CONNECTEDNESS

In 2015–2017, humanitarians had some success in linking their activities to development, generally when working as part of larger, government-led programmes. More development actors began working in fragile contexts, but it remains to be seen how the humanitarian system will engage with these organisations.
The humanitarian sector is increasingly engaging with the underlying problems of poverty, vulnerability and conflict. These activities have been effective when working with governments to address vulnerability to recurrent ‘natural’ disasters. In other contexts, activities have been less successful.
Connectedness

In brief

Connectedness is one of the areas that has seen significant movement over the last three years. Key informants, interviewees and – to a lesser extent – evaluations and literature suggest that the humanitarian sector is increasingly engaging with the underlying problems of poverty, vulnerability and conflict. There is evidence to suggest that these activities have been effective in some cases – particularly when working with governments to address vulnerability to recurrent ‘natural’ disasters. In other contexts, there is much less evidence that these activities have been successful.

Some agencies and practitioners question the relevance of the concept for humanitarian action, and argue that humanitarians should focus on life-saving activities. There is also concern that increased attention to resilience may divert funds from these activities. Beyond these concerns, the main constraints to successful action relate to links, relationships and coordination with development actors. While development actors are frequently present, humanitarian counterparts have generally not been good at handing over programmes, and joint planning and implementation is difficult. In many cases, particularly in conflicts, this reflects a lack of development planning and structures within governments.

At the same time, the international community (beyond the humanitarian system) has begun to engage more robustly with the challenges of poverty and insecurity in fragile states. For many years, humanitarian actors complained that development actors did not involve themselves in these contexts. In the period 2015–17, this changed. Significant amounts of funding and assistance were allocated – bilaterally or through international funding institutions – to states experiencing conflict or hosting large numbers of refugees. It remains to be seen how humanitarian actors will adapt to these changes in the operational and funding environment.

To what degree does humanitarian action take longer-term and interconnected problems into account?

Changes in policy, structures and finance

There has been notable activity at the policy level: key informants suggested that this had been catalysed by (and reflected in) the World Humanitarian Summit process. The Secretary-General’s report One Humanity, Shared Responsibility spoke of transcending ‘humanitarian–development divides’: ‘Humanitarian actors need to move beyond repeatedly carrying out short-term interventions year after year towards contributing to the achievement of longer-term development results’ (UNGA, 2016: 34). At the WHS, UN agencies signed a commitment to action agreeing to a ‘new way of working’ intended to meet people’s immediate humanitarian needs, while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability (OCHA, 2016b: para. 1). The agreement
Policy change on resilience has been backed by increased funding, and funding that is better adapted to meeting longer-term, more developmental needs.

was also endorsed by the World Bank and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). The issue of the humanitarian–development relationship was subsequently included as a workstream in the Grand Bargain (although this workstream closed in early 2018, it continues as a formal initiative of the WHS).

These issues have also received increased attention in humanitarian literature and research (see Berg and Seferis, 2015; Stites and Bushby, 2017), and individual donors and agencies have developed and promoted strategies aimed at addressing longer-term vulnerability to crisis, generally through the frame of resilience. Institutions including USAID, DFID, DFAT, the World Bank, the UNICEF, the WFP and the FAO have all implemented organisational strategies in this area, and in several cases have set up specific units to support them.

Policy change has been backed by increased funding, and funding that is better adapted to meeting longer-term, more developmental needs. Case study interviewees in some countries reported that (possibly as a consequence of policy changes) it was easier to obtain financing for resilience objectives. Since 2015, under the Grand Bargain, donors and agencies have also committed to increasing multi-year planning and funding (Derzsi-Horvath et al., 2017; Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2017b), which in theory is better adapted to longer-term activities. According to a recent review: ‘Multi-year humanitarian financing is an established and growing donor practice’, although it ‘still represents a relatively small proportion of total humanitarian funding and has not yet reached the critical mass necessary to shift incentives and drive transformative change’ (FAO et al., 2017: 5).

Key informants and interviewees in the country case studies expressed some concern that increased resilience funding might serve to move money from humanitarian budgets to cover cuts in development funding. This concern is echoed in the literature (FAO et al., 2017), although there is no hard evidence to suggest that this is happening. While the period 2015–17 saw increased pressure on development financing, it also witnessed the entry of a key development financer – the World Bank – into the humanitarian funding landscape (see box below).

Box / The World Bank in humanitarian contexts

Over the period 2015–17, the World Bank played a more prominent role in humanitarian contexts. The Bank uses a range of funding, from itself, its branches – the International Development Association (IDA) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) – and government donors, to support a diverse portfolio of instruments, many of which are currently being trialled.

The Global Crisis Response Platform (GCRP), established in 2016, acts as a network of Bank departments to provide a range
of financing in crisis-affected or at-risk contexts. Instruments span preparedness, prevention, response and recovery. The Bank estimates that around $110 billion was committed over 2006–2016 in crisis-affected countries, representing over a quarter of IBRD and IDA commitments combined (27.4%). Of the Bank’s available suite of instruments, two are described in more detail here: the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) and the Somalia Emergency Drought Response and Recovery Project.

The Global Concessional Financing Facility

The GCFF, officially launched at the 2016 UN General Assembly, provides development support on concessional terms specifically to middle-income countries hosting refugees. The World Bank both hosts and functions as a supporting implementing agency within the GCFF, with a target of raising $6 billion in concessional financing over the five years following its inception. Of this, $1.5 billion is to be provided as grants.

In 2017, ten donors committed a total of $515 million to the GCFF, for Jordan and Lebanon, of which $357 million had been contributed by the end of the year. Two-thirds of the contributed funding ($244 million) had been approved for implementation through three ‘Implementing Support Agencies’ by the end of 2017, with the World Bank channelling the majority of this funding (87%, or $212 million). The GCFF states that, for every dollar provided by supporting countries, $3–4 can be unlocked in concessional loans. Contributions through the GCFF to Jordan and Lebanon supplement grants given in the form of humanitarian assistance to these countries, which combined stood at $1.7 billion in 2017.

The Somalia Emergency Drought Response and Recovery Project

On 30 May 2017, the World Bank approved a $50 million emergency project – the Somalia Emergency Drought Response and Recovery Project (SEDRP) – to scale up the response to drought in Somalia. The project, a partnership between the Bank, the ICRC, the Somali Red Crescent and FAO, targeted about half a million people, the majority of whom were in areas deemed inaccessible to international humanitarian agencies. Initial activities aimed to provide high-impact, rapid interventions, including the provision of food, water, cash, health services and essential household items, to be followed by programmes to support productive assets, production capacity and livelihoods (including through cash-for-work programmes).

• LUMINITA TUCHEL, DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES
There has also been an increase in the level of development funding available to support refugees and host communities outside the funding channels of the humanitarian system. In February 2016, governments signed the ‘Jordan Compact’ for refugees whereby, in return for a package of grants, loans and preferential trade agreements, the Jordanian Government agreed to provide Syrian refugees with access to services (notably education) and employment. The idea is to ‘turn “the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity” for Jordan by shifting the focus from short-term humanitarian aid to education, growth, investment and job creation, both for Jordanians and for Syrian refugees’ (Barbelet et al., 2018: 2). The sums involved are separate from, and much greater than, humanitarian spending: ‘pledges of $12 billion in grants and more than $40 billion in loans for the region up until 2020’ (CGD and IRC, 2017b; IRC, 2017), compared to $3.2 billion for the humanitarian response inside Syria and for refugees in the region’ (ibid., quoting Huang and Ash, 2017). A smaller EU–Lebanon Compact was also agreed in 2016, and there are ongoing discussions on similar mechanisms in other countries.

Changes in programming

Some key informants stressed that it might take time to see changes in policy translate into changes on the ground: one INGO manager at HQ explained that ‘it is slow moving. It takes a long time for a good idea in New York to translate to what our partners are doing in South Sudan’. In fact, the case study research suggested a continuation of the trend identified in the SOHS 2015 report: much humanitarian programming now includes elements of connectedness – at least with respect to addressing economic vulnerabilities. The increase since the last reporting period is also suggested by surveys in 2013–14, when there seemed to be much less of this type of programming (see for example WHS, 2014).

Multi-year Humanitarian Response Strategies and Plans have been introduced in several contexts, including Cameroon, Sudan, the DRC and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, with collective outcomes to be jointly attained by humanitarian and development actors. The majority of key informants and case study interviewees who discussed these inter-agency approaches felt that they had not, to date, led to much change in terms of activities. One particularly important multi-year, multi-agency approach during the period was the Sahel Regional Humanitarian Response Strategy, which alongside its life-saving activities, aimed to help vulnerable people cope better with shocks. A review of the programme suggests that, while the strategy provided a good basis to build partnerships with governments and civil society, and allowed space for additional tools (particularly cash programming), ‘the integration of humanitarian and development programming remains a challenge’ (OCHA, 2017a: 9). It had not been possible to build resilience in adverse situations (where there was insecurity or climate shocks), although where ‘the absence of violence coincided with two relatively good rainy seasons ... progress and success can be seen’ (ibid.: 12). A formative evaluation of multi-year response
planning suggests that ‘strategic objectives tend to be general statements of intent, framed in such a way that defies easy measurement and often with no measurement mechanism in place’ (Taylor et al., 2017: 9).

At the single agency level, many of the case study interviewees said that their organisations were working according to longer-term country strategies addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and resilience or developmental objectives. In all of the countries visited, some humanitarian agencies were involved in programming to address the underlying causes of humanitarian need. These activities were being undertaken both by national and international organisations, in conflict and refugee contexts as well as in situations of ‘natural’ disaster. Interviewees mentioned a wide range of approaches, including broader targeting of relief supplies to preserve assets and livelihoods, the provision of small-scale infrastructure to support economic activities, livelihoods diversification through training and grants, linking humanitarian efforts to social protection mechanisms and expanding access to basic services (particularly health and clean water).

In some cases, agencies appeared to be operating on a traditional ‘relief to development continuum’ logic, where humanitarian assistance transitions to development activities once the crisis is over. The failure to effectively plan for or conduct this transition was a consistent thread in evaluations (Conoir et al., 2017; Gardner et al., 2016; More, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). That said, a large number of interviewees described programmes conducting humanitarian and longer-term activities at the same time, and the importance of parallel, rather than phased, approaches is a common theme in evaluations (Drummod et al., 2015; Turnbull, 2016a; UNICEF, 2016) and in the literature (Omar et al., 2016).

Although a large number of agencies are now conducting ‘resilience-style’ activities, there are very real questions as to whether these are having significant effects. Only 33% of respondents to the practitioner questionnaire felt that performance related to connectedness between humanitarian, development and/or peacekeeping activities was excellent or good, making it the worst performing criterion in the survey.8

Of the 1,170 aid practitioners who completed the SOHS 2018 survey, 33% felt that performance related to connectedness between humanitarian, development and/or peacekeeping activities was excellent or good, making it the worst performing criterion in the survey.

In Ground Truth surveys of crisis-affected people ‘the overwhelming majority of respondents do not feel that the aid they receive empowers them to live without support in future’ (Ground Truth Solutions, 2017: 9), and this measure scored worse than most other questions.8

Evaluations and other research – as well as interviews with practitioners on the ground – suggest that only a minority of resilience efforts have enabled vulnerable people to prepare for future shocks. Successful initiatives tend to relate to ‘natural’ disasters (cyclical drought in the Horn of Africa, and to a lesser degree hurricanes in Haiti and earthquakes in Nepal), and have been undertaken as part of a broader, government-led strategy (Béné et al., 2016; IFRC, 2015; More, 2016). Where this is not the case, there is little evidence to suggest that resilience approaches have been effective (Barbelet and Wake, 2017; Cabot Venton et al., 2015; FAO et al., 2017; Levine, 2018; Maxwell et al., 2015; Stites and Bushby, 2017). Granted,
resilience is hard to measure, but evaluations show a fairly consistent ‘theme of relatively strong relief responses but much weaker responses to more structural problems’ (Darcy, 2016a: 17) – or, as one interviewee put it: ‘Despite the new concepts ... of resilience, or the nexus; all that jargon ... we aren’t really any further forward, either in knowing what to do or in being more effective’.

**Connectedness in situations of conflict**

As noted above, several agencies were involved in resilience activities in countries such as Yemen and the DRC. There is, however, only very limited evidence on the nature or success of this form of programming in conflict contexts: a recent review noted that ‘relatively few sources examine resilient livelihoods in the face of conflict’ (Stites and Bushby, 2017: 7). What evidence there is shows that investments in microfinance, infrastructure development and agricultural/livestock support have had a weak, or at best mixed, record. Targeting to effectively support the resilience of the most vulnerable is a consistent problem, and obtaining funding for these types of activities can also be difficult depending on the strategy of the donor involved (Stites and Bushby, 2017). Certainly, some interviewees in the case studies had found it difficult to access funds for these sorts of activities. One manager of an INGO in Yemen explained: ‘it is very hard to convince donors [to pay for projects with longer-term, resilience components] ... how can [you] ensure the sustainability of schools or farms that can be gone with an air strike?’. At the same time, as the P2P report for the Whole of Syria response notes, humanitarian solutions are expensive ways of addressing infrastructure problems (STAIT (P2P), 2015: 26).

A number of other factors militate against successful resilience programming in conflicts. The P2P reports suggest that the approach is hard to operationalise in these contexts, and there is little established good practice on which to build. More fundamentally, the conditions that appear to have supported more successful work in ‘natural’ disasters do not exist in conflicts. Humanitarian actors do not understand the underlying risk of and vulnerability to violence in the same way as they understand vulnerability to drought, say, and national, government-led plans do not exist. In Afghanistan and Yemen, agency staff explained that it was not possible to support broader national frameworks for resilience because there were none.

The evidence collected for this report on resilience work in conflicts is consistent with the findings of the two major evaluations of conflict responses published by the IASC in this period, in South Sudan and CAR. In the former, despite the focus on livelihoods in the HRP, resilience work ‘lost out in practical terms to the narrow focus on life-saving interventions’, and as a result ‘was relatively modest and unlikely to offset reliance on ... food aid to any significant degree’ (Clarke et al., 2015: 60, 39). In the latter ‘[o]perational actors ... achieved ... poor results in livelihoods and recovery' and ‘missed the opportunity to use the great surge of capacity to address the country’s protracted crisis’ (Lawday et al., 2016: 8–9).
Addressing economic vulnerability is by no means the only approach to tackling the root causes of humanitarian need in conflict. Just as important – and largely overlooked by humanitarians – are the areas of conflict prevention and peace-building. Peace-building and conflict prevention receive some attention in the literature (Maxwell et al., 2015; Omar et al., 2016), but there appears to be less focus – or at least fewer publications – on this than in the past (particularly compared to the immediate post-Cold War period in the 1990s). Evaluations are almost silent on the topic: only three of the 120 looked at in the review consider peace-building, perhaps because this is seldom an objective in humanitarian responses. Similarly, it was not generally an area discussed by key informants. While a wide variety of organisations made commitments at the WHS related to preventing and ending conflict, this was the least popular of the five areas for action, with the smallest number of commitments and the fewest organisations involved. A 2017 review of action on the WHS commitments concluded that ‘few self-reports indicated a stepping up of efforts to resolve or prevent conflicts’ (David et al., 2017: 8). International humanitarian workers interviewed for the case studies in Afghanistan, the DRC and Yemen suggested that they did not engage with work to address the causes of conflict because they did not know the actors involved, were not sure of the role their organisation might play and did not see this type of work as an organisational priority (a finding underlined by recent research suggesting that UN humanitarian agencies found ‘understanding their role in sustaining peace ... challenging’, and that this tended to lose out to other agendas and operational priorities (Pantuliano et al., 2018: 9)).

In these contexts, work in this area was being done by national NGOs, which saw it as a natural extension of their humanitarian activities. The situation was different in Mali, where donor and government strategies tended to link humanitarian work to development, security and migration. Here, a number of interviewees expressed concern about the politicisation of humanitarian aid, and saw the growing links between humanitarian action and peace-building as potentially compromising humanitarian impartiality.

While international agencies generally seemed to ignore or avoid work that explicitly aimed to build peace, they were aware of the fragility of the contexts in which they were operating, and sought to design humanitarian interventions in such a way as to not put people at further risk. This awareness was also (and perhaps particularly) visible in refugee and migrant contexts, where a number of interviewees spoke of the importance of addressing tensions between migrants and host communities. This concern – often discussed under the term ‘social cohesion’ – also appeared in a number of evaluations (see for example Hidalgo et al., 2015; Sule Caglar et al., 2016), and seems to be an increasingly important part of the policy discourse around refugees and migration.
Connectedness in refugee and migration contexts

A number of high-level initiatives during 2015–17 sought to address the longer-term needs of refugees and migrants. While these activities have often taken place in parallel to, rather than as part of, humanitarian action, they are significant in scale and, potentially, in their implications for the way humanitarian agencies work. The issue of connectedness has always been an important part of the response to refugee situations: addressing the long-term needs of refugees is a fundamental element of the durable solutions approach, in the form of activities to support the voluntary repatriation of refugees, facilitate their resettlement in a third country or assist them in integrating into the economy and society of the country to which they have fled.

Over the last three years, as a result of the large and growing numbers of people fleeing violence and conflict, considerable pressure has been placed on the international refugee system and the implementation of durable solutions has become increasingly challenging for those who have been granted refugee status. Similar problems around addressing longer-term need also apply to the very large numbers of people moving to Europe, the US, Australia and elsewhere who require humanitarian assistance in the short term, and the ability to live with dignity in the longer term. Given the ongoing nature of many conflicts that have produced refugees – including those in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan – only a small percentage of refugees have opted for voluntary repatriation (UNHCR, 2017). Although the numbers of refugees being resettled in third countries reached a 20-year high in 2016 (ibid.), there are questions as to whether these numbers are even keeping up with the natural growth of refugee populations, as children are born to refugee parents. The number of people being resettled also decreased in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018) as governments cut resettlement quotas: in many countries an increase in nativist discourse in politics seems to be making resettlement harder, and leading wealthy nations to take in fewer people. At the same time, the third plank of the durable solutions approach – integration in the country of first asylum – is becoming more difficult as a number of countries hosting large numbers of people fleeing conflict – overwhelmingly countries in the global South – become less welcoming.12

Interviewees in Lebanon noted that the main problem in addressing the longer-term needs of refugees was government policy, in particular the exclusion of refugees from formal employment. As one INGO interviewee put it: ‘the blockage isn’t … development partners coming in and saying, “Yeah, we’ll fund this for years and years and years”. It’s the government’.
Performance of the System

International actors have also tried to breathe new life into the concept of durable solutions, and explore new ways for states to collaborate to meet their obligations to refugees (e.g. the UN’s New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants in 2016). Donors and others have attempted to address the challenges presented by large refugee populations in the Middle East for some time, and with particular urgency following the large-scale migration flows into Europe. In 2014, the EU established a Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (the ‘Madad fund’) to provide support to Syrian refugees and host communities (largely in Jordan and Lebanon) through programmes focusing on education, livelihoods, health, socio-economic support and water and sanitation.

International actors have also tried to breathe new life into the concept of durable solutions, and explore new ways for states to collaborate to meet their obligations to refugees. In September 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which committed states to establishing two global compacts – one on refugees and one on migration – by September 2018. With respect to refugees, the declaration, which is based around a Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), essentially reaffirmed states’ obligations under the existing legal architecture, rather than proposing additional obligations. Critics have suggested that the declaration lacks ambition and that its language is weak (ICVA, 2017). Many were disappointed that the CRRF was not used in the Rohingya Crisis (although it was implemented in 13 countries in 2016–17). There is also disappointment that the additional resources required from donors have been less than hoped in situations such as Uganda. That said, the CRRF does appear to have helped refugees access state facilities (particularly for health and education) in a number of countries (UNHCR, 2017).

As noted above, one concrete example of new thinking around longer-term refugee needs that is already in implementation is the Jordan Compact. An early review of the Compact concludes that, while ‘considerable progress has been made, challenges remain’ with regard to access to education and to work opportunities for refugees. These challenges essentially stem from the fact that the Compact is ‘a narrow agreement that does not adequately reflect reality on the ground’ (Barbelet et al., 2018: 1, 6). The Compact did not benefit from the views of refugees (or, indeed, from the humanitarian and other agencies that work for them) in its design – a defect that, the review’s authors suggest, should be remedied in future agreements.

It remains to be seen how many humanitarian agencies (beyond UNHCR) will engage – or attempt to engage – with these initiatives. Several key informants were clear that humanitarian actors are attempting to reconfigure their refugee programming in order to bring humanitarian and developmental concerns more closely into line. Similarly, a number of evaluations note that UN agencies in particular are aligning their work with government policies for long-term support to migrants and refugees (Darcy
et al., 2015; Moughanie, 2015; Peacocke et al., 2015). Humanitarian actors have been involved in integration-related activities for refugees, particularly in cash assistance and linking this assistance to social safety nets. However, this work is starting from a low base: ‘livelihoods and developmental approaches to forced displacement remain ad hoc and sidelined in aid agencies’ responses to refugee crises’ (Barbelet and Wake, 2017: 23), and many agencies may decide to maintain a focus on acute needs. At the same time, donor and host governments may conclude that the humanitarian system is not the most effective channel for addressing these issues, and rely instead on government-to-government agreements or on other actors to implement developmental activities.

Box / Irregular migration

Efforts to manage international migration have long sought to reduce irregular mobility and unsafe migratory practices, such as smuggling and trafficking, by targeting their underlying socio-economic drivers. While such development-led, ‘root-cause’ strategies are not new, they have gained significant momentum through the post-2015 development agenda. Key milestones include the Global Forum for Migration and Development and the UN High-Level Dialogues on Migration. The 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and subsequent 2018 Global Compact for Migration promote a global commitment towards promoting ‘safe, orderly and regular migration’ aligned with the 2030 SDGs, in part by addressing the root causes of irregular migration. Similar efforts have also featured prominently in EU policies following the so-called European Migration ‘Crisis’. Measures include a €2 billion EU Emergency Trust Fund (EU-TF) and the 2016 EU Partnership Framework on Migration, which established bilateral agreements between Europe and ‘priority countries of origin and transit’. Both initiatives are controversial, in part due to the use of conditional aid to compel third countries to cooperate with European migration management priorities.

More broadly, while major knowledge gaps remain around the causes of irregular migration, a growing evidence base has begun to challenge a number of long-held assumptions underpinning the ‘root cause’ debate. Data suggests, for instance, that greater development in lower-income countries may in fact increase, rather than depress, rates of migration. And research into the lived experience of migrants draws the important distinction between unsafe and irregular migration – the latter of which can, in certain contexts, represent best-alternative livelihood and protection strategies for migrants themselves.

Consensus surrounding the New York Declaration and the Global Compact has also made clear the need to balance efforts to reduce irregular migration with corresponding steps to expand regular migration pathways. This is in tension with increasing restrictions on legal pathways, particularly the closure or narrowing of routes for
obtaining legal visas in Northern states. The EU’s Malta Declaration has imposed restrictions on migration flows and returns between Libya and Italy, and an increasing reliance on detention, family separation and returns at the US–Mexican border all point to a hardening of border control policies worldwide.

Against this background, ongoing dialogue emerging from the Global Compact process continues to struggle with questions of state accountability towards irregular migrants’ fundamental rights, including non-refoulement. Irregular migrants displaced by adverse conditions (severe poverty and food insecurity, environmental change or denial of basic social services) are often difficult to distinguish from refugees in contexts of mixed migration. They are also outside the definition and associated protections set out in the 1951 Refugee Convention. Efforts, including the Nansen Initiative’s agenda for extending protections to migrants affected by climate-induced displacement, seek to address this protection gap, but significant work remains. • Josiah Kaplan, Global Migration and Displacement Initiative, Save the Children International

Factors affecting connectedness

Commitment

Connectedness is unusual among the OECD DAC performance criteria in that there is disagreement as to whether it should be used as a measure of humanitarian performance at all. The debate over whether, to what degree and how humanitarian action should connect to developmental action and peace-building has a long history (see de Waal, 1997; Rieff, 2003). Over the period covered by this edition of The State of the Humanitarian System, there appears to have been a move towards an approach to humanitarian action which explicitly considers developmental and peacebuilding approaches, and – in some cases – actively works towards these ends. This found particular expression in the World Humanitarian Summit and the UN Secretary-General’s report One Humanity, Shared Responsibility. However, many humanitarians remain sceptical about the desirability of the ‘explicit elision of humanitarian and development goals into a single global challenge … wrap[ping] humanitarian action into the wider project of the SDGs in a totalizing ambition to “end needs”’ (ICRC, 2016b: 3). From this perspective, the WHS objective of ending needs ‘threaten[s] to dissolve humanitarian assistance into wider development, peace-building and political agendas’ (MSF, 2016: 2). Critics point, in particular, to the risk that humanitarian funding will be diverted away from saving lives, and that greater connectedness will damage the ability of humanitarian actors to behave in an impartial and independent manner. Questions over the degree to which humanitarian agencies should be involved in longer-term activities emerged in a number of evaluations (Darcy, 2016a; Taylor et al., 2017b;
UNICEF, 2016), and in some key informant and case study interviews. At the same time, many critics also recognise that the humanitarian system is a broad church containing many approaches: there is no need for one single, canonical understanding of ‘humanitarian’: ‘People in armed conflicts and disasters are not best served by a single humanitarian machine. Principled diversity that cooperates to meet people’s needs will serve them better’ (ICRC, 2016a). While the system as a whole may become more connected to other international systems (such as the development system), specific agencies will not assess their own performance by the degree to which they achieve developmental objectives.

**Clarity around concepts and approaches**

One key informant from the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement described the attempt to relate humanitarian and development activities as ‘still embryonic and a bit of a mess’. While there appears to be greater clarity over the meaning of key concepts such as resilience than there was at the time of the last SOHS report, evaluations still noted confusion over what resilience means, and how it might be achieved (Hidalgo et al., 2015; Lawday et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2017b; UNICEF, 2016). Some interviewees also mentioned that their efforts in this area were hampered by a lack of tools and programming approaches – there is still significant work to be done in building evidence on practical ways to achieve effective resilience programming in humanitarian contexts. This point was also made by participants in the Grand Bargain workstream on this issue: ‘Some signatories also expressed frustration that this issue had been framed as an HQ-based conceptual problem, when the Grand Bargain should focus on how the nexus can be operationalised at country level’ (Metcalfe-Hough et al., 2018: 61).

**Structures**

Just under a third of respondents (29%) in the practitioner survey cited coordination mechanisms and planning processes as the single most important challenge in linking humanitarian and development programming. The figure was highest in ‘natural’ disaster-type settings, at 36%, but this option also received the most responses in conflict settings, above funding and difficulties in working with governments. This was also a constraint discussed by key informants, who added that, even where structures were in place, important actors (for example private sector entities performing development activities under contract to donors) did not attend, and there were often disagreements over who did what. One INGO director suggested that ‘humanitarian and development was born at a time when it was clear what was humanitarian and what was development. And the development of the UN bodies reflected that and maintain the political power which they are unwilling to give up’. Different cultures can also make coordination challenging; an INGO staff member, observing this from the ground, suggested that ‘humanitarians have their own way of doing things ... they want to go quickly, get rapid results.
they are obsessed by speed. Development actors work to different timescales; so you don't get too many coordination meetings between humanitarian and development actors'.

In 2016 and 2017, OCHA and a number of other agencies concerned with this issue began to investigate how humanitarian coordination mechanisms might be better structured to address these challenges. However, given the number of functions that the existing humanitarian architecture is expected to fulfil, it may not be easy to expand the scope of coordination mechanisms while maintaining a strong focus on operational humanitarian coordination.

**Tensions between connectedness and humanitarian principles**

As noted above, engagement with developmental and political agendas will generally bring humanitarian agencies into closer contact with the host state and – often – with the broader geopolitical programmes of donor states, and may lead humanitarian agencies into conducting activities which go against humanitarian principles. While this is often seen as a problem particular to conflicts, these tensions can equally occur around ‘natural’ disasters. As one evaluation of activities in Haiti explained: ‘The common tension between ... humanitarian and development processes is frequently the missing link between what people need (i.e. the concern of humanitarians) and what the government wants (i.e. the driver for development frameworks). Especially in a politically-charged context like Haiti, this tension is no small issue’ (Grünewald and Schenkenberg, 2016: 44). Involvement in development processes would challenge both the principle of impartial provision of assistance based on need alone, and the principle of independence from government direction.

Most key informants and interviewees focused on the challenges to humanitarian principles that could arise when engaging with governments or donors to implement connected approaches in conflict. In the case studies, this was a particular concern in Mali – perhaps because humanitarian agencies there were often encouraged to support humanitarian, resilience and peace-building objectives simultaneously. As one NGO interviewee put it, including stabilisation activities was ‘a total contradiction of humanitarian principles’. Key informants tended to take a more global view of the system as a whole, expressing fear that humanitarians would be ‘co-opted’: ‘as the system gets more and more political, then it loses its teeth in the real life and death protection situations’.

Key informant interviews also pointed to the importance of nuance in this discussion. The problem should not be seen simply as one of ‘principled humanitarianism’ versus ‘unprincipled stabilisation’. Humanitarian action already struggles to work according to the principles and there are always tensions in operationalising them.
Scale, breadth and the role of government direction and planning

As noted above, humanitarian actors appear to have been most successful in supporting the resilience of crisis-affected people where they were able to do so as part of a much larger, more comprehensive strategy. A recent evaluation suggests that resilience efforts have been too small to make a difference, and that a ‘narrow focus on household level assets was ... ineffective’ in building resilience (Levine, 2018: 4). The evaluation goes on to say that household resilience needs to be understood in a broader economic context, where access to land, education and economic opportunities are all critically important in establishing resilient livelihoods. Both the scale and nature of resilience activities, then, generally require that they be led by the state if they are to be successful. It is no surprise that humanitarians were able to contribute most successfully to resilience where they worked with effective state structures preparing for ‘natural’ disasters. Interviewees in states undergoing internal conflict tended to say that the state was not engaged in development activities, and – even where humanitarians prioritised resilience – there were no larger plans or strategies to which they could connect. In refugee contexts, the attitude of the host state was also critical – but here the problem was less the lack of a development strategy than a desire not to support or encourage activities that might lead to refugees becoming more integrated into social and economic structures. Where activities had been developed outside government planning processes and structures, agencies struggled to hand over to the government at the end of their funding period (Advisem Services Inc., 2016; Duncalf, 2015).

Resources

Questions remain as to how much the humanitarian system can achieve with existing resources in situations where development actors are not present. A number of interviewees expressed concern that humanitarian funding, at the global scale, would never be able to address developmental needs. However, the number of situations where humanitarian agencies are the only service providers, and are expected to substitute for the state and for other development actors, may be declining. Development actors – and particularly development finance – are increasingly present in humanitarian contexts, and a relatively small number of respondents to the practitioner survey (6% overall, and 6% in conflicts) said that the lack of development actors was the main constraint to addressing the humanitarian/development divide in their setting.

At the level of the individual country or programme, the concern was more about obtaining funding for resilience work. While more funding has become available, and this appears to have led to an increase in work on the ground, many interviewees, particularly in
conflict situations, talked of the difficulties of obtaining funding, and 25% of practitioners responding to the survey said that short-term funding was the main challenge they faced in addressing the humanitarian/development divide. A lack of sufficient, multi-year funding was a particular constraint for the Sahel Regional Humanitarian Response Strategy (OCHA, 2017a). Another theme that emerged from key informants and interviewees was that more resilience funding was being made available because donors were becoming less willing to fund responses to cyclical or recurrent emergencies, and that resilience funding was being used to phase out of humanitarian commitments. There is, however, very little empirical evidence on the relationship between resilience and humanitarian funding. One evaluation found that, in Ethiopia, resilience investments had not compromised funding for humanitarian relief (Levine, 2018), but further analysis in this area would be helpful.
One day, the war will come to an end and the Festival of the Desert in Timbuktu will resume. Chief of a Tuareg faction north of Timbuktu.

Mali used to be known for the beauty of its desert, the hospitality of its people and its ‘cousinage à plaisanterie’, a peaceful social contract between its communities. Today, however, tensions are high and many areas are no longer accessible to outsiders. The current crisis, and the constraints affecting humanitarian operations, are a source of great concern. Ongoing unrest is the result of a combination of historical factors, unequal development between the south, north and east of the country and unresolved issues raised by the conflict in the 1990s. Libya’s implosion in 2011 and the subsequent flow of armed groups and weapons into Mali, alongside the rise of domestic and international radical groups, has led to spiralling conflict. Military operations by France and the UN helped the government regain control of its territory and a peace agreement was reached in May 2015, but genuine peace still seems a long way off: a new crisis has flared up in the central region of the country, fuelled by competition over land, grievances around state corruption and violence by the armed forces.

In early 2016, many observers regarded Mali as a crisis nearing its end, and anticipated a smooth transition from humanitarian response to development. Instead, it has gradually transformed into a highly complex and explosive conflict, with insurgents...
establishing bases in the arid lands along the country's borders. It is unlikely that a military response will succeed in resolving the crisis, but political negotiations are making little headway. Malians want and need justice and good governance but, caught in the midst of this multi-faceted crisis, they are losing hope. With donor fatigue growing, regular droughts and resilience eroded by years of conflict, this is an increasingly challenging context.

**Reaching the population: a key challenge**

Security remains a major barrier for aid organisations. Until recently, the humanitarian community was able to work almost everywhere in the country, but as the situation has deteriorated access has become more difficult. While NGOs have attempted to adjust their strategies to continue providing assistance, Western aid workers now rarely travel to the north of the country because of the risk of abduction or robbery: break-ins and vehicle theft in the north account for more than 80% of attacks against NGOs in the country. Although access is possible, including through the use of UN aircraft, the UN mission in Mali is a political entity and humanitarian organisations are reluctant to use UN logistical assets for fear of compromising their perceived neutrality.

Most international aid workers stay in Bamako or are based in bunkers cut off from the field. This effectively transfers risks to African expatriates, national staff and local NGOs, which are supposedly less visible and are, as one humanitarian worker put it, 'less valued in the hostage market'. While a practical solution, this is neither ideal nor particularly ethical.

Large parts of northern and central Mali are neglected: in areas north of Timbuktu, east of Gao and in the central Niger Delta, it takes hours to travel short distances on sandy desert roads or on muddy tracks in flooded areas. The population is very widely dispersed and the insurgents are extremely mobile. Working in low-density areas north of the river Niger is difficult and costly, and the majority of assistance goes to the most accessible and secure areas. As one Malian livestock specialist explained: ‘These are huge, practically empty areas, with a few settlements at water points. It can take hours or days to cover the harsh sandy or rocky terrain that separates villages and settlements’. In areas where humanitarians are present the impact is generally positive, albeit insufficient and largely unsustainable. Livestock programmes connected with human health are reasonably effective, and a significant amount of assistance has been funnelled into providing free healthcare, though the system depends on external assistance and it is unclear what will happen when the aid stops and the pre-war practice of cost-recovery resumes.

**The difficulty of providing ‘protection’**

Providing protection is also a complex challenge in northern and central Mali. On their own NGOs are often unable to do much, as this is either the responsibility of the state or is managed by traditional local systems that international agencies are generally not familiar with. Civilians are regularly attacked by armed groups or find themselves caught in fighting between opposing groups, and sexual violence is a serious problem. Human rights organisations have underlined how the national army and police have regularly behaved ruthlessly, leading to widespread distrust of ‘men in uniform’. Specialised NGOs have worked hard to document abuses and violence by the army and have engaged in advocacy to mitigate them, but in the absence of sanctions impunity remains the norm. Donors have tried to support the Protection Cluster and its partners, but resources and specialised personnel are lacking and state institutions are very weak in large areas of the north and centre of the country, which remain practically lawless.

**Humanitarian principles in the vicinity of a UN integrated mission**

Humanitarian organisations have to manage their relationships with state institutions with great care. Being perceived as too close to the authorities can be interpreted as a loss of neutrality and independence, which can put NGO staff...
directly at risk. NGOs also want to avoid appearing too close to the UN integrated mission in the country, MINUSMA, or even sometimes to the UN in general. The armed groups active in much of the north and centre of the country tend to target military forces. As one NGO staff member stressed: ‘the danger for humanitarians is being too close to these military forces, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time’.

With around $1 billion spent on military operations each year by the UN,21 the situation remains unsettled and the future uncertain. In the absence of sustained development efforts, basic needs are still not being met and will only grow as a result of a rapidly deteriorating food security situation, triggered by a crisis in a pastoral economy already weakened by the impact of insecurity resulting from the conflict and the deteriorating law and order situation. Faced with these conditions, combined with increasing insecurity and the challenge of working in parallel with a range of different armed forces (from France, the UN and regional states), humanitarian actors are going to need a great deal of imagination and stamina. Staff security will depend on the ability to negotiate with all stakeholders, and a continued commitment to demonstrating respect for humanitarian principles.

While it is likely that humanitarian resources will decline, new funding mechanisms are being deployed with the aim of bridging the gap with development. It remains to be seen whether these are agile enough, or whether development donors will be sufficiently flexible to enable the response to adapt to such a fast-changing and unpredictable environment. For the time being, sustainable peace in Mali, and the Tuareg Chief’s hopes that the Festival in the Desert will resume, appear a long way off. • FRANÇOIS GRÜNEWALD, GROUPE URD

This write-up is based on a case study conducted for the SOHS 2018 by Groupe URD. The full case study can be found at: sohs.alnap.org
Endnotes for this criterion


2. This includes investment income.

3. The other implementation support agencies are the Islamic Development Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which received 11% ($27 million) and 2% ($4.6 million), respectively, of GCFF disbursements.

4. Data sourced from FTS only, and not based on DI’s international humanitarian assistance calculations.


6. This seemed to be particularly the case in Côte d’Ivoire, where there was a general sense in the interviews that, with the end of hostilities, the country was in a ‘recovery phase’.

7. This question was not asked in the 2015 survey, so it is not possible to make a comparison over time.

8. The other questions were on sense of safety felt by aid recipients, relevance and fairness of aid and degree of participation.

9. Although the authors note that, as there was little monitoring data, these findings are ‘impressions’.

10. 8% of commitments were in this area, compared to 34% related to development and resilience work.

11. Although the annual number more than doubled over the period, to 667,400 in 2017 – but it still did not keep pace with the rate of new displacement (UNHCR, 2018). There are also real concerns that not all of these repatriations were voluntary.

12. For example: the government of Kenya issued a directive to close Dadaab refugee camp in 2016; in Turkey, President Recep Erdoğan had suggested that Syrian and Iraqi refugees might be granted citizenship, but this was met by popular opposition, and by early 2018 the Turkish government was leaning more heavily towards voluntary return; and in Lebanon, a number of evaluations suggest that governments and the public are becoming less receptive to Syrian refugees.

13. 19% said that this was the major constraint to addressing the humanitarian/development divide, compared with 14% in conflicts and 12% in natural disasters.
14. UNHCR was consulted in the final stages.

15. For example, WFP and the Turkish Red Crescent’s engagement in the Emergency Social Safety Net programme in Turkey.

16. ‘Irregular migration’ refers broadly to movement outside the regulatory norms of sending, transit or receiving countries, including irregular entry, residence or employment (IOM, 2011). The term is disputed; while irregular movement frequently involves unsafe migratory practices, including smuggling and trafficking, it can also represent a livelihood and protection strategy for migrants.

17. For example, Article 13 of the 2000 Cotonou Agreement.


19. This point was made in the UN Secretary-General’s December 2017 report Making Migration Work for All, and migration dialogues such as the 2014 Khartoum Process.

20. Examples include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention Against Torture, the Migrant Workers Convention and, for children, the Convention on the Rights of the Child.