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Humanitarian Aid: A Donor
Perspective

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Imagining More Effective Humanitarian Aid: A Donor Perspective

Rachel Scott¹

Abstract

This paper is intended to provoke debate, and stimulate further thinking and study, about *humanitarian effectiveness*, and what that will mean for donors and other stakeholders, in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

Today's humanitarian system is made up of many different moving parts. These different parts are guided by different standards and learning initiatives, all aimed at promoting an effective humanitarian response. However, the system itself does not yet have a core set of shared values, and it is not clear whether the overall humanitarian endeavour is fit for purpose or optimally configured, given the challenges of a changing global context, and the increasing complexity of crises.

A common framework for humanitarian effectiveness, designed to promote collective responsibility and mutual accountability, would ensure that each actor would be held accountable for their contribution to the same characteristics of effectiveness – based on what they can control, what they can influence and where they advocate – no matter who was assessing them. No doubt, a shared understanding of humanitarian effectiveness will also stimulate change in the design, tools and approaches, and results measurement, within the humanitarian system.

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Executive Summary

On face value, the humanitarian system contains all the necessary assets for delivering an effective response, but it is not yet producing consistent, optimal results.

WHAT IS THIS PAPER ABOUT?

The humanitarian system is made up of many different moving parts, each with different comparative advantages, different interests and different capacities. These factors determine what individual agencies, states, and people can do or control, what they can influence, and where they are more effective as advocates. There are different assumptions about how the parts of the system fit together, and many different standards and principles to guide good practice. However, power dynamics – an unspoken but very real part of humanitarian action – coupled with a complex and constantly changing operating environment, and the lack of a common definition of success, often prevent the different parts of the system from working together in an optimal manner.

In addition, it is not clear whether the different actors that make up the system are ready for what will be, from all accounts, a very challenging and crisis-prone future.

This paper is intended to provoke debate, and stimulate further thinking and study, about *humanitarian effectiveness*, and what this will mean for donors and other stakeholders, rather than to propose a definite solution or framework.

Nevertheless, it has been interesting to note that the donors interviewed for this study – eleven major players in the global humanitarian system, who collectively provided USD 8.23 billion of funding in 2012 – are broadly aligned on what factors are important for *humanitarian effectiveness*, and on what needs to be done to increase effectiveness in the face of both recurring and new global and local challenges.

CAN WE IMAGINE A COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR HUMANITARIAN EFFECTIVENESS?

Operational actors, affected populations and states, donors and policymakers can't be put into neat boxes, but they can, and should, be held accountable for their contribution to *humanitarian effectiveness*. Arguably, a system of collective responsibility and mutual accountability could work best. A common framework of *humanitarian effectiveness* would mean that each actor would be held accountable for their contribution to the same characteristics of effectiveness – based on what they can control, what they can influence, and where they advocate – no matter who was assessing them.

This paper proposes four sets of characteristics that are critical for humanitarian effectiveness:

- Humanitarian effectiveness is a shared responsibility, but with different roles – programmes should be grounded in comparative advantage, they should be forward-looking, and they should respect fundamental principles.
- Humanitarian effectiveness begins with effective programme design – programmes should aim to maximise reach, be adapted to the context, be demand driven, focus on results, and be good value for money.
- Humanitarian effectiveness needs the right tools and partnerships – programmes should be predictable and flexible, they should be timely, and co-ordinated, working together in partnership.
- Humanitarian effectiveness must be measured, demonstrated and improved – through system-wide learning, and accountability.

HOW ARE DONORS IMAGINING A MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSE?

Business models, including the way we plan and deliver humanitarian assistance, need to change and evolve if they are to remain fit for purpose. Donors interviewed for this paper have made a number of suggestions to ensure that the humanitarian system is optimally configured, both to meet today's challenges, and to provide assistance more effectively in the future. These changes can be grouped under three main headings:

1. Moving away from the one-size-fits-all response model
2. Adapting and refining programming tools and concepts
3. Clarifying when, where and why the response is effective

Some of these suggestions provide quick wins for the humanitarian system, others require a step change in the way humanitarian programmes are designed, delivered, enabled and measured. Interestingly, however, most of the proposed options for improved effectiveness will require collective efforts and change, across the entire humanitarian system. It seems we are beyond that time when individual actions, by individual actors, will be enough to improve overall results from humanitarian interventions.

Donors are already making changes to their own systems and processes. Many of these changes have been part of wider organisational processes, often brought on by a tight fiscal environment, a push for value for money, or changes in government policy. The reviews have resulted in staffing reductions, changes to quality control processes, a shift towards more active and comprehensive risk management, and stronger links with either foreign policy or development and stabilisation colleagues, or both. Perhaps as a result, maintaining the core identity of the humanitarian programme, and defending humanitarian principles with colleagues across government, remains a struggle for many donors.

In addition, donors have also sought to improve humanitarian effectiveness by investing in cash based programming, improving the quality of grant funding, increasing investments in research, and focusing more strongly on results.

What next?

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit provides a useful opportunity to tackle the question of *humanitarian effectiveness* head on, providing a forum where the broader humanitarian system could agree on a common framework for *humanitarian effectiveness*, to which all actors will be held accountable, no matter what their capacity to “do”, “influence”, or “advocate”.

As such, the only recommendation from this study is to seize the opportunity that the Summit provides, and to work towards a common framework for *humanitarian effectiveness*, and to then use this shared set of values to design better, results-driven, context-appropriate responses through effective tools and partnerships, that will in turn enable people at risk of terrible, urgent, life-threatening suffering to make the best possible decisions about how to protect themselves and those for whom they are responsible.

Introduction

The United Nations Secretary-General will convene the first-ever global humanitarian summit of this scale in Istanbul in 2016. The goal of this summit is to find new ways to tackle humanitarian needs in our fast-changing world. The summit will set a new agenda for global humanitarian action. It will focus on humanitarian effectiveness, reducing vulnerability and managing risk, transformation through innovation, and serving the needs of people in conflict.

www.worldhumanitariansummit.org

Why this study?

This paper aims to provoke discussion around the idea of *humanitarian effectiveness*, one of the four main pillars of the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. It provides an initial summary of thinking about *humanitarian effectiveness*, both today and into the future, from a donor point of view. Eleven donors provided either oral or written submissions for this paper; the paper presents a synthesis of those submissions¹. The co-chairs of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative² helped facilitate the research.

The paper complements a separate body of research commissioned by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs; research that looks at *humanitarian effectiveness* through the eyes of other major stakeholders in humanitarian assistance.

The timing of this study is important; over the next 18 months there will be significant opportunities to feed into the broader post-2015 debate about the future of development co-operation. By the time the World Humanitarian Summit takes place in 2016, there should be new agreements on Sustainable Development Goals³, climate change⁴ and disaster risk reduction⁵. Linking up with these processes will be critical, to ensure that humanitarian issues, and ideas around *humanitarian effectiveness*, are properly integrated into other aspects of development co-operation.

What is humanitarian effectiveness?

Interestingly, there is no clear or shared definition of what success looks like in the humanitarian endeavour. What are the objectives of humanitarian programmes? Are we meeting them?

The Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD, 2003) define the objective of humanitarian programming as:

to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations (Principle 1)

The OECD/DAC criteria for evaluating humanitarian assistance define effectiveness as⁶:

effectiveness measures the extent to which the activity achieves its purpose, or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs. Implicit within the criteria of effectiveness is timeliness...similarly, issues of resourcing and preparedness should be addressed (OECD, 1999)

Chapter 2 of this paper outlines the initial thoughts of humanitarian donors on the characteristics of *humanitarian effectiveness*, or how to best help people to meet their own humanitarian needs.

Why does effectiveness matter?

Much has already been written about changing global dynamics, and how these changes, coupled with existing challenges, will have a major effect on the future humanitarian landscape.

Major global drivers of change include environmental, social and demographic, and geo-political shifts, coupled with the increasing influence of technology, a globalised economy, and rising inequality. There are likely to be new types of crises, which will be increasingly uncertain and complex, and often occurring at the same time. More people, in new places, will be affected, especially those living in urban areas. The humanitarian operating environment is likely to be influenced by a growing political dimension to crisis response; a stretching of the humanitarian mandate; new, and new types, of actors; new ways to co-ordinate; innovative responses; various interpretations of humanitarian principles, a shift towards more demand-driven approaches, and changes in the sources and tools used for humanitarian financing (CALP, 2013).

In such a dynamic landscape, a clear idea of what factors are critical for the success of the humanitarian endeavour – *effectiveness* – will help actors design better policies, programmes, tools and partnerships, and devise better institutional configurations and incentives, at the very least to *do no harm*, even as the situation evolves.

Humanitarian effectiveness should also provide much needed guidance on how to deal with protection issues such as shrinking humanitarian space, increasingly negative trends in the protection of civilians in general, and women in particular; many of these compounded by humanitarian access constraints, security threats for humanitarian workers, and also the perception of a growing risk aversion on the part of major humanitarian actors⁷.

Critically, a clear idea about *effectiveness* will also help the broader humanitarian community, and other major stakeholders, including affected populations, hold each other accountable to one common framework. This will also highlight areas where ongoing programmes must be altered to deliver a better result, while promoting opportunities for learning from success, and from failure.

We can also learn from the development community, and their Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness⁸. This declaration helped bring about a better quality of aid, in particular more focused, efficient and collaborative aid efforts at the sector level; more transparent and effective partnerships; and supported rising volumes of aid (Wood, 2011). Perhaps the same could be achieved in the humanitarian sector.

Overall, a shared understanding of humanitarian effectiveness should ensure that humanitarian investments – resources, time and skills – are targeted and used in the best possible way, to address the needs of those affected by crises.

What is the wider humanitarian system doing about effectiveness?

Of course, this is not the first time that the humanitarian system has made efforts towards *effectiveness*. Most recent collective events include the 2005 humanitarian reform process, which included the birth of the current cluster co-ordination system⁹, and the 2011 transformative agenda, which outlined a set of actions to further improve the humanitarian response model¹⁰.

However, there are still multiple standards to promote and assess the effectiveness of the humanitarian system, complicating accountability to stakeholders and creating confusion about the benchmark/s for humanitarian assistance. The Core Humanitarian Standard, currently being developed by several standards organisations¹¹, will help improve this situation, by offering one practical and verifiable framework for humanitarian operations. It is the intention of the three organisations' Boards that the Core Humanitarian Standard will replace three of the most influential existing standards.¹²

In addition to this, there is a suite of other standards that guide good practice and aim for better behaviour in various sectors of humanitarian response, including the Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery¹³ and the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards¹⁴. On top of this, specialised agencies are also contributing to improvements in humanitarian effectiveness through the promulgation of learning¹⁵, or raising the bar through training¹⁶.

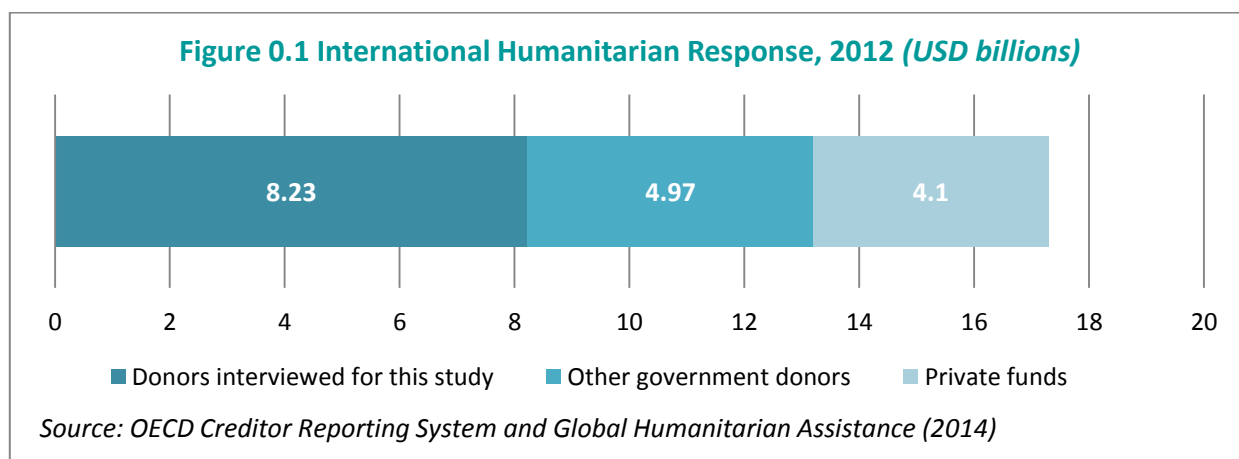
Finally, the Global Protection Cluster is launching a "Whole of System" Protection Review¹⁷.

All of these initiatives will inform the discussion on *humanitarian effectiveness* that will take place at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.

Why does the donor perspective matter?

Two major factors – the nature and size of the donor contribution to the humanitarian endeavour, and the domestic pressures that donors are increasingly facing – mean that donors, and their domestic stakeholders, need to share the humanitarian system’s view of effectiveness, if there is to be a coherent and successful overall humanitarian programme.

The donors interviewed for this study provided USD 8.23 billion in funding for humanitarian assistance in 2012¹⁸ - this factor alone justifies a major voice in the *humanitarian effectiveness* debate (Figure 0.1).



However, donors play a much bigger role than just funding; they also provide other types of assistance directly to affected governments and people, influence their partners and other key stakeholders, and advocate at a global and country level for humanitarian policy issues (Chapter 1).

In addition, over the last few years, most OECD/DAC donors have been under growing pressure, domestically and internally, to prove and improve their performance. Donors have been told, by their parliaments and taxpayers, that they must demonstrate value for money and tangible results, if they are to maintain their share of the aid budget. Internal re-organisations have seen more humanitarian departments integrated into Ministries of Foreign Affairs and, therefore, under increased political scrutiny. Administrative pressures have led to cuts in staff numbers, travel and research budgets, and an increased pressure to be accountable for all funds spent. Donors are very aware of the need to show that they are contributing to an effective humanitarian endeavour.

How should this study be used?

As mentioned earlier, this is an initial scoping study, intended to provoke, and add to, debate around the idea of *humanitarian effectiveness*. It is based on written inputs and individual interviews with eleven major humanitarian donors. As such it is not a position paper, nor a definitive or representative statement of what all donors think about this issue.

The paper is organised in the following chapters:

Chapter 1 explores the concept of *humanitarian effectiveness* as a shared responsibility, but where different actors have different roles. It attempts to answer the following question: can states, civil society, multilateral agencies, the private sector, military actors, concerned citizens, neighbours, and people affected by crises share an understanding of humanitarian effectiveness, and use this to improve how humanitarian assistance is delivered?

Chapter 2 outlines, and attempts to organize, the characteristics of *humanitarian effectiveness* as seen from a donor perspective. These characteristics provide a common framework that could allow each and every humanitarian actor to be held accountable for their contribution to the same characteristics of effectiveness – based on what they can control, what they can influence, and where they advocate – no matter who was assessing them.

Chapter 3 builds on these characteristics of effectiveness, and asks, if this is what *humanitarian effectiveness* looks like, how should the humanitarian business model change and evolve to remain fit for purpose? This chapter looks at how donors are imagining a more effective response, and what actions they have already taken to move in that direction.

Notes

- 1 Eleven donors provided either oral or written submissions for this paper: Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
- 2 The Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative is an informal donor forum and network which facilitates collective advancement of GHD principles and good practices. More at www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/gns/home.aspx
- 3 More on the Sustainable Development Goals process available at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1561>
- 4 The United Nations Climate Change Conference, COP21 or CMP11 will be held in Paris, France in 2015. This will be the 21st yearly session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 21) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 11th session of the Meeting of the Parties (CMP 11) to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.
- 5 At the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. More at www.wcdrr.org
- 6 In 1991 the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD set out broad principles for the evaluation process for DAC members. These principles were refined into five criteria that have been widely used in the evaluation of development initiatives – efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and relevance. Subsequently the criteria were adapted for evaluation of complex emergencies (OECD, 1999), becoming a set of seven criteria: relevance/appropriateness, connectedness, coherence, coverage, efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.
- 7 See, for example, the critique of the humanitarian system by Médecins Sans Frontières www.msf.org/sites/msf.org/files/msf-whereiseveryone_-def-lr_-july.pdf
- 8 The Paris Declaration of 2005 is a practical, action-oriented roadmap to improve the quality of aid and its impact on development. It gives a series of specific implementation measures and establishes a monitoring system to assess progress and ensure that donors and recipients hold each other accountable for their commitments. The Paris Declaration outlines the following five fundamental principles for making aid more effective:
 - Ownership: Developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.
 - Alignment: Donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems.
 - Harmonisation: Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.
 - Results: Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.
 - Mutual accountability: Donors and partners are accountable for development results.
- 9 Clusters are groups of humanitarian organizations (UN and non-UN) working in the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. shelter and health. They are created when clear humanitarian needs exist within a sector, when there are numerous actors within sectors and when national authorities need coordination support. Clusters provide a clear point of contact and are accountable for adequate and appropriate humanitarian assistance. Clusters create partnerships between international humanitarian actors, national and local authorities, and civil society. www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/cluster-coordination
- 10 More on the reform processes at www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx?page=content-template-default&bd=87
- 11 The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), People In Aid and the Sphere Project, with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Technical Steering Group are involved in the development of the Core Humanitarian Standard.

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- 12 The three are: the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership Standard, the People In Aid Code of Good Practice and the Core Standards section of the Sphere Handbook on Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response.
 - 13 From the International Network for Education in Emergencies www.ineesite.org/en/minimum-standards/handbook
 - 14 For more refer www.livestock-emergency.net
 - 15 See, for example, the work of ALNAP www.alnap.org and CDA www.cdacollaborative.org/#&panel1-1
 - 16 For example, the work of RedR www.redr.org.uk, the Emergency Capacity Building project www.ecbproject.org, and ATHA www.atha.se
 - 17 The Global Protection Cluster has undertaken to commission and implement a ‘whole-of-system’ review of protection in humanitarian action, to be undertaken by independent consultant(s), that aims to strengthen the roles of Protection Clusters and protection actors, and their strategic and operational interaction with Humanitarian Coordinators and other actors. The review will take into account existing IASC policy documents, tools and reference guides as well as relevant elements of the “Rights Up Front” Plan of Action. More at www.globalprotectioncluster.org/_assets/files/Secret%20Documents/GPC_TT_PP_TORs%2023%201%2014_EN.pdf
 - 18 Figures are disbursements in current prices. Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

Chapter 1:

Shared responsibility, different roles

Humanitarian assistance is provided by a growing range of actors, in different ways, all with a sense of solidarity, but perhaps without a core set of shared values.

What motivates different actors will ultimately depend on what they regard as effective. It is pertinent, therefore, to ask this question: “can states, civil society, multilateral agencies, the private sector, military actors, concerned citizens, neighbours, and people affected by crises share an understanding of *humanitarian effectiveness*, and use this to improve how humanitarian assistance is delivered”? This question will be central to achieving successful outcomes at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.

Different actors, different roles, but shared responsibility?

WHAT IS THE HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM?

The State of the Humanitarian System report defines the international humanitarian system as:

The network of interconnected institutional and operational entities through which humanitarian assistance is provided when local and national resources are insufficient to meet the needs of a population in crisis (Stoddard et al, 2013).

The authors of the State of the Humanitarian System report acknowledge that this definition does not cover all the ways that people in crisis are aided or supported, as this would mean that the definition would not have been useful for the purposes of that study. The definition leaves out, for example, bystanders, religious organisations, local merchants and other actors who are often the first responders in a crisis; their efforts must be augmented and supported – not undermined.

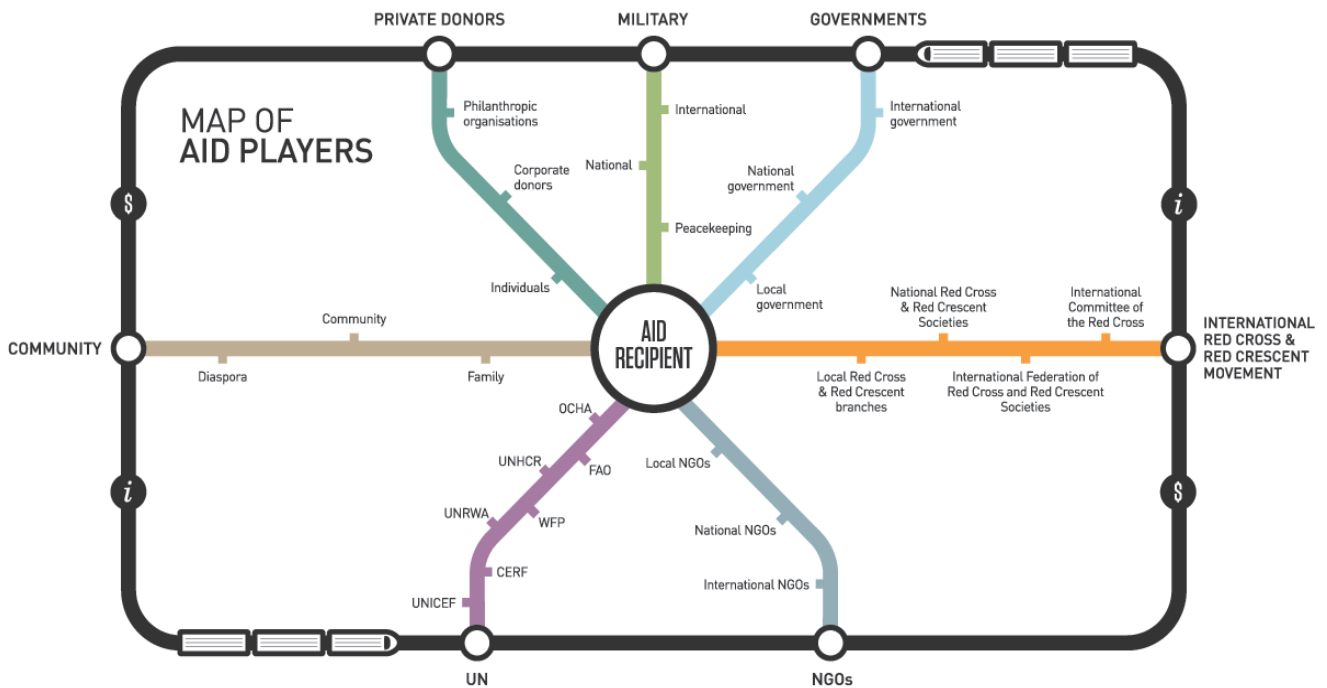
To illustrate this broader view of the humanitarian landscape, a complementary map of humanitarian players has been provided by the Global Humanitarian Assistance programme (Figure 1.1).

Whatever our understanding of the humanitarian landscape, it is clear that the range of actors involved in providing humanitarian assistance is very broad and diverse. Many groups of actors in the system will never cross paths – never meet or discuss what they are doing, how they are working, or why they are there, let alone share their criteria for success.

Donors interviewed for this paper pointed out that the system has – both organically and more formally – configured itself into a range of self-regulatory groups, such as the clusters which coordinate sector responses, various NGO forums at global and local levels, and global coordinating bodies such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee¹, the Emergency Directors Group² and the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative³. There are also many different standards, sets of principles and collaborative learning initiatives that guide the actions of these different groups.

Inevitably, it seems that the roles, goals and operating norms of these various groups and of individual actors overlap in different contexts – and this is to be expected in a fluid, and often very difficult and chaotic, working environment.

Figure 1.1 Map of Aid Players



NOTES

This map is illustrative and intends to show the main groups of people involved in humanitarian crises. It does not intend to suggest linear connections or funding relationships.

Aid recipients receive assistance from a multiplicity of sources and sometimes aid goes through several intermediaries before it reaches them. They have little opportunity to give international actors direct information about what they require or have received.

Governments provide humanitarian funding through the UN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, public-private partnerships and the governments of affected countries.

The UN manages some funding mechanisms, provides direct support to aid recipients and also channels some of its funding to other delivery agencies (including NGOs) for implementation.

NGOs provide direct support, mobilise resources and advocate for actions and policies. International NGOs deliver directly to recipients but also work through local NGOs.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies might deliver aid directly, and/or provide support to each other, and/or to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and/or to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Private donors provide money to the UN, international NGOs, local NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and directly to affected communities and individuals.

Military actors are sometimes deployed to support humanitarian response to natural disasters and are also often present in humanitarian crises in peacekeeping missions and security operations. Peacekeeping missions vary widely in their engagement with humanitarian crises according to context, mandate and mission character, with activities ranging from limited information sharing to direct programme implementation.

Source: Global Humanitarian Assistance www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/infographics/whos-who-in-humanitarian-response

Indeed, there are many assumptions about how the system fits together. However, many donors interviewed for this paper agree that the collective effort is not good enough, and that the way different actors work together is not yet optimal.

Donors were also in broad agreement that, given the diversity in the system, it would not be useful to attempt to pigeonhole different types of actors, or to create formal roles and responsibilities for individual players. However, it would be useful to try to come to a shared view of effectiveness, to allow for collective responsibility and accountability, and a shared view of priorities, no matter who is providing humanitarian assistance in a given crisis.

POWER DYNAMICS

Power dynamics are a major, but unspoken, factor in determining the effectiveness of any humanitarian response.

Donors noted that in many cases all the assets are in place to provide an effective response, and yet power dynamics – actors with a strong capacity to influence decisions crowding out other

voices – can lead to a sub-optimal use of those assets, and thus a sub-optimal response. Affected populations might not be heard in the programme design phase, local civil society can be side-lined in the response, non-traditional donors might not want to participate in co-ordination processes over which they have little control or influence, and – for traditional donors especially – response and funding decisions can be influenced by strong media, and new media, and taxpayer pressure at home.

Several donors felt that having a shared view of effectiveness, a view that covers all actors in the humanitarian system, would provide operational leverage, and help guard against some of these negative power dynamics.

This has been one of the great successes of the 23 Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD), for example. Forty-one donors⁴ have now endorsed GHD, the principles to which donors are held accountable, and many report that it has helped them defend principled positions in the face of pressure from influential actors at home – “we signed up to this international agreement, now we must abide by its provisions” – allowing donors, for example, to move ahead with reducing funding earmarks, increasing flexibility in financing arrangements and refusing to cut funding to ongoing crises in favour of new, heavily mediatised events.

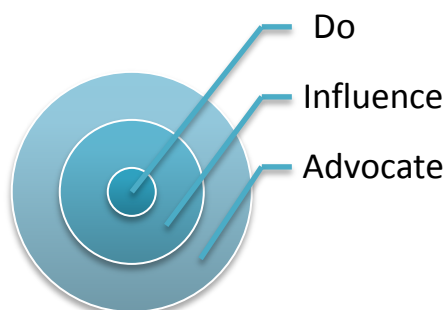
Therefore, many donors feel that a common framework to guide *humanitarian effectiveness* would allow humanitarian actors to resist some of the political pressures, and to defend certain positions and decisions, by reminding those in power about the values they share, and have collectively agreed to uphold.

DIFFERENT ROLES, SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Finally, donors think that different actors in the humanitarian arena play different roles in different circumstances, and that this must be taken into account when looking at effectiveness.

One donor likened this to what an actor is able to do, or control; what an actor is able to influence; and where, given their limited power or mandate, they can only advocate for others to act (Figure 1.1). This phenomenon will vary from context to context, and between the different layers of the system – at global level one actor, for example a UN agency, may be very powerful, and able to do and influence many areas of *humanitarian effectiveness*, but at a very local level, for example in a displaced persons camp, the principal, powerful, actor is more likely to be a community leader, a local or international NGO, and/or local authorities.

Figure 1.2 Do, Influence, Advocate



Source: OECD, discussions with donors during research for this paper

Each actor's specific role and mandate, expected results, and ability to deliver *humanitarian effectiveness* will therefore be governed by what they are able to do, what they are able to influence, and where they are only able to advocate for change.

What role for donors?

The model outlined in Figure 1.2 is a useful organising concept for the different roles that donors play in supporting *humanitarian effectiveness*.

DONORS 'DO'

When most people think of donors, they think of a cheque-book; a mechanism to provide funds to operational actors, who then deliver humanitarian assistance. While this is true, it is also a very simplistic view of the myriad of roles that donors play in the humanitarian system.

Donors directly 'do':

- *Provide funding for humanitarian crises.* In 2012, OECD/DAC donors⁵ provided USD 8.53 billion⁶, or 8.4% of total official development assistance, as funds for humanitarian programmes.
- *Receive and host refugees and asylum seekers*, eventually integrating some of these people into their own societies. Support to refugees and asylum seekers can only be counted as Official Development Assistance (ODA) during the first twelve months that these people are present in a donor country. In 2012, this support totalled USD 4.48 billion⁷, or 4.4% of total ODA. For many DAC donors, domestic support to refugees makes up between 3% and 15% of their total ODA; sometimes more money is spent on hosting refugees than is allocated to the international humanitarian budget.
- *Provide civil protection services*, including search and rescue teams, in-kind goods from donor warehouses, specialised emergency response teams and specialists, information sharing, mapping and co-ordination, and specialised services to the humanitarian community (Sweden's civil contingencies agency, MSB, built and managed the staff camp in Haiti, for example). These services are usually provided in the first few weeks of a new or escalating crisis; some donors also fund their domestic civil protection personnel to build the capacity of response teams in partner countries.
- *Provide staff to operational agencies and affected governments:* donors provide Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and other staff seconded into the United Nations system, and also specialist staff to work on humanitarian emergencies. Switzerland provides around 35 technical experts to the multilateral system (OECD, 2013a) and other donors provide Junior Professional Officers; Japan provides experts in disaster recovery to affected governments, including, recently, to support recovery from Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.
- *Provide tax-free status or tax credits for donations to humanitarian NGOs* – thereby increasing the incentive, and probably the total volume, of public donations to these organisations. Some donors, such as France, provide state-run funds to collect and disburse public donations in times of crisis (OECD, 2013b). Greece provides free advertising on state broadcasting services for Greek NGOs seeking funding for crisis response (OECD, 2011).
- *Provide military assets to support the humanitarian response.* For some donors, the marginal cost of using military assets for humanitarian response – especially logistics assets and specialist personnel – is funded from the aid budget.

- *Support military interventions to avoid or stop conflict.* Although this area is perhaps controversial, and parallel to the aid system, donors, such as France, have played a useful role through military interventions to contain newly erupted conflict, including (in France's case) in DRC in 2003, in Mali in 2012, and in the Central African Republic in 2014.

DONORS 'INFLUENCE'

Donors also have a significant role to play – depending on their interests and size – in influencing effective humanitarian assistance. This includes:

- *Upholding operational standards and programme quality* – Donors can help ensure that operational agencies deliver quality programmes, by ensuring that their partners apply relevant standards, and by providing funding that is sufficient to deliver the results required by these standards. They can also fund and promote new modalities and tools, to improve the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Donors also sit on the executive boards of multilateral agencies, where they pass messages that help promote better performance. Exercises such as the United Kingdom's multilateral aid review (and the Australian version that followed it) have sent a strong message that only effective organisations will continue be funded, creating a powerful incentive for quality.
- *Championing co-ordination* – Donors can influence co-ordination by requiring partners to demonstrate active participation in co-ordination structures. They can also fund and provide technical support to those structures, and, when donor staff are present in the field, they can also participate in operational co-ordination meetings.
- *Promoting affected population participation and feedback* – by providing sufficient funding to ensure that operational agencies have the skill-sets and resources to listen to affected populations throughout the programme cycle, and asking for confirmation of participation in reports. It also helps when donors build sufficient flexibility into funding agreements so that partners can act on the feedback received from affected populations, for example to change programming activities.
- *Co-ordination with other donors* – For example, European Union member states are increasingly looking to the European Community's humanitarian directorate, ECHO, to provide them with crisis situation reports, risk and vulnerability analysis and advice on good practice.
- *Employing anticipatory and forward looking approaches* – multi-annual funding can help drive more efficient humanitarian assistance (Courtenay Cabot Venton, 2013), it may also help operational actors take a longer-term, forward-looking, risk-informed approach to humanitarian assistance, although this has not yet been proven⁸.
- *Leveraging development investments* – humanitarian donor staff may also have influence over their development, stabilisation and climate change colleagues. This may help influence the targeting of funding to alleviate the structural causes of crises. One recent example is, for some donors, joint humanitarian/development programming to boost resilience.

DONORS 'ADVOCATE'

Donors, as states, can also play a useful advocacy role, both on the domestic and international stage to align political support behind humanitarian action in the field:

- *Promoting coherent domestic policy* – OECD/DAC donors have agreed to promote policy coherence for development⁹, which means ensuring that their domestic policies do not

undermine development efforts. This is also a useful concept in the humanitarian arena. For example, donors who are major arms exporters can help ensure that these arms do not flow to conflict affected states; other donors can work to enforce the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas (OECD, 2013c). Domestic climate change policies can also be vetted, for example for their impact on disaster prone states.

- *Incentivising peace* – donors, through their diplomatic representations, can work to find political solutions to conflicts. Norway, for example, has played a strategic role in the Sri Lanka and West Bank and Gaza peace negotiations.
- *Promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law* – a number of donors actively work to uphold international humanitarian law on the global stage.
- *Advocating for humanitarian access* – donors can, for example, play a useful role in advocating for humanitarian corridors and other diplomatic solutions to improve humanitarian access in conflict areas.

Towards mutual accountability for effective humanitarian assistance

EFFECTIVENESS, A SHARED VALUE – AND A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

So, the humanitarian landscape has many, diverse actors, and unequal power dynamics, which vary from the global to the very local level. Different actors – including donors – have different effects on the delivery of effective humanitarian assistance, depending on their mandates, size, interests, comparative advantage and power. Donors interviewed for this study believe that, because of this diversity, it would not be helpful to formalise roles and responsibilities for each different part of the humanitarian system.

However, donors believe that it would be useful to try to come to a shared view of *humanitarian effectiveness*, to allow for collective responsibility and accountability, no matter who is providing humanitarian assistance in a given crisis, and no matter who is holding the individual actor to account.

For donors, this means that domestic stakeholders – taxpayers, parliament, audit institutions, domestic NGOs and the media – would all measure donor performance against a common framework. This common framework would also be used to measure the performance of operational actors – taking into account what they are able to ‘do’, ‘influence’ and ‘advocate’.

The next chapter will outline a collection of characteristics, which could provide a framework for *humanitarian effectiveness*, one that would allow for mutual accountability – shared values, shared responsibilities, but different roles.

NOTES

- 1 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination of humanitarian assistance. It is a unique forum involving the key UN and non-UN humanitarian partners. More at: www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/
- 2 The Emergency Directors' Group brings together NGO and UN Emergency Directors
- 3 Forty-one donor countries are currently members of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative. More at www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/gns/home.aspx
- 4 The up-to-date list of GHD members can be found at: www.goodhumanitarianandonorship.org/gns/about-us/our-members.aspx
- 5 OECD Development Assistance Committee members can be found at: www.oecd.org/dac/dacmembers.htm#members
- 6 US dollars, gross disbursements at current prices. Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System
- 7 US dollars, gross disbursements at current prices. Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System
- 8 DFID is, however, currently undertaking an evaluation of the effectiveness of multi-annual funding
- 9 Guidance and tools on policy coherence are available at www.oecd.org/pcd/guidanceandtoolsforpolicymakers.htm

Chapter 2:

The Characteristics of Humanitarian Effectiveness

Operational actors, affected populations and states, donors, and policymakers cannot be put into neat boxes, but they can, and should, be held accountable for their respective contributions to *humanitarian effectiveness*.

Arguably, a system of collective responsibility and mutual accountability could work best. A common framework for *humanitarian effectiveness* would mean that each actor would be held accountable for their contribution to the same characteristics of effectiveness – based on what they can control, what they can influence, and where they advocate – no matter who was assessing them.

For donors this would mean that their partners, national audit offices, taxpayers, other donors, affected states and people, parliaments or the press would hold them accountable for their actions including:

What they do – including financing humanitarian partners, providing rapid response teams and military support, receiving refugees, creating more coherent policy around issues such as arms control, mobilising the domestic private sector and other actions such as creating tax breaks for donations to NGOs.

What they influence – including promoting an effective co-ordination system, encouraging better responses through new and improved tools and practices, supporting links to development programming, and adherence to good practice principles and standards.

Where they advocate – including for humanitarian access, towards peace processes, for global accords and agreements, and other acts of diplomacy.

This chapter will outline a set of possible characteristics of an effective response, based on areas of broad agreement amongst the donors interviewed for this study.

Humanitarian effectiveness is a shared responsibility, but with different roles

GROUNDING IN COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

What is this? Individual actors should contribute to *humanitarian effectiveness* where they can clearly and consistently add value.

Why does it matter? Focusing on areas of comparative advantage will increase predictability, quality and impact. Organisations that specialise and focus are able to learn, evolve, attract specialist staff, deliver consistent and comparable results, leverage results to influence others, and consistently add value to the humanitarian effort.

What does this mean for donors? Donors will need to look at their legal frameworks, national interest, historical experience, budget size, and programming tools, and determine where they can most add value to the broader humanitarian system – where they should “do”, what they

should “influence” and when they should “advocate”. This may require a review of their funding criteria, and their choice of partners.

FORWARD LOOKING

What is this? The world is changing, and humanitarian programmes must anticipate the challenges of the future, and evolve to meet them more effectively by:

- boosting resilience to future crises, thus limiting their impact; and
- innovating, improving and evolving, so as to deliver a better response.

Why does it matter? Business models need to evolve to ensure that they remain fit for purpose; a programme that meets needs today does not guarantee success in the future. Money is also a factor. Needs are increasing but resources are not; so the system needs to evolve so it can continue to deliver in the most cost-effective way.

Donors also believe that better outcomes (reduced mortality and suffering) can be achieved through anticipatory responses, and making a contribution to building resilience, rather than through waiting to react when crises hit. There is general agreement that the benefits of reducing risks – both in reduced mortality and in reduced economic losses – significantly outweigh the costs.

What does this mean for donors? Donors will need to invest in risk-informed programming, and boosting resilience and local response capacity; this will also require increased allocations for risk reduction from development budgets. Donors will also need to invest in research and innovation in their areas of comparative advantage, promoting learning between partners, and building lessons from the field into their future programme design. Many donors have already looked at their structures and systems, and re-designed processes and tools, to ensure that they will be able to meet the challenges of the future.

RESPECTING A PRINCIPLED APPROACH

What is this? All stakeholders in the global humanitarian system should abide by the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality, as the core values of effective humanitarian action.

Why does it matter? Donors broadly agree that aid is not a political instrument, and that the international rules and principles guiding humanitarian assistance are appropriate. However, donors also agree that there should be more focus on putting these international agreements into practice. This applies not just to the humanitarian system, but also to all actors involved, either directly or indirectly, in crisis risk countries.

What does this mean for donors? For donors, the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (often abbreviated as GHD) provide supplementary guiding principles for their own programmes. In general, donors have made most progress on those areas of international agreements and principles where they can take action individually. There has been less progress on areas where collective action is required, such as standardising reporting, reinforcing co-ordination, policy coherence and burden sharing. Donors will need to renew their commitment towards progress in these areas. In addition, ensuring that colleagues in other parts of government understand and abide by humanitarian principles is a constant struggle for many humanitarian donors; this work will need to be reinforced, and new tools may be required.

Humanitarian effectiveness begins with effective programme design

MAXIMISE REACH

What is this? The humanitarian system should aim to reduce all risks to life and livelihood – reaching and filling as many needs as possible, irrespective of location.

Why does it matter? There is general agreement amongst donors interviewed for this paper that the humanitarian caseload will continue to increase. This will include more people affected by new and escalating humanitarian crises, adding to a stable caseload in care-and-maintenance protracted crisis environments, where humanitarian actors must provide basic services in the absence of other functioning systems. It is unlikely that resources available to provide an effective response – funding and operational capacity – will ever adequately match the level of needs. Indeed, in 2013 only 65% of the needs identified by UN appeals were funded (GHA, 2014).

What does this mean for donors? For donors, maximising reach means maximising available funds, even in tight fiscal environments. Closer co-ordination between donors could also be useful, to minimise gaps in individual responses, to minimise forgotten crises, and to avoid overlaps. Global, and then in-country, comparative needs and/or risk analyses will be required¹.

In addition, greater attention on value for money will be required; ensuring that each dollar spent reaches as many needs as possible. Investing in innovative programmes and increasing learning – finding better and smarter ways to work – could also help ensure greater reach in future responses.

ADAPT TO THE CONTEXT

What is this? Humanitarian action must be tailored to each individual context.

Why does it matter? Boosting the capacity of households, communities and states to absorb shocks, or to adapt so that they are less exposed to shocks, should be the starting point for all humanitarian interventions. And yet, the humanitarian system often designs, funds and delivers responses in the same way, despite the significant variations in risks, timescales, and potential for results, recovery and exit in different contexts. As a result, there is a feeling that the humanitarian system often undermines local systems and reduces the capacity for people to cope with shocks without international and external support.

What does this mean for donors? There is growing agreement that the “one-size-fits-all” response model needs to be reviewed (Chapter 3). A new conflict in a fragile context does not have the same dynamics as a long-term protracted crisis, or a disaster in a stable middle income country. Responses in urban contexts will be very different from traditional responses in rural areas. Donors need better tools to analyse risks, to identify the causes of mortality, morbidity and suffering, to develop shared priorities for the response, and to design, fund and prioritise each response based on this analysis.

BE DEMAND DRIVEN

What is this? Programmes should enable affected or at-risk people to make their own choices about how to deal with shocks.

Why does it matter? Today’s humanitarian system is arranged around supply. Co-ordination systems and agency mandates, as well as plans and results matrices, are often linked to sectors, or the supply side of aid. Therefore, the natural tendency – as played out in current response plans – is to think in terms of what goods and services can be supplied, rather than what would

actually empower people to cope more effectively with current and future shocks – and what they actually want. New media are likely to play a key role in shifting this paradigm, empowering affected people to become agents of their own destiny, rather than just passive recipients of aid.

What does this mean for donors? Donors could focus on response tools that enable choice; many donors consider that cash programmes are useful for this purpose.

Donors could also look at supporting new media solutions that ensure that the voice of affected populations is heard throughout the programme cycle. A holistic response based on severity scoring by affected populations could be useful, as could stronger accountability to affected populations. Funding to develop a new approach to planning and results, based on prioritisation of major risks to life and livelihood – and measuring overall impact rather than sector-specific indicators – could also be useful for the wider humanitarian system.

MANAGING FOR HUMANITARIAN RESULTS

What is this? Each humanitarian intervention should be based on clear objectives and expected results. Operational actors should have flexibility about how to achieve these results, taking into account risks and opportunities, as well as feedback from key stakeholders, as the situation evolves. Actual results should be monitored and measured against these targets.

Why does it matter? To be effective, every humanitarian intervention should have a realistic set of objectives. Humanitarian resources, time and effort should be focused on achieving these objectives, and progress should be measured against these objectives over time. Objective setting will involve:

- identifying and analysing trade-offs, opportunities, risks and dilemmas;
- weighing up short-term versus long-term effects and actions;
- inputs from the affected population;
- being realistic about what can be achieved in a given programme time-frame.

Monitoring to determine where individual actors are on track (or not) to achieve results could stimulate adjustments to ongoing humanitarian programmes, and produce a more effective overall result.

What does this mean for donors? Donors will need to promote systems to collect and monitor results, and use this information to make decisions about the future direction of humanitarian programmes. New systems – perhaps shared between donors – for more systematic monitoring may need to be developed. The trend to reduce earmarking, focusing on expected results and not activities, will need to continue.

VALUE FOR MONEY

What is this? Each humanitarian intervention should focus on maximising the benefits gained from the use of all available resources – time, goods, money and skills.

Note that there is a tension between ‘maximising reach’ and ‘value for money’ – the drive for greater efficiency should not be at the expense of meeting needs in places that are difficult to access or require expensive operations.

Why does it matter? Focusing on the best use of resources will help ensure that the system can deliver better results for the same, or less, expense, time and effort. This is important because the overall humanitarian funding envelope is either unchanged, or declining, for most OECD/DAC donors². In addition, budgets are being stretched to cover a broader range of programmes, reducing the amount of funds available for ‘saving lives’. As a result, even when additional

resources are available from non-traditional donors, the gap between needs and resources continues to widen. Demonstrating the good use of taxpayers' money will also help donors continue to secure appropriate annual budget allocations for humanitarian aid.

What does this mean for donors? There is increasing domestic pressure on donors to manage costs more effectively, and thus increase the reach of each dollar spent. Most donors have already been forced to look at their own systems, structures and staffing levels to reduce costs, increase financial controls, and increase efficiency. Lessons from these processes could be usefully shared with partners. Donors also think that comparative analysis of operational partner transaction costs could be useful, to help in selecting the right partner.

Humanitarian effectiveness needs the right tools and partnerships

PREDICTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

What is this? Resources for humanitarian programmes should be provided in a reliable and predictable way, and there should be flexibility in how those resources are used to deliver results.

Why does it matter? Predictability allows the system to plan ahead, and to determine how resources can be allocated to best meet emerging humanitarian priorities. It also helps the system analyse and fill gaps in the response, and allows operational partners to avoid last-minute solutions, which are often more expensive. Flexibility allows operational actors to adapt programmes as contexts evolve, ensuring that they are always targeting the highest risks to life and livelihood, in the most effective way.

What does this mean for donors? The current trend towards multi-annual financing for multi-lateral agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent family, and for NGOs, should continue. Funds should, at most, be earmarked for the delivery of specific results – they should not be earmarked to an individual project or to specific activities.

TIMELINESS

What is this? The delay between the onset of the crisis and the planning and delivery of the response should be minimised.

Why does it matter? Humanitarian response aims to ensure that shocks either have no, or only temporary, effects on households and communities. For this to happen, the response has to be delivered as quickly as possible.

What does this mean for donors? Donors should continue to develop and maintain rapid funding mechanisms, both at global and country level, but also with trusted partners. Investments in strengthening the preparedness of the system will be important, including seed funding for emergency analysis and planning teams and tools, as will mechanisms to respond quickly and appropriately to early warning signals.

CO-ORDINATION and INTER-OPERABILITY

What is this? Different parts of the humanitarian system should work together coherently, efficiently and effectively, to achieve shared strategic and operational objectives.

Why does it matter? A shared commitment to inter-operability provides strong motivation for different actors in the system to work together, and encourages them to be creative, improving relationships, minimising competition and promoting synergies. It also helps minimise the waste of resources – reducing gaps and eliminating overlaps.

What does this mean for donors? Donors can continue to promote inter-operability at different levels. Internally, this means developing a coherent, whole-of-government approach to humanitarian programming. Externally it could involve promoting and participating in co-ordination between donor countries, and influencing the participation of partners in operational co-ordination in the field, for example through greater emphasis on setting shared priorities for the response. Excess bureaucracy should be avoided.

PARTNERSHIP

What is this? All actors in the humanitarian system should trust, respect, and be responsive to each other. Feedback from partners should be solicited regularly, and promptly acted upon, and actors should openly share information.

Why does it matter? Choosing reliable, experienced, partners capable of delivering a quality programme, and approaching these partnerships in a strategic and respectful manner, will help enable a more effective response. Affected communities should also be considered as partners in the response.

What does this mean for donors? Donors, like other actors, will need to continue building relationships with a wide group of domestic and international stakeholders, nourishing and investing in these partnerships over time. Operational partners should be trusted to make the right decisions about the use of resources; in turn these partners will need to demonstrate that they are accountable, to justify the trust that has been placed in them. Investing in processes to promote partnership, which might include measures such as the capacity building and certification of local NGOs (while taking care that these processes are not used for political ends), could also be useful.

Humanitarian effectiveness must be measured, demonstrated and improved

SYSTEM-WIDE LEARNING

What is this? Learning involves actively sharing practices that:

- show elements of success (or failure),
- affect something important, and
- are able to be replicated or adapted to other settings.

Advocating for the application of global standards and norms is also part of learning.

Why does it matter? Learning helps improve performance by replicating successes across the humanitarian system, where the context permits, and where the lesson is appropriate. This process will help raise the overall quality of programme delivery, reduce duplication of effort and 'reinventing the wheel', minimise the time spent re-doing work of poor quality, and increase cost savings through increased productivity. Because learning focuses on what is working well, it can also help raise morale and motivate people to reach excellence.

What does this mean for donors? Effective learning requires resources and commitment – people and tools to identify, document and share good practice. Organisations will also need political will and appropriate institutional incentives to promote a learning culture. Donors should keep providing funds for research and evaluations, but should also help the system to disseminate the lessons widely, scale-up successes, and adapt or terminate programmes and responses that are not achieving results.

ACCOUNTABILITY

What is this? Accountability is the acknowledgement and assumption of responsibility for decisions and actions, including the responsibility to report, explain and be answerable for the resulting consequences.

Why does it matter? All actors in the humanitarian system should be accountable for their actions and decisions, including to affected communities.

What does this mean for donors? Donors, particularly those who are present in the field, have a challenge role towards partners. Partnerships with new media could also play a role in promoting accountability and feedback loops, especially to and from affected people. Standardising reporting requirements – so that partners only provide one set of results to all their donors will improve the quality of results information and decrease administrative burden – a win/win situation.

NOTES

- 1 The InfoRM tool – Information for Risk Management – could be useful in this regard. More at: <http://inform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>
- 2 Gross disbursements for humanitarian assistance provided by OECD/DAC donors (in constant prices) were USD 9.51 billion in 2009, USD 9.95 billion in 2010, USD 9.58 billion in 2011, and USD 8.53 billion in 2012. Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System

Chapter 3

Imagining the future: Options for boosting effectiveness

The previous chapter outlined the characteristics that appear to be critical for *humanitarian effectiveness*. Business models, including how humanitarian programmes are planned and delivered, need to change and evolve if they are to remain fit for purpose, in the face of current and future humanitarian challenges.

The challenges facing the humanitarian system are not all new – many of them have been haunting the global community for decades. However, there are new ideas about how they should be solved. The timing is good; over the next two years there will be major opportunities to influence the wider humanitarian and development communities through the various post-2015 processes.

How, then, are the donors imagining more effective humanitarian programming?

Moving away from the one-size-fits-all response model

What is this? Donors interviewed for this paper agree that the humanitarian system should take the context as the starting point, and not assume that a one-size-fits-all model will be appropriate for all crises. More study is required to determine what works best in different contexts. However, moving towards a differentiated approach might include:

- Increasing the focus on context and risk analysis, before sector plans are put in place, strengthening the role of affected people across the programme cycle, and improving analytical capacity and tools
- Differentiating the planning, tools and actors involved in the early emergency phase of the response from the care-and-maintenance phase that follows
- Reviewing how forgotten crises are supported – including advocacy and aid delivery – given that absorption and response capacity, and not just funding, are major constraints in these situations. Some donors interviewed have put out calls for proposals for individual neglected crises, and received no responses.
- Increasing the involvement of the affected or host state in the response, where this is possible and appropriate – perhaps differentiating between basic service delivery, where the involvement of the state is less likely to be controversial, and protection responses; remembering that humanitarian principles do not preclude working with state actors, and indeed that UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182 holds the role and responsibility of the affected states as central to humanitarian response
- Allowing for different types of responses in the same country – for example the response to a disaster and a protection crisis could be treated very differently, even if they occur in the same country
- Moving towards a focus on comparative advantage, by both operational agencies and donors – for example by sector, theme, geographical region and/or type of crisis – while

ensuring that all responses remain sufficiently flexible to adapt to a changing needs or risk profile

- Disaggregating the particular needs of different groups within the overall humanitarian caseload – for example between affected populations who will be able to return home, and those who cannot; or between urban and rural populations
- Linking up with, or helping develop, social protection programmes for repeatedly vulnerable people, in collaboration with national authorities where appropriate, and contributing to the resilience of at-risk communities, based on the actual risks that they face
- Looking at the regional implications of crises that might, or already do, transcend borders
- Being more realistic about the timeframe for different responses, and thus between short-term fixes and long-term planning, and about the criteria for exit. Many of today's protracted crises will likely continue into the medium term; envisaging more sustainable solutions, rather than repeated "plastic sheeting" type interventions¹, may be more appropriate, and more cost-effective, in the long run
- Adapting co-ordination systems to the context, and moving towards a system of interoperability, both of actors and of standards, rather than seeking to draw all actors into the existing system
- Accepting responses that go beyond minimum standards, where resources are available

Why does it matter? Today, humanitarians respond to a vast range of crises. These include mega-disasters in middle income countries with stable governance systems, functional response capacities and social protection systems (for example, Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines) or without them (Haiti earthquake) to complex crises with regional impacts and major humanitarian access issues (Syria), forgotten crises (Central African Republic), smaller scale disasters (flooding in Vanuatu and Serbia), slow-onset crises (chronic food insecurity in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel) and care-and-maintenance responses to protracted crises (Democratic Republic of Congo).

However, humanitarian assistance is often provided in a more or less generic manner, with one funding model (often short-term grants), one planning model, one co-ordination model and a core set of operational actors. This is despite the varying levels of risk and capacity in each context, the different types of actors, and available funding volumes, and different opportunities for recovery.

Adapting the response to these different contexts would help ensure that humanitarian assistance is demand driven, focused on appropriate results, maximising its reach, with different stakeholders contributing based on their comparative advantage, together ensuring that the overall response achieves maximum value for money.

What does this mean for donors? Imagining a context based model for humanitarian assistance could require the following changes for donors:

- Increasing resources for context and risk analysis, including providing funding to develop and use improved analytical tools
- Moving to anticipatory responses (contributing to building resilience) based on context and risk analysis rather than waiting for crises to happen
- Building trust with, and strengthening the capacity of, formal and informal actors who will be influential and important in the humanitarian responses of the future, including civil protection services and crisis management agencies in at-risk countries. This may require new skills, different partnerships, direct funding of national structures, public/private

partnerships, shared training exercises with new actors and new donors, capacity building interventions and frank and open discussions about different value sets

- Building stronger relationships and trust with G77 countries, and key domestic actors in those countries, around humanitarian issues
- Strengthening donor co-ordination, and including regional actors in co-ordination mechanisms. Donor co-ordination will need to look at some form of division of labour between donors, based on individual donor comparative advantage, interests and volumes. Some donors note that better co-ordination will take time, and will likely involve a team-building process passing through the norming and storming phases, before it moves on to performing².
- Specialising in areas of comparative advantage and national interest – for example donors specialising in different types of response, geographical areas, themes, and/or sectors. For some donors this may mean updating legal frameworks and policy guidance.
- Seeking greater coherence with development colleagues and financing tools, including with the post-2015 frameworks. This will include stronger links with the successor to the Hyogo Framework for Action, and seizing the opportunity to ensure that resilience is properly incorporated into the broader post-2015 development discussions. Shared humanitarian/development/climate change analysis and planning exercises will be critical, including around social protection mechanisms.

Adapting and refining programming tools and concepts

What is this? The tools and approaches that humanitarian actors use to enable an effective response could be improved. This might include:

- Promoting and investing in innovative solutions that could provide a step-change in the effectiveness of the response.
- A more realistic appraisal of the timeframe for the response, and what this means for how the response is designed and delivered. In many contexts, humanitarian responses will be required for many years – this might mean considering durable basic service infrastructure from the outset, rather than providing, and regularly renewing, temporary “plastic sheeting” fixes.
- Moving towards comprehensive risk management in complex environments, with clear roles and responsibilities for different actors. Risk management should include programmatic risk (the risk that humanitarian programmes do not achieve their planned results, or that they have unintended negative consequences) and institutional risk (including security, reputational risk, fiduciary risks, operational risks). The risks involved in operating remotely, through local partners, require special attention.

Why does it matter? Adapting and refining programming tools and concepts will help maximise reach, adapt the response to the context, improve predictability and flexibility, promote greater value for money, increase the focus on results, strengthen partnerships and support system-wide learning.

What does this mean for donors? Adapting programming tools and concepts for humanitarian assistance could require the following changes for donors:

- Continuing to move towards multi-annual funding models
- Continuing to forge strategic partnerships with operational agencies³, focused on results, rather than activities

- Investing in innovation, and researching how new technology can be used to improve humanitarian effectiveness. Promoting competitions and other catalytic approaches as incentives for the private sector, academics and youth to develop innovative humanitarian solutions
- Advocating for more effective partners, promoting organisational reviews to ensure that partners are fit for purpose, with the tools and processes for an effective humanitarian response
- Scaling up the use of cash transfer and voucher programmes as an effective, demand-driven solutions to humanitarian crises (as many donors are now doing)
- Sharing a view of the risks in each crisis landscape with partners and other donors, and agreeing who will be responsible for monitoring and managing these risks.

Clarifying when, where and why the response is effective

What is this? The humanitarian system needs to develop a coherent approach to measuring when, where and why humanitarian interventions are effective. This should include a clear statement of intent about the expected results of a humanitarian intervention, and a coherent system for monitoring the impact of both individual humanitarian programmes, and the global humanitarian endeavour.

Why does it matter? Setting out clear expected results and regularly measuring progress will increase effectiveness – especially in terms of maximising reach, ensuring that the overall programme is adapted to the context and demand-driven, and providing value for money. It will also help ensure that everyone shares the same objectives and incentives in a crisis, despite their separate interests, by helping determine whether the response is effective, and where and how it could be improved.

Finally, monitoring progress will help promote learning on what works, and what doesn't work, in different contexts.

What does this mean for donors? Donors interviewed for this paper were very aware that measuring the effectiveness of humanitarian programmes could be improved. For donors, this might involve:

- Designing systems that can systematically demonstrate cost-effectiveness to key domestic stakeholders, especially those who make budget decisions, such as politicians and parliamentarians. This will help shore up support as funding and budgets come under increasing scrutiny and strain.
- Looking at sharing reporting, monitoring and learning processes – given that the humanitarian programme is a shared endeavour
- Seeking methods to ensure that lessons from the field are properly embedded in future planning processes
- Developing a shared view of when to exit individual crisis situations, and whether (and how) to transition towards a development relationship

The future starts today – changes that are already underway

Donors interviewed for this paper are already making changes to ensure that they will be fit for purpose in the future humanitarian environment.

PROCESS REVIEWS

A number of donors, including Australia, Denmark, the European Union, and the United Kingdom, have already started, or completed, reviews of their internal systems and processes, to ensure that their organisational structures will be fit for purpose in the future humanitarian environment. Switzerland is looking at refining its understanding of its comparative advantage, with a view to greater selectivity about its interventions, and thus more effective humanitarian programming; while recognising that this process will involve some difficult decisions.

CASH BASED PROGRAMMING

Many of the donors interviewed for this paper sent positive signals about cash based programming, and links between cash tools and social protection mechanisms. This was especially the case for donors whose wider development programmes are now focused on stimulating economic growth in developing countries.

QUALITY FINANCING

Humanitarian donors are working towards more flexible funding. Earmarking is generally now only to a country level, rather than to a specific project and/or activity, and donors are working on more strategic, results-based relationships with a reduced number of key operational partners.

In addition, many humanitarian donors are moving to multi-annual funding, for United Nations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent family, and NGO partners. Some donors, including the Netherlands, are engaging in these relationships as pilots; others, including Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom are fully engaged in multi-annual funding tools.

INVESTING IN RESEARCH

The larger donors are consistently investing in humanitarian research. Australia has a humanitarian futures programme looking at innovation, technology and new thinking. The United States has increased staff numbers in its policy and engagement division to help research and propose solutions to the challenges of the future. The European Union, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States are also involved in research on new and evolving humanitarian challenges, including the challenge of responding in urban environments.

FOCUS ON RESULTS

Donors continue to struggle with how to report results. The European Union has developed key performance indicators for its humanitarian programme, and Swedish SIDA is developing its own indicators. The United States and European Union are also making good use of their presence on the ground by ensuring that their assessments of the performance of multilateral partners are input into the Executive Boards of those agencies.

Notes

- 1 Plastic sheeting is one of the most widely distributed non–food relief items used in humanitarian operations. Each year, hundreds of thousands of square meters of polyethylene sheets are distributed by NGOs, government agencies and private sector. The versatility and low cost of plastic sheeting have made it a default choice for emergency shelter interventions by agencies. More at http://sheltercentre.org/sites/default/files/IFRC-Oxfam_PlasticSheeting.pdf
- 2 From Tuckman’s four stages of small group development. More at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuckman's_stages_of_group_development
- 3 Operational agencies include NGOs, the United Nations System, the Red Cross and Red Crescent family, development banks and other agencies that provide humanitarian assistance.

Next Steps

The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit provides a useful opportunity to tackle the question of *humanitarian effectiveness* head on, providing a forum where the broader humanitarian system could discuss and potentially agree on a common framework for *humanitarian effectiveness* to which all actors will be held accountable, no matter what their capacity to “do”, “influence”, or “advocate”.

As discussions around this issue continue, the humanitarian system needs to do more than just pick low-hanging fruit; instead it should aim for true *humanitarian effectiveness*, beyond minor tweaks that will perhaps render the system more efficient, but fall short of the step change that is required, to better help people meet all their humanitarian needs going forward.

As such, the only recommendation from this study is to seize the opportunity that the Summit provides to work towards a common framework for *humanitarian effectiveness*, and to then use this shared set of values to design better, results-driven, context-appropriate responses and effective tools and partnerships. This will in turn enable people at risk of terrible, urgent, life-threatening suffering to make the best possible decisions about how to protect themselves and those they are responsible for.

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