

INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS IN HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS



**WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT
PUTTING POLICY INTO PRACTICE**

THE COMMITMENTS INTO ACTION SERIES

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The Commitments into Action series

Humanitarian needs continue to grow, with millions of people affected by conflicts, natural disasters and other crises every year. Simultaneously, these shocks undermine development gains and block the path out of poverty and towards sustainable development. Furthermore, these negative events can destabilise neighbouring countries and have regional or even global repercussions.

And yet, many humanitarian crises remain underfunded or forgotten. Donors and operational agencies make hard decisions about which operations to prioritise and which to let go. In short, there is insufficient quality money — money to reach all those in need, to purchase what they need and when they need it. Human suffering continues unabated.

In May 2016, the World Humanitarian Summit reflected on the shifting nature of crises and on the need for new ways of funding and delivering humanitarian assistance, so that humanitarian aid can remain a key and effective tool for the critical task of saving lives and preserving livelihoods. The question of how to better finance humanitarian operations – including how to finance some of the emerging good practices and new ways of working in humanitarian crises – was seen as key to delivering a better response.

The OECD, under its mandate to monitor the effectiveness of aid and to promote peer learning, will continue to support its members to deliver on the commitments they made at the Summit, especially the commitments around better humanitarian financing.

As part of this work, the Commitments into Action series was developed to provide straightforward, practical guidance for OECD Development Assistance Committee members and other humanitarian donors. It is aimed at helping them translate their humanitarian policy commitments into quality results in the field, deliver better finance and better engage with the humanitarian community on the key issues surrounding humanitarian responses in modern crisis situations. The series specifically targets professionals in donor agencies making decisions about humanitarian funding.

All guidelines are available on a dedicated website designed for humanitarian donors: <http://www.oecd.org/development/humanitarian-donors/>.

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1. Introduction

The global humanitarian assistance budget keeps increasing and yet there is never enough humanitarian money. There are more crises, they are lasting longer and humanitarian aid is covering more than it ever has before. The prolongation of crises has made it clear that emergency needs do not clearly diverge from development ones. Indeed, for the people affected by crises, humanitarian needs intersect and co-exist with longer-term resilience issues.

Responding to such an array of diverse needs in different sectors is complex. With multiple stakeholders operating in crisis contexts, it is increasingly difficult to design and support programmes that are adapted to each context, focused on results and yet remain good value for money. Put another way, the overlap of needs and goals means that it is ever more challenging to design and support programmes that are effective.

The effectiveness of humanitarian aid, of course, is not measured in money alone, and donors are doing more than delivering funds to their humanitarian partners. Understanding the specificities of the contexts in which they work and the population's needs is essential. So is working coherently with others so that donors contribute to collective outcomes beyond humanitarian aid (UN OCHA, 2016).

Recent global policy commitments recognise the importance of strengthening the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. The 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, in particular, produced a range of initiatives that aim to increase humanitarian aid effectiveness. The Grand Bargain, for example, contains 51 commitments that all focus on improving the way programmes are being designed and implemented so that they reach people who are most in need in a timely manner (GB, 2016).

The OECD Commitments into Action Series is an attempt to support donors to improve effectiveness in the way they address humanitarian needs in today's complex and long-lasting crises. This guideline builds on the topics addressed in the series, examining some of the most critical factors that can increase humanitarian aid effectiveness and provide the quality funding that people in need can expect from the international community.

2. Definitions

Aid effectiveness is about delivering aid in a way that maximises its impact on development and achieves value for aid money (Killen, 2011). The definition of development aid effectiveness is embedded in a series of international agreements; most notably the Busan Partnership for

Effective Development Co-operation (Busan HLF-4, 2011). However, there is no such binding definition of humanitarian aid effectiveness.

The OECD/DAC criteria¹ for evaluating humanitarian assistance measures effectiveness as “the extent to which the activity achieves its purpose or whether this can be expected to happen on the basis of the outputs”. (OECD, 1999)

3. How donors can increase humanitarian effectiveness

Indeed, for relief organisations effectiveness is based on upstream preparedness, the strength of leadership to initiate early action, the ability to operate in a complex environment, and actors’ technical skills to act well (Peigney, 2016).

The upshot for donors is that increasing humanitarian effectiveness means creating for their partners a financial and technical environment in which those characteristics can emerge. This requires an effective policy, financial and regulatory framework, an effective programme design and a learning and accountability mechanism.

An effective policy, financial and regulatory framework

Timeliness of funds

Timeliness is at the core of humanitarian funding effectiveness. (UNOCHA, 2016) A late response hampers effectiveness. Donors should seek to reduce the time between identification of humanitarian needs and response to those needs. In the case of a natural disaster, for example, most donors can deploy their civil protection assets within hours. Many donors also maintain rapid funding mechanisms. Yet, financing of humanitarian partners usually takes longer to unfold in protracted crises, because administrative procedures can take longer when the urgency becomes less acute.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors should continue to develop and maintain rapid funding mechanisms, both at global and country levels. Timeliness also includes partnership mechanisms with fast-track procedures. Core or lightly earmarked funding also reduces administrative procedures when crisis hits. Investments in strengthening the preparedness of the system are also increasingly regarded as a good way to ensure timeliness of funds availability. Innovative mechanisms such as forecast-based financing release humanitarian funding based on forecast information for pre-agreed activities, reducing risk and enhancing preparedness and response.

Multi-year funding

A multi-year funding plan, even with annual disbursements, gives humanitarian actors more predictability and more confidence to engage their own funds to ensure a timely response (OECD, 2016a). Crises affect a country's dynamics and economy, and a society recovering from a crisis can be dramatically transformed. Donors in humanitarian contexts should accompany those changes in a way that fosters society's resilience in these new environments. Donors should pay attention to new vulnerabilities that may have been brought about by the crisis and/or during the recovery process. Multi-year funding also helps to increase coherence and allows more effective programing.

What does it means for donors?

Donors can plan multi-year funding even when they are restricted to annual humanitarian budgets. Donors should evaluate and possibly review their current legal, strategic and grant making environment to identify where these need to be adapted to allow the use of multi-year humanitarian funding. For example, to ensure that current laws allow humanitarian funding to be provided longer than twelve months. Another way around is to increase the flexibility given to development co-operation funds, notably in fragile contexts, to adapt programming to emerging needs. For instance, the European Development Fund has an inbuilt emergency reserve that can be mobilised in case of a sudden emergency in an ACP² country affected by a crisis (Cotonou Agreement, 2010).

Seek coherence

Responding to the needs of affected people only through humanitarian response can keep people alive, but often fails to meet their aspirations for self-sufficiency in the longer term. Therefore, coherence between humanitarian and development programming, based on shared outcomes, can maximise the impact of the response for the affected populations and thus, increase effectiveness. Crucial elements of coherent programming are shared or common analysis of risks and capacities, and the careful setting of objectives based on people's vulnerabilities. A shared picture of the risk landscape incentivises natural synergies among different development and humanitarian actors, as well as climate change actors, when relevant (Scott, 2013).

What does it mean for donors?

Within their institutions, different parts of governments work in different ways and address development and humanitarian challenges at different layers of society, targeting individuals, communities, and/or states and their institutions. When programming in their partner countries, donors should bring together teams responsible for the management of humanitarian aid, development co-operation, and peace and stability issues. Doing so can build an institution-wide risk analysis and help define an objective leading to a country strategy that builds on the value added of each instrument: development co-operation, diplomacy and humanitarian aid.

At country level, donors should participate in determining and achieving collective outcomes. Reaching a collective outcome is at the core of the UN's New Way of Working. This means working with an UN country team, humanitarian and development actors and the government in the process to agree on collective outcomes, and then aligning strategy and funding decision to achieve them.

Increase emergency preparedness

By improving the speed and quality of assistance provided, emergency preparedness can make a major difference in saving lives and reducing human suffering. Investing more in preparedness, early warning and risk assessment tools also pay off as it can increase the value for money of relief actions and ensure that scarce resources are directed where they will have the greatest impact. Yet, preparedness is often not a policy priority, and as a result represents only a marginal proportion of total bilateral humanitarian official development assistance.³

What does it mean for donors?

Donors can support preparedness through financing mechanisms that allow funds, capacity and relief items to be ready ahead of a crisis. At the minimum, donors should be prepared for potential disasters in their development partner countries. They may choose to support preparedness in other countries based on a comprehensive risk analysis that balances the likelihood of a disaster occurring against the human and financial cost of not being prepared.

There are three main ways for donors to support preparedness (OECD, 2017):

1. Preparing funds for an early response;
2. Making sure that money is available before a disaster hits so that humanitarian actors can start their relief operations immediately;

3. Preparing partners for early action: this is about financing activities ahead of a disaster so that partners are ready to respond prior to a shock, mitigating the negative impacts on the population.

As soon as early warning tools signal an imminent crisis, donors should plan for a crisis response.

Foster innovation, accept risk

Innovation is increasingly important to ensure an effective humanitarian response. This is especially the case in urban areas. Future crises will increasingly occur in urban contexts, creating needs and challenges that traditional humanitarian responses - designed for camp settings in rural areas – will struggle to address. Innovation can take many forms: from technical innovation such as shelter design, to the use of data, mapping and communications technology, new delivery mechanisms or innovative financing.

What does it mean for donors?

Anything new comes with a risk, and donors will need to accept a certain level of it when financing innovation. Not all innovative approaches will work, or enhance effectiveness, but a careful assessment and strong partnerships can mitigate those risks.

Donors should also ensure that the use of technology in humanitarian aid does not exclude the most vulnerable or the poorest. For example, innovation based on mobile technology may not always be appropriate: not all beneficiaries have internet or mobile access, especially the most vulnerable. Reaching the furthest behind should remain at the core of the humanitarian work, even the furthest away from a telephone screen.

An effective programme design

Flexible development programming

Fragile contexts are unstable and can spiral into a humanitarian crisis rapidly. Therefore, in such contexts, donors should ensure that their development programming integrates risks and builds in flexibility mechanisms. Doing so can allow development programmes to continue to deliver results in times of crisis, and to help better connect with other humanitarian aid programmes that are set up, if a crisis unfolds.

Built-in flexibility mechanisms allow development programming to adapt to evolving situations and needs. These mechanisms can include core or lightly earmarked funding to partners, preferably only specifying intended results, giving the operational partner the leeway to modify

the project whenever the situation evolves. Such provisions permit a programme to get larger or smaller and to modify the way it operates; they also allow funding from different budget sources to be redirected to crisis response.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors should always apply a conflict or crisis lens to each programme in fragile contexts. This means analysing the risks that could have an impact on the programme's objective and putting in place contingency mechanisms to foresee alternative ways to reach the objective and meet the emerging needs, should the risk materialise.

Support local capacity when relevant

It is widely recognised that local humanitarian responders are often the first to respond to humanitarian crises. Indeed, in certain situations, they are the only ones to respond. Supporting local humanitarian responders should lead to a change about how crises are managed, optimising existing partnerships and strengthening the voice of affected populations. However, there are a number of challenges blocking effective support to these local humanitarian responders. In most cases, donors will not have pre-assessed national or local capacities in the field. Or donors will not have the capacity to administer multiple small grants often needed by small partners - adding to the challenge of supporting local humanitarian responders.

Supporting local humanitarian responders is also a good emergency preparedness measure. There are situations, however, in which supporting local humanitarian responders does not increase effectiveness in the short term: during an acute emergency where local capacity is weak, or when local humanitarian responders are unable to respond or overwhelmed by the scale of a disaster, international humanitarian support will remain necessary to save lives and provide humanitarian protection for the most vulnerable.

What does it mean for donors?

Even donors that are not present in countries affected by crises can support local humanitarian responders. Especially important is building the capacity of humanitarian responders. This must go beyond training, to include learning by doing, which donors can support with funding and appropriate tolerance for the risks that can be involved in these types of partnerships. Only when local humanitarian responders are involved in all the aspects of a humanitarian programme cycle will they gain more expertise, experience and increased trust from international partners and donors.

Localising aid is more than just allocating more money to local humanitarian responders. Donors should aim for a fair partnership with them, ensuring, for example, that the same costs are eligible for local humanitarian responders as for international organisations or NGOs. There are different ways donors can provide support directly or as directly as possible to local humanitarian responders as detailed in the guideline “Localising the Aid” (OECD, 2016b).

Donors should assess whether the context is conducive to an increased support to local humanitarian responders. During the acute phase of a crisis, in a large-scale natural disaster, for example, deploying prepared and trained international expertise with logistical capacities might save more lives.

Keep protection at the core

Humanitarian response is effective when it reaches the most vulnerable. In crises, vulnerable people face a heightened risk of exploitation and violation of their rights. In urban contexts, where population density is high, protection needs can be particularly acute. Vulnerable people may be excluded from humanitarian programmes, particularly when they are not part of a social community or are trapped in illegal networks, for example, in forced labour.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors can advocate for the government to address legal issues related to protection, for example, related to identification or refugees’ right to work (Box 1). In conflict contexts where the government is a party to the hostilities, humanitarian protection should be considered in all programmes as a priority for donors who can use political dialogue while also supporting partners who have a protection mandate and sufficient capacities.

Box 1. International Labour Organization and the response to the Syria crisis

As part of the wider United Nations response to the Syrian refugee crisis, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted a development-focused and employment-driven strategy to support host communities and refugees in order to maintain and reinforce the social and economic stability of the affected neighbouring countries. In Jordan, for example, the ILO focuses on improved labour market governance and enhancing capacities of companies to grow. With support from Germany, the ILO is implementing an employment-intensive investment programme and immediate job creation for Syrian refugees and Jordanians. Other efforts include assisting in the production and implementation of local economic development plans to generate employment in various industries. The ILO is also implementing a project aimed at combating rising child labour among Syrian refugees and host communities through labour policy reform and technical capacity building.

Source: ILO, 2017

Respect a principled approach

Humanitarian actors are concerned that collective outcomes put at risk the principles of humanity, neutrality and independence. However, in fragile contexts a collective outcome does not automatically threaten humanitarian principles. For example, keeping malnutrition under a specified rate is a collective outcome that requires coherence between humanitarian action and development action, and one that respects the mandates and value added of both humanitarian and development actors.

What does it mean for donors?

For donors, the Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship (GHD, 2003) provide guiding principles for their own programmes. Humanitarian principles are generally well integrated within donors' humanitarian strategies. When working on a coherent articulation between humanitarian aid and other aid streams, such as development co-operation and peace and stability, donors should pay particular attention to keeping humanitarian aid clearly distinct from political objectives.

Learning and accountability

Managing for results

Each humanitarian intervention should be based on clear objectives and defined results. These results should be monitored to determine if adjustments are necessary, and if the operation is still relevant in a changing context (Scott, 2014). The monitoring of a programme in humanitarian contexts should include a review of how the programme is adapting to possibly changing realities and needs, and not only focus on its initial activities.

However, relying exclusively on directly quantifiable measures is not sufficient; these kinds of measures, such as the number of health consultations or food rations distributed, do not indicate whether programmes are contributing to medium-term or longer-term outcomes for crisis-affected people.

Donors should ensure that affected people can give feedback on the aid they receive and communicate their needs. To do this, donors should also ensure that regular feedback is being circulated and consultations are part of every programming cycle. Asking aid beneficiaries to assess the aid they receive is a useful mechanism to assess humanitarian aid effectiveness (Box 2).

Box 2. OECD/Ground Truth Solutions and perception surveys

Following on from the World Humanitarian Summit, the OECD has started to assess whether donor commitments, and changes to the way in which humanitarian funding is mobilised, are having a tangible impact on people affected by conflict. For instance, does giving more support to local actors or using multiyear funding modalities – that is, providing “better” humanitarian aid, from the humanitarian community’s point of view – mean better humanitarian aid for the target beneficiaries? With this in mind, the OECD has partnered with Ground Truth Solutions to interview aid beneficiaries and local humanitarian workers in different crisis settings. Questions revolve around the core responsibilities of the Agenda for Humanity, for example on humanitarian aid delivery, inclusion of the most vulnerable and the humanitarian-development coherence.

Source : <http://www.oecd.org/development/humanitarian-donors/>

What does it mean for donors?

Particularly in protracted crises where short-term and long-term programmes aim to improve a system, such as strengthening the health sector or decreasing water-borne diseases, donors can mix result measurements with a qualitative appreciation of the durability and adaptability of systems, which provide a more robust indication of the effectiveness and sustainability of investments (Poole, 2016).

Review regularly

In fragile and crisis-affected contexts, conditions and needs evolve rapidly. While emergency humanitarian response is designed to meet those needs, this becomes more challenging for development programmes with its long-term planning and fixed results. Even when development programming tools are flexible enough to accommodate change, regular reviews of the context and planning assumptions will be necessary to identify any required changes so that programmes keep delivering results in times of crisis.

What does it mean for donors?

In crisis contexts, strategies and outcomes must be reviewed regularly against the risk and vulnerability analysis so that any necessary course correction can be made.

Co-ordination

When different donors and different actors intervene in a crisis context, co-ordination is critical for effectiveness. Donor co-ordination can help avoid duplication and help achieve shared strategic and operational objectives in the field. Operational co-ordination aims at ensuring greater predictability, accountability and partnership. It also can avoid duplication and limit the

needs that remain unaddressed. In that respect, the UN's New Way of Working can strengthen partnerships and collaboration across the humanitarian-development nexus and clarify each stakeholder's role in achieving predefined collective outcomes.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors should participate in donor co-ordination mechanisms globally and at country level, when relevant. They should be transparent in sharing their priorities and financial engagement so that all actors can position themselves with the wider picture of the humanitarian response in mind.

Donors should also support the operational co-ordination mechanisms that are in place in-country, under the leadership of the national government and/or the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator. Most importantly, donors can support the UN's New Way of Working in agreeing on collective outcomes, providing the UN humanitarian co-ordinator with the means and capacity to reach them, and reviewing progress regularly.

Sufficient staff

The humanitarian component of crisis response is increasingly important to OECD Development Assistance Committee members, and humanitarian budgets tend to be preserved even while development budgets are cut. Nevertheless, the number of staff working on humanitarian issues often remains very limited in donor organisations. Moreover, embassies in fragile contexts often have no staff with humanitarian expertise. As a result, donor capacity to analyse, strengthen partnerships with the humanitarian community and measure outcomes may be severely strained. Staff in the field may also be reluctant or unable to add additional programming and programme design to an already high workload.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors should ensure they have sufficient staff from both development and humanitarian units — organised in a multidisciplinary pool or surge capacity for example-- to absorb the extra workload provoked by a crisis. Staff dealing with development programming should also be trained on humanitarian issues.

System-wide learning

Learning helps improve performance by analysing results and replicating successes (Scott, 2014). Research remains an important way to develop learning, and increases the overall

quality of response in humanitarian contexts, especially where responses to crises are increasingly complex, and involve more actors with different objectives and cultures.

What does it mean for donors?

Donors should keep engaged with policy work around humanitarian aid, ensuring research and evaluations are promoted and funded. Results of these learning exercises should be disseminated widely including among field staff and accompanied with appropriate guidance or training. In addition, humanitarian strategies and country strategies should be systematically informed by evidence, including research and the results of evaluations.

ENDNOTES

1 In 1991 the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD set out broad principles for the evaluation process of 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.

2 Africa, Caribbean, Pacific.

3 In 2015, Disaster Risk Reduction and emergency preparedness represented 4% of the overall humanitarian ODA. The highest rate was reached in 2011 with 7.1% of humanitarian ODA allocated to Disaster Risk Reduction and emergency preparedness. (OECD Creditor Reporting System, <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=CRS1#>)

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