'hands-on' approach to oversight, with components including: collaborating with field teams, joint responsibility for problem solving, expecting changes to activities, timely decisionmaking, subsidiarity (recognising they're one part of a bigger effort), light narrative reporting (not quantitative vs. output targets).





PART IV: **Reflections and cross-cutting themes from the Global Forum**

The Global Forum generated a discussion around how the international system needs to change to better respond to different crisis contexts. The ALNAP Secretariat offers three areas of reflection and analysis on the recommendations that emerged from this event: 1) on the issue of context, and to what degree it matters; 2) on cross-cutting issues, in particular areas of disagreement or tension; 3) on process, in particular what change processes look like and what this means for the WHS.

We can see a variety of priority issues that differ from one context to the next.

IMPROVING HUMANITARIAN ACTION: DOES CONTEXT MATTER?

While there is much anecdotal material to support the idea that different response contexts present different obstacles to effective humanitarian action, and thus demand different reforms, there has been little systematic work carried out to support this.⁵

The Global Forum set out to test this idea by separating participants into six different context groups and asking each to identify recommendations for improving humanitarian action in their context. Participants were asked to pick a context group based on their expertise and experience in humanitarian action.

Each group was provided with the same inputs: the briefing papers (described above in Part I), which provided a general evidence base for the state of humanitarian performance, a list of key obstacles and a list of synthesised recommendations that might address these

obstacles. Each context group identified key obstacles for the context and recommendations on how to address these. All of the obstacles and recommendations for each context group were then presented for a prioritisation exercise in which all Global Forum participants took part.

If context matters, we would expect that the obstacles and, particularly, the recommendations for improving humanitarian action would differ from one context to another. We would also expect that the recommendations participants prioritised to be different in each context. If, on the other hand, obstacles and recommendations were largely the same in all groups, this would point to the opposite conclusion: that the way the sector thinks about the main obstacles facing effective humanitarian action, and the recommendations that will best address these, are in fact quite general and not highly context-specific.

⁵ One of the few exceptions to this is Ramalingam and Mitchell (2014).

SO, WHAT DID WE FIND? DOES CONTEXT MATTER?

When we look only at the highest priority recommendations for the six contexts (the three top-polling recommendations for each of the contexts), we can see a variety of priority issues that differ from one context to the next.

In **conflict**, priority recommendations focused on issues around access, in particular improving **access** through **greater dialogue with all parties in a conflict**, more **training of staff** in how to negotiate access, **better analysis** on the barriers to access and **high-level advocacy** that builds on this analysis.

The **recurrent** crises group focused more on the **lack of coordination between development and humanitarian actors**; proposing a **binding compact for collective crisis management** to address this; it also called for **reforming funding mechanisms** to support a **leading role for local/national actors** and to provide **more flexible funding** that adapts to a crisis as it evolves over time.

The **protracted** crisis group shared overlaps with both the conflict and the recurrent groups: priority recommendations focused on **reforming funding mechanisms to achieve greater coherence between development and humanitarian financing** and addressing **challenges around access**. Similar to the conflict group, they also addressed **skills gaps in the humanitarian system**. However, rather than proposing more training for humanitarian staff, these recommendations called for pulling in the skills of specialists outside the humanitarian sector and focusing on leadership teams, as opposed to individuals, to ensure locally recruited staff participate more in decision-making.

In conflict, priority recommendations focused on issues around access.

The recurrent crises group focused more on the lack of coordination between development and humanitarian actors.

In rapid-onset crises, priority recommendations focused almost entirely on localisation and changing who does what in a response.

In **mega crises**, priority recommendations looked at **lack of accountability for poor programming**, the **need to better implement protection activities** in humanitarian action and the need to build mechanisms for collecting information on population groups not being reached by humanitarian assistance, and monitor action in response to this information in order to **ensure humanitarian action is targeted on the basis of needs and not of ease**.

In **rapid-onset crises**, priority recommendations focused almost entirely on **localisation** and changing who does what in a response: this included emphasising a **greater role for governments** through disaster preparedness coordination mechanisms, national action plans and a **change in international attitudes** towards a more facilitative role, guided by humility and subsidiarity.

In **urban crises** as well, priority recommendations focused on **strengthening and building on local systems and structures** through **cash-based** approaches, empowering local networks and increasing investment in strengthening the rule of law in fragile urban environments. Recommendations on **addressing the unmet needs of specific vulnerable groups**, through better social safety nets and legal recognition of the rights of migrants and IDPs, were the highest-voted recommendations for this context.

In general, then, we can see there are different areas of focus for each of the context groups, which would suggest different obstacles need to be overcome in each context, and, therefore, context is an important factor in improving humanitarian action. However, we can also see certain important areas for improvement that several contexts share – namely, access, funding and enhancing support to local and national actors.

In terms of broader patterns, when we look across all of the recommendations from all of the groups (and not just the top three

from the prioritisation exercise), there is greater overlap between the obstacles and recommendations for certain pairs of contexts: urban and rapid-onset contexts featured significant overlap in their obstacles, perhaps reflecting the shared contextual feature of a viable host country infrastructure. The protracted and recurrent contexts also featured some overlap, particularly on issues raised around the relationship between humanitarian and development actors. This reflects the underlying crisis drivers protracted and recurrent crises share – namely, a lack of development capacity and either ongoing instability or perpetual risk.

Beyond this, while there was variety across the recommendations for each context, a set of core issues were common to most, if not all. These are:

- 1. Improving access:** Identify and address the many varied barriers to access, not only of humanitarian actors to affected people but also of affected people to humanitarian assistance;
- 2. Finance reform:** Address financing structures, in particular through more multi-year, flexible funding;
- 3. Supporting the agency of affected people:** Reform approaches to humanitarian assistance in a way that supports greater agency and voice for affected people and creates greater accountability in the system for achieving this;
- 4. Supporting local/national capacities:** Support, financially and through capacity-building, the work of local and national actors (this was even included in the conflict and protracted groups), and, more generally, localise humanitarian action and its governing structures;
- 5. Mandate/structural reform:** Reform the structures and/or mandates of certain institutions (in some cases donors, in other cases UN agencies or INGOs);
- 6. Context-specificity:** Develop approaches and analyses specific to each operating context.

In urban crises, priority recommendations focused on strengthening and building on local systems and structures.

Context does matter but not for every reform issue: a number of issues are common to all, or to several, contexts.

The last point came up most frequently: 21 times in the obstacles and recommendations across all six context groups.

This leads us to conclude that, overall:

- Context does matter;
- But not for every reform issue: a number of issues are common to all, or to several, contexts;
- And often context matters most at the level of individual responses (getting the tools in place to understand each response context is more important than developing standard operating procedures for different context ‘types’).

Context *does* matter: improving access and international humanitarian law is most important to conflict settings, whereas, for future mega disasters, enhancing the centrality of protection activities and ensuring humanitarian assistance is driven by needs rather than by what humanitarians find easiest to deliver are seen as critical. Addressing the relationship between humanitarian actors and

development actors and reforming current funding structures is more important for protracted and recurrent crises; developing better approaches that empower and build on local structures and capacities is more of a priority in rapid-onset and urban contexts.

However, context matters most fundamentally in terms of understanding and responding effectively to each specific crisis context. Indeed, this level of contextual understanding and specification may be more relevant than understanding the context type. Recommendations across all six groups reflected the view that the best way to address context is through more sophisticated tools and practices that help humanitarians understand and create tailored plans for each individual crisis. This points again to the importance of flexibility, discussed above in Part III: while enhancing the power and role of local and national actors is critical to a context-appropriate response, so too are the tools and practices that enable international actors to understand different response contexts and to adapt their approaches appropriately.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Across the synthesis and the discussions and outputs from the Global Forum, six key themes emerged:

1. There should be significantly less direct international intervention in humanitarian response. In order to achieve this, affected states, donors and national and international agencies will all need to make major changes.
2. The international humanitarian system has huge analytical gaps that are significantly impeding effectiveness and will impede future attempts to improve performance.
3. There is a gap between the values of the international humanitarian system and its practices.
4. While there is strong support for reviewing the mandates and structures of the humanitarian system, in particular the UN, this remains a polarising issue.

5. There is an urgent need to clarify the relationship between international humanitarian actors and activities that address the underlying causes of crises – human development and conflict resolution – including in the WHS process itself.
6. Ongoing challenges exist with leadership and coordination.

1. There should be significantly less direct international intervention in humanitarian response. In order to achieve this, affected states, donors and national and international agencies will all need to make major changes

Discussions at the Global Forum suggested there was strong support, in principle, for national leadership of crisis preparedness and response and for less direct international intervention in humanitarian response. This was particularly the case in natural disasters and in recurrent crises.

However, even in conflicts, protracted crises and situations of urban violence, there was agreement that states should fulfil their obligations to their people, in terms of the provision of services and of protection – although it was not clear what more could be done, by whom, to ensure states do this. Participants also clarified that, even where the state is a party to conflict, there are often government agencies that continue to provide services, and any external support should seek to build on this capacity where possible. There was also a suggestion that the international community establish some form of objective, third party measurement of the degree to which states allow impartial action, which would serve to help humanitarians make and justify decisions.

In mega crises, while there was agreement that governments should manage the response wherever possible, there was also recognition that governments may become overwhelmed, and as a result international aid actors must be prepared to lead response planning and implementation.

In many cases, national leadership would require governments to provide increased attention and support to strengthening their own capacity.

Currently, there are often constraints to states leading humanitarian activities. Many of these constraints are financial, but they also reflect policy choices and spending allocations. In many cases, national leadership would require governments to provide increased attention and support to strengthening their own capacity, through the development of effective administrative structures and policy frameworks for emergency response. As noted above, leadership would also mean a commitment by states to meeting their obligations to their citizens.

National leadership goes beyond the state, however, to encompass CSOs. There was strong support for the idea that national and local CSOs/NGOs be recognised for the critical role they already play in humanitarian action in all contexts, and should be further supported to provide protection and support; to ensure the participation of vulnerable and at-risk people in planning and response; and to take the lead in holding government and other humanitarian

actors to account. This would require significant changes to the current system of humanitarian aid. One consistent theme here was the importance of increasing the amount of money that goes directly from international donors to national and local organisations. This might require changes in reporting and accountability procedures on behalf of the donors. Opinions were more mixed on whether the WHS should set targets for the percentage of funding directed to national organisations. Another theme was support to capacity-building, particularly around specialist skills such as mediation and conflict resolution. It was also noted that, were local NGOs to play a greater role in conflict, international actors would have to consider how to take responsibility for the risks they face and work to decrease these.

A third element of nationalising response is increasing the role of private sector organisations – and particularly of national and local private sector organisations. There was general agreement that private sector organisations should also be a part of these

preparedness and response plans – providing specialist support and aligning their business continuity planning with government plans.

International organisations would still be required to fill specialist, technical ‘gaps’ (at the behest of the government) and to provide additional support when the government was unable or unwilling to act. This is a restatement of the role that international organisations should be playing at the moment; however, many participants felt these organisations had not internalised the importance of subsidiarity, and currently tended to default to response even where government or civil society was able and willing to perform this function. International organisations should exercise more caution in response, and donors and others should reconsider the incentives that lead to international actors automatically responding and ‘crowding out’ national actors.

There was less consensus around the role of international actors in situations of armed conflict – notably in inter-state conflicts,

protracted crises and situations of urban violence. While many would like to see a decreased role for international organisations in these contexts, some organisations have clear international mandates to work in conflict (although not necessarily in situations of urban violence, where there is some resistance from states to the idea of international organisations becoming involved). Beyond this, a number of participants observed that international agencies were in a position to behave impartially in these contexts – in a way that state or civil society actors may find more difficult – and so should continue to play a main role in the planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes. Others noted that challenges to humanitarian principles also occurred in many natural disasters, and that international actors may retain a role as supporters of, and advocates for, humanitarian principles in all contexts. The degree to which international humanitarian actors have a role in advocacy – in attempting to influence others to address the underlying causes of humanitarian need – was much debated (see next page).

There was strong support for national and local CSOs/NGOs to be recognised for the critical role they already play in humanitarian action in all contexts.

How can international organisations simultaneously respond less, while also increasing the capacity to respond, and even lead, in situations where local capacities are overwhelmed?

All of this would mean a fundamental reorientation of the focus of international humanitarian agencies. In general, they would need to become more facilitative, and might need to enhance skills in capacity-building. They might need also to develop capacity in advocacy. However, they would also need to retain operational capacity in specialised areas for ‘gap-filling’, and possibly to provide ‘surge support’. One important question that emerges from this is, how can international organisations simultaneously respond less, while also increasing the capacity to respond, and even lead, in situations where local capacities are overwhelmed? In particular, how can this be done in a way that does not make significant sacrifices in terms of efficiency?

2. The international humanitarian system has analytical gaps that are significantly impeding effectiveness and will impede future attempts to improve performance

Across the recommendations and discussions at the Global Forum, a variety of gaps and limitations regarding data, analysis and understanding – in short, the analytical gaps of the system – were consistently highlighted. This is of particular importance for enabling a more context-appropriate response, as discussed in Part I. There is a clear demand for better data, including around needs, humanitarian funding flows and the vulnerabilities of specific demographic groups. There is also a widely recognised need for better analytical capacities across the board, including analysis that includes affected people or incorporates their feedback; analysis that supports better understanding of and solutions for underexplored problems around access, security and protection; analysis that supports better risk management; and analysis that is carried out through particular mechanisms, and at particular levels, for example:

‘Multi-stakeholder, multi-risk analysis [...] done systematically at local, national, regional and global levels, kept updated, rooted in scientific (physical, natural and social sciences) and local knowledge and shared in a transparent and open manner.’

Areas in which greater analysis and understanding are required include:

- Context, including local capacities, socio-economic dynamics, power dynamics, legal frameworks;
- Needs assessment, in particular the needs of specific demographic groups;
- Access and security issues;
- Risk, both long-term and at country level.

Solutions to address these issues include not only the establishment of centres or support to pre-existing institutions to conduct this analysis but also, importantly, better ways of sharing this analysis and incentivising decision-makers to use it – arguably a much harder change to bring about.

3. There is a perceived gap between the values of the international humanitarian system and its practices

Discussion around the issues of subsidiarity, accountability, participation of affected people and financial reform to provide stronger support to local and national organisations reflected a sense that the international humanitarian system is unacceptably inequalitarian, with a majority of its resources allocated to, and key decisions being made by, international organisations headquartered in high-income countries. International humanitarian actors need to work on attitude issues that inhibit their ability to build relationships and trust with other actors, as well as to maintain an adequate presence and relationship with affected people. While there is wide support for these values, practice continues to lag far behind. Several of the recommendations, particularly around accountability to affected people, were both novel and specific, suggesting there may be observable progress on this issue if the WHS takes these recommendations forward.

The international humanitarian system is unacceptably inequalitarian, with a majority of its resources allocated to, and key decisions being made by, international organisations.

The recommendation to the Secretary-General to call for a reform of UN agency mandates and roles to better meet humanitarian needs of affected people received the highest degree of approval.

4. While there is strong support for reviewing the mandates and structures of the humanitarian system, in particular those of the UN, this remains a polarising issue

The recommendation ‘There should be a more collaborative and complementary system with fewer agency overlaps, duplication and gaps. The Secretary-General should call for a reform of UN agency mandates and roles to better meet core humanitarian needs of affected people’ received the highest degree of approval in the polling of the flexibility recommendations (71.7% strongly support). Addressing the inefficiencies in the current mandate structure of the UN was also raised in several of the context-specific recommendations on Day 1. There are a variety of arguments for structural review and change. Depending on the nature of the changes, they might: reduce overlaps and so increase efficiency; facilitate more unitary leadership and effective coordination; allow for greater synergy between development and humanitarian activities; or improve coverage by decreasing the focus on specific population groups. However, some participants also

expressed scepticism that a mandate review would achieve the level of positive reform humanitarian actors wish to see. While it is easy to describe what humanitarian actors would like to see in a reform of the mandate structure of the UN, it is much more difficult to articulate the steps to take to achieve this. One participant with extensive knowledge of working with the UN on the ground in different response contexts commented that, in their experience, mandates were less of an obstacle than attitudes towards cooperation, which could be addressed without a mandate review.

5. There is an urgent need to clarify the relationship between international humanitarian actors and activities that address the underlying causes of crises – human development and conflict resolution – including in the WHS process itself

There was general agreement that governments, in partnership with international development actors, should do more to reduce vulnerability to crises and address issues of basic service provision in all contexts, and that international political actors should do more to

address issues of human rights, peacebuilding and stability.

However, there was frustration around the perceived inability of humanitarian actors to engage with and influence governments, political actors and development agencies. Participants frequently commented that humanitarians were still only ‘talking to themselves’ and had not been successful in establishing links and initiating useful conversations with these groups.

Discussions on the relationship between development and humanitarian activities are not new. However, the Global Forum was a useful opportunity for participants to clarify some of the options.

Humanitarian and development activity might:

- Remain separate and more clearly demarcated, with humanitarian activities addressing only specific (and often short-term) ‘life-saving’ issues: acute rises in mortality and disease morbidity, acute malnutrition and protection issues in crises;

- Remain separate, but with stronger links for handover between humanitarian and development;
- Work more closely together, over longer periods of time, but with separate humanitarian and development areas of expertise, values and skill sets, each suited to engage with a crisis in its own way;
- Work more closely together, with humanitarian activities incorporating developmental outcomes and being planned and financed for longer time periods.

Similarly, in conflict and protracted crises, there were discussions as to whether international actors should focus on the provision of protection and services ‘on the ground’ or should recognise the increasing difficulty of providing effective support in these contexts, and instead concentrate on advocacy and activities aimed to influence political and other actors who might be able to increase adherence to relevant areas of international law and bring conflicts to a speedier conclusion.

There was frustration around perceived inability of humanitarian actors to engage with and influence governments, political actors and development agencies.

**There is more to
be done in terms of
exploring exactly
what defines and
distinguishes
humanitarian action
from other types of
assistance.**

Two fundamental points about the humanitarian–development and humanitarian–peacebuilding relationships arose out of the discussions at the Global Forum. First, there is more to be done in terms of exploring exactly what defines and distinguishes humanitarian action from other types of assistance. While some participants viewed the humanitarian–peace-keeping/development divide as a long-term/short-term distinction, others challenged the idea that humanitarian action was necessarily short in term and instead drew a distinction in terms of the kind of vulnerability and harm to which humanitarian aid responds. As one participant put it, ‘[...] *I don’t think we should generalise by saying humanitarian action is about the short-term. If a population is being systematically subject to grotesque mistreatment, year after year, after year, after year, it remains a humanitarian concern. I don’t think anyone would say, you know, Syria, well it’s entering the fifth year, it’s time to hand over to the development actors.*’

Whether the distinction is value-driven or practical, the point is to have these discussions more openly, and in particular more frequently with development/peacebuilding actors.

The second point is that it is unlikely that a single, common agreement on this distinction, or on the appropriate relationship between humanitarian and other international actors, is necessarily possible or desirable. Different actors can clarify the relationship for themselves, and then deliver differentiated roles and take different approaches to how they view humanitarian action and its connection to more ‘structural’ activities. It may be that the actors for whom this distinction is most important are donors, whose funding structures are affected, and who then in turn affect the financial flows, particularly for protracted, urban and recurrent crises.

5. Ongoing challenges with leadership and coordination

The atomised nature of the international humanitarian system, and the fact that the capacities of national and international actors will differ in each crisis, conspire to make the issues of leadership and coordination a challenge in any humanitarian response that involves international actors.

Despite the sustained focus on this area under UN reform and the Transformative Agenda processes, participants at the Global Forum continued to identify leadership and coordination as a significant constraint to effective humanitarian action. The Ebola crisis in particular showed the difficulties in leading large-scale ‘mega’ crises – an area of responsibility that might increasingly fall to the international humanitarian system. Fundamentally, these problems can be addressed through:

- Passing leadership and the operational response to these disasters to another system (such as the military);
- Wholesale structural reform of the system, to enable a single command and control system to be exercised across a single structure; or
- Actions to optimise coordinated joint action through the current atomised structure.

Global Forum participants did not reach conclusions on how to move forward on this area, but identified it as a major concern.

Participants at the Global Forum continued to identify leadership and coordination as a significant constraint to effective humanitarian action.

Fundamentally, the WHS process is one of change.

Change strategies and influence strategies are different, and need to be elaborated separately.

CHANGE AND HOW IT HAPPENS

Fundamentally, the WHS process is one of change. Participants at the Global Forum were asked to consider successful changes with which they had been involved and identify the factors that had led to this success. Some of the key points that came out of this exercise, and of ALNAP's previous work on organisational learning and change⁷ are presented here.

It is possible to change things that are under your control. Without control, you can hope only to influence others to change. Humanitarian action does not take place in a vacuum, but in a space where powerful political and economic forces interact. Many of the recommendations from the Global Forum – and the WHS process more generally – relate to changes that other powerful actors need to make: states, non-state armed actors or development banks, for example. It is important to recognise that many of the diverse organisations that form the 'humanitarian system' do not control the actions of these

actors, and cannot change them (although the representatives of governments who participated in the Global Forum do have some level of control over state and inter-state institutions). Other non-state organisations will need, instead, to develop strategies of influence. The point is an obvious one, but is important for planning purposes. Change strategies and influence strategies are different, and need to be elaborated separately. In this light, it is noteworthy that few of the recommendations for the WHS have looked closely at how to expand and improve the advocacy and influencing function of humanitarian actors.

When designing change strategies, it is important to see change not as a shopping list of new activities but rather as a realignment and transformation of current resources, capacities and functions. Unless new capacities are introduced – through more actors, increased attention or greater resources – change cannot happen: it does not consist simply of the addition of new elements, procedures and ways of working on top of the old. We need to pay as

much attention to what we take away and stop doing as to what we add.

We should also bear in mind that ‘resistance’ to change is generally held to be a normal – and healthy – response to change activities;⁸ it allows organisations to maintain direction and consistency in turbulent times. Resistance to change does not occur only among those with power and political interests to defend: it can also be expected among people who are highly committed to their work, and to the organisations for which they work, and who have invested significant amounts of their lives in these organisations. Where this resistance is expressed, it is best listened to and understood, as a way of gathering more information about the system and ultimately creating more effective change.

But, of course, resistance is often not expressed: either because the climate does not allow ‘uncomfortable’ or ‘unfashionable’ points of view or because the resistance is unconscious, and not apparent even to the

individual concerned. This type of ‘hidden’ resistance can take a number of subtle forms. One of these is the failure to fully accept that a problem or opportunity exists and that change is necessary and desirable. People may recognise the situation intellectually, and even talk about it, but without any concrete personal engagement. More than a few change programmes have failed because broad spoken agreement failed to translate into the energy to act. It is interesting to note that, at the Global Forum, those recommendations that suggested the humanitarian system achieve broad, ‘transformational’ objectives were in general more enthusiastically supported than the more specific, focused recommendations that suggested how these objectives might be achieved. One explanation for this might be that we become less enthusiastic about change when we begin to engage seriously with what it will take to actually make the change happen.

‘Resistance’ to change is generally held to be a normal – and healthy – response to change activities.

7. Clarke and Ramalingam (2008); Sandison (2006); Hallam and Bonino (2013); Knox Clarke and Darcy (2014).

8. Maurer (1996); Nevis (1988).

A second form of resistance is, paradoxically, taking enthusiastic half measures.

A second form of resistance is, paradoxically, taking enthusiastic half measures. Some policy generation, recruitment and training activities fall into these categories: organisations create a new post, or institute a training course, as a way of ‘doing something’ – something that tends not to address the deeper procedural, structural and motivational changes required in the organisation. These limited actions provide the appearance of change while allowing for continuity instead of real transformation. In the humanitarian system, these half measures seem often to take the form of attempting to change (or, more often, add to) organisational structures, rather than addressing the less tangible processes and sets of relationships these structures exist to support.⁹

A third form of hidden resistance manifests itself as despair, or the sincere belief that – while changes are required – ‘they will never happen here’. Throughout the WHS process,

several parties have asked how this change process will be different from those that came before it, which did not result in large-scale changes to the humanitarian system. The answer lies in how the WHS process advances in recognising and taking actions to engage with and address all these forms of resistance.

A further challenge to any system-wide change is planning. As already noted above, change does not take place in a vacuum. The course of a humanitarian change initiative will be affected by broader changes in the global economic and political landscape, by the interactions between different parts of the humanitarian system, by other activities occurring in the same organisations and by the (often unexpected) consequences of the initiatives themselves. There will very seldom, if ever, be a ‘straight line’ between the decision to make changes and the successful implementation of the activity.¹⁰ In many cases, these various

9. One good example of this is the attention that has been placed on the structural elements of the Clusters and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings (ICCMs), at the expense of considering the essential coordination functions these structures exist to support (Knox Clarke and Campbell, 2015). Another example is the consistent focus on early-warning systems rather than early-warning processes (Levine et al., 2011).

forces will dampen the impact of the change and work to preserve the status quo. In some cases, they will greatly enhance the impact and success of the activities. The difficulty here is that it is almost impossible to plan in advance for these various forces. What is possible is to monitor the progress of pilot efforts, identify what is working and increase support in these areas. This is more likely to be successful than an approach that plans years, or even months, ahead.

There will very seldom, if ever, be a ‘straight line’ between the decision to make changes and the successful implementation of the activity.

10. See Ramalingam, 2013, for a number of examples of the unplanned results of change processes in the development and humanitarian sectors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

What does this mean for the process leading up to, and following on from, the WHS?

1. Stakeholders

It will be important to continue to define who the subjects of the WHS are. Affected states? Donor states? Humanitarian organisations? This will allow the division of the recommendations into those that can be implemented as changes and those that primarily require influencing strategies, such as advocacy.

2. Focus of recommendations

Recommendations should focus not only on new activities but also on activities that need to stop and on activities that are already successful and should continue.

3. Iterative approaches versus planning

Humanitarian organisations should be encouraged to initiate and monitor change initiatives (rather than waiting for central solutions) aimed at addressing the obstacles the WHS process and the Global Forum have identified. They should be prepared to abandon those that do not work and step up support to those that do. They should also put significant resources into publicising success and failure, to allow replication of success across the system (many of the most effective and innovative improvement exercises are currently let down because they are largely unknown outside the country or organisation).

4. Capitalising on the power of consultation

The WHS process has been marked by an unprecedented degree of consultation, of which the Global Forum was one part. These consultations matter: they allow a variety of perspectives to be heard and help create social knowledge – the broad understanding and engagement that can move people from

a purely intellectual to a more active position. Moving on from here, it is important that:

- The voices of those affected by crises are heard in discussion, as they have significant moral and emotional authority and can increase the engagement of policymakers in the change process.
- Recommendations are based on the emerging consensus from these consultations, where consensus exists.
- Those drafting recommendations engage closely with people and agencies who hold strongly dissenting views, to better understand why they disagree and how this can improve recommendations.
- There is recognition that the humanitarian system is diverse, and in many areas it will not be possible, and may not be desirable, to achieve consensus. Organisations should be encouraged to see the consultation process as an opportunity to clarify their own positions and make changes without waiting for overarching systemic change.

CHANGE: INCREMENTAL AND TRANSFORMATIONAL

One of the key discussions around the changes expected from the WHS is the degree to which they should be ‘transformational’ as opposed to ‘incremental’. In the sense that the words are used (in this discussion and in some of the literature around change), transformational change appears to mean large-scale, revolutionary change, which affects many elements of the system at the same time. Transformational change – to the degree it is not imposed on a system by external forces – will generally need to be planned and managed, and, given the breadth of the changes required, these changes will normally occur from the top downwards.

Incremental change, in this discussion, tends to mean small-scale, evolutionary changes to discrete elements of the system, which are instigated and occur at many levels of the system over time.¹¹

The majority of recommendations were for more discrete, ‘incremental’ types of change.

11. Streeck and Thelen (2005).

Incremental changes like cash have, as participants at the Global Forum noted, the potential to be truly transformational.

At the Global Forum, there were certainly some calls for transformational change: the most popular of all the recommendations called for ‘a reform of UN agency mandates and roles to better meet core humanitarian needs of affected people’, a recommendation that, if it is adopted, would lead to very significant, top-down, ‘transformational’ changes to the organisational structures of some of the most important humanitarian actors. However, the majority of recommendations were for more discrete, ‘incremental’ type changes – and many of these are recommendations that have been made for many years.

The humanitarian system does not have a good record of implementing transformational change. Calls for ‘radical’ change made after the Rwanda genocide and the South Asian tsunami did not lead to a thoroughgoing overhaul of all aspects of humanitarian action. Given the discussion above, this is perhaps understandable: planned, transformational changes would likely have fallen foul of changes in the environment, including shifting political will, and would anyway have been resisted,

actively and passively, by many of the people whose involvement was required to make them work.

Incremental changes have a more mixed record. As noted above, many changes, particularly those that concern actors outside the system or that require any transfer of power within the system, have never been implemented; several of these have resurfaced during the WHS process. But many incremental changes have occurred. Real changes have been made in areas as diverse as unconditional cash programming; the use of communications technology; flexible funding and the integration of social safety nets into programming; adapting coordination mechanisms to local conditions; and early-warning and assessment methods. In many cases, however, these changes have been local, and have received limited support in ‘going to scale’. Nevertheless, as they receive this support and become more generally accepted across the system, ‘incremental’ changes like cash have, as participants at the Global Forum noted, the potential to be truly transformational. Increased cash distributions may, in the long run, make

more (intended and unintended) changes to the processes and architecture of humanitarian aid than any mandate review.

The fallacy lies in the opposition of transformational and incremental. In essence, the two terms are describing different things. Transformational change describes the result of a change. Incremental change describes the process. And there is no reason not to believe that incremental changes can have transformational results.

Large-scale transformational change can seldom be achieved by ‘pulling a lever’. High-level political support and declarations – particularly where this is demonstrated in action, as well as verbal commitment, by powerful individuals and groups – is a very important factor that can contribute to change. But it is not sufficient in itself to create the sort of improvements that participants at the Global Forum hope to see. Transformational programmes should consider the resistance that they are likely to face in implementation and the importance of gaining wide support. They will inevitably take time and resources, and

may decrease effectiveness in the short-term, as resources are diverted to the change effort. They may not lead to the expected results.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the transformation that can be achieved from scattered, initially unrelated, activities that influence each other, evolve and grow as they go along. Many of the Global Forum recommendations are not particularly new, comprehensive or ‘blue sky’. But taken together, these more ‘incremental’ changes might lead to a radically different humanitarian system. Until now, ideas such as, for example, increasing direct funding transfers to local NGOs, prioritising context analysis, or decreasing incentives to international actors to respond by default, have proved difficult to implement. The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 provides an opportunity to address this.

It is often built up from scattered, initially unrelated, activities that influence each other, evolve and grow as they go along.

Large scale transformational change can seldom be achieved by ‘pulling a lever’.

REFERENCES

The following publications can also be accessed via the Humanitarian Evaluation and Learning Portal (HELP): www.alnap.org/resources/global-forum

Clarke, P. and Ramalingam, B. (2008) *Organisational change in the humanitarian sector*. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Hallam, H. and Bonino, F. (2013) *Using evaluation for a change: insights from humanitarian practitioners*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Knox Clarke, P. and Campbell, L. (2015) *Exploring coordination in humanitarian clusters*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Knox Clarke, P. and Darcy, J. (2014) *Insufficient Evidence? The quality and use of evidence in humanitarian action*. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Levine, S., Crosskey, A. and Abdinoor, M. (2011) *System failure? Revisiting the problems of timely response to crises in the Horn of Africa*. London: HPN/ODI.

Maurer, R. (1996) *Beyond the wall of resistance*. Austin: Bard Press.

Nevis, E. (1987) *Organizational consulting: a Gestalt approach*. New York: Gardner Press. ()

Ramalingam, B. (2013) *Aid on the edge of chaos*. Oxford: OUP.

Ramalingam, B. and Mitchell, J. (2014) *Responding to changing needs? Challenges and opportunities for humanitarian action*. London: ALNAP.

Sandison, P. (2006) 'The utilisation of evaluations', in *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2005*. ALNAP Review. London: ALNAP/ODI.

Streeck, W. and Thelen, K.A. (2005) *Beyond Continuity: institutional change in advanced political economies*. Oxford: OUP.





Overseas Development Institute

203 Blackfriars Road

London, SE1 8NJ

www.alnap.org/global-forum

#ALNAPForum