A Design Experiment

IMAGINING ALTERNATIVE HUMANITARIAN ACTION

This document reflects a six-month project to reimagine humanitarian action using design thinking, part of the wider two year 'Constructive Deconstruction' initiative led by the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute.

HPG Humanitarian Policy Group

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About this document

What is its purpose?

The purpose of *A Design Experiment: Imagining Alternative Humanitarian Action* is to share the ideas and discussion (some resolved, some not) that emerged using design thinking to reimagine humanitarian action – in the hopes that it may spark new ways of looking at old problems.

The document is structured in a way that takes readers on a similar journey, first describing how the approach taken is different, then outlining the current state pathologies and the design challenge, then profiling the various users of the system and some of their experiences, then exploring what a future state vision for humanitarian action could look like through a series of ideas and frameworks, then taking a deeper dive into a few of those ideas and how they may be implemented in practice, before concluding with some reflections on both the outcome of this process, as well as its limitations.

Although this document is a reference, it will also remain a work-in-progress as the ideas within it are adapted, challenged, tested, and revised by anyone inspired to do so.

Who is it for?

This document is written for all those who fund, coordinate, deliver, account for, volunteer, receive, challenge and in some way interact or experience humanitarian action at play.

This document is also written for any organisation who is interested in taking forward any of the ideas into execution. In the future, other stakeholders who have an interest in changing the way they operate can use this document as an illustration of what to consider and hopefully, a source of inspiration.

This document has been prepared by

HPG Humanitarian Policy Group

ThinkPlace

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> **The international humanitarian system might be at the centre for us, but if we put ourselves in the shoes of people affected by crisis today, the system is largely invisible or ineffective for them.**

Project participant

Photo credit: Elizabeth Fitt/IRIN

Welcome

Dear Colleagues,

When the Overseas Development Institute's Humanitarian Policy Group launched Constructive Deconstruction, a two-year research project to reimagine the humanitarian system, it was a project borne of frustration and promise in equal parts. Frustration that – despite significant changes in the nature of crises, the tactics of war and the profile of aid workers; despite big money, big data and the industry growth that it generated – in its fundamentals, the international humanitarian system had changed very little since the end of the Cold War, when many of the institutions we now know came of age.

But in developing this research, we also found promise. Promise that these frustrations were shared by humanitarian practitioners and senior aid officials, host and donor governments and even the humanitarian stalwarts. All were finding it more difficult to do their jobs and live up to public and personal expectations amidst stagnant funding, political indifference and declining public support. In its run-up and its follow-up, the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) amplified these concerns and generated momentum for change. And increasingly, people living in and around crises had the ambition, the tools and the critical mass to be pro-active responders and change agents on their own behalf.

The international humanitarian system needed a rethink, and we felt that that this project could help catalyse that process. Even the name, Constructive Deconstruction, was intended to suggest that reimagining the humanitarian system required dismantling what currently exists – at least intellectually – and challenging the values, assumptions and incentives that underpin humanitarian action today.

For such an ambitious task, we didn't want to employ the usual analytical tools – decades of traditional analysis of the sector's flaws had not got us far enough. And in light of perennial hollow commitments to 'put people at the centre' and be accountable to affected populations, we thought that Design Thinking, an approach that prioritises 'end users', was a good place to start.

Design Thinking is a collaborative tool that uses human experience to develop solutions to complex problems. It's been around for about 20 years, used by governments, businesses and academics to bring empathy into product, service and systems design. Design Thinking is creative more so than theoretical, employs human connection, more so than statistics, and while based on principles of product and systems design, it's focused on user journeys and experiences.

Once we settled on Design Thinking as our approach, we brought in ThinkPlace, an established design firm with a community-minded ethos and global reach, to help us. We convened a group of experienced humanitarian practitioners, refugees and other recipients of aid alongside people from the private sector, finance, academia and the media – some of them disruptors, all of them 'change agents' – as our co-designers. Soon after that our discomfort began.

Change? Why bother? These questions came up all too frequently in our discussions. Change is too hard and not within our power. The change required is all about politics and what power did we have to influence politics or government interests? Was there any point in refitting a system that had become too big to be dismantled, and that is so contextual, complex and ungovernable that it can't be designed at all? Well, perhaps. But we took all that in as part of our challenge and put our trust in the design process in the hope that its user focus would unearth some new ideas, or at least bring new sheen to rusty conversations.

So with all of that, we introduce Constructive Deconstruction: A design experiment to re-imagine the humanitarian system.

Christina Bennett
Head, Humanitarian Policy Group
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Acknowledging our co-designers

The ThinkPlace team would like to thank the many people who generously contributed their time and thoughts in interviews, willingly shared their knowledge and networks and enthusiastically participated and trusted in the co-design process. We are particularly grateful to people affected by protracted crisis who shared their insights with us; your participation was invaluable and allowed us to be truly 'human-centred'.

The ThinkPlace team would also like to express our appreciation to the Core Design Team for contributing their boundless expertise and guidance as, together, we navigated human-centred design in the humanitarian space.

Finally, we would like to thank our hosts, the Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute, for instigating this journey and for their unfailing support (and trust) of the process throughout.

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Note: The Core Design Team (CDT) contributed regularly and intensively to design activities throughout the project. However, this document does not represent the views of the individuals in the core design team, but rather, captures some of the collective thinking as a group – including points of both agreement and disagreement – as part of this single narrative.

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a different approach

1

> **Everyone designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.**

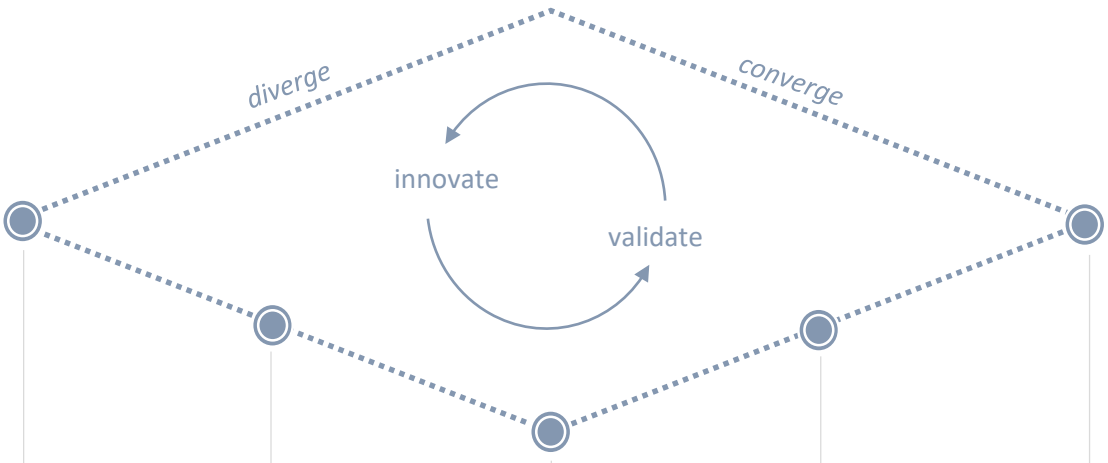
Herbert Simon
cognitive psychologist

Why design thinking?

Design Thinking refers to the strategies designers use during the process of designing. The notion of design as a "way of thinking" can be traced to Herbert A. Simon's 1969 book: *The Sciences of the Artificial*. Design thinking differs from traditional scientific and hypothesis-led problem solving in that it investigates both known and ambiguous aspects of a current situation through immersion in, empathy with, and discovery of latent human patterns which then lead to novel solution sets.

Co-design is an approach that upholds the value that who we design *for* should be who we are designing *with*. It is particularly suited to design in the context of complex systems where there are many different and often competing perspectives that must be integrated into a design or solutions set. While engaging in a co-design process is not always linear, it is a rigorous yet creative method for problem-solving.

Taking a co-design approach on this project started with building a shared understanding of the intent or vision (the change we seek to make), leading to a process of rapid exploration and divergence as we explored, innovated, and tested until we finally converge to formulate the future vision. Through these cycles, it was best to work in rapid iterations that were responsive and adaptive to user and stakeholder inputs.



intent

The first stage of a co-design process is about clarifying and re-framing the challenge or opportunity space.

explore

The second stage of the co-design process is to conduct research and surface insights about actors' experiences.

innovate

The third stage is about generating new ideas from the insights and patterns identified during the explore stage.

test

The fourth stage tests and refines concepts directly with actors in the system through iterative rounds of 'user testing'.

formulate

The final stage of the co-design process is to converge on a re-envisioned future state or solution options.

Design methods

Human-centred and empathic

Taking a human-centred approach to the design activity acknowledges that all systems, services, organisations and products are ultimately used by and created for people, who ought to have an experience of them that is positive and easily navigable. Taking a human centred approach means we look to understand the attitudes, expectations, past experiences, current knowledge, current behaviour, motivational intent and social norms – this depth of understanding can be then leveraged into nudges and larger scale interventions that speak to people's innermost drivers.

Empathy in design requires deliberate practice. We intentionally sought opportunities to connect with people in meaningful ways and to set aside assumptions and behaviours that will interfere with it.

Collaboration and co-design

In order to achieve alignment and breakthrough thinking across a diverse humanitarian sector, our design process favoured a highly collaborative way of working. Co-design is a methodology that engages all relevant stakeholders in a constructive dialogue to optimise the project outcome. Co-design means we do not start with knowledge a priori; rather, we construct knowledge with the actors in the system.

Throughout the course of our design process, diverse audiences in the sector were brought together for intensive, hands-on learning and co-creation opportunities. This process had a central steering group, our Core Design Team, comprised of twelve current and former humanitarian practitioners with a diversity of backgrounds, field experience, affiliations, and aspirations. The process directly engaged over 100 other actors (from various institutional and geopolitical contexts in the sector) through exploratory research, group testing sessions, ideation workshops, and more.

Inspiration at the edges

We deliberately incorporated the idea of designing with the extremes in mind, or researching according to the principles of universal design. While any group of people can usually be described by a bell curve distribution, researching and designing for the 'extremes' of the population ensures that we not only meet the needs of extreme users but also capture the needs of all users in between – designing 'universally'.

We looked for how people have found work-arounds, improvisations and unobvious ways to achieve their goals despite the system rather than because of it. These examples serve as platforms for design inspiration. As designers, we will learn from these and consider how to incorporate those into the designs we co-create.

Prototyping and iterating

A hallmark of design thinking is its bias toward action – we believe in *learning by doing*. Every design process moves from a place of highly exploratory and divergent thinking (wherein research is conducted and key learnings are discovered) to a place of convergence (through building and testing). From a place of empathy and deep understanding, users ideate or brainstorm potential ideas to address their needs and challenges. Once these ideas are built into prototypes, designers work iteratively to test and refine those prototypes according to user feedback.

In this process, a diverse set of humanitarian actors were convened to brainstorm ideas, shortlist those ideas, and then develop those ideas into concepts which could be built out into prototypes. These prototypes ranged from proposals for discrete interventions to a call for large-scale cultural changes in the system.

Design inquiry

What would humanitarian action look like if it were re-imagined based on lived, human experiences? The primary aim for our design consultations was to explore just that. The specific aims were to:

1. **Surface situated stories and narratives about people's touchpoints** with the formal humanitarian architecture, framing those experiences in their own words, and designing preferred future scenarios from a place of deep empathy with them.

2. **Identify 'extreme cases' and cases of 'positive deviance'** where people interacting with the formal humanitarian architecture share the ways they 'work-around' the barriers they encounter.

3. **Provide a deliberate and safe space to co-design** preferred future experiences WITH people who interact with the formal humanitarian architecture, rather than FOR or TO them.

The challenges with the existing formal international humanitarian architecture have been well-documented. This design activity was not aimed at producing new knowledge about the established problem space, but rather, it is about framing both challenges and opportunities, barriers and enablers in a human-centred way and through the words and imagination of people who are experiencing them.

The following summarises the line of questioning for this design inquiry. These are not the actual questions posed to people during consultations. Questions were framed in ways that invited stories and reflections about people's lived experiences with the humanitarian system. People's stories and reflections served as the springboard to ideas about alternative humanitarian futures with them.

power

What needs to happen to enable more shared power and resources among a diversity of actors?

What perverse institutional incentives exist that maintain the status quo?

What are possible, alternative incentive options?

experience

What are the experience pathways of people through the humanitarian architecture?

How do people affected by crisis see their own roles?

What structures in place limit or enable the roles people have for themselves?

accountability

How do people affected by crisis want others to be held to account?

Why do some actors feel powerless about being accountable to people affected by crisis?

How should systems of representation exist?

agility

What are the blockages to furthering already-made commitments to change?

How can the sector be better equipped or ready for change?

When is more flexibility needed and when is more rigidity needed?

diversity

How do different actors propel or compromise each other's work?

What have self-organising actors been able to do that traditional actors haven't?

What different types of working relationships are needed?

Who participated?

12 Core Design Team members

A set of 12 Core Design Team (CDT) members steered the design process. The CDT was comprised of former practitioners, former UN representatives, informed observers, experts in humanitarian financing, conflict, resilience and change. We convened six co-design workshops with the CDT over the six month period.

23 Participant locations and reach

Desiring a truly global reach to this project, we operated out of three hubs of humanitarian thought leadership and practice. We had research and design teams in North America, East Africa, and Europe that extended out to conduct research and design activities in 23 locations around the world (including but not limited to Syria, Turkey, Kenya, and Greece).

75 Participants in discovery research

To diagnose the challenges of the sector from a deeply human perspective, we conducted exploratory and semi-structured interviews with a number of people across various scales and functions in the sector. This research was conducted across 16 distinct locations and 73 different organisations.

50 Participants in co-design workshops

To diverge and explore and generate as many ideas as possible before beginning to converge or focus on any given set of solutions. We did this by convening a wide range of people for a two-day 'Insights and Ideation' workshop on 3-4 May, 2017. Attendees included government officials, funders, technologists, private sector disruptors, international NGOs, local/national NGOs/CBOs, volunteers, researchers, policy-makers, host community representatives, refugees and others who are displacement-affected.

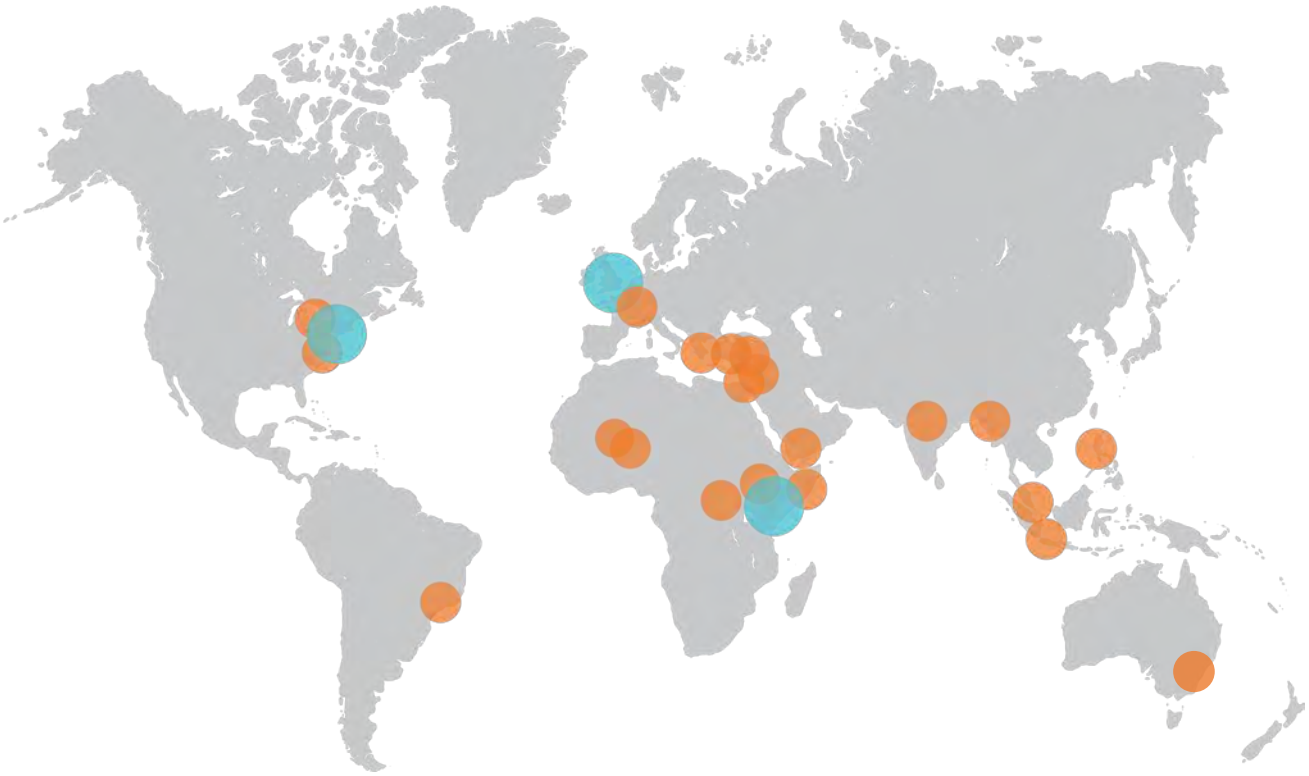
20 Participants in user testing and refinement

In order to test and refine the assumptions and principles underpinning the shortlisted ideas, we conducted user testing with a variety of people 'inside of' and 'outside of' the international humanitarian system. We not only tested concepts through interactive workshops, but also through comparative analysis (one-on-one interviews with people who are engaged in 'real-world' applications of concepts similar to the ones developed through this process). In total, our testing engaged 31 people across several protracted crisis contexts from 25 distinct organisations.

5 Operating languages

The research and testing portions of this project were conducted across the following five languages: English, Arabic (Lebanese), French (West African), Swahili (Kenyan) and Greek.

Where did we co-design?



design team locations
where the design teams were based

co-design activities
where the co-design (research, testing, workshops, etc.) activities took place

Photo credit: Patrick Bar/IRIN

current state

2

Platform for change

Humanitarian action is inadequate, inappropriate, inefficient, untimely and inflexible and therefore, not fit-for-purpose.

In recent years, the international humanitarian system has seen a rapidly shifting landscape of actors: first, an increasingly changing nature of crises; and second, exponential growth in funding. This system is comprised of more than 4,000 operational aid organisations with expenditures of over $25 billion, and more than 450,000 professional humanitarian workers (ALNAP, 2015).

Despite all this, the international humanitarian system is considered to be struggling to meet the global demand, with some suggesting 'atrophy, inflexibility and a skills deficit' in situations that require speed, flexibility, and creative approaches to navigating the complexity at hand. Recent efforts for change have resulted in small tweaks to current practices instead of any disruption to the underlying architecture and assumptions that the system has been built upon for decades. Given that the way we are working, is just not working, it is time for a system rethink.

On a conceptual level, the humanitarian system is characterised by a growing awareness of 'change' accompanied with a stated desire to see and effect change. In practice, however, in-field accounts reveal a demonstrated lack of appetite and latitude for change, as well as a noticeable absence in the mechanisms and incentives to support that change.

Early in 2015, Oversees Development Institute's (ODI's) Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) launched the Constructive Deconstruction research project to get this systems rethink underway. Track 1 of this research project and its Time to Let Go (ODI, 2016) report has reinforced our understanding that, on a conceptual level, this system is characterised by a growing awareness of 'change' accompanied with a stated desire to see and effect change. In practice, however, in-field observations and other ethnographic accounts reveal a demonstrated lack of change and a noticeable absence in the mechanisms, norms, and incentives to support that change.

Following Track 1's work in identifying the theoretical and analytical frameworks that describe what impedes effective response in today's humanitarian system, the next phase has been to imagine what alternative humanitarian action could look like taking a more 'user-centred' or 'human-centred' approach. Imagining an alternative future state for the system provokes a dialogue about a multiplicity of pathways to, and visions for, success. Urgently, our challenge as co-designers then is: how to engage with a 'sector' or 'system' or 'industry' of different actors with 'varying forms and levels of capacity, as well as varied values, goals, and power to imagine alternative humanitarian action that meets tomorrow's demands?

ALNAP (2015) The State of the Humanitarian System. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.
ODI (2015) A new global humanitarianism. Integrated Programme Proposal. London: ODI
ODI (2016) Time to let go: Remaking humanitarian action for the modern era (HPG Working Paper, April 2016). London: ODI

The current state pathologies

An important step to addressing any systems design challenge is to get a shared understanding of the current state and all its complexities. The core design team identified the key pathologies that pertained to what is understood as the humanitarian system – currently. This was achieved through exploratory interviews with 75 'users', including recipients, practitioners and experts across 16 locations and 73 organisations, as well as an extensive literature review.

Although a meaningful effort was made to speak with a number of frontline responders and people affected by crisis, we were limited by our own resources and the user availability and accessibility to get wider perspectives across different typologies and geographies of protracted crises.

The focus of this effort was to better understand the structural issues and levers for change from a deeply human perspective. Some of the pathologies that emerged were inward looking and system-centred, while others were more outward looking and people-centred.

Within each of the 10 pathologies identified, we have outlined the key insights and opportunities, and have provided relevant and supportive quotes from our interviews.

system-centred
inward-looking

1 Forgetting the human in humanitarian

2 Denying the hypocrisy of humanitarian principles

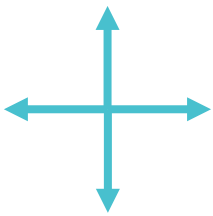
3 Institutionalising self-interest and dysfunction

4 Lacking shared vision and governance

5 Contravening data and evidence

6 Dismissing alternative assistance channels

people-centred
outward-looking



7 Misaligning response to what is actually needed

8 Undermining local civil society and government

9 Habituating short-term and parallel arrangements

10 Neglecting dignity, agency and self-reliance

1 Forgetting the human in humanitarian

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Remembering to be quiet, listen, empathise, and be humble

International humanitarian actors are neither trained nor incentivised to be humble, really listen, and empathise in a way that is respectful of human connection, culture and context. This has led to poor relationships and distrust on the ground.

Investing more in human-to-human relationships and trust

Improving coverage and reach involves greater reliance on local connections with strong reputations. This kind of quality relationship building can take time, and push boundaries when required to do so with warring parties.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we nurture or reward humanitarians to engage in 'tea drinking' type relationship building with people at the frontline?

How might we practice and train humanitarians in empathy and humility in contexts where they are unfamiliar?

How might we get donors to trust their local partners in taking the best possible decisions?

INSIGHT 1 FORGETTING THE HUMAN IN HUMANITARIAN
SUPPORTING QUOTES

> …as implementers, our argument with [the donors] is that they sit comfortably in their nice office and then they don't see the suffering of the people with their own eyes. If they don't feel the people suffering, it is very difficult for them to empathise with the people, so they rather stick to the principles and regulations which is easier, rather than help us make the changes we would like to make…they talk about the flexibility needed to save people's lives, but actually, I think these are just words. The practice is not fully there, yet.
>
> - Local NGO

> Professionalisation at headquarters has affected our bedside manner and our ability to show empathy. We have lost the capacity to sit down, drink tea, and listen to people on the ground, whether they're our own staff or people we are trying to help.
>
> - UN Official

> Unless you have leadership that is more humble and willing to accept that local knowledge is very important and local capacity is something that is present in many situations even in the most circumstances, then you can never build the trust.
>
> - INGO

> Be humble, not coming there saying you know everything...identify in any community who are the leaders...It could be the community midwife, it could be the religious leader, the teacher, or the priests or the imam or whatever and then some local government officials...Get to know them and get to understand and be really, really humble and listen...build the confidence of the community that you actually understood to them.
>
> - INGO

> I think it's elders and community leaders, elements of social movements, good national NGOs, and in some cases, international NGOs… It's really hard [to identify them]. But you have to know the country really well. Have to have people who know the local language, people who know the importance of the issues. It's not going to be done out of a land cruiser or out of a compound that has a barbed wire on it in a capital.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> ...we represent the church. The church leaders, the priests, are the lead bargaining people with the warring parties. And they approach the warring parties, requesting to them that they don't want our people to be hurt. But they want to go back and do their livelihood. With their agreement, we can help them cope and move back to their places. It's the priests who can convince the warring parties.
>
> - Local NGO

> Trust is built from mutually beneficial relationships - that takes time...If you have no trust, then the value chain breaks down...People get pressured into saying they can do things that they can't' - this is where trust gets lost
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> There's a qualitative difference between what people discuss under a tree sitting on rocks in the hot sand than those people sitting in an air-conditioned conference room at the capital level and in between...when you're in that position on the ground, you see things...you see a lot of things…
>
> - Local NGO

2 Denying the hypocrisy of humanitarian principles

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Acknowledging the pretense in 'western' intervention

Western donors fund and support humanitarian efforts that complement western military and foreign policy directives. True impartiality is needed to gain access to areas of need that are wary of western influences; this requires a divorcing of funding and western ideologies.

Re-examining historical paternalism and current day manifestations

The international humanitarian sector is guided by norms that have roots in Christian ethics and Euro-centric values. This can compromise the sector's relevance and effectiveness in some contexts with other, existing value systems.

Doing what we say, not just saying what we do [with local actors]

Using the neutrality principle to disqualify local/national actors is perceived as hypocritical. Many international humanitarian actors acknowledge that it is rare for a humanitarian operation to fully abide by the principles without making trade-offs.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we stay truer to our humanitarian principles in our day-to-day work?

How might we apply the humanitarian principles in a more context-specific way?

How might we de-link funding from foreign policy or political ideology?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> If you take a step out of the humanitarian sector, each of us individually are political beings, we have political opinions, political views, we support the political parties, we have ideas in whatever way that is articulated or expressed… So when you are in Shatila camp in Beirut, or in Mosul in Iraq, or Libya, people are very much aware of the political context around them, and these subjects are extremely visceral. When the white expat aid worker rocks up on their doorstep to build their resilience, it is an affront on their dignity as individuals who are very politically engaged and active and see this as part of a global power system that is unjust. The very fact that the white expat aid worker is standing on their doorstep is a demonstration of privilege that they have been excluded from, and are very aware of. I do think that the aid system is not necessarily self-aware of its own role in perpetuating and contributing to, or reminding people of global power structures of privilege. I think the only people that can be unaware, are the privileged, and they are generally the ones sitting in NGOs.
>
> - INGO

> Traditional donors' morality is linked to a kind of paternalism – the sense that there are these values of humanity, equal rights, etc. that make up this 'inner sanctum' – I think that prevents humanitarian agencies from addressing what's happening locally, where there are existing moral systems. For example, take the 2002 Gujarat earthquake. OCHA showed up with beef packets. If you know anything about India, you would know that the cow is sacred here, so beef is the most useless item to us. OCHA got out of the country and hasn't been allowed back since.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> [Where] local organisations engage in conflicts which are man-made, they aren't trusted to be completely neutral. There is always a question whether they can be trusted to work in a principled way when they are part of the country... The system assumes that, if you have an opinion or a stance in a conflict, then you are not able to implement aid according to principles because you will inherently prefer one group over another. But I think that is wrong, a post-colonial assumption and a useful [argument] for agencies not to fund locals more intensively.
>
> - Donor

> The UN functions in a very traditional way, they say, we're working in Syria, we need to be based in Syria, we need to work with the Syrian government. And here, you have a case where the Syrian government is the same government that is bombarding people and killing them.
>
> - Local NGO

> This kind of power structure, sorry to say, but this 'white supremacy'… and this 'we have to help you, we know better, we destruct your countries and then we come to tell you what you need to do.' I think changing the mindset in the short term or the medium term may not be possible… when we want to talk reforming the international humanitarian structure, I think we need to first start with changing the ethics.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> Our entire emergency response in Syria is based on a relationship with networks of doctors and medical actors inside Syria. We are able to do that because we don't have money from governments that are telling us that we can or can't work with certain groups, or we have to sign a service agreement with a local NGO. We can just identify people and support them.
>
> - INGO

> We should be able to negotiate with the Russians to be able to work inside Syria….which requires us to have independent funding, which requires us to have an organisation that is an international movement not a western movement… it requires us to be able to navigate with civil society actors on the ground who are providing direct action responses…It requires greater adaptability from us as humanitarian actors.
>
> - INGO

> The sector is very much influenced by this Christian enlightenment trajectory, civilization mission historically – which, today, manifests itself as having ready-made solutions, a set of attitudes, etc.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> …China conceptualizes humanitarian action, or what they call rendai (sic), which is a slightly different concept…it's about the responsibility of the State to take good care of the well-being of the population, it's the responsibility of the local leader, local authorities, even local business communities to intervene when there is a crisis or natural disaster or whatever. Which is a different way of conceptualizing humanitarian action, from the way in which we define these so-called universal values, that have their roots in the Enlightenment, Christianity, the Red Cross movement.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

3 Institutionalising self-interest and dysfunction

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Breaking deep-rooted habits and mandate-driven action

Current incentives encourage competition, defensiveness and over-claiming rather than partnerships, complementarity and collective action. Changing this mean breaking deep-rooted habits, procedures and organisational cultures that prioritise organisational mandates over the actual needs of people affected by crisis.

Prioritising impact and collective action over image

There are many incentives for actors to say they are doing a good job but next to no incentives for them to actually do a good job. Distorted funding structures have led major agencies to focus their efforts on what is easier to do and what makes them look good, rather than what is actually needed for real impact.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we encourage investment in learning and piloting?

How might we reverse the incentive structure that leads to mission-creep and mandate-creep?

How might we realign financial models and incentives toward collaborative competition and complementarity?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> How do you deconstruct self-interest, institutional self-interest in a system where all these structures are there to basically sustain that model with the 3-4 monoliths at the top? If you look at the funding flows, it looks worse than Russian oligarchs… 1% of actors take 90-something% of the money, and they can then divide that up to the smaller fish, which means they have total control. So, that's just one, follow the money…a journalistic way of looking at it.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> This is clear to Syrian staff, everybody talks about it, everybody knows it. The non-Syrian staff there say to the Syrian staff: 'It's business, there's a lot of money here. This is why we work in Syria because there is a lot of money here.' They pay themselves extortionate amounts of money for their directors, which often have very little to no involvement on the projects.
>
> - Local NGO

> It's about power. It's about who wants to remain in power, and who wants to keep their job.... UN agencies and international organisations, and government – those are the main culprits. The aim of most aid is to be effective and temporary, but rewarding the achievement of that outcome is contradictory, as it competes with job security for a lot of the same people.
>
> - INGO

> I have seen humanitarian actors acting in a way that I don't see as focused on humanitarian causes. It's about certain interests, about their own interests, politics, and control. I'm quite surprised at what I've seen so far. But, in the context where there is quite a lot of money here from donors, and actually people quite like their nice jobs, their big houses, their big offices, and sustaining all that… so self-interest is certainly one thing I'm quite shocked at, with supposedly humanitarian agencies.
>
> - Donor

> The people who for whom [the current system] is working is definitely the donors and the big agencies, particularly the UN. It's not really working towards the interests of the beneficiary in the sense that, any kind of formulation of their interests as opposed to what we think their interests are isn't really built into the system.
>
> - Donor

> If I could change something about the system, it would be the entire system of grants and sub granting to small NGOs... it's completely messed up, and it encourages hyper competitiveness between NGOs. If there is another NGO doing something that we do, in theory, they are our competitor, that is completely mad! That's not how we act, we work very closely and co-operatively with other NGOs and ones that we know and trust are the same with us. But the system is not designed to make us collaborative, the system is designed to make every local NGO so desperate for funding that they will do anything to get this grant.
>
> - Local NGO

> People who get into the aid game...there's not a lot of pressure to improve... you can limp along doing bad work, as long as you could write a good report, no one will ever know… This is why we're seeing social enterprises popping up and doing so well – they have a different culture – they attract a different mindset of people.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> When DFID wants to support work in Syria, they prefer for the money to stay in the UK. They fund Save The Children, they support Adam Smith International, so basically all the money that they spend on Syria is staying in the UK… They pay a company that is based in the UK, the staff is British, salaries for British citizens going back in tax, then tax from the company itself as well.
>
> - Local NGO

> …the system is set up to compete – most of the finance in the sector is provided voluntarily and the fact that there is overlap between what agencies do creates competition for resources. It also creates this kind of cartel mentality when there is pressure not to compete or to make efficiencies across the system, then there is kind of a regrouping to protect everybody's interest.
>
> - Donor

> …having to acknowledge that the need that they institutionally set up to promote may not be the greatest need out there. That's very threatening. Particularly if, say, you're UNHCR and you have an extremely effective fundraising machine and do very good work for your subset of the population, but maybe your subset of the population is not actually in the greatest need… So, they're not necessarily structurally incentivised to do the right thing… We need to create an information environment and set of norms / practices that incentivise them to do the right thing.
>
> - Donor

> If you have two UN organisations that are fighting at an HQ level, they're going to be fighting at the ground level. And the rivalries and the segmentation just really flow straight down… So I think classically the solution to that is say better coordination. And coordination is super important, and I think OCHA does really important work and provides a lot of value, but fundamentally OCHA is a kind of Band Aid on a very deformed industry.
>
> - Donor

4 Lacking shared vision and governance

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Collective governance for collective performance

There is no universal governance structure for the whole humanitarian sector. Instead, each agency or organisation sets its own agenda, then reports to its own board, on its own performance.

Unifying on vision and direction

No one takes responsibility for driving a single vision or strategic direction for the humanitarian sector.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we design a governance structure that is only concerned with accountability for timely, adequate, appropriate assistance and protection?

How might we redefine our risk tolerance to be able to "stay and deliver" in difficult settings?

How might we create a financial mechanism that allocates funds only based on a more universal, human-centred assessment of need?

SUPPORTING QUOTES ``

> What worries me about all of that, is that that movement is not directed to a specific vision, that is shared by a large number of the stakeholders. I think we are a sector that lacks vision, and that goes down to the organisational level. There are some individuals in it which I think do have a bigger vision, but broadly as sector, we lack vision
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> There are no kinds of counter balances, checking the system between the different actors, NGOs, donors, government, the UN. The UN are definitely in charge. The lack of accountability from everybody, from donors to NGOs, all of them enjoy the same kind of situation – you can do whatever you want and you cannot do what you are supposed to be doing here, and nobody is going to make you accountable.
>
> - Donor

> The agencies are only fundamentally accountable to their executive boards, and any accountability to the wider system is basically voluntary or transactional."
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> It's actually very clear that the UN has beaten everyone into submission, and if they step out of line there are severe consequences.
>
> - Donor

> Overabundance in some areas, duplication, and confusion. And waste and fraud and all of that. In other areas, you have nothing…. In the humanitarian side you don't have [restraint] because you have conglomeration of multiple agencies, with billions of dollars, and a funding raising that is not designed for adaptability, flexibility but more towards plant my flag, occupy the space, and say I was here, and pictures of sad kids. So ironically what you need to be more adaptive and flexible, you need more coherence and centrality.
>
> - Donor

> [The humanitarian architecture] needs to have more control and command in terms of the common objectives, in terms of what are we trying to do and how do we prioritise that, and then these common objectives and outcomes – people should fall around them instead of devising their own. But day-to-day work, flexibility has to be bigger…This is what we need for a more central structure and a clearer vision of where we actually want to get at… that is something everyone talks about, but no one really does. Us included.
>
> - Donor

> Donors have a lot of power and most finance in the system comes from institutional donors, maybe there is a need to rebalance that as well because that is also what is creating the perverse incentives. So, for example, there aren't a lot of donors where humanitarianism sits outside of foreign policy, that could create perverse incentives not necessarily the fact that this kind of Machiavellian use of humanitarian aid, but the fact that it doesn't enable aid to be looked at holistically… If you want to apply what came out of the World Humanitarian Summit, you can't have a silo humanitarian finance system, it should be looked at together with the governments, and the development agencies, and potentially also peace building support.
>
> - Donor

> It should be a requirement from government, that's the only thing I would say, from donating countries, there should be at least four or five mandatory requirements, that it needs to be demonstrated by whoever is taking the donation, not by words, if you say 'inclusion', how are you doing it - it needs to be evidence-based. Don't just say, we do consultations, focus groups, no, we need to see that in the report, really - list of attendance, everything, a verified evidence base on things that you can claim.
>
> - Local NGO

5 Contradicting data and evidence

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Developing a common language around data and evidence

Evidence concerning where the greatest need is sparse, fragmented, or contradictory across organisations who are meant to be working towards common goals.

Opening access and sharing the information available

The lack of data, or lack of sharing of data is perpetuated by it seeming like a threat to the business model of certain organisations competing for the same resources. Sharing information could highlight that the need they are institutionally established to promote may not be the greatest need out there.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we enable funding priorities to be shaped by people affected by crisis rather than by those motivated by self-interest?

How might we remove barriers to the sharing of data among those whose business models were established to be the sole collectors of such data?

How might we encourage more independent data gathering free of organisational mandate bias?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> The programing should be impact based more than statistics , statistics should come in when doing the budgeting but most of the supporting procedures and reporting tools most people are asking how many towns did you visit or how many people, you know I can visit so many towns and there is no impact and I can visit only one and I have impact so it depends on what you are interested in so the programming should change and focus on impact more than the numbers. What does this person want? What are they going to gain?
>
> - Host

> The donor sees other reports. They don't care about anything else. At the end of the day, you have some other numbers that you have put in that report, and you can negotiate and bring that number down or up depending on your relationship with the donor. This is your accountability in a very narrow sense of the word. It's all about numbers at the end of the day and anybody can manipulate that. I can say, "I've supported five local councils. I can tick this box on the plan or on the logframe and it's perfect.
>
> - Local NGO

> There is such a cacophony here that even now there is no partnering on anything, even on the number of refugees, the caseload we are meant to take care of, it's not clear. So, it starts from there. Each one of them come out with a report every few months, about exploitation, the conditions, all this kind of stuff. And I just say… at least can you come together, harmonize your data collection methodology, can you harmonize your analysis on key issues and come out with a product which is common and based on evidence.
>
> - Donor

> …we try to be a principled donor, even when we ask for basic consolidated information of needs or where the gaps are etc. it's been a struggle. We're getting there but there's not always a very clear sight of what the reality is actually, and what people that are affected feel and need and want. We mainly have a picture of what the actors in the system can provide and them making a pitch for the resources to provide that.
>
> - Donor

> It is a big issue all over with statistics let me just say you have reached X number of people but what exactly is that, WFP can say a hundred families in Kakuma but what exactly are you giving them so that question of what is behind the numbers it's just data and data makes one person happy but it doesn't mean that its useful.
>
> - Host

> OCHA brought in people last year to provide support to UNHCR to do information management and analysis, after six months these people resigned. They say, UNHCR does not give us access to data, how can we do analysis if we have no access to data? The UNHCR does this with everybody, they have been called the gatekeeper of information. They have their analysis, they only share analysis conducive to their narrative, for whatever it is, the fundraising or whatever it is.
>
> - Donor

> In 2014 a couple of years into the Syria conflict, we were very dissatisfied with the quality of the information and analysis that we were getting out of our partners… Could we point to some data set to say that we were putting the better part of a billion dollars into this country in the most effective way we could? And could we say, okay the way that we are balancing this across sectors is optimal, given the need, the way that we are coordinated with other donors, is optimal given the distribution of where their support is going? And that geographically this is optimal based on where we know the greatest need to be? And we couldn't on any of those, we didn't have a good dataset to say we were doing that...
>
> - Donor

> I can't believe how that the package of goods that people get is to this day never right. They're never giving the right type of food, they're never given the right type of shelter assistance, whether it's a tents or plastic sheeting, they're never giving people what they actually want!... Even in Haiti, I was just there, I mean of all countries, of all places, all the money that went into humanitarian responses, they never did an accurate assessment of what people needed. They just didn't … they don't have the systems in place to understand the communities … the people have to drive the response.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> I've heard comments like, in the South Sudan we did it like this. I've heard, 'Greece is South Sudan with islands''. I said, really, minus the bombs falling. Number one, when you don't understand the context of the country you make mistakes. Secondly, you create resentment and I know many people who were working, Greeks, who said, I'm done, I'm not going to keep on doing this, because I can't stand these attitudes.
>
> - UN

6 Dismissing alternative assistance

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Working in partnership with diaspora groups

Diaspora communities have a significant reach and motivation to support their families and networks in ways the international humanitarian community cannot. Some still refer to diaspora groups as a double edged sword given their limited technical expertise.

Shifting to cash to challenge unchecked power and turf

Cash transfers have dramatically changed 'the game' – demand for the skills and resources that humanitarian organisations provide has been reduced, which works in the donors favour, but not the NGOs or the UN. Cash-based delivery disrupts power dynamics and though it is favourable for recipients and local economies, it is often unsettling to turf-based, mandate-driven organisations.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we identify and collaborate with diaspora groups that have connections with people in high-risk situations?

How might we leverage the agency-supporting power of cash transfers in more innovative ways?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> In the Syria experience, diaspora was helping families from day one, where I feel confident and entitled to talk about. Contributions to families, relatives, far relatives. In Syria, diaspora organisations have played a crucial role in delivering assistance, doing great efforts in what's happening.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> I haven't checked this out yet, but apparently the Somali diaspora has raised $3 million for the current famine in Somalia. Is it going to national NGOs, to community structures? Or is it literally going to individual families? But I think the diaspora to the extent that they can get resources to those first responders and to vulnerable families, I think that can be part of the solution. They are bypassing the system entirely... Let's face it, some of it is going towards building a mosque, some of it is going to these Madrasas to indoctrinate people, but some of it is getting in the hands of vulnerable people… Let's figure out what it's accomplishing. Maybe INGOs should raise money and give it to the Somali diaspora to disperse in Somalia. My colleagues would never agree to that in a million years, but if you want to get crazy…
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> We have been a strong proponent for the use of cash transfers as part of humanitarian aid, where ever markets exist. We really think we need to go all the way and basically provide cash transfers to people affected so that they can use it for a variety of needs.
>
> - Donor

> The idea of handing out blankets and jerry cans to poor starving populations is slightly colonial and slightly paternalistic. In terms of dignity and freedom of choice, it's much better to allow them to make their own decisions. So for us, cash has for a long time been the way to go…it has this disruptive element.
>
> - Donor

> The major argument was that the people have a variety of needs not just food that WFP was giving at that time, being given to livestock. They were given rice, maize and machines to grind the maize. Most of them were giving the food to the livestock. They were not eating it. People need other things like water and other things that need cash. All the shops were closed because there was no cash circulating in the market. The economy had collapsed because there was no cash circulation...People should be more dignified in choosing what they need rather than others determining it.
>
> - Local NGO

> One of the big things which has gone largely unexamined in the sector, is the way in which the humanitarian community in particular but the international community more widely, has channeled civil society response, so the emergent response which we've been talking about, has forced it into familiar organisational shapes, i.e., forcing local civil society to form itself around the idea of an NGO, rather than accepting that there can be different ways of approaching these problems.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

7 Misaligning response to what is actually needed

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Tailoring response to fast-changing contexts

Institutional donor requirements and ease of scaling up responses have pushed for a sector that applies the same formula to all contexts rather than tailoring responses to cater for changing social, cultural, political and historical circumstances.

Flexibility in day-to-day decision-making

Decisions made outside of the crisis context, by people who are not affected by crisis, are often too slow, too rigid, and/or wrong. Strategic objectives should be rigidly upheld, but day-to-day decisions on the ground should be flexible.

Informing decisions based on the lived experiences of people

Accountability efforts, such as feedback loops and reporting requirements, tend to be tokenistic and disconnected from the lived experiences of people – whether recipients, first responders, or host communities.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we incentivise performance-based funding – for outcomes not outputs?

How might we tailor responses to particular cultural and political contexts on the ground?

How might we strengthen feedback loops to enable more effective decision-making?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> We were in an IDP camp, and looking at the health service provision in that camp.... if you are a woman and you need GBV care you go to a different corner, when you need nutritional services, you go to yet another corner, if you are not a woman or a child and you need general health services you go to a mobile clinic, if you need psycho social services you go to yet another facility, and that is for health care service. So there were no less than five people in each facility, providing a different kind of health care to people with different health care needs, to different population categories.
>
> - Donor

> I've heard comments like, in the South Sudan we did it like this. I've heard, 'Greece is South Sudan with islands''. I said, really, minus the bombs falling. Number one, when you don't understand the context of the country you make mistakes. Secondly, you create resentment and I know many people who were working, Greeks, who said, I'm done, I'm not going to keep on doing this, because I can't stand these attitudes.
>
> - UN

> I think it's a theme that defines the whole humanitarian system…because it's quicker and easier to move plastic sheets out of the warehouse than do a proper assessment, and it is easier to support people if they are in the refugee camps as opposed to when they have spread out and so the logistics define a lot of ways but it doesn't necessarily serve the beneficiaries as well as it could or should.
>
> - Donor

> …a classic example of not really understanding the local context and listen to advice was...in Indonesia, where a large NGO focusing on shelter had their experts pushing for a certain kind of shelters and said, 'Oh, these people they can do with a very basic bamboo shelter that's good enough'...this was not something [the people affected by crisis] used. They were used to solid structures which were concrete or brick and wood, but not bamboo...It was really difficult because there was a refusal to listen, unable to accept that these are not helpless people who've led their life fiercely independently...the same NGOs started to build shelters that was not acceptable to the local community [who] threatened to burn them down...the community saying they don't listen to us, the foreigners come in, they get big money and there's complete distrust.
>
> - INGO

> What it looked like, was somebody who didn't know anything about the context, turning up asking questions, and then disappearing with no follow up whatsoever. Then being the ones who get invited to the coordination meetings with the government and having loads of money from outside the country, but having almost no interaction with the existing volunteer effort.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> The humanitarian system] failed my family, and all the Syrian families...they don't have power over the politics in the world… The main problem is not about the boxes of food that you send to the people, the main problem is stopping the war.
>
> - Affected person

> I spent one afternoon, they had sent us a bunch of baby kits, like baby hygiene kits and they all had baby powder. And the members of the community said they didn't want or need baby powder. And so, I and one of my colleagues ended up spending a whole afternoon opening up every single hygiene kit, taking out the baby powder and gave whatever else was in there. I just remember taking out 100s if not 1000s of baby powder.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> ..another interesting example was in Darfur where a large reputable NGO was building latrines. The local community told them not to put the latrines there. They wouldn't listen. They couldn't understand why the locals were so against. Now, when I went to talk with these people, they said that's because the direction of the latrine was pointing towards Mecca so nobody would use the toilets. In the end, the toilets had to be abandoned.
>
> - INGO

> I can't believe how that the package of goods that people get is to this day never right. They're never giving the right type of food, they're never given the right type of shelter assistance, whether it's a tents or plastic sheeting, they're never giving people what they actually want!... Even in Haiti, I was just there, I mean of all countries, of all places, all the money that went into humanitarian responses, they never did an accurate assessment of what people needed. They just didn't … they don't have the systems in place to understand the communities … the people have to drive the response.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> Traditionally we define effectiveness as what is the gap and what gap is it covering, you know as a donor, you would like to see that your money is going where there is real need, but you would also like it to be used in a way that you understand if the need is relevant to the population that you are targeting, and this is where we find ourselves in crossfire, with the population because if you are not looking it from that angle then you will find yourself having problems with the general population.
>
> - Donor

8 Undermining local civil society

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Reciprocal and 'hand-in-hand' capacity building

Capacity building of local organisations has become about ad-hoc, generic training exercises to tick a box on a budget or to use unspent funds. Capacity building efforts would benefit from becoming more reciprocal and rooted in 'hand-in-hand' ways of working over the long-term.

Increasing flexibility to lead and make life-saving decisions locally

Working in true partnership with local/national actors in the lead can enable faster, more effective responses. The localisation agenda has not actualised as was intended as local/national actors still feel they do not have the flexibility or trust to make critical life-saving decisions at the frontline.

Removing double standards and increasing operational support

Local actors often feel accused of being incapable, lying, misrepresenting reality, corrupt and only after money. This leaves them feeling like they have to constantly be 'proving' themselves without being provided the resources to meet those standards.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we foster trusting, long-term relationships with local NGOs during non-crisis times in order to reduce inefficiencies during crisis times?

How might we ensure grand bargain initiatives get implemented in the way they are intended?

How might we lessen the administrative burden of local actors when partnering with them?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> Everybody will have a small component in their budget to say, "We're building the capacity of Syrian organisations!" But what is that for real? This is basically a budget for trainings and workshops that does not factor in any manner what Syrian organisations actually need. So, you have hundreds of workshops and trainings by trainers who know nothing about the Syrian context.
>
> - Local NGO

> A simple capacity issue and timing issue becomes a 'mismanagement of funding.' This is what I mean, how 'proving ourselves' is such a time-suck for us. It's detrimental to a small organisation.
>
> - Local NGO

> It's crazy, the challenges that Syrian organisations face in regards to funding their own teams, as opposed to how much INGOs or the UN spend on their teams and logistics and operations, and things that are not related to the actual work on the ground. If you compare it to Syrian orgs, the gap is massive. You look at this, you can see that we're actually doing so much work with very little money in comparison. Why are you so much opposed to supporting Syrian orgs?
>
> - Local NGO

> At the end of the day, these are countries' policies and tax money… sometimes they prefer to go to these big machines where they have good financial systems, or at least they submit good financial reports... At the end of the day, they will not go and give it to small, local NGOs, and manage maybe, instead of two contracts, two thousand contracts to distribute the same money and do negotiations with I don't know how many, although it's the ideal.
>
> - Local NGO

> Because most of the time we, Syrians, cannot even work on our country's problems in the neighbouring country because we cannot have a work permit. UN agencies and INGOs are not willing to hire Syrians to work as nationals or take the risk to bring them and instead, ignore our expertise... But still unfortunately I couldn't, because there are always excuses that you're lacking something…but it's my country! And then I see these other people working as interns, but because of their nationality, because they are Americans or Europeans, and immediately after three months they become program managers. I've seen that in many many cases in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. This is not how you change the system.
>
> - Person affected

> Since the start of the Syrian crisis, we have broken contracts with big agencies, at least four times, for grants of millions of dollars… because trust me, it's not that they don't need me, if they want to reach the people, as an intermediate I can be one maybe among many, but they know that they can't do what they want to do on their agenda without us people working like donkeys on the ground every day, and they just ask for numbers and reports etc.
>
> - Local NGO

> We are not asking to change the whole programme – we are not going to deviate from 80% of it. But for the remaining 20%, we want to be flexible to shift to areas where there is need… but when this emergency suddenly happened, food was taken care of by some other initiative... And then we, as the implementer at the field level, we see food is being taken care of but then there are needs other than food. So we asked them to allow us to quickly respond to this other urgent [transport] need – but they didn't respond for two months – then they said no.
>
> - Local NGO

> I think at the end, we had an underspend of $60,000, that we just returned to Oxfam. But they asked us to spend it, we were pushed to spend it… it was left over money because we have, for instance, mobilised local resources so the catering that was originally put for $30, we were able to get for $5, just because we supported local capacity, so you want to also hold us accountable if we are building the capacity of local communities? Should I buy from big suppliers, caterers to take to there, just to ensure I am spending $30?
>
> - Local NGO

> I saw this particularly in countries like Afghanistan or South Sudan, where you have national NGOs who aren't really NGOS, they're what you used to call 'briefcase NGOs' – one guy with a briefcase, a solution in search of a problem, and meanwhile just down the road you've got community groups which are trying to do things, but they can't receive funding because they haven't formed an NGO that's been officially registered with the government and therefore we can't fund them.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> [International organisations] stay as long as the project is there, as long as the money is there, they stay. When project stops, no more money, they close and leave the region. [Local NGOs] are there with the people. And we are staying with them as they are moving from place to place. Money is important, but even without the money we have to stay with the people. They are our people, our congregation members, our neighbours. We cannot leave those people.
>
> - Local NGO

> One of the big things which has gone largely unexamined in the sector is the way in which the humanitarian community in particular… has channeled emergent civil society response and has forced it into familiar organisational shapes, i.e., forcing it to form around the idea of an NGO, rather than accepting that there can be different ways of approaching these problems.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

9 Habituating short-term and parallel arrangements

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Accountability that interfaces with the long-term

Stronger accountability to people affected by crisis ought to be integrated into longer-term response strategies from the onset. Given the nature of modern day protracted crises, a multi-year and adaptive approach is necessary.

Integrating with and building on existing national systems

In protracted crises, the humanitarian sector needs to shift from operating on a six-monthly or yearly basis that in turn creates a parallel system that undermines markets and existing national structures/initiatives.

Letting go of control

The international humanitarian system is still being deployed in countries where there are favourable conditions for national ownership – but international humanitarian actors do not necessarily want to transition out.

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we recognise and support community-born initiatives that are organically formed during or post crisis?

How might we create a hybrid network of local actors that can mobilise local ground truth, context and cultural knowledge?

How might we experiment with initiatives where the community figures out what they want to do, do it, and be held-accountable by their own communities for it?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> The fact that conflicts are becoming so protracted now is a complete disaster. Even if you look back 20 years, people pretty quickly could go back to where they came from or they made a decision that they stayed where they'd come to. Now you have most displaced people basically stuck somewhere, basically wanting to go back but not being able to go back, but at the same time, not being able to develop any kind of vision for the future on the what they, their families and children will eventually be doing. The most important thing for all humanitarian agencies would be to develop a vision for what people will be doing, where they will be going, how they can help make the situation more bearable psychologically beyond pure survival.
>
> - Donor

> Climate change is a new risk…But the good news about it is that we actually have a pretty good understanding of where the biggest risk is. Climate data can tell us an enormous amount of where this is happening and where it's going to get worse. And the problem for humanitarians is that they don't have the budgets, or the time frames, or the mandates to start to address the longer-term erosion of vulnerability that climate change is causing. So again, they're just reacting as a mandate to the problem.
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> And it's about vulnerability and resilience, and that's where the framing has to start from. And this humanitarian system is still too much like, "Okay, how many houses were destroyed? How many shelters do we need fixed? How many of these do we need?
>
> - Multi-mandate INGO

> I think that the [international] humanitarian community is stuck in a pattern of identifying needs and providing short-term material assistance. That is the pattern that replicates itself world over. And no one on the one hand, disagrees; but on the other hand, it's not outcome oriented. It's not solution oriented, it's not really policy oriented. That's the problem.
>
> - Donor

> …in places were natural disasters are predictable, we need to get to a place where we don't need an international humanitarian system. We need those countries to manage that themselves and we need, for example, to leverage money that is not institutional money, that is mainly insurance type funding that governments can access, that people at risk can access themselves, that communities can access – and we need to get to that place.
>
> - Donor

> In countries that have been in crisis for years, or even decades, you can't continue to have a humanitarian system that is operating on a yearly basis, because with an emergency you're planning and receiving grants on a six monthly or annual basis, and in doing that, creating a parallel system that is slightly undermining markets, undermining national and local capacity….we realise actually that we still are using the humanitarian system in countries where we should be shifting to national ownership, and if we are making that transition, be concerned that humanitarian actors won't necessarily want to transition out.
>
> - Donor

> This is something that I think that's also the humanitarian sector has not necessary adapted to – in the sense that we are now, more and more, working in places that had sophisticated social security, health systems, education. Syria and Iraq, these are not places that have never seen a health facility, it's not somewhere that hasn't had an education system... So you have seen a breakdown in these structures, and then humanitarian actors are coming in at a point where the system is broken to the point where it needs external support, but that requires an interaction with people that doesn't come from a place of arrogance, and condescending know-all… we are not starting from a blank slate.
>
> - INGO

> …the default should be national and local actors, government actors, civil society actors, private sector actors, and if not, we need to have a very clear narrative as to why not. There could be very valid reasons – the government is a party to the conflict, there are sanctions, there could be a number of issues but I don't think that is the thought process that's going on at the moment… What's happening now is that we apply the humanitarian architecture to every country regardless.
>
> - Donor

> We have all been saying for the last 10 years that… preparedness is important. But, in the end, people are not investing in that… Donors or big agencies who have the capacity to actually do preparedness and know how to set this up should be focusing on this. And if, nevertheless a disaster happens and it has very, very bad negative results, then it should be other people, including people from the region, the countries themselves, private citizens who would kind of contribute to relief efforts. As long as you leave everything for relief, you will never have enough investment for preparedness.
>
> - Donor

> …it's difficult to think of a conflict that is going to be resolved soon because of the overall geopolitical context so we need to plan for protracted conflict from the onset. We need to take a multi-year adaptive approach to that and we need to define who has got the best comparative advantage to do what.
>
> - Donor

10 Neglecting dignity, agency and self-reliance

INSIGHTS & OPPORTUNITIES

Reframing response from 'technical inputs' to more holistic concepts

It is humanitarian to help people maintain their dignity and sense of agency, this requires a shift from the usual framing of humanitarian response as food, water, and other technical inputs – to more about dignity, agency, aspirations, jobs and education.

Respecting people as active agents of change

The term 'beneficiaries' directs humanitarian actors to consider people affected by crisis as passive recipients of aid rather than active and self-organising agents of change in their own lives. The current setup does not capitalise on the deep sense of motivation that helps people affected by crisis overcome their circumstances.

Prioritising actual need over status

Particularly in politically charged, conflict environments, resources tend to be heavily allocated based on status rather than actual need. This tends to create incentives for people affected by crisis to feel the need to 'race to the bottom.'

'HOW MIGHT WE' QUESTIONS

How might we facilitate more dignified pathways to normalcy (including jobs and education) for people who were affected by crisis?

How might we support the agency of people affected by crisis following the acute phase of a crisis response?

How might we link people affected by crisis with job services to enable them to pursue self-reliant pathways to normalcy?

SUPPORTING QUOTES

> One of the challenges you get into in the conflict environment is how resources get allocated, do they get allocated based on need or on status? And they tend to get allocated heavily based on status. So, if you're a refugee, you've managed to cross a border, you're going to get three times as much per capita support than IDP. And that's pretty indefensible.
>
> - Donor

> If I don't have the main things, like water, a place to stay, food… your mind is just thinking about these things... When you put all your energy, year after year, just into these few small things, you lose dreaming, you lose the ability for your mind to work, to think about different things, how to make a plan for your life. Because you don't have life.
>
> - Affected person

> If I put myself in the shoes of being faced with a crisis, anywhere in the world people react and respond and adapt. I think the humanitarian system is…very much at the centre for us, but I don't think people in Mosul today are even conscious or aware of what the aid system is even doing because it's largely invisible to most people that need it…So for people at the forefront of crisis today, in the worst conditions many of them don't even come into contact with anything that is supported or even linked in some way to the aid architecture.
>
> - INGO

> I have to tell you, if it wasn't like that, the first two years we would have been able to achieve much more with the communities that has been displaced to organise themselves and to be able to manage their own issues. They don't need us, trust me they don't need us.
>
> - Local NGO

> After staying in the [UNHCR provided] tent for a while, people in the camp make their own houses. People advised us that you need to clear the bush and make your own soil bricks at a certain area [of the camp]. We saw these from others that had done it and we had to do it, though you have never been a carpenter, you had to. The good thing was, people from the community knew that you are still new and assisted voluntarily. It took us 2 weeks to get that house done - then we moved in.
>
> - Affected person

> When you are a refugee there, you don't have decisions about you, or your style, or your life, or who you want your leader to be, how the system works in your place. They don't give you the opportunity to do that so if they let us do this in a free way and we give them a list of what we need to change, give them a plan like how can we take these people off the street and find work, how can more people go to school. I think you can make big, big change.
>
> - Affected person

> How to define aid. Hm, to me it is the person who is not made better but who is being supported. And it doesn't mean that when you are a refugee you don't have the ability to take care of yourself… So when we speak of aid, it involves me as refugee. Aid doesn't have to be a continuous thing. You can't help me forever. Help me today and maybe tomorrow, then give me wings so that I can also fly. Don't give fish, teach me how to fish my own fish.
>
> - Affected Person

> Instead of giving out assistance for a year or a long time, it only undermines their human integrity. You need to help them with their self-help or some resilience programme, so they can move on in their own ways. So yes, they have left all their things behind and you need to support them with fundamental or basic needs, but we need to help them to support themselves on their own so that their lives become meaningful.
>
> - Local NGO

> [Affected people] are deprived of agency and ownership at many levels. They cannot participate in designing the project, in decision-making, their efforts most of the time are ignored… Generally, we see them as victims, helpless, paralysed… we take their agency from them… Start by recognising that affected people are contributing in helping each other, and they are doing great efforts.
>
> - Knowledge Generator

> One change would be to stop treating people as subjects and start treating them as people like you and me who have capacity and who are able to do things. I will take an example… that guy who didn't go to school, I will listen to him when they tell me that this is how we do things here: ensure you take the cow outside by 6:00am and the cow has to come in by 3:00 and I don't need to question why it has to come in by 3:00 and not by 7:00 because this guy knows that from 3:30 its starting to rain. They might not tell you but they know why the cow has to be back by 3:00… They are able to tell time by looking at the sun that tells you that everyone has that capacity within their particular locality unless you have taken this person to a strange location, for example if you take a refugee from South Sudan to the UK or US they will need a lot of support but if you take them from South Sudan to Northern Kenya what have you changed exactly? Nothing. These guys can make decisions as if they are just at home so that involvement and allowing them to be human and participate fully in the project is important.
>
> - Host

The strategic shifts

Based on the insights on the pathologies gained from interviews with frontline responders, people affected by crisis, experts and practitioners, the following key strategic shifts were identified in order to reform international humanitarian crisis responses. Strategic shifts focused on three keys areas: enabling agency of people affected by crisis; improving the humanitarian system's ability to adapt response to ground realities; and focusing accountability *to* people affected by crisis.

	FROM	TO
AGENCY of people affected	A supply-driven model that treats people affected by crisis as passive consumers in need of commodities determined and supplied by others.	A social solidarity model where people affected by crisis are valued as active 'producers' and capable fulfillers of their own needs, not just as recipients.
	Top-down decision making where people affected by crisis have limited voice and power over decisions that affect them.	Bottom-up decision making driven by participatory processes with local communities and national institutions from affected places.
	International humanitarian action replaces or works in parallel to local systems (at national and community levels).	International humanitarian action only fills gaps and builds on what is already being done at the national and community levels.
ADAPTABLILITY of the system	An exclusionary international humanitarian system made up of a 'herd of elephants' with minimal diversity.	A highly diverse system that evolves, adapts and synchronises with other actors working towards common goals.
	A rigid structure of institutions and incentives that is set-up to preserve the status-quo.	A flexible structure with the capacity to be adaptive based on changing realities.
ACCOUNTABILITY to people affected	Humanitarian approaches to address short-term, emergency problems are inappropriately applied to mid/long-term needs and problems.	Humanitarian action is not treated as the long-term solution, but integrated with other long-term solutions.
	Humanitarian action is concentrated in accessible contexts and based on "category" of beneficiary.	Humanitarian action prioritises those most in need.
	Humanitarian actors are held to account based on resource use to funders and not for performance to people affected by crisis.	Humanitarian actors are FIRST held to account for performance to people affected by crisis and THEN to donors.

The design question

How might international humanitarian action become **adaptable and accountable** in ways that recognise people affected by crisis as the **agents of change** in their own lives?

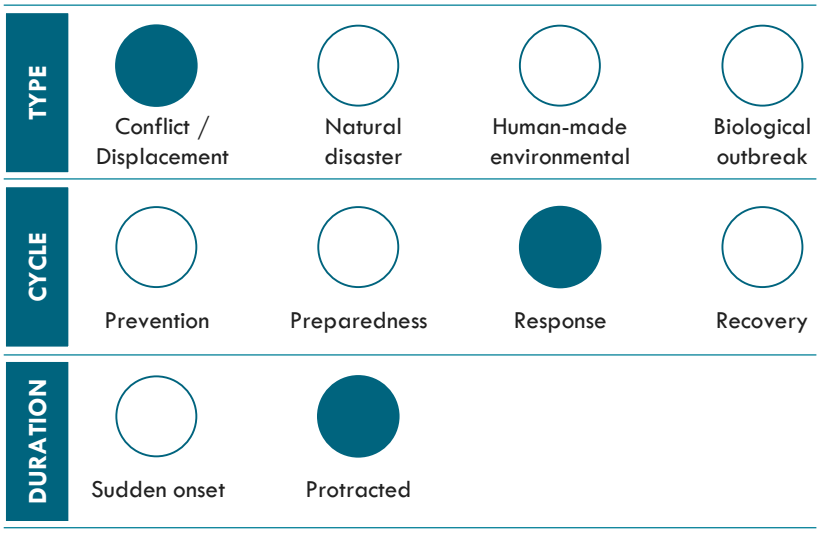
The design focus

In scoping the project, three key parameters were considered to narrow the design focus: type, cycle, and duration of crisis.

Type: An overwhelming majority of recent humanitarian crises were affected by conflict and subsequent displacement of people, with only 9 of the 53 countries requiring international humanitarian assistance in 2016 experiencing natural disasters [Development Initiatives, 2017; 16]. Financing is also increasingly concentrated in a small number of conflict-affected contexts: in 2016, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and South Sudan received over half of all humanitarian funding [Development Initiatives, 2017; 60]. In response to these trends, initiatives such as the World Humanitarian Summit have sought to improve the sector's ability to respond to and prevent conflicts. [UN-OCHA, 2016].

Cycle: Humanitarian response remains the primary focus of the formal humanitarian sector. Although humanitarian activities have expanded into more preparedness and post-crisis recovery, especially with protracted crises, strategies for addressing these are likely more aligned with the development sector, therefore left out of the scope of this project. This project was limited in scope to primarily focus on humanitarian assistance and protection in protracted crises.

Duration: Protracted crises refer to situations "where a large population is vulnerable to disease, death and disruption of livelihoods over a long period, with the affected state having limited capacity to help those affected" (Aly, 2011). Classifications questioned in protracted crises, 2011]. Moreover, the need is greatest here, where nearly 80% of humanitarian response takes places against the backdrop of protracted conflicts (UN-OCHA, 2015).



Aly, H (2011) Classifications questioned in protracted crises, IRIN web article.
Development Initiatives (2017) Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2017. Bristol; Development Initiatives
UN-OCHA (2016) World Humanitarian Data and Trends
UN-OCHA (2015) World Humanitarian Data and Trends

people and their experiences

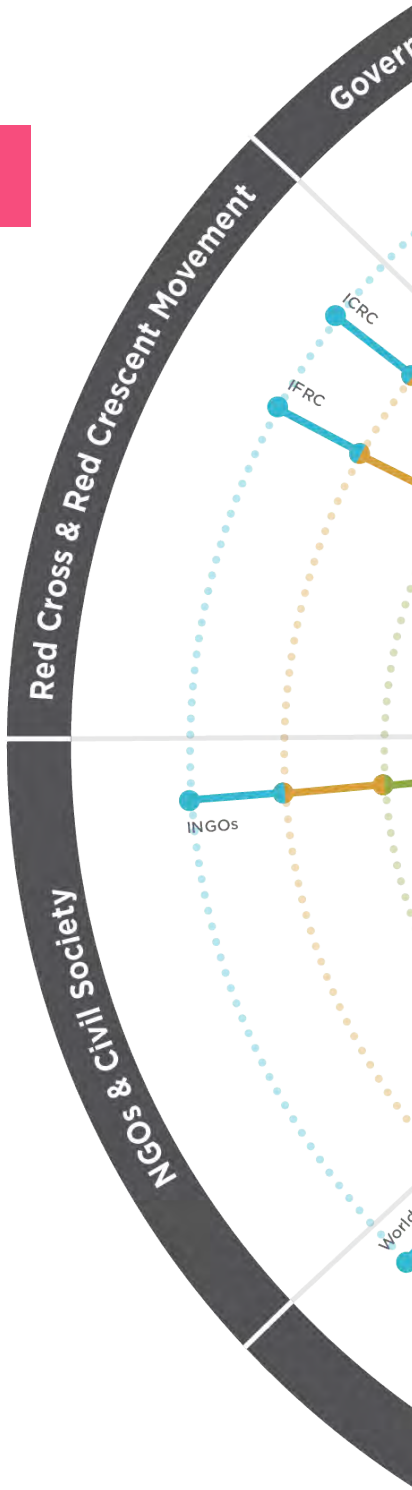
3

Mapping the system actors

A critically important step to the beginning of any design process is situating the design challenge within the context of the key actors. In this case, understanding the broad actor groups, key entities, their roles, functions, and relationships through a non-representative "wheel" visualisation allowed us to circumvent discussions around real/perceived hierarchies and, instead, it provoked conversations about where and how current humanitarian action fails to place 'people affected by crisis' at the centre of its operations – despite all the well-intentioned rhetoric.

There are thousands of actors who operate within, and millions more who interact with humanitarian action in some way. The broad actor groups were categorised as People Affected, Government and Intergovernmental, NGOs and Civil Society, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Multilaterals, Military and Non-State Armed Groups, Knowledge Generators, Community, and Private Actors. Although we are not able to speak to everyone, we aimed to co-design with as many diverse perspectives as possible during this process.

We acknowledge that maps are imperfect. However, some are useful. In this map, the circular rings represent the functional areas in which different actors operate, as well as incorporating an indicative sense of the function's proximity to people affected by a crisis.



FUNCTIONS KEY

DEVELOPING & UPHOLDING NORMS
setting and safeguarding legal and ethical frameworks

LEARNING & ADVOCACY
capturing, generating and disseminating knowledge

FINANCING
provision of funds

COORDINATION
organising actors and activities for coherent response

DELIVERY
provision of services, security and other assistance

CONTACT
direct interaction with affected people

Private Actors
Community
Knowledge Generators
Military & Non-State Armed Groups
Multilaterals
ment & Intergovernmental
Affected People
CONTACT
DELIVERY
COORDINATION
FINANCING
LEARNING & ADVOCACY
DEVELOPING & UPHOLDING NORMS
Intergovernmental mechanisms
Donor gov'ts
Regional orgs
Philanthropic foundations
Philanthropic individuals
Multinational companies
National/host gov'ts
Municipalities & local gov'ts
Local businesses & traders
Immediate family
Local community
Religious leaders
Diaspora
National Red Cross/ Red Crescent Societies
Local Red Cross/ Red Crescent Branches
Think Tanks, Research Organisations & Policy Shops
Nat'l NGOs
Local NGOs & CBOs
Non-State Armed Groups
Academic Institutions
Other Research Organisations
Journalists
Evaluators
International
Peacekeeping
National
Bank
UNRWA
UNHCR
WFP
OCHA
UNICEF
UNDP

Why use personas?

Personas are fictitious characters who bring to life the needs, goals, values, drivers and behaviours of larger groups of people. Composite images of real user groups or actor groups, personas are tools that help guide teams when asking questions and, ultimately, making empathic decisions about the functionality of a solution.

Personas have two primary uses in every design process: (a) they help us build deep empathy and understanding of the pain points and needs of our user segments and (b) they are useful design tools because they help us define the design considerations or criteria which best allow us to design a solution that delivers on all users' needs.

On the pages that follow, the personas created during this project, which were based on composites of actual interviews, are situated across a two-by-two matrix, revealing the user groups' relative capacity to influence change in the humanitarian system as well as their relative degree of 'affectedness' as it relates to crisis. The following pages showcase abbreviated versions of all fourteen personas.

While not exhaustive for describing the humanitarian system, this set of personas has been a useful field of reference for decision-making throughout this design process.

Photo credit: Katie G. Nelson

Personifying the actors

Funder (Proactive)
The progressive

Magda

United Nations
The defender of turf

Tobias

Knowledge generator
The cautious investigator

James

Knowledge generator
The critical thinker

Janine

Funder (Reactive)
The proceduralist

Timothy

Responder (INGO)
The constrained leader

George

Least affected by crisis

United Nations
The change agent

Aisha

Host
The embracing

Linus

Responder (local NGO)
The over-burdened

Babacar

Host
The reluctant

Riad

High degree of influence for change

Most affected by crisis

Low degree of influence for change

Responder (INGO)
The risk-taker

Jose

Affected by crisis
The self-reliant

Zahaar

Affected by crisis
The system-reliant

Sifa

Affected by crisis
The under-served

Mahamadou

Personas, in depth

HOSTS

RECEPTIVE VOLUNTEER HOST

Kenyan national who has volunteered with an INGO at Dadaab Refugee Camp for a couple years

Babacar

The embracing host

MY ASPIRATIONS include increasing trust between aid workers and refugees, as there is very little understanding between their two 'worlds' within the camp. I also would like to see a more simplified organisational landscape – there are too many organisations with competing mandates operating in Dadaab.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include 'amateurism' – that is, knowing that many of the staff delivering services in Dadaab are much less trained and much less professional than people would think.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes creating a much more simplified approval process for procuring funding when we need it. The refugees here in Dadaab often have great ideas about what we can do to help them, but if funding wasn't allocated at the beginning of the funding cycle then it can be extremely difficult to secure approval.

DISHEARTENED HOST

Mayor of a village municipality in northern Lebanon

Riad

The reluctant host

MY ASPIRATIONS include wanting to see more inclusive decision-making in the aid sector. Our community is hosting thousands of refugees and yet the decisions about resource allocation and NGO presence are made without me being at the table.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include convincing the community that taking in refugees is a wise decision for our local economy. I worry about refugees and locals having tension over employment, land, etc.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes establishing a civic forum for the village in which not only local but also all international humanitarian actors (along with refugees and Lebanese townspeople) with a presence in this area can voice needs and resolve challenges.

UNREACHED PERSON AFFECTED BY CRISIS

A displacement-affected Congolese man who manoeuvred to avoid the UNHCR support and travelled without family or friends to find work in Nairobi.

Mahamadou

The under-served displaced person

MY ASPIRATIONS include wanting to have security and stability in my employment as this is what keeps me focused and makes me feel a sense of permanence here in Nairobi. I have Lingala-speaking friends here in Nairobi who tell me of the camp experience and I am glad I have not gone through it – I am determined to be fully self-reliant.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include patronising humanitarian assistance that gives me IDs, long waiting times, and forms that I don't understand. I want to feel like a Kenyan, so I get frustrated when people address me as a 'refugee' or have pity on me because of my past..

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes better communication about the value of basic humanitarian services, as well as a system that helps me feel a sense of belonging rather than one that makes me feel even more alone and discouraged. I don't want to have to live in a camp to get assistance – I don't see the value in that.

LONG-TIME REFUGEE AFFECTED BY CRISIS

A Palestinian refugee, born in a camp in northern Lebanon and seeking work.

Zahaar

The self-reliant refugee

MY ASPIRATIONS include wanting to grow my personal network and feel a sense of belonging, and being connected with job opportunities so that I can show that being refugee does not mean you are downtrodden or helpless.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include the discrimination and misunderstanding I feel when labelled as a "refugee," the desire for people to give me more credit, and the difficulty of being away from my family.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes a camp experience which provides a pathway to a better life, flexible programming that accommodates my needs, and a host country that better understands/responds to my needs.

RECENT REFUGEE AFFECTED BY CRISIS

Separated from her husband during migration out of Syria, Sifa now makes and sells jewellery in a camp to support her children.

Sifa

The system-reliant refugee

MY ASPIRATIONS include wanting to be fully self-sufficient through stable employment, to regain a sense of self-confidence, and to see my children fulfil their own dreams of getting out of this camp for a better work opportunity here or abroad.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include feeling stifled in the camp and being treated like I'm less than human. Since I was abused, I haven't felt safe alone in a long time. I am always thinking of my family and hoping one day we have the chance to reunite.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes having a camp atmosphere which is more cohesive and embracing (less rules-oriented). I would really like to understand where I can find opportunities to be more productive so that I can support my children to leave and can fund the (psychosocial) support I need.

LOCAL NGO RESPONDER

A Myanmar national who works as the Director of a faith-based NGO outside of Yangon

Babacar

The overburdened frontline worker

MY ASPIRATIONS include gathering local knowledge to help me report more accurately on what's going on in our project sites around the country. To that end, I'd like to foster more trust between locals and aid workers. Even though I'm from Myanmar, because I am an aid worker there are a lot of assumptions that get made about me and what I do.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include feeling undervalued as one of the smallest service providers in the 'foodchain' of aid money. I also get frustrated when I see how much of the aid sector is consumed by monocultural, monolinguistic ways of doing things.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes the need to strengthen the capacities of local NGOs before crisis occurs. We often get funding only when crisis hits, but there is so much proactive work that we and our local partners could be doing before that point.

MULTI-MANDATE INGO RESPONDER

Based in Nairobi, Director of the Somali response effort at a well-known NGO

George

The constrained leader

MY ASPIRATIONS include establishing strong partnerships with local organisations who I know our organisation can trust and rely on. I also want to build my own organisation's capacity to seek out and make appropriate use of local knowledge when needed.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include broken ties with local NGOs who have failed to maintain our standards of integrity and reliability. One of the things that keeps me up at night is constantly managing donor expectations and making sure that our staff are kept safe while delivering high-quality work for the donor.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes hiring local nationals at the country and regional levels in order to improve the quality of information we're able to provide the donor, and fostering more collaboration among other INGOs and local CBOs.

SINGLE-MANDATE (DUNANTIST) INGO RESPONDER

Formally trained, highly experienced physician currently providing frontline care in Jordan and Southern Syria

José

The risk taker on the ground

MY ASPIRATIONS include putting people above politics and making sure that everyone is provided the same standard of care. To that end, I want to build my own capacity for new skill sets, training local staff, and actively listening to local experts.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include maintaining my safety when working in some of the most high-risk and contested environments in the world. I also get frustrated when I see humanitarian actors which appear to be really self-serving and selective about to whom and how they provide services.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes wanting to have a structured way of collaborating with local medical professionals so we can better share our skills and knowledge.

PROACTIVE FUNDER

Over 20 years of experience in humanitarian work and currently oversees the Southeast Asian portfolio for a European donor agency

Magda

The progressive funder

MY ASPIRATIONS include allocating taxpayer money using common sense - i.e. I try to make allocations based on our bottom-line mission of improving and saving lives. If a project doesn't provide me with a clear vision of how it's going to help us achieve that, I can't justify spending our money there.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include having access to poor quality information (including old, imprecise, and/or 'uncleaned' data). It frustrates me to also hear of so many conversations and learnings across donors about the same topics (e.g. cahs transfers) and yet there's no way to streamline those conversations.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes seeing more consolidation of needs, of challenges, of learnings, etc. among NGOs. This would help solve our age-old problems around accurate, real-time reporting and general coordination.

PASSIVE/REACTIONARY FUNDER

A background in foreign policy, now working at a major European donor agency

Timothy

The proceduralist funder

MY ASPIRATIONS include meeting political demands and making sure that our taxpayers and our legislators are satisfied with the work we've been doing.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include unrealistic humanitarian commitments toward localising funding and activities. I'm not sure local organisations are able to fulfil the demands that are placed on us, and so we often find it hard to 'let go' and trust the implementers when we have so many case studies of that ending poorly for us and the people to whom we are accountable.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes better systems to vet local NGOs and ensure that we are depending on reliable, trustworthy, ethical organisations that uphold the same standards that we do.

FORWARD-LOOKING UN

Yemeni national who has been contracted to various UN agencies as a national staff member for the last 5 years

Aisha

The change agent

MY ASPIRATIONS include more agile responses that don't depend on rigid mandates and Western-specific principles. To that end, I'd like to see more decision-making power given to the local people. This is something I do in my own work for the UN but is not formally operationalised or recognised.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include constantly coming up against highly restrictive 'rules of the game' for this sector. Many organisations seem to make more decisions based on favouritism or cultural bias than they do on 'right fit'.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes creating a country taskforce that brings together local CBOs with UN, government, and INGOs. I would also like to see more local hires at UN agencies and INGOs, as they need to build their own capacity in working with and supporting people who have tacit local knowledge that can't be learned or replicated.

PROTECTIVE UN

Has spent over 10 years working within the UN system

Tobias

The defender of turf

MY ASPIRATIONS include debunking the myth that the UN holds all of the authority in the sector. In fact, I would argue that we take on a lot of risk so that other organisations don't have to.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include having a relatively limited perspective over the operations and flows of resources in the sector. I get frustrated when I see other people's standard of work being lower than mine (or ours here at the UN).

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes developing better mechanisms for sharing quality information and visibility over other areas of work that are related to or dependent on the success of mine.

INQUISITIVE KNOWLEDGE GENERATOR

Reporter and analyst, highly critical of the humanitarian sector and its ethical and moral principles

Jasmine

The critical thinker

MY ASPIRATIONS include discovering the root causes of recurring problems in the sector. I try to avoid being trend-obsessed and to follow stories which provoke, question, and interrogate long-held practices and beliefs.

MY FRUSTRATIONS include being characterised as pessimistic or out-of-touch. I believe that what I do is important, and in small ways I think my reporting and investigation is able to prompt conversation – and ultimately, catalyse the kind of change the sector so badly needs.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes finding ways for humanitarian actors to engage in the political sphere in ways that are productive and responsible. There needs to be more of a focus on trust-building and relationships – this is central to my work and should be central to the way humanitarians practice.

MAINSTREAM JOURNALIST

Based in New York City, journalist for major news outlet.

James

The cautious investigator

MY ASPIRATIONS include capturing the most inspiring stories possible by being bold with the types of stories I tell

MY FRUSTRATIONS include getting access above and beyond the areas where humanitarian organisations are permitted to work within. I have trouble keeping people engaged in stories about this sector – unless it's heroic or deeply tragic, there's not much that will keep readers interested.

THE CHANGE I'D LIKE TO SEE includes creating forums where journalists and others in the media can have frank conversations about what's going on, and for there to be a pathway for sharing that verified information with humanitarians.

Photo credit: ThinkPlace

Mapping user experiences

User experience maps allow us to walk in users' shoes by traveling with them as they interact with a service/organisation/system. Experience maps display not only a person's touchpoints with the system, but also their thoughts and feelings about that experience. This opens up a design space for us to consider how to re-imagine those touchpoints, and re-design them as the leverage points for change – rather than a whole of system, top-down re-design. By revealing the leverage points in the system, these experience maps also helped us to identify the key enablers, as well as key barriers which stand in the way of users achieving their objectives. From a creative perspective, these barriers and enablers become opportunity spaces for design.

The following pages display snapshots (abbreviated versions) of 11 experience maps – rich human stories – which were documented from exploratory research with system actors. They are presented in raw 'first-person' verbatim form, to give the reader the opportunity to empathise with and embed themselves in that user's thinking and actions. These stories are annotated through 'barriers' and 'enablers' which were posted up by participants of the co-design workshops.

A list of the experience maps on the following pages are:

EXPERIENCE MAP 1 A billion workshops, just because LOCAL NGO, SYRIA

EXPERIENCE MAP 2 Obsessed with their own bureaucracy SYRIAN ADVOCATE, TURKEY

EXPERIENCE MAP 3 Holding down the fort, without power UN NATIONAL, YEMEN

EXPERIENCE MAP 4 I am African like they are African REFUGEE, DRC

EXPERIENCE MAP 5 Any press is bad press REFUGEES, KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA

EXPERIENCE MAP 6 There's no room for us in life, or in death REFUGEE, GREECE

EXPERIENCE MAP 7 Divide and disempower HOST MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, LEBANON

EXPERIENCE MAP 8 Cash: cure or curse? PROGRESSIVE FUNDER

EXPERIENCE MAP 9 Contract compliance or saving lives? LOCAL NGO, MYANMAR

EXPERIENCE MAP 10 Not all law is good, obviously INGO FRONTLINE STAFF, IRAQ

EXPERIENCE MAP 11 Being called a liar in public LOCAL NGO, SOMALIA

EXPERIENCE MAP 12 If you don't kill yourself, you are killed already PALESTINIAN REFUGEE, UK

EXPERIENCE MAP 1

A billion workshops, just because LOCAL NGO, SYRIA

Stages
Along the journey

1	2	3
I AM DISCRIMINATED.	I WITNESS CORRUPTION.	I DISTRUST THE SYSTEM.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1	2	3
We see very, very shitty projects. They're the worst that you can imagine. Very shitty implementers, corrupt and as bad as you can imagine. There are two British implementing organisations, they have very bad reputations in Syria but still constantly receive donor funding and support. They rebrand and rebrand just so their name is not there because they have such a notorious reputation.	They pay themselves extortionate amounts of money for their directors which often have very little to no involvement. Like the director paying themselves from the Syria work that they had no involvement in, 30,000 pounds a month from one project. The non-Syrian staff there say to the Syrian staff: "it's business, this is why we work in Syria because there is a lot of money here. I know this is happening because I know somebody involved in the budget, somebody sees a document here or there.	I'm not sure whether they lie to their donors or what. The donor sees other reports. They don't care about anything else. It's all about numbers at the end of the day and anybody can manipulate that. I can say, "I've supported five local councils. I can tick this box on the plan or on the logframe and it's perfect" Donors say: "We need accountability, and that is why we can't support all the local organisations." Well it's fake accountability.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

1	2	3
✓ We are proud of the work we do	✓ We are actually present	✓ We are accountable to the people

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

1	2	3
✗ 'Rewarding' unfairness```	✗ Support-based relationship ✗ People make money from our suffering	✗ Individuals are corrupt but not punished ✗ "Accountability" seems open to manipulation

4

I FEEL UNDERVALUED.

For Syrian NGOs our accountability is with the Syrian people we work for. It's shifting slowly to the donor because this is the donor's mentality that we should be accountable to them, and not to the Syrian people.

In an international NGO or UN context, it's clear for them, their accountability is to the donor. They can produce as many leaflets on how the accountability should be with communities as they want, but at the end of the day, the input of the communities has zero impact on their decisions.

5

I BELIEVE IN BETTER.

In a Syrian organisation, we would do our best to allocate this money to fund extra activity or extra timeframe in terms of impact. But they are difficult about reallocating what is in the budget. However, they are not difficult about having a billion workshops at the end of the financial period, just because you just have to spend it. In fact, they would push for it.

We then have hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of things that nobody needs. It's the paperwork accountability not actual accountability they care about. They should care more about the actual impact we are having.

6

I IMAGINE ALTERNATIVES.

You also have some excellent projects, that just stop receiving funding, regardless of what the communities think, regardless of what impact you're having on the ground, regardless of what you report.

If only there was a way where community X will be able to feedback whether we're good or not. This whole monitoring and evaluation on how we're doing is basically just for preparing yet another report that very, very, very, very few people read. If this can actually be linked to whether organisations get more money or not, this will change and shift the accountability. Though I wonder how to do that?

- ✓ We do our best to spend our money in ways that actually benefit people
- ✓ Hope for the future?
- ✗ Expats are paid money for "nothing"
- ✗ Our expertise is ignored
- ✗ Our voices aren't heard
- ✗ Accountability is mostly 'paper-based', not about helping people

EXPERIENCE MAP 2

Obsessed with their own bureaucracy ADVOCATE, TURKEY

Stages
Along the journey

1	2	3
I REPRESENT OTHERS.	I MONITOR THE ISSUES.	I IDENTIFY THE ISSUES.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1	2	3
I work for an organisation which advises the the UN on strategy of the humanitarian work inside Syria. As far as the architecture that we are engaged with, the UN, that designed one, it is very complicated, very difficult to manoeuvre, very difficult to know where you need to put your weight to change things. And then you change things and we are not sure whether you had an actual impact or not, ultimately you would like to have an impact and improve the humanitarian response, but then the structure that we are dealing with is so complicated and so bureaucratic.	Their focus is basically on their bureaucracy, they are obsessed by bureaucracy, and our focus is, we need to get things done – and these are very two different views. For example, when we are engaging with them, their focus is like: "No, this should be done this way", and their focus is not what should be done or when to do it. They're very slow in a context where Syrian organisations are feeling there is an emergency, we're always dealing with an emergency. We have totally different priorities. Basically, the UN says, we're working in Syria, we need to be based in Syria, we need to work with the Syrian government. And here, you have a case where the Syrian government is the same government that is bombarding people, killing and besieging them.	You have the leadership of the humanitarian operation based in Damascus under the eyes of the regime, constantly threatened by being kicked out, and yet they're making the decisions on what to do inside Syria. They had some major f*ck ups last year. I'll give one case, they were preparing their humanitarian response plan on what to do in all of Syria. The regime took that report and said: "No, there's nothing such as a besieged area, take that out. There's no Syrian NGOs in Turkey, they're not licensed by Syrian authorities so they don't count, take them out. We don't acknowledge this thing that is called protection. The government protects people."

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

1	2	3
✓ Media coverage	✓ Syrian organisations achieve a lot with very little (resourceful) ✓ Changed structure	✓ Good representation of Syrian organisations ✓ Understand why donors work this way ✓ Successful reporting of information

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

1	2	3
✗ Lack of knowledge on donor rules; lack of relationships	✗ UN system resistant to change and high costs ✗ Tiresome – use a lot of energy on system rather than humanitarian work ✗ Funding controlled by self-serving actors – funds flow back to donor country	✗ The government is a belligerent party in a war AND still decide on humanitarian 'needs'? ✗ Different political goals and ways of working make for duplication and inefficiency

4
I FIGHT FOR CHANGE.

The regime took the document, altered it and told the humanitarian coordinator in Damascus: "This is the version you have to approve." So he did.

The UN is so bureaucratic and old fashioned that the leadership of the humanitarian operation is in Damascus regardless. This, for us is like: "What do you mean?" The leader of the humanitarian operation in this besieged area is under the control of the military leader that is besieging it, how does that make sense?

Since then, we have been pushing the point that this is not acceptable. As *The Guardian* has published re corruption in the UN's Damascus office, where the UN is pressured into employing relatives of Syrian government officials and the regime. We did some media coverage on that, which they were very pissed off about because they only care about their image.

- ✓ Fighting spirit
- ✗ Not an equal playing field
- ✗ UN is out of touch with reality and inflexible

5
I NAVIGATE.

For us, Syrian organisations, we don't have previous experience with this UN body, so when we are engaging with them, there are a lot of resources wasted on just trying to figure out what we need to do to get something done. It is a big mess, lots of resources and energy are wasted for very slow changes. People that work on these things will not be able to work on other things which are more urgent, more pressing.

The UN's priority is bureaucracy, actually, the only way they function is bureaucracy, while for us we want to get things done, like actual action for urgent needs on the ground. We shouldn't be fighting over the basics of what is the definition of protection. Is this area besieged? It is besieged, everybody sees that. You should be able to put in your humanitarian response plan that this area is besieged. You can't wait for the regime to tell you whether it is okay or not to do so.

- ✓ Commitment to try to help, despite the system
- ✓ Working with government is simpler than working with 1,000 groups
- ✗ No resources for Syrian NGO collaboration
- ✗ UN is an inter-government agency embedded in politics
- ✗ Mistrust and competition between agencies

6
I COMPETE.

In official operations, Syrians are little represented. In these bodies you see Syrians competing with the international NGOs on representation and voice.

Syrian organisations internally don't have the resources to actually coordinate and work together, to report back and forth. It takes people to do it and no resources are dedicated to that for us. While, for example, for the UN and international NGOs they have staff and budgets dedicated just for coordinating and facilitating these meetings. Us, we have to do it on top of our actual work, nobody sees us as peers or equal partners. We have to push for our own, we have to compete. The structure is not friendly to us. The structure is friendly to rules and procedures and if you have a big budget, you have a bigger say. If you have a smaller budget you don't have as much a say. But our objective at the end of the day are simple: we want aid to be going where it's needed.

- ✓ Funding from UN
- ✓ A seat at the table – possibility to be heard
- ✗ UN forced to compromise humanitarian principles in favor of state interests
- ✗ Delays and slow response to crisis because of bureaucracy
- ✗ Confusing multi-threaded architecture with unclear responsibilities

EXPERIENCE MAP 3

Holding down the fort, without power UN NATIONAL STAFF, YEMEN

Stages Along the journey	1 I SEE CHANGE.	2 I LEARN OUR ROLE.	3 I QUESTION OUR WAY.
User Experience Activities, thoughts, feelings	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) invaded Yemen in 2011 and took over a Northern state. They started to put rules in their area: no schools, no local market, etc. The Islamic ideology, the extremism one. People started to panic. I was there, there was no kind of coordination for transporting IDPs fleeing the area. That wasn't the mandate of the UN, if you want to flee you have to flee by yourself. We had ICRC, MSF, and IOM. They were the only ones who were in this state controlled by Al-Qaeda because their mandate is different.	When the people had started to flee, the UN agencies, USAID started to have meetings. I was one of those who planned those meetings. We asked 'what we can do to provide assistance here.' They tried to coordinate, but the crisis was already here. When the IDPs settled, the UN started to visit the schools (where they had been staying), collect data on how many we have, how many children under age five. Frankly speaking, that's the role of the UN. They don't do any interventions within the conflict.	The schools were a mess. There was no hygiene, no sanitation, nothing. The UN was not thinking about how people are feeling. We conducted assessments, and we identified the needs based on items we had at our storage. We didn't approach it on a human being level. The UN actually… created the division between the host community and IDPs. We had supplies from the refugees' program, and we went to a school that had only like 15 families. We designed a plan to distribute them. The local community came to the school, and said we couldn't distribute anything unless we gave them something.
Enablers What's enriching the experience?	✓ Thankfully there are still some Dunantists	✓ Some help/order still present ✓ IDP agency to seek a shelter solution to represent themselves	✓ Willingness of hos community to find a way of supporting IDP despite critical hostility
Disablers What's taking away from the experience?	✗ Chaos, panic, and lack of functioning services	✗ Feel like our coordination is ineffective ✗ Not informed about the situation on the ground ✗ Lack of understanding & no clear purpose outline for the UN.	✗ I feel like I am being implicated in making things worse and unintended consequences.

4
I SEE A MISSED CHANCE.

The UN agencies relied on the international NGOs, who were part of the cluster meetings for their work. We didn't ask for the local community or local NGOs to help us distribute things. We never thought of how to empower local NGOs. Later on, I worked with more than 15 local NGOs. If you ask them to write a contingency plan, they would ask me 'What's a contingency plan, why do you want me to do that, can you just give me a form?' They don't have the capacity, the training on how they deal with crisis or take over after.

I don't know if this is appropriate to say, but it seems like as a national or local NGO, you are made to need internationals all the time.

- ✓ Lack of context conflict analysis
- ✓ I am finding other ways on how I can help the affected.
- ✗ Misperception of what the capacity is

5
I TAKE ALL THE RISKS.

If you look at the conflict in 2015, the militia took over the whole country. The UN agencies and NGOs closed their offices, and evacuated their international staff. The national staff stayed there with absolutely no salary. We waited two months till international organisations organised something in Jordan and Djibouti.

They reached out to me to help deliver assistance from Djibouti through boats to Aden, to my city. I had to do all the logistics; to go to the port, to rent the trucks coming to the beach, taking all the stuff, trying to coordinate in the area that wasn't controlled by the militia. But the local people would ask "okay, we're going to secure for you the check points, but what are you going to get for our people?" You also have to listen to their demands.

- ✓ Local fast responders
- ✓ Empowered to do an individual project
- ✓ Willingness of National staff to stay engaged
- ✗ Field response is *the* response
- ✗ We are supporting local NGO's to be independent
- ✗ Lack of context/conflict analysis
- ✗ The community does not trust us/also the affected don't.

6
I HAVE NO SAY.

There's no way you can lie. Hospital managers would say to me, 'we don't have enough money to treat those kids.' And I said, 'you have my word. I will give you this money, get them to the surgery room.' We are the ones on the frontline. We are the ones giving people promises.

The national staff only have positions in the field, like officers, but in management they're not there. The reality is, there will be a grant from UNHCR or UNICEF, you see organisations writing a proposal from their limited experience in the field or from reports from the national staff, just to get the grant. Unfortunately, I didn't understand all this when I was there, but now I do. And I hate what I did, but it's kind of like the intentions were good. I keep saying to myself, the intentions were good...

- ✓ Able to work around the system to fund and support local responders
- ✓ He want to be accountable
- ✓ I am finding ways I can to help people who need it
- ✗ Frustration at poor quality of services and lack of dignity for IDPs
- ✗ We are overwhelmed with impossible demands in really difficult crisis contexts
- ✗ Fueling breakdown and pressure in trust trying to maintain trust locally but not trusted

EXPERIENCE MAP 4

I am African like they are African REFUGEE (DRC), NAIROBI

Stages
Along the journey

1
I DROP EVERYTHING.

2
I GO ALONE.

3
I DON'T STOP.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

I grew up in Uvira Village (DRC), where I used to work and sing in church. One year, we were on a mission in another part of the country – this was in 2011. The war broke out while we were there, but it didn't last long. We came back to Uivra after the war.

Our Pastor was involved in national politics. By bad luck, those from the maji maji side, they accused our church of eating the money that was brought into our area by the peace talks. They said we were lying to them. The war began again. We started running.

By bad luck, our pastor was caught. Myself, I ran and went back home. So, they started looking for everyone from the church. They killed many people and the maji maji went looking for those who had escaped the war. I went from my home in Uvira to another place called Swima. This is where I started making plans for my escape.

My brothers gave me money (50,000 CDF / $35 USD) and told me, "you must leave." I got a boat to Tanzania and that is how I left. I went alone, and now I don't know where my parents or brothers or sisters are or if they're alive.

In Kigoma [coastal town, Tanzania], no one asked me for an ID. I saw a few people on the coast who allowed me to work for a little while at a salon. I can do hair. But at the time, Tanzania was not really taking refugees.

I started thinking of going elsewhere. I had heard from people that if you come to Kenya from Congo, you normally come on foot and board a bus from Kitale to Nairobi to find work. Since I was coming from the Southern direction [Tanzania], I had to figure something else out. I earned enough money as a hair stylist to get a bus from Kigoma to Kenya. It took so long to get there and I found it hard to sleep on the bus.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Hope: Sense of inclusion
- ✓ Mobility, money, family
- ✓ Family is source of support
- ✓ Connection and opportunity. Determination and mobility

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Lack of trust
- ✗ Confusion, no good options. Forced choices
- ✗ Fear of family
- ✗ No preparations. Run first, plan later
- ✗ Going to the unknown. Fear of family
- ✗ Confusion, uncertainty
- ✗ Instability from being on the move

4
I AM CALLED A REFUGEE.

Most of the refugees start their life from Kakuma camp [Northwestern Kenya], I learned, so when I got to Nairobi I went to UNHCR and then they said I need to go to Kakuma. It's the law that all my files be kept there since I am a refugee. That's what they were calling me and I guess I learned it to be part of my identity.

When I arrived in Kakuma, I still remember we went through the reception centre of the UN compound, which is the first and best [in terms of amenities] building on the grounds. There's only one road into the camp, but all of the aid workers live in compounds with air conditioning and house girls [cleaners]. The refugee houses are lined up in rows, and we saw lots of people hanging out and playing in the 'streets' – more like little dirt lanes.

- ✓ Camps are not too bad on first arrival… it's well run
- ✓ Feeling protected despite difficulties
- ✗ Forced displacement
- ✗ A new identity taking over me
- ✗ Heartache, loneliness, lack of opportunity

5
I WANT TO MOVE ON.

When we arrived at the reception center, we were given a tent and were told us exactly where the space we were given was where we would mount our tent. They told us, later, when you get iron sheets you can build your own house. That was the first thing.

I was glad we were getting support by being in the camp, but in my opinion, the food we were getting would not satisfy a human being. It could never take you an entire month. It was provided in very small portions. You can't survive on a 5kg ration per month. But that was it, and those are some of the things that made me want to move out.

.

- ✓ Material Assistance
- ✓ African Identity
- ✗ Saw only the negative side of being a refugee. Lack of understanding
- ✗ Inequality: people helping are better off.
- ✗ Lack of choice: My needs are in short supply
- ✗ Lack of easily comprehensive avenues to work; skills not used

6
I LOOK ELSEWHERE.

By law, if your refugee [caseload] was registered in the camp, then all your files are there. Being in Nairobi was therefore of no use to me beyond just the money and meeting new friends. If something were to happen to me, then I'd have to be where my files are.

In Nairobi, I was a little overwhelmed at first. I was living in a rough part of town. I didn't want to be found out as a refugee, because I knew the police would ask for my ID and I never carried it. Work in Nairobi, it was slow. It wasn't reliable. I was discouraged pretty fast. After all that torture of my mind, I just decided to stay at the camp so that I could focus on other things that would bring food to my table. I am frustrated Kakuma, but it is where I fit for now. I will go back to Nairobi one day when I feel ready.

- ✓ Stability is the new requirement for long-term planning
- ✓ Being in a peaceful country
- ✗ Tied to camp bureaucracy. Permission/Authority limit mobility
- ✗ Systems both legal or de facto legal hamper mobility
- ✗ Long-term solutions hampered by short-term problems
- ✗ His potential hits a ceiling

EXPERIENCE MAP 5

Any press is bad press REFUGEES, KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA

Stages
Along the journey

1 WE WANT TO BE HEARD.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

A few of us here in Kakuma Camp come from places in life where we enjoyed telling stories. Some of us used to sing in church, write for local newspapers, manage community events, and more back in our respective home villages. Most of us have advanced university degrees, so we felt like it was a waste to be doing nothing.

After living in Kakuma for about a year, we started learning how the aid workers became a voice for us – even if we didn't want them to. We started talking about starting a group that would speak out about life in the camp. We wanted to do something along the lines of radio or short plays that we could do in the camp – just some way to feel like we had a space to tell our truth.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ I have a strong sense of who we are and who I am
- ✓ We gathered as a community. Everyone wants to be a part

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- X Our voices voice are not heard and our expertise ignored
- X Our work is sometimes belittled

2 WE GAINED MOMENTUM.

Our idea grew into a movement for building solidarity among all of us in the camp and we started to focus on information, specifically. The way we saw it, information is a form of power. The aid workers have their reports and their information, which is almost never translated into the languages we speak.

We thought, why don't we reject that and use their own weapons against them? That was the birth of Kanere (for "Kakuma News Reflector"), a completely refugee-run free press (although I often hear our work referred to as a "project" or "experiment") with always honest and sometimes difficult subject matter that originates right here in the camp.

Enablers

- ✓ Motivated to want to tell their truth and do something
- ✓ Their ability to come together as a group
- ✓ Empowering ourselves and acting on our own agency

Disablers

- X Aid workers aren't using us or including us in their work
- X Closed-minded about good ideas from UNHCR

3 WE DON'T HOLD BACK.

A US Fulbright scholar noticed what we were doing. She began asking us questions and encouraged us to collaborate and give ourselves a web platform for the press. Our very first issue was published on December 22, 2008.

One of the articles in our first issue was about water. We didn't hold back anything, "Community leaders have raised many issues concerning water at monthly meetings with UNHCR and NGO staff, but nobody seems to heed their concerns by giving a proper solution…"

We decided on a mission statement, "Kanere: to counter the monopoly on information enjoyed by humanitarian organisations that largely control access to and information about refugee camps."

Enablers

- ✓ We feel empowered and validated by our community (speak local language)
- ✓ Self-belief
- ✓ Daily problems and solutions are now being surfaced.

Disablers

- X Taking a position of anti-system

4
WE ARE A THREAT.

Almost immediately after we started publishing, humanitarian agencies started calling us. UNHCR, specifically, called us in to a few meetings which were mainly focused on confidentiality, protection of identities, and other ethical standards of reporting that they said we weren't following. Once we knew we had something viable and stimulating to readers, we submitted a whole host of documents to become a community-based organisation (CBO) in early 2009.

Our registration, unfortunately, got halted by the local government officials because UNHCR failed to provide a letter of support for us as a CBO. We weren't deterred, though, and were starting to gain a lot of recognition internationally. It was an exciting time.

5
WE SEEK ADVICE.

Our relationship with UNHCR started to grow sour as we started to hear some things in the camp about us 'jeopardising' people's livelihoods and complicating the organisation's work in the camp.

A couple of the guys on our team were introduced to a human rights lawyer who advised us around 'free press', ensuring us that we were operating completely legally. He invited a few of the humanitarian agencies who operated within the camp to a meeting where they finally agreed to support our registration as a CBO. But then it all went to sh*t.

We started fearing for our lives in 2009 when our editor was assaulted and his house burned to the ground and he wrote about it in Kanere…

6
WE MARCH ON.

We tried to hold our ground. We pled on our website for the UNHCR to actively address the claims being made about Kanere since these "false beliefs" (as we referred to them in our article) were creating insecurity and instability for refugees in the camp.

Over the last few years, our reporting has been intermittent as funding has been very hard to come by and the support for us has slowly and surely waned among the organisations who are most present in the camp. We won't be deterred and we like to think that our story has inspired others elsewhere. Our latest post says this succinctly, "Every time a new edition of Kanere is out, it's an anticipation for the voiceless camp resident. This is the thing we do…provide uncensored stories to counter humanitarian propaganda..."

- ✓ Even without money or help we still manage
- ✓ Growing international support
- ✓ Support from expert 3rd party to resolve differences within the UN
- ✓ Access to expertise
- ✓ Through external validation, we were able to keep working; recognition by humanitarian agencies
- ✓ UNHCR helped us understand the sensitivity of work – which helped to keep us safer
- ✓ We have a deep conversation about the necessity of our work

- X UNHCR's fear of losing control
- X UN motives = not accountable to refugees
- X Mistreatment of us meant heavy burden to prove otherwise
- X We've lost some of our original motivation and energy
- X No rewards for volunteerism
- X Lack of funding

EXPERIENCE MAP 6

There's no room for us in life, or in death REFUGEE, GREECE

Stages
Along the journey

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1 I ARRIVE.

After I reached Lesvos by boat in early 2015, we had funerals for those who died while seeking asylum. Every day.

Local Greek Orthodox communities donated sections of their cemeteries for Islamic burial but these soon became full. At one point, by the end of 2015, the Mayor of Lesvos said there was "no more room" in the cemeteries, and they had to keep our bodies at the morgue until we found a solution.

We needed to wrap them in their white shroud, to make sure those who are buried are facing south-east towards Mecca.

2 I FIND SOLIDARITY.

After the cemeteries became full, the municipality allocated some of its own land for a new Islamic burial ground.

Muslim volunteers came to the island to assist with funeral rituals for the religious community amongst asylum seekers in Lesvos. An Egyptian man living in Greece told me that he came to Lesvos to assist with funerals - he wanted us to find dignity. Another British man who fundraised in his local community to travel to Lesvos and perform Islamic funeral rituals on the island also said he felt it was his religious duty, but he never could have imagined what he would face here.

3 I AM EXCLUDED.

After leaving Lesvos for Athens to attempt to travel onwards into Europe, I lost a member of my own family.

In Athens, my family and I faced unthinkable obstacles in our attempt to give my niece a proper Muslim burial. Although Athens has a de facto Muslim population, it has no authorised mosque or Islamic cemetery, only informal prayer spaces. The Synod of the Greek Orthodox church recently agreed to the creation of a two-hectare Muslim cemetery in Athens, in an area called Schisto.

We tried to arrange burial here, only to be told we did not have the correct paperwork accompanying the release of my niece's body.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Solidarity despite different religions
- ✓ Peers who are in the same situation
- ✓ Short crossing lower risk
- ✓ Kindness of local community
- ✓ Access to knowledge through local networks
- ✓ Independent Muslim volunteers

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Confusion, new language
- ✗ Lack of understanding from the host community
- ✗ Lack of clear communication
- ✗ Emotional impact of death
- ✗ Lack of understanding from the Greek NGO's

4
I FEEL VALUED.

Our only option was to take her north to the region of the Greek Muslim minority in Western Thrace, where there is a mosque and Muslim cemetery, or else attempt to return her body to Syria. Both options are expensive and out of our reach.

A small faith-based organisation heard about our situation and they arranged and accompanied us on the long drive with her body to the Muslim cemetery in Kamutini, 800km away. They also assisted with the bureaucratic costs that accompany death here in Greece.

It took us days to be able to bury my niece, which was difficult to bear, considering our custom is to bury our loved ones as soon as possible. It touched me to share such an intense moment of grief with those of another faith, who afforded us great compassion in our time of need. No other organisation provided support to us at this time.

- ✓ To be heard/to have someone speak for me
- ✓ We have empathy
- ✗ Unidentified treatment
- ✗ Strict religious doctrines from the Muslim community

5
I ADVOCATE.

The organisation told me they want to undertake advocacy for our situation. After their experience with my family, they feel compelled to highlight the injustice we have had to bear.

I found out that this treatment of those who die at borders is not limited to Greece. Most governments across Europe do not even bother to count our deaths.

People talk of human rights in Europe, but where is our right to dignity and to freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, where is the respect for our right to family life and to the physical and moral integrity of those left behind.

- ✓ Regulations to set up cemetery
- ✓ Inter-race Solidarity
- ✗ Lack of Muslim population and experience

6
I WORK AROUND.

A group of refugees I know living informally in Athens decided that we needed to consider alternatives. We pooled our money and bought farm land, where we have allocated a section to be used as a cemetery for people on the move like us to bury their loved ones according to our religious customs. We are waiting to receive a child who died recently on one of the islands. We did not obtain any kind of official consent to go ahead with our plan, but we will deal with it as it happens.

My personal experience has shown me the need for stronger measures to address the rights and the treatment of those asylum seekers who die on the move, and of their relatives and loved ones, not only within the EU, but worldwide.

- ✓ Pooled money to solve problem
- ✓ People of faith in host communities
- ✓ Recognize need for global initiative
- ✗ Municipality not providing land
- ✗ Double standards
- ✗ Gender specifics on burial rituals e.g. washing female bodies in preparation for burial.
- ✗ Limited standards of humanitarian agencies

EXPERIENCE MAP 7

Divide and disempower HOST MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, LEBANON

Stages
Along the journey

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1 I AM EXCLUDED.

In my municipality in northern Lebanon, we have 6,500 Lebanese in this village and then 3,000 Syrians. There are four local NGOs working in the village, and we don't know anything about their work because these NGOs don't pass by the municipality at all. We are unaware of who is entering, what money is entering, what these NGOs are doing exactly. I wish they would liaise with me more in future, there is no communication at all, yet I would like to cooperate with them.

These local, Lebanese NGOs are all in it for their 'own profit' they might say they are non-profit organisations, but, they are in fact profit organisations!

2 I WISH THEY'D ASK.

These NGOS bring foreigners to work with them and they don't mobilise people from our own community to help the Syrians with their projects. They should involve the Lebanese community that is already living here and have them work with them. This is something that increases the hatred and conflict between the Lebanese and Syrians.

The decisions on what they want the projects to do comes from the outside without doing any needs assessments with the community. Sometimes they think that something is a need, when it's not actually a need.

3 I WISH THEY'D COUNT.

Most of the projects that come to us are very low budget. How the money is spent is not organised, so in the end they end up not finishing the project that was meant to be. Sometimes we have to actually contribute from our own municipality funds to finish their projects, and sometimes the project just stops because we don't have the money.

There is no budget transparency, neither do the reports ever reflect the work that is actually done.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Willingness to co-operate
- ✓ There are plenty of ideas in the community
- ✓ Contributing no rent to local economy
- ✓ Offer to co-finance project

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Communication is non existent, boring municipality
- ✗ Complaints from constituents
- ✗ Information is not shared we are left in the dark
- ✗ Un-transparent and opaque
- ✗ Lack of long-term participatory planning
- ✗ Mistakes are repeated
- ✗ Disempowering lack of dialogue on priorities

4

I WISH THEY'D CARE.

When the donors give these NGOs money there is no strategy, there is no plan for productivity, there is no plan for continuity, there is no plan for maintaining anything, they are not creating employment, they are not empowering people, actually they are disempowering people, they are disabling people and are creating more unemployment.

The NGOs come, do their project, and they just apply it, they don't mobilise the community. Now, the community are disabled. They don't involve them, instead they are making them incapable of doing stuff. It forces them to just wait for the funds, wait for the money and think, well there are people coming to do this stuff for us and we don't need to do anything, we are not empowered, we do not have ambition, since we have people to do these things for us.

- ✓ Donated land for the project
- ✗ Lack of long-term capacity building
- ✗ Gaps between international actors and actors on the ground

5

I WISH THEY'D THINK.

What about these ATM cards given to the Syrian refugees. This is humiliating because they give them 300 000 lira, and actually on 300 000 lira you cannot survive in Lebanon for one week, and it's supposed to be for one month. But still people are fighting for this money.

This money could be used to empower people, instead of this, the money is getting wasted. These ATM cards affect their dignity, it disables them, where they don't feel like they are doing something to earn it. And also, it creates more division, because now the Lebanese community is fighting for this card!

People feel the Syrians are taking the employment, they are taking the services – the water and electricity is not enough – they are taking everything, and the Lebanese are left with nothing.

- ✓ Visions for use of cash assistance
- ✗ Listening deficit
- ✗ Creating divisions within communities

6

I DON'T SEE CHANGE.

Not too long ago, there was a huge incident where there were knives and lots of people got hurt, it was really a huge conflict in the village because of this divide.

I don't even see any change in the situation for the 3,000 Syrians in my village. There is nothing concrete, it's not something you can see, touch or feel. It has just been these NGOs working on their little projects. Everything is still the same for the people. It's not enough to do focus groups, it's not enough to bring the women teach them about the rights of the child, and you are not actually equipping them with anything useful. You are giving them knowledge, but nothing to actually survive.

But there are other villages who refuse to accept Syrians to live with them, but we accepted them because we know the people need help, so of course we will offer them what we have and we will not refuse to welcome them.

- ✓ Sense of pride
- ✓ Willingness to accept and assist Syrians
- ✓ Lobbying for our ideas
- ✗ No Syrian perspective
- ✗ Insufficient resource frustrations
- ✗ Dwelling so much on the past problems impedes visions for the future

EXPERIENCE MAP 8

Cash: cure or curse? PROGRESSIVE FUNDER

Stages
Along the journey

1	2	3
I AM SO PERPLEXED.	I SEE ALTERNATIVES.	I QUESTION OUR ROLE.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1	2	3
We're fed up of doing the same thing again and again. Why year after year do we keep on putting huge amounts of money into a system that is not fit for purpose? Last year was a big year for humanitarian reform, with the World Humanitarian Summit and the Grand Bargain and all that, then 2017 should really be putting it all into practice. That's how I see it. I have heard of other donors who have been experimenting with cash. They say they it is the antidote to us trying and trying and failing and failing with all this other stuff.	In countries where the bank system is fine, where food is accessible everywhere, places like this have all the ingredients for refugees to actually be given cash and for them to decide how to use their money, it's very simple. If you ask refugees if they want vouchers or cash, they say: "cash, because I don't want to have to travel five kilometres away just to get my food from a specially WFP designated shop and travel all the way back with it when I can go walk five minutes down the road and get food there, which is half the price and still the same quality, so please just give me cash so I can decide how I want to support my family."	But then as a donor, how do we best support this? Do we just continue to give our taxpayer money to the UN agencies to do this cash thing? Other donors say this is inefficient. If you look at the bigger cash actors in the humanitarian space, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, etc, they are all processing independent cash streams into one card for a household. That's four agencies all doing it, all with their overheads, their offices, their staff costs, their vehicles – and the question is why not just one of them? Why not streamline? Why does there need to be duplication in the system?

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

1	2	3
✓ Cash distribution expands choice	✓ Vouchers remove human agency and individuality	✓ One focal point for cash

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

1	2	3
✗ Perverse incentives unclear process of accountability	✗ Lack of good research/data ✗ Feeling frustrated at the systemic/institutional blockages in the UN	✗ No personal incentive to change or adapt

4

I WITNESS OTHERS.

I guess these questions being raised by other donors are important ones. There are very few donors who are willing to challenge the UN, and for those who are trying to reform and challenge the UN structures, they really struggle. The UN has an army to defend its turf and it is very good at beating donors and NGOs into submission – for those of us who step out of line – there are consequences. I've seen this happen with other donors.

Other donors ask questions, the UN reaction to them is: "but why are you asking for more transparency, why do you want to have all this data?" These other donors have decided to challenge the UN anyway to find a more efficient way to do cash. Apparently, this new governance structure is more inclusive of civil society and beneficiaries as well. I like the sound of that.

- ✓ New technology has created new opportunities
- ✗ Cash is seen as a panacea – but only works in certain contexts!

5

I INVESTIGATE THE TRUTH.

For some reason, the UN rarely shows its donors how much it costs to run their cash transfer program, they refuse to show the transparency of their budgets. All they say is that they are able to deliver 91/100 cents to the beneficiary, but then, when you look at the budget, the numbers don't add up that way.

One thing we hear the UN always say is: we want to serve as many people as possible in the best way possible, to make sure the beneficiaries are right at the centre. But their actions are louder than their words, we can see with this cash case that in actual fact the beneficiaries are not at the centre, it's the sector, it's the agencies' self-interest at the centre.

I am shocked at how so-called humanitarian agencies are working to stop reform from taking place.

- ✗ There should be allowance to deviate from plans based on reality
- ✗ Lack of transparency

6

I TRY TO REMAIN TRUE.

There's political backlash towards those donors who challenge the system. It makes me angry that those who are brave enough to do something different get punished and sidelined.

I can see that the current system is so out of date. We are using emergency response approaches for protracted conflicts, and it's outrageous. There is a lot of money going to the Syria crisis, which is in its 7th year, but there is going to be a point where this money will stop. My worry is that as donors, we will get challenged: "Why did you not do more to force the UN agencies to work better, cut out the hypocrisy, bureaucracy, the lack of transparency, bring in greater accountability, and show that our taxpayer money is going to support as many people affected by the crisis as possible, why did you not do that?" This is what I am worried about in the long term.

- ✓ Access to others doing similar work
- ✗ I fear repercussions for speaking out about problems
- ✗ Frustrations at lack of space and opportunity to innovate in any effective way

EXPERIENCE MAP 9

Contract compliance or saving lives? LOCAL NGO, MYANMAR

Stages Along the journey	1 I AM ASSESSED.	2 I PROPOSE.	3 I ROLL OUT.
User Experience Activities, thoughts, feelings	We heard about the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund in 2014. We learnt it focuses on locals to apply, we saw a very good opportunity for us, so we decided to apply. We had to go through a technical proficiency assessment by UN OCHA, it was quite a tough one. They investigated a complete A to Z of the organisation, all kinds of financial management standards we had to meet just to be eligible to apply. As we had prepared, we passed all the due diligence requirements.	They gave us one month to write the proposal, which was enough time. The first proposal had to be submitted by email, the second proposal had to be submitted through an online portal. We have good internet connection, so luckily it was not a problem for us. Within one week, they processed our proposal and came back to us with some comments. Based on these, we updated the proposal to respond to their comments. And then, after one month, we had agreed with them and had our proposal approved. It was a very quick process.	We signed the contract and began to rollout the program. We applied to work with certain conditions, but in reality, there are situations that change in an emergency response. In our proposal, we said we would provide immediate food support in an urgent emergency. This is our food assistance program, part of the donor's rapid response mechanism. But in an urgent emergency, people have to move constantly to avoid the conflict. So then, transportation becomes an issue to move IDPs from areas of imminent threat. But there is no funding mechanism to support this.
Enablers What's enriching the experience?	✓ Relatively simple format and reasonable response ✓ Recognition of professionalism	✓ System worked well to be accessed ✓ Access to technology	✓ Balance between what donors are imposing vs. what local knowledge says ✓ Electronic and remote process that is flexible and responsive
Disablers What's taking away from the experience?	✗ Technical proficiency and ICT access/literacy ✗ Poor change requests processed resulting in negative outcomes for beneficiaries	✗ One moth is perceived as quick – low standards!	✗ Lack of experience of NGO in factoring in a buffer for changing situation on the ground

4

I REQUEST.

I guess these questions being raised by other donors are important ones. There are very few donors who are willing to challenge the UN, and for those who are trying to reform and challenge the UN structures, they really struggle. The UN has an army to defend its turf and it is very good at beating donors and NGOs into submission – for those of us who step out of line – there are consequences. I've seen this happen with other donors.

Other donors ask questions, the UN reaction to them is: "but why are you asking for more transparency, why do you want to have all this data?" These other donors have decided to challenge the UN anyway to find a more efficient way to do cash. Apparently, this new governance structure is more inclusive of civil society and beneficiaries as well. I like the sound of that.

- ✗ Poor response to change request resulting in negative outcomes for beneficiaries.

5

I ADAPT.

We couldn't leave people to get into danger. We ended up moving the IDPs to a safer place anyhow, but if we were to wait for a decision, people would be in real trouble.

Finally, after two months, when we heard back, it was a 'no' you are not allowed to move money from the food aid and you will have to cover transport from other means. Us guys, we are with the IDPs where they are in the danger zone so we cannot ignore it.

- ✓ Good responsiveness to actual needs
- ✓ Increase flexibility in re-allocation process
- ✗ Bureaucracy
- ✗ Donor remoteness
- ✗ Local NGO presuming that IDPs will move on their own
- ✗ Transparency – with 2 month delay?

6

I AM RESTRICTED.

When we request a change, that causes a change at different level of their administration. I think that's why they are not flexible with us.

We are not asking to change the whole programme – we are not going to deviate from 80% of it. But for the remaining 20%, we want flexibility to shift to areas where there is need. We are not asking for 100% of control of the budget, but to prioritise.

What is more important? Compliance to the contract or saving people's lives?

- ✓ Empathy
- ✓ Proximity
- ✗ Perhaps donor having concerns in moving IDP's
- ✗ Dependence on donor

EXPERIENCE MAP 10

Not all law is good, obviously INGO FRONTLINE STAFF

Stages
Along the journey

1	2	3
I AM DISILLUSIONED.	I SEE OUR HYPOCRISY.	I TAKE OTHER PATHS.

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

There is a lot of 'capacity' to 'capacity-build' others, whether it's the state or, local NGOS, and that comes with a lot of consultants, a lot of smart thinking, (sometimes, not always). But, when it actually comes to getting shit done? I don't see that, really, in the field very much.

For me, the biggest, most condescending 'white man savior mode' of humanitarian action is the one that thinks it can build capacity of the other by coming from somewhere that is completely disconnected from that reality.

When we are talking about resilience building and the aspects that are less 'dependency', I mean, who are we talking about at the end of the day?

We don't have donors wanting to build the resilience of the Taliban health system, and that's a very effective health mechanism that exists in areas under the control of the Taliban, or al-Shabab in Somalia. There is no question or even desire to reduce dependency or build resilience or tackle issues in those areas because it is politically not aligning with what drives western humanitarianism.

We are literally the only naive ones to think that is possible just because we adhere to humanitarian principles, as if those principles whitewash all other compromises that we make politically, they determine resources that we have, the human resources that we use.

When it's a white, middle class, male, Frenchman head of an NGO receiving a grant from OFDA to implement a program in, pick a country, and then claiming principles of independence, neutrality and impartiality, as a way to somehow whitewash all those other political choices and compromises.

The aid sector today is rejected from many places that we need to work in. We have to find a way to divorce ourselves and find a true impartiality. For my organisation, this entails the rejection of funding from major donors. We don't take any money from ECHO, DFID, US, actually no European governments today, no US. We are lucky in that sense, we have a huge fundraising capacity that other NGOs have as well – but by the way, they just don't use it.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Huge fundraising capacity utilised, especially by private donations

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Smart thinking does not translate to effective action
- ✗ Western humanitarianism only addresses issues in politically aligned regions
- ✗ Humanitarian action disconnected from realities
- ✗ White saviour mentality
- ✗ Perverse political incentives of humanitarian sector
- ✗ Humanitarian principle 'white washing' to cover up political choices and compromises
- ✗ Aid is rejected in many places because of politics
- ✗ Hampered partiality

4

I FIND WORK AROUNDS.

In Syria today, for us, our entire emergency response is based on a relationship with networks of local doctors and medical actors inside Syria. We are able to do that because we don't have money from governments that are telling us that we can or can't work with certain groups, or we have to sign a service agreement with a local NGO that then has to report to us with their receipts if they buy a generator in an area under siege, or all of this crap. We can make our own decisions based on our own resources and support the priorities of other actors that align with us in terms of medical action.

I have been involved in programs where the aid system is allowing itself to be limited by what is considered legal. This is particularly important in the global war on terror environment and counterterrorism. Where 'treating terrorists', is considered illegal in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Iraq, and it is illegal in many ways.

- ✓ Adaptable to conditions on ground
- ✓ Attempting to form new alliances with civil society mechanisms and grassroots actors based on trust
- ✗ Laws that limit humanitarian action
- ✗ Politics and legislation stemming from global war on terror environment

5

I BREAK THE LAW.

Not all law is good, obviously. That entails breaking the law in many instances.

There are many instances where we have set up clinics that have been illegal, underground clinics in Bahrain to provide treatment to torture survivors that are considered 'illegal' clinics by the state, whereas the other actors… well actually in Bahrain there were no other humanitarian actors because there was 'no humanitarian crisis' since [Bahrain] is a US ally.

There are other examples where we have gone against, we have been the only ones willing to… and I am not saying this because we are so great… it's because we have the flexibility to do so and we are not bound by the same obligations and reporting and limitations that others face. Other actors can't do that.

- ✓ Flexibility around adherence to law which conflicts with humanitarian principles
- ✓ Adherence to medical ethical principles over law which is influenced by politics
- ✗ Law that conflicts with duty of care and professional ethics
- ✗ Formal aid system abiding by laws created by atrocity perpetrators

6

I HEAR EXCUSES.

That is where we will face problems again, we can't be all about doing things like WHO is today in Iraq, entirely embedded into the state.

Negotiating with the Russians requires us not to be seen as agents of western imperialism, which requires us to have independent funding, which requires us to have an organisation that is an international movement not a western movement, it requires us to not have a track record of serving the state building interests of western donors, it requires greater adaptability from us as humanitarian actors, greater capacity and ability to navigate what is possible. Not in a condescending way, we will build your capacity kind of way which is the current approach of the humanitarian sector, but in a mutual solidarity kind of way of working together with other actors to do things, to get things done, to save lives, and to alleviate suffering.

- ✓ Flexibility and adaptability to work around barriers that conflict with fundamental principles
- ✗ Inability of aid sector to work on multiple cross frontlines
- ✗ Formal aid sector serves dominant political powers and state building interests of western donors
- ✗ Formal aid sector unable to form new alliances or relationships

EXPERIENCE MAP 11

Being called a liar in public LOCAL NGO, SOMALIA

Stages
Along the journey

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1
I AM DISILLUSIONED.

I guess I had a pretty idealistic notion about humanitarian work when I was starting to look for work back in Nairobi [after being educated abroad]. I first started off with WFP, surprisingly, for about six months. I was developing reports, which was fine at the time because I didn't know any different.

I was told to write this one report as about food security and disaster prevention in Somalia, but I kept asking [my superior] who the audience for the report was. I got discouraged over and over again by [my superior], because he never seemed to hold any of the answers I was looking for.

It always seemed like a huge fight for them to understand the use of translating the materials we produced and having them trickle down to the community level. So that was my first experience with the whole international system in Somalia and I realised quickly how Nairobi-centric everything was…how everything was intended only for the elite UN groups and the INGOs.

2
I SEE OUR HYPOCRISY.

It was a few years after that when I started working for [local NGO] and decided I had found the kind of 'idealistic' but still practical work that I had always wanted to do.

The NGO I now work for had humble beginnings. It was founded in the home of a Somali-American back in the 1990s, a time when Somalis were barely even allowed to be present at meetings in Nairobi.

At the time, there was a lot of name-calling and outright discrimination against Somali organisations. Perhaps because we weren't actually living in Somalia at the time and there were intense security issues in the country at the time, we were called liars, corrupt people, etc.

It was a difficult time, especially because we had to operate out of Nairobi (where most of the Somali response effort is remotely managed) and in the Kenyan context we often felt misunderstood and, frankly, unwanted.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ Able to question and articulate my frustrations
- ✓ Good response to actual needs
- ✓ Diaspora

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Discrimination against local employees
- ✗ In competence of her superior
- ✗ Negative perception of Somali NGO

3

I PERSIST.

Our organisation was gaining traction back in the late 1990s because we we saw a gap in the aid 'landscape.' We saw a need for more African voices, more African leadership, and a better representation of local needs.

We started hiring only Africans to work in our office and we started building a vast professional network with other like-minded organisations. We really wanted to change the narrative of what it meant to be a Somali aid worker. I guess I was already proud of our success as an organisation but it was about that time that I was becoming more and more aware of not only of my own identity as a 'black' aid worker but also the position of our organisation as having the potential to overcome that stereotype and to reassert the authority of local knowledge and local perspectives. It was a tough sell at the time, but we persisted.

- ✓ Strong self-belief (she cannot be truly undermined)
- ✓ So many people in Nairobi blame colonialism for all contemporary problems
- ✗ "Old boys club"
- ✗ Operating out of Nairobi
- ✗ Onus is on local NGOs to prove themselves honest, because monitoring is so difficult

4

I AM UNDERMINED.

There was this one time when I had to go to a conference in Nairobi. It was in one of the nicer West Nairobi 'estates' and I remember walking in to a room full of middle-aged European men. There were a couple women, but virtually no Africans from what I can remember. One of the Country Directors in the room was French. I never saw anyone raise an eyebrow at him when he spoke, even though his English was honestly terrible.

When a man from our team stood up, I remember literally watching people roll their eyes or lose attention. This man was educated in the UK and came back to East Africa to work with us as a project manager. His English was excellent, though he had a thick accent. It was so clear the way people responded to him speaking. Just a blatant disrespect for him.

- ✓ Their professionalism increased
- ✓ High levels of corruption are experienced in Somalia
- ✗ Negative perception of locals
- ✗ Local NGO remains dependent on a system they have no control over

5

I WORK HARDER.

You have a series of experiences like that and that's about when I realized – I make a similar point as a white man, and I get eyes rolled at me. It happens all the time when you actually look for it. This is racism. The humanitarian system is not prepared to talk about racism, about neo-colonialism, about the kind of disempowerment we feel everyday here at our organisation.

Our biggest problem is not even about resources, and it's not about money. It's about how we can't talk about our baggage. We all have it when we come to Kenya and try to work in this space.
People always think I'm exaggerating, but all of this is real because we face it everyday here in this office. We spend so much of our time trying to prove ourselves all the time.

- ✓ Local NGOs depend on us
- ✓ Advocacy needed to go beyond perceptions and demonstrate with evidence
- ✗ Strong self confidence and not being undermined

EXPERIENCE MAP 12

If you don't kill yourself, you are killed already

PALESTINIAN REFUGEE, UK

Stages
Along the journey

User Experience
Activities, thoughts, feelings

1

I DEFINE MY IDENTITY.

Identity, it's the main problem because I was born as a refugee. Even though I was born in this place [Yarmouk, Syria], I know this place exactly like others do, but they call you a Palestinian refugee, you are not a citizen. So, you are born without a home, or you are born with some problem with your identity.

It becomes like part of you and you have to defend this birth. You try to make it positive somehow, like you start to make yourself different. You say to yourself, I may be a refugee, but I'm really clever, I can do this, I can do that. And that's good, because you benefit from telling yourself that.

But the main reason you are doing that is because you want to show yourself, 'refugee' is not bad, refugee is not like the name, refugee is a human, he has a life, he has good times, he has bad times, he has memories.

For me, I changed the label of refugee to freedom fighter. It is connected to history. When we left in '48 and '68 from Palestine, we were like refugees... UNRWA, the organisation they made just for us, is to help find opportunities for these refugees.

2

I SEE THE CORRUPTION.

But UNRWA doesn't talk about the main subject of concern to us... we need to go back to our country, we have a political issue… but they [UNRWA] are ignoring this bit. They are talking about just the humanitarian issue... We are fighting for our story, to make it right. Okay, we are refugees but we didn't decide to be refugees. We have a place, so let's go back to our place.

My experience with NGOs and UNRWA is not really good...if you go to Yarmouk, a lot of people get positions in UNRWA and they give the people money or a box of food or anything, but they decide who can get it. Sometimes they call their friends, sometimes they put the name of their friend or their relative at the beginning of the list and the people who actually need the help don't get it or they become at the end of the list...

There is no law to see what is happening, you don't know who controls it... it is not just the people who work in UNRWA that are bad, the situation in Syria is bad and it drives people to do bad things because all are victims.

Enablers
What's enriching the experience?

- ✓ An organisation with a mandate to help him shows political committment

Disablers
What's taking away from the experience?

- ✗ Stigma and 'racism' around being a refugee
- ✗ System assumes people are victims who need 'our' help on our terms
- ✗ Aid agency inability to affect wider change / political landscape
- ✗ Aid agency inability to affect wider change / political landscape

3

I MANEUVER.

If you have problems in Yarmouk, for us, we never go to the police station, we never go to the council because we know if we go to these places it will be more trouble. So, we try to fix it ourselves, and sometimes the problem is really big, you can't fix it by yourself…

Sometimes the government finds out you're doing something, so they bring people to disrupt it. You wait, you try again, you know what I mean? Sometimes you spend three years trying to build a room, or two rooms on a roof, just to let one of your children get married and have a family. This is why most of the people, they don't get married! The community becomes bigger and bigger, and you need more places to let people live and to let people get married, and have a family.

- ✓ Strength of family bonds
- ✓ Individual initiative / people responding to their needs themselves

- ✗ Complicated and corrupt bureaucracy among authorities
- ✗ No easy, legal channels to get routine things done
- ✗ …

4

I TRY NOT TO LOSE HOPE.

The most bad thing is when you have lost control of your life. You feel you can't control what you want to do tomorrow or you can't see what will happen next year. That makes life hopeless. That's happened to a lot of people I know when you don't have nothing actually. You don't have life.

So, a friend of mine, he killed himself when his father died, he used to have five brothers and sisters, and his mother, and he was the eldest one, and I think the main reason he killed himself was because he lost control, he felt like he was under a lot of pressure, he wanted to work, he wanted to make life better for his mother and his family, he wanted to bring food, and he was still just fifteen, sixteen years old. He couldn't control his life, so he decide to kill himself. Not all people decide to kill themselves, but if you don't kill yourself, you are killed already, you are as dead people. Though, I guess, as a human you keep defending your life, until the last moment. To find hope.

- ✓ Capacity to manage oneself in face of tragedy

- ✗ Lack of control and decision-making over one's life
- ✗ Risk of military recruitment
- ✗ Lack of psycho-social support (beyond relief) that is also community-based
- ✗ Pressure of the immediate

5

I TELL THE REAL STORY.

You can't wait… you need to be strong and make a step, and maybe after this step will make it easier in your life, it will give you hope… But you need to do a step sometimes. And sometimes it is a dangerous step, but you need to do it. Like the people who go themselves in the boats, it is a really dangerous step but what else do you have? Nothing.

For me, I can't do a lot, but for me at least if I do what I am doing now and I can change the idea of what the real story is for at least a few people, I'm thinking I am making a change. But other than that, maybe I have my ideas, but I haven't made change because I don't have power to make change. I am in the UK now doing mostly art. I do graffiti, I do music, I do installation art. And those few people that come to my installations, I tell them my story, my sisters' story, the people I know, their stories, they can know at least the real story from a real voice, the voice from this place, what happened. This makes a little change, but that for me is very good.

- ✓ Active, able mind with many capacities if tapped into
- ✓ Empowerment through creative outlets and communicating directly with the world
- ✓ Human resilience and hope

- ✗ Not enough legal pathways for resettlement
- ✗ Humanitarian fig-leaf (an excuse for political inaction)
- ✗ Lack of opportunities

future state

4

The future state framework

The framework for imagining alternative humanitarian action has four critical layers to it:

THE WHY

The vision layer is about intentional shifts, direction and outcomes.

THE WHO

The experience layer is about human journeys, motivations, goals and interactions to deliver on the vision.

THE WHAT

The functions layer is about the modes, roles, and channels of engagement to deliver on the experience.

THE HOW

The delivery layer is about the processes, systems, and implementation to deliver on the functions.

Photo credit: Ann Wang/IRIN

Future state vision

For people affected by crisis

In a crisis that creates significant humanitarian needs, every person affected has access to basic services, safety, and opportunity, with the capacity to absorb shocks, and the agency to shape her/his future.

For the system

A system that **adapts** to address the self-determined needs of people affected by crisis; is built upon recognising the **agency** of people, communities and states; and which can be held **accountable** to people for its failings.

Future state experience

No one experiences the whole system: we experience pathways through it.

Dr Richard Buchanan, "Managing as Designing" 2004

We did not look to redesign the entire system from the top down. Instead, our design activity began at the human interaction level. At this level, the user is pulled (rather than pushed) to 'touch' and interact with parts of the system according to his/her needs, preferences, motivators, and values. Different human pathways through a system provide insight into the multitude of different touchpoints and interaction points that could be leverage points for transformative change at the experience layer.

The 'future experience pathway' on the following pages visually represents an archetypal human journey. In reality, people's experiences are obviously much messier, more non-linear, and less comprehensive.

The pathway outlines key user needs that international humanitarian actors could use as starting points to respond to effectively, needs such as resilience, protection, assistance, a sense of community, a future and self-reliance. These needs can be met through many various touchpoints by many various channels. It also visually demonstrates through the blue box that people affected by crisis are agents of change in their own lives and this should be taken into account across crisis preparedness, response and recovery actions by the formal system. It also depicts that primary accountability of response efforts should be to people affected, and at the same time, still maintain transparency and efficiency for funders.

This depiction aims to reinforce a starting point that is rooted in (as much as can be) desirable user experience as they interact with alternative humanitarian action.

We have AGENCY

We determine our needs, tell our own stories, and shape our own futures.

We surrender control and let go of our decision-making power.

As persons affected by protracted crises…

As the international aid system responding to people affected by protracted crises…

We are RESILIENT

We have the capacity to deal with the impact ourselves.

We prioritise efforts and resources towards both preparedness and response elsewhere.

We have PROTECTION

We all need quick and safe pathways out of life-threatening danger.

We take action to protect people from danger – while prioritising reaching those in greatest need.

We have ASSISTANCE

We have access to food, water, shelter, safety, healthcare, and education in ways that do not take away from our dignity.

Where there are no alternatives to direct delivery, we deliver assistance in a synchronised and transparent way – while integrating protection into our response.

We have ACCOUNTABILITY

We hold authorities accountable for their failings, successes and learnings.

We monitor and continuously improve our practices, putting people's interest above self-interest.

We have COMMUNITY

We (re)connect with family and create a sense of community and humanity with others.

We build and enable relationships based on human connection and trust.

We have FUTURE

We seize education, employment and enterprise opportunities.

We enable skills development, employment and enterprise opportunities by leveraging wider networks, markets, and working with non-humanitarian actors.

We are SELF-RELIANT

We focus on our long-term needs and aspirations.

We withdraw and re-deploy or return home.

Future 'response' modes

The following describes three future 'response' modes that suggest the different ways in which the international humanitarian system might deliver aid based on a clear understanding of the needs of crisis-affected people and its own role in meeting those needs. Each mode describes the purpose of the response, as well as the respective roles of international, national, local, and other frontline actors. These modes are not perfect; they are meant to serve as starting points for reflection and discussion. They are also not mutually exclusive. In protracted crises, a comprehensive response likely requires all three modes to be in operation in some combination. However, factors such as capacity, governance, and sudden changes in the conflict/crisis situation, will determine which 'response' mode(s) will be needed most.

Fail safe

Provides timely and appropriate assistance and protection based on humanitarian principles in situations where the state and other response actors are unable/unwilling to adequately address the nature and scale of needs. The international humanitarian community leads in planning, coordination and/or delivery of services/goods. Local and national organisations collaborate and support where appropriate and possible.

'We survive and feel safe'

'We lead the response to assist and protect'

Network

Collaborates with and complements existing actors and systems wherever possible. Community-based, local, national, or other frontline organisations lead response efforts. The international humanitarian community supports national and local efforts by filling gaps in coverage and expertise.

'Our needs, perspectives and agency shape decisions and action'

'We stand back, listen, collaborate and support'

Cooperative

Links up short-terms needs with longer-term aspirations and opportunities. International humanitarian organisations connect and work with crisis-affected communities and others to decrease dependency, support a return to stability and enable self-reliance.

'We stabilise, grow and dream"

'We facilitate and let go when needed. We create opportunity'

Future 'response' functions

When we asked people to redesign elements of the system, the ideas and concepts appeared to address six key areas (while some of them addressed more than one). The following describes these six future 'response' functions of the international humanitarian system.

funder

A funding and financing function that is depoliticised, anonymised and decentralised.

custodian

A safeguarding, quality assurance and accountability function that provides checks and balances to ensure positive impact through honest and quality practices.

assister

A response function that aims to maximise assistance and protection efforts and coverage based on those most in need.

connector

A connecting, weaving and synchronising function that strengthens system networks, facilitates (un)likely collaborations, and intertwines 'assisting' efforts.

multiplier

An energising and multiplying function linking traditional and non-traditional humanitarians (eg. informal groups or private business) and provides alternative options for people.

storyteller

A storytelling function which guides strategic decision making by co-creating narratives that stay true to the lived experiences of people.

Effective crisis response will require depoliticised and flexible financing mechanisms, deep understanding and responding to the needs of crisis affected people, closer connection and collaboration between diverse actors, and checks and balances to hold both organisations and individuals to account.

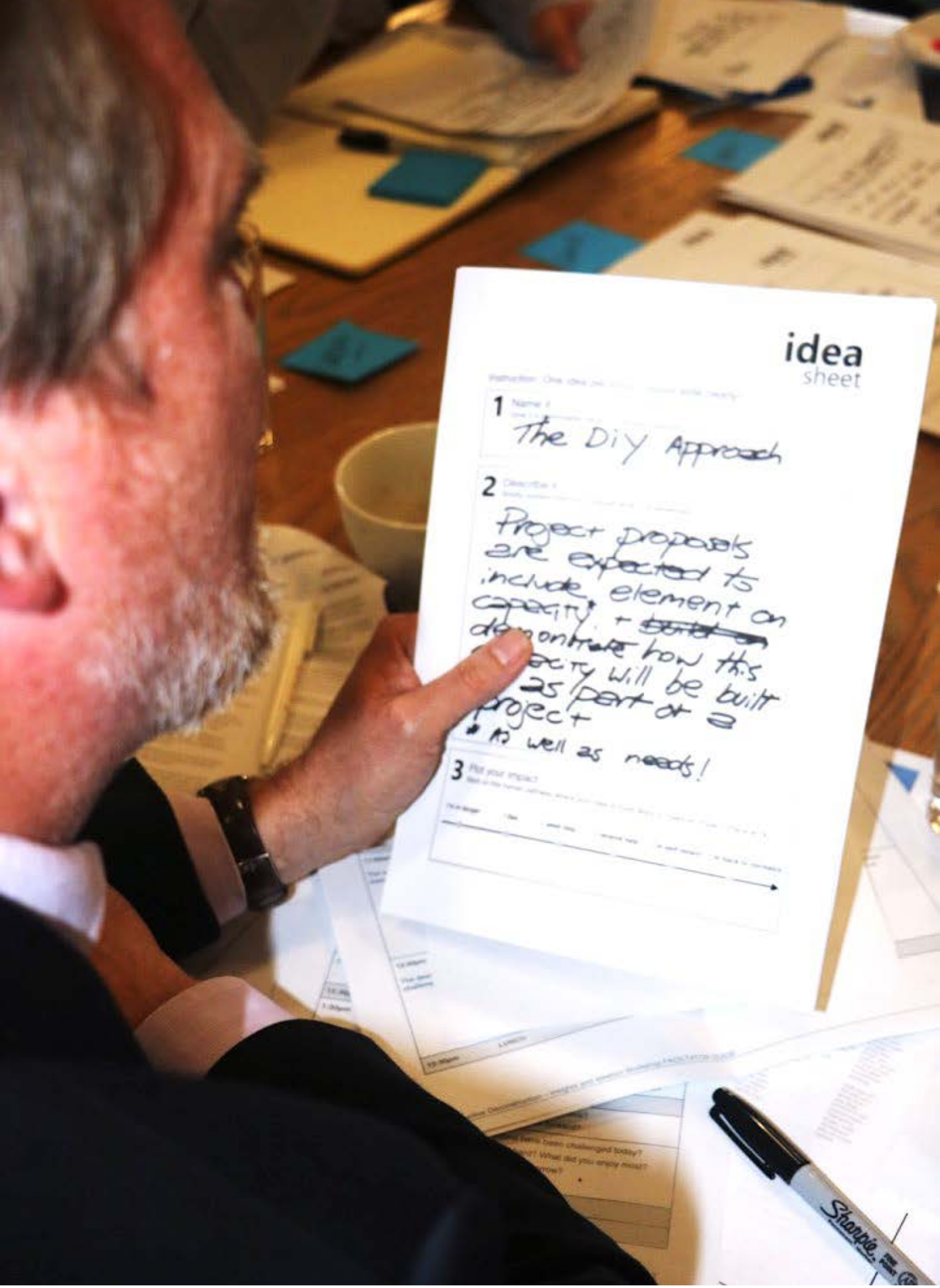


Photo credit: ThinkPlace

delivery

This shortlist of 27 ideas resulted from co-design workshops that generated hundreds of ideas to reimagine the *how* of alternative humanitarian action. The instruction was to think 'blue sky' and start with a blank slate and to think of what was 'desirable' rather than immediately possible or feasible. Many ideas were generated based on deliberately trying to think differently, and so the issue of feasibility was not the main criterion for inclusion. Some of these ideas are not new, are already underway or in pilot. Each idea is expanded on in the following pages.

funding

- INDEPENDENT, UNIFIED FINANCING MECHANISM
- INSURANCE FOR SELF-RELIANCE
- HUMANTIARIAN MONEY NOW
- FUNDING APPROVALFOR SPEEDY TRANS-ITION(FAST)
- MUTUALISATION FOR COMMUNITY CHOICE
- COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSE FUND

safeguarding

- FAILURE TARGETS
- PLAINTIFF ATTORNEYS WITHOUT BORDERS
- HUMANITARIAN ANALYST SQUAD
- DOWN WITH RED TAPE
- RELIEF WATCH
- INDEPENDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT BODY

assisting

- NO LABELS
- UNIVERSAL ID / HUMANITARIAN PASSPORT
- INTENDED OBSOLESENCE INCENTIVES
- MAKING PALS / ENFORCED ETHNOGRAPHY
- LANGUAGE LESSONS
- PROOF OF COMPETENCE IN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
- HUMANITARIAN SOCIAL ECONOMY

connecting

- LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES
- INGOs AS SUBSIDIARIES OF LOCAL NGOs
- UNITED BEYOND NATIONS

multiplying

- REFUGEE CHARTER CITIES
- LICENSE FOR RENT
- TIME BANK

storytelling

- COMMUNITY NEWS
- CONTEXTUALISE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Ideas for future alternative action

Each of the shortlisted ideas were explored in subsequent workshops in terms of what change it seeks, barriers in the system that impede its implementation, and possible ways to overcome those barriers. Each idea also states what future 'response' function it primarily enables humanitarian actors to do better.

INDEPENDENT, UNIFIED FINANCING MECHANISM

funding

An international, pooled, anonymous funding mechanism with mandatory contributions from all governments based on a percentage of GDP. Allocations would be based on an independent board and needs assessment body. At least 50% would be allocated to local NGOs and certain percentage for preparedness and capacity building.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Delinks humanitarian action from the political agenda Ensures adequate, faster response based on need Allows the international organisations to focus on effectiveness and crisis outcomes, and treat local responders as equal partners	An appeal system that allows donors to set their own priorities for money Lack of appetite in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) based on political interests and sovereignty Conflicting donor domestic political requirements Ambiguous liability	Get UNGA approval by convincing Member States that: ▪ This is more cost-effective, less bureaucratic ▪ They would still be able to use this as good PR ▪ This will achieve stability and progress towards the SDGs ▪ This would mean more burden sharing for humanitarian crises ▪ This would release more funding for their own development priorities ▪ This will lead to more effectiveness, and less politicisation of aid

INSURANCE FOR SELF-RELIANCE

funding

Create and promote individual insurance products for people/communities at risk of being affected by a crisis. This could be a micro-insurance model that encourages people in risky regions to make provision for disasters, but also leverages international aid as part of the capital backstop and pay-out system. This could create a system where people/communities could achieve some level of protection against disasters at subsidised rates. This would be aimed at countries and regions where risk premiums might be elevated.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Does away with the notion of charity and promotes self-reliance among people affected by crisis Incorporates affected people as participants/agents in their own response Changes language from "aid" to "investment", "beneficiary" to "agent," "response" to "prevention" and "mitigation"	Appreciation of insurance is low in many parts of the world (it is seen as an opportunity cost not as protection) and the most vulnerable people can't afford it More complex than existing micro-insurance examples, e.g. weather-based micro-insurance Governments prefer not to commit in this manner Insurance products are not fit for protracted conflict scenarios, nor are they enticing to insurers Scaling with insurers during times of large scale disasters	Demonstrate a level of profitability to insurers who will be prone to avoid the most risky/important markets Tap into political will for investment in prevention and disaster risk mitigation efforts Generate aid agency interest, investment, and support for prevention efforts Find a better value proposition for insurance companies

HUMANITARIAN MONEY NOW

funding

Fostering an expanded network of potential individual donors and investors and linking them with opportunities for direct cash transfers.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows us to consider a funding model based on solidarity and burden sharing with an understanding that "crises are all of our problem" Catalyses additional financing for needs-based humanitarian action	Resistance from aid agencies for fear of being cut out of this process Lack of accountability on making sure funds are delivered via appropriate channels and applied on the basis of need.	Convince wealthy, risk-taking individuals/ philanthropists of the benefits of grant making Integrate funds into existing cash transfer programmes, platforms and delivery systems. Explore alternative models and tools to grant making where there is some ROI.

FUNDING APPROVAL FOR SPEEDY TRANSITION(FAST)

funding

Speed up approval for local funding. Forced simplification of funding approval process from central to local. Aim for one day turn-around and a one page form.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows us to focus on effectiveness and crisis outcomes Ensures adequate, faster funding of need-based responses Treats local responders as equal partners, and allows them to meaningfully participate in crisis response Engages and streamlines various donors, from private sector/philanthropists, diaspora groups to institutional to remove bureaucratic red tape, and push funding quickly to meaningful efforts on the ground	Western, institutional donors are comfortable with funding services delivered by UN agencies and INGOs that they have worked with before Power is concentrated with aid agencies, and they control how and where aid is delivered Difficulty vetting new/unfamiliar organisations and other new entrants, and ensure consistent quality of goods and services are delivered Public pressure to guarantee value for money and avoid corruption and misappropriation of funds. Ambiguous liability	Convince major donors that funding local organisations is more cost-effective, less bureaucratic, and leads to more effectiveness Tap into alternative funding sources that are willing to take risks on innovative aid delivery efforts Set national/regional and central bodies that can be activated to review and approve funding requests quickly Maintain a repository of local organisations, and creating quality control standards and simplified reporting requirements

MUTUALISATION FOR COMMUNITY CHOICE

funding

Control of the budget by crisis-affected communities, in order to create a competitive market for services. Communities can contract and choose their aid providers through direct dialogue between donors and communities to suggest and validate funding priorities.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Empowers members and self-formed groups in crisis-affected communities to determine their priorities and needs Shifts power to the community to choose aid agencies/organisations that are able to operate and provide quality services in the area	Western, institutional donors are comfortable funding services delivered by UN agencies and INGOs that they have worked with before Power is concentrated with aid agencies, and they control how and where aid is delivered	Pitch to donors: this leads to better collaboration with the community, as well as design of relief efforts Require service providers to be subject to user ratings of the timeliness, quality and appropriateness of their services. Link ratings to agency funding levels. Force aid agencies to come to the table with community members in order to build trust between actors.

FAILURE TARGETS

safeguarding

All agencies must hit targets of 10% failed projects and report extensively on this.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Permission to take risks may lead to better coverage of people most in need	Risk-averse community/culture	Pitch failure as a learning tool, normalising it over time
Prevents project teams from avoiding difficult decisions and risky efforts due to fear of failure	Potential of exposure in the media and loss of reputation controls government and aid agency decision-making	Educate the public and government donors to accept failure
Exposes and educates on the complexity of humanitarian response	Pay on results funding mechanisms	Encourage donors to fund honest sharing and risk-taking behaviour
Increases integrity and respect for humanitarian principles, since it shifts away from playing it safe	Ethical considerations	Engage in risky/innovative projects outside of crisis countries or in times of stability.
Normalises risk/failure, and enhances truthfulness		

DOWN WITH RED TAPE

safeguarding

Compliance to donors is simplified and standardised. Donors and INGOs cannot each set their own requirements for reporting, accounting, recruitment, etc. Agreed-upon principles and protocols are set and kept to.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Sends the signal that donor reporting need not be prioritised over response.	There is a public demand for more tailored scrutiny	Pitch to donors that it is a better 'bang for the buck' when grantees spend more time implementing rather than reporting
Makes it easier for new actors to engage with the humanitarian system	Specific countries counter-terror concerns/legislation may conflict with this approach	Work with progressive individuals within donor organisations to convince others
Reduces the focus and time spent on transactional tasks	High cost of changing internal systems	Developing a Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative – where one 'certification' can then count for all donors (i.e. donor-trusted entities provide a mechanism)
Facilitates collaboration between organisations		

INDEPENDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT BODY

safeguarding

Independent from all existing operational agencies, this body will listen to the voices of affected communities and assess local capacities. This body will also ensure funding is allocated based on needs, and incorporated into planning and implementation.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Shifts the conceptual lens to addressing the needs of people affected by crisis Leads to a more needs-driven response, rather than agency, supply-driven response Captures needs accurately and in an integrated, holistic way to avoid categories of beneficiaries being left out Changes how we think of 'need' to include long-term need.	Self-interest of aid agencies Lack of credibility for the independent body; potential turf war Issues of sovereignty: why shouldn't a host government determine needs rather than an external independent body?	Demonstrate that the accurate capture of need allows organisations to better use program funding and efforts on the ground Demonstrate faster and more efficient return of investment and cost saving to donors to unlock more funding Allow international agencies to collaborate in development of needs assessments

HUMANITARIAN ANALYST SQUAD

safeguarding

An outsourced, pooled data analysis of crises responses and gaps in coverage for all actors to leverage for decision-making purposes. Consultation with this squad becomes part of implementation and accountability, so we're making new mistakes not old ones.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Moves our beliefs away from the assumption that aid agencies are objective do-gooders, without a need for checks and balances Creates a data intelligence hub with a centralised database on data relating to crisis responses Leads to a more needs-driven response, rather than agency, supply-driven response Reduces 'assessment fatigue' in communities by streamlining data collection efforts Having a centralised data of response efforts allows the system to learn from its mistakes, and replicate successes	Self-interest of aid agencies, and potential turf wars Bureaucracy of the humanitarian machinery, and possible reluctance of agencies to accept assessment by a third party Lack of credibility for the analytical body Difficulty standardising data compiled from various sources using different methodologies Little practice of evidence-based decision making across the sector	Demonstrate that accurately and cohesively evaluating crisis responses and gaps in coverage, allows organisations to better use program funding and shift efforts on the ground Show faster and more efficient return on investment and cost saving to unlock more funding Publish data and analysis openly, transparently and often to force decision makers to consider evidence in their actions.

PLAINTIFF ATTORNEYS WITHOUT BORDERS

safeguarding

A dedicated organisation that uses local legal systems to sue INGOs and UN agencies for poor practices, and money not spent or not well spent.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows people affected by crisis meaningful participation in the legal process of holding organisations accountable rather than as passive recipients Ensures people affected by crisis have their interests adequately represented as rights holders Holds UN agencies, international organisations accountable with enforceable legal sanctions which can affect their ability to operate in local environments, a powerful incentive for greater compliance with humanitarian standards	No firm international legal or normative agreements on humanitarian 'laws' beyond the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, and a handful of agreements concerning conduct in armed conflict No clear entity responsible for enforcement of judgments concerning violations or reparations, and assumes there is will from local legal and government authorities to enforce Lack of institutional interest from donors and international aid agencies Complicated and diverse legal structures and policies between jurisdictions/countries Assumes that there are functioning local legal systems that can operate as avenues of legal redress	Work with legal organisations, local legal systems and governments to establish some form of court or tribunal for arbitration Adapt existing humanitarian laws, codes of conduct and standards to enforceable standards Educate/advocate with local authorities to demonstrate that greater accountability of organisations working in their environment/ jurisdiction is to their benefit

NO LABELS

assisting

Eliminate all categorisations placed on crisis-affected persons in favor of geographic identifiers; eliminate all branded, mandate driven organisations. Instead, independent needs assessments drive a hyperlocal, multiplicity of service delivery options.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
International humanitarian actors stop categorising people based on history or frameworks that have lost their currency. Aid can be provided based on need and a recognition of rights Reconsiders the normative frameworks and mandates of humanitarian organisations in favour of remits based on geographical, sectoral, and operational expertise.	UN mandates would require renegotiation in the General Assembly; NGO mandates by their executive boards. Alternative governance arrangements could lead to larger, more bureaucratic UN structures Some labels are protective and necessary and there are trade-offs inherent in changing them.	Getting donor governments to see that the use of labels and mandate-driven policies and practices of international agencies lead to inefficient use of resources, poor outcomes, and discrimination against crisis-affected people Enabling crisis-affected communities and states to claim ownership and drive response efforts, and demanding change at the UN level

UNIVERSAL ID / HUMANITARIAN PASSPORT

assisting

Aid agencies can issue persons affected by crisis a universal ID or humanitarian passport that is portable between programmes, organisations and countries.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
International humanitarian agencies stop categorising people with arbitrary labels Aid can be provided based on actual need and for those most in need Able to track displaced people as they move to different areas; able to track what has assistance has been given at individual level.	Logistically complicated and hard to scale Ensuring privacy/confidentiality of ID system across different programs in different settings requires buy-in from various governments and humanitarian actors Technologically challenging to generate and maintain unique IDs	Get others to see that an universal humanitarian ID system can help track individuals as they move through the system Get donors to see how this can lead to improved effectiveness, and better delivery of services Adapt the use of Blockchain technology to the humanitarian sector.

INTENDED OBSOLESENCE INCENTIVES

assisting

Donors request INGOs/UN agencies to design response efforts with local partners and provide their exit strategy in their proposals. They build/ strengthen capacity and hand over local ownership long before the exit, with funding structures that incentivise INGO/agencies to exit once goals are met.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Enables more dignified responses by increasing participation and ownership by people affected by crisis in the communities Encourages collaboration between organisations and allows them to work as a unit Strengthens local and national capacity to weather future shocks and reduces long-term reliance on the international aid system Shifts power and decision-making to local and national experts	Weak relationships between international and national/local actors would prevent necessary, rapid response Self-interest of international agencies and need to defend one's 'turf' and sustain operations Decisions on which local/national entities to fund are based on Western political ideologies rather than local effectiveness	Leverage diaspora and other groups to rapidly identify reputable local and national organisations in order to support local response Create pooled, anonymised, de-politicised funding streams Pitch to donors, UN, and other actors as a way to test and implement the Grand Bargain and the localisation agenda

MAKING PALS / ENFORCED ETHNOGRAPHY

assisting

Ensure that each and every member of an organisation has spent at least one week living alongside people that organisation exists to assist.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Helps aid workers to build and use empathy, as they (hopefully) see people affected by crisis not as faceless 'recipients' but as fellow human beings or personas with highly contextual wants, drives, needs, desires, fears, etc. Allows aid workers to speak with greater nuance and complexity, rooted in lived experience Seeks to centre the user journey of those the organisation members work with, as living in close quarters allows insight into how local communities navigate crisis and humanitarian response efforts	Potentially viewed as too costly, time consuming and frivolous, especially when compared with more urgent crisis response needs Organisational as well as personal arrogance from aid agencies, that "they know better" or "I've done this before so I don't need the immersion." Cultural and religious constraints, gender issues may make this difficult in certain settings	Include cultural awareness parameters as key performance indicators into internal evaluations and reviews Convince donors to pay for this as better quality programming and value for money Create flexible immersion programs so as to cater for a wide range of cultural, religious, or gender norms which would allow greater participation

LANGUAGE LESSONS

assisting

All international staff must attend local language lessons organised by community members.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows international staff to speak with greater empathy and nuance if they are able to effectively communicate with the community they are meant to work for Encourages access, community participation and sense of ownership by increasing ability of community members to communicate on their own terms, creating more dignified humanitarian responses Ensures communities have greater ability to demand accountability from international staff if they are able to access information in their own language	Potentially viewed as too costly to require mandatory language lessons for *all* staff It could be a fruitless exercise, that is, requiring staff to participate in mandatory languages lessons will not necessarily ensure their language acquisition Organisational as well as personal arrogance by aid agencies, "I don't need to speak the local language as we have national staff for this" or "I am not engaged out in the field so why bother"	Build these language requirements into international organisational policy for field staff prior to deployment Include language parameters as key performance indicators in internal evaluations as an incentive to treat language lessons seriously Convince donors that an ability to communicate with local communities is a necessary requirement for staff to effectively perform their roles which will enhance the quality of programming and increase return on investment

PROOF OF COMPETENCE IN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

assisting

Aid recipient nations pass laws that require personnel coming from international agencies and INGOs to undergo induction and pass a local knowledge test to get permission to work.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Creates an ethos of accountability by formalising responsibility owed by international agencies and INGOs towards the communities they seek to work in, through properly training staff before they even commence their role Attempts to flip power dynamic by requiring humanitarian actors to meet specified standards set by the aid recipient nation (rather than standards set only by humanitarian actors) Increased situational context leads to better judgement in a humanitarian response	Timing of such inductions and testing, particularly before sudden onset crisis Financial disincentive, as the process could be potentially costly and time consuming Unclear as to which actor would administer the induction and testing process - host nations, international agencies/ INGOs or independent organisations Assumes that legal systems and authorities in aid recipient nations are willing and able to enforce such laws	Build induction and local knowledge tests into pre-deployment organisational policy for field staff Convince donors to cover cost for better return of investment through better quality programming and value for money Educate and incentivise local authorities to require greater local knowledge and cultural awareness from organisations operating in their environment/jurisdiction, as this will enhance performance and accountability which is ultimately to their benefit

LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES

connecting

Having greater representation of local staff from conflict zones in policy and decision-making at the UN and INGOs (say 20% minimum). This means organisations employ people who are representative of the demographic they are assisting (i.e. a refugee on the decision making team).

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Enables more dignified responses by increasing participation and ownership by people affected by crisis Allows for more nuanced and culturally appropriate responses to crises	Local aid workers perceived as having difficulty or conflicts with upholding humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence Growth and professionalisation of the sector places greater value of leadership and senior staff having formal education and experience responding to different crises than having deep contextual/cultural knowledge to develop and implement services	Train local staff and providing them with technical expertise, both during operations as well as through educational exchanges with universities Create organisational cultures that respect contextual knowledge as much as technical knowledge in order to deliver aid that is respectful and culturally appropriate

INGOs AS SUBSIDIARIES OF LOCAL NGOs

connecting

International humanitarian NGOs are not allowed to operate in crisis-affected countries as individual entities, but rather operate under the governance of local/national NGOs or governments and actively seek to compliment and strengthen local efforts.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Enables more dignified and appropriate crisis responses by increasing participation and ownership of local and national organisations Decreases parallel systems of aid delivery and builds/strengthens local capacity Shifts power and decision-making to local and national experts	Requires functional local crisis response capacity Weak relationships between international and national/local actors would prevent necessary, rapid response High cost of changing internal systems Self-interest/self-preservation of international agencies and need to defend one's 'turf' Decisions on which local/national entities to fund are based on Western political ideologies rather than local effectiveness	Build and strengthen cooperation between international actors and local counterparts that goes beyond simple contracting relationships Unify donor reporting and accountability requirements according to principles and protocols developed with international organisations Investment in systems to identify and coordinate information on local responders

REFUGEE CHARTER CITIES

multiplying

Create an infrastructure for private or commercial actors to enter and drive economic viability in the community by creating employment opportunities for refugees and other displaced people, as well as host populations.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Recognises the value and under utilised capacity of crisis-affected people Creates an alternative model for accessing dignified livelihoods for displaced people Decreases long-term dependency on international aid	Legalities in host countries for employment of displaced people, including work permits and the right to work Attitudes of host communities feeling like displaced people are 'taking over' their jobs and opportunities	Match affected people's skill sets and career aspirations with a employment opportunities with foreign and local businesses Work within the economic landscape and infrastructure of the host country in ways that benefits their economy

LICENSE FOR RENT

multiplying

Allow frontline, established organisations to rent their administrative status and license needed for receipt of resources and donations to smaller, low-capacity, informal groups providing important services.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows smaller, informal community groups to obtain legitimacy Enables faster, more dignified responses by increasing participation and ownership by people affected by crisis in the communities	Shortage of available organisations to host informal groups administratively Insufficient standards for hosting, and potential for abuse/corruption by host organisation	Create standards for hosting institutions and reporting requirements to ensure community groups are not taken advantage of.

TIME BANK

multiplying

Create/formalise time banks as an alternative for displacement-affected people and host communities to work without requiring formal work permits.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Forces a rethink of our understandings of work and remuneration, and subsequently the value of the individual Creates an alternative model for accessing dignified livelihoods	Legality maybe challenging to formalise time banks if structure too similar to work permits in the particular contexts Political will may vary between host countries	Work with legal organisations and local governments to establish standards for time banks as alternative to usual work permits Educate/advocate with host communities to see refugees and other displacement affected people as producers of goods and services, and contributors to growing the local economy

COMMUNITY NEWS

storytelling

Create and fund media (newspapers, radio, video) owned and run by crisis-affected individuals and give them access to information and staff from NGO/government service providers to increase accountability.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows people affected by crisis to determine the effectiveness and appropriateness of the aid they receive Rebalances/reprioritises donor needs as important as impact on the lives of people affected by crisis Supports public demand for more tailored scrutiny, nuanced and in the words of those affected most	Western, institutional donors are comfortable funding services delivered by UN agencies and INGOs that they have worked with before Power is concentrated with aid agencies, and they control how and where aid is delivered	Capturing need and impact accurately allows aid agencies to better use program funding and cater efforts on the ground Creating pooled, anonymised, depoliticised funding streams Partnering with external, independent media entities to get the word out and connect refugees/displaced people's journalistic interests with other people in the media

CONTEXTUALISING HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

storytelling

Rebranding the humanitarian principles to be more universally applicable and compatible with local norms and values.

How does this idea change what to think, do and say?	What are the current barriers to implementation?	What are ways to overcome the barriers?
Allows us to value and work with local responders and organisations in crisis-affected communities without forcing them to be neutral and independent in complex political settings Forces international humanitarian organisations to examine their actions and adherence to principles and balance them with delivering aid to those who need it most	No organisation has legal/ normative authority to lead this effort Diverse political, religious ideologies conflict with application and violation of the principles Decisions on which local/national entities to support/fund are linked with Western political agendas	Creating a 'country-principles' committee of different international, national and local government officials/ organisations to determine how the principles will be applied and where and what crisis response will be done

prototypes for action

5

Selecting ideas to prototype

Of the 27 shortlisted ideas from the ideation and conceptualising workshops, 10 ideas were further explored. Four of these ideas were chosen in line with the focus on Agency, Adaptability and Accountability. The four ideas explored innovative financing, integrating short and long-term needs of crisis affected communities, better supporting local response efforts, and establishing accountability systems.

In order to validate the assumptions and principles underpinning any potential interventions, we further developed and tested these ideas with 31 experts and practitioners from 25 organisations working in various protracted crisis contexts. This was done through interactive 'user testing' workshops, and one-on-one interviews with people who are engaged in 'real-world' applications of concepts similar to the ones developed through this process.

We understand that elements of these ideas are not new, and are sometimes a part of current practice. Indeed, existing initiatives greatly helped the team conceptualise how they may be adopted and adapted for different contexts. Yet although aspects of some of these approaches do currently exist in reality, they are far from common across the sector. We hope this Design Experiment acts as an amplifier for these alternative approaches.

funding

INDEPENDENT, UNIFIED FINANCING MECHANISM

INSURANCE FOR SELF-RELIANCE

HUMANTIARIAN MONEY NOW

FAST: FUNDING APPROVAL SPEEDY TRANSITION

MUTUALISATION FOR COMMUNITY CHOICE

COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSE FUND

safeguarding

FAILURE TARGETS

PLAINTIFF ATTORNEYS WITHOUT BORDERS

HUMANITARIAN ANALYST SQUAD

DOWN WITH RED TAPE

RELIEF WATCH

INDEPENDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT BODY

assisting

NO LABELS

UNIVERSAL ID / HUMANITARIAN PASSPORT

INTENDED OBSOLESENCE INCENTIVES

MAKING PALS / ENFORCED ETHNOGRAPHY

LANGUAGE LESSONS

PROOF OF COMPETENCE IN LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

HUMANITARIAN SOCIAL ECONOMY

connecting

LOCAL HIRING PRACTICES

INGOs AS SUBSIDIARIES OF LOCAL NGOs

UNITED BEYOND NATIONS

multiplying

REFUGEE CHARTER CITIES

LICENSE FOR RENT

TIME BANK

storytelling

COMMUNITY NEWS

CONTEXTUALISE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Linking real-time, community-led assessments of need with flexible funding structures for rapid response

Community-led Response Fund

overview

A large proportion of response in crisis-affected areas is led and implemented by a self-motivated set of local responders and community-led groups. These responders often possess the appropriate local connections and deep contextual knowledge to respond effectively. However, they receive very little direct funding from donors to properly implement and scale their work, and are often dependent on larger international organisations for resources. This relationship also compels them to to act based on the priorities set by these large organisations.

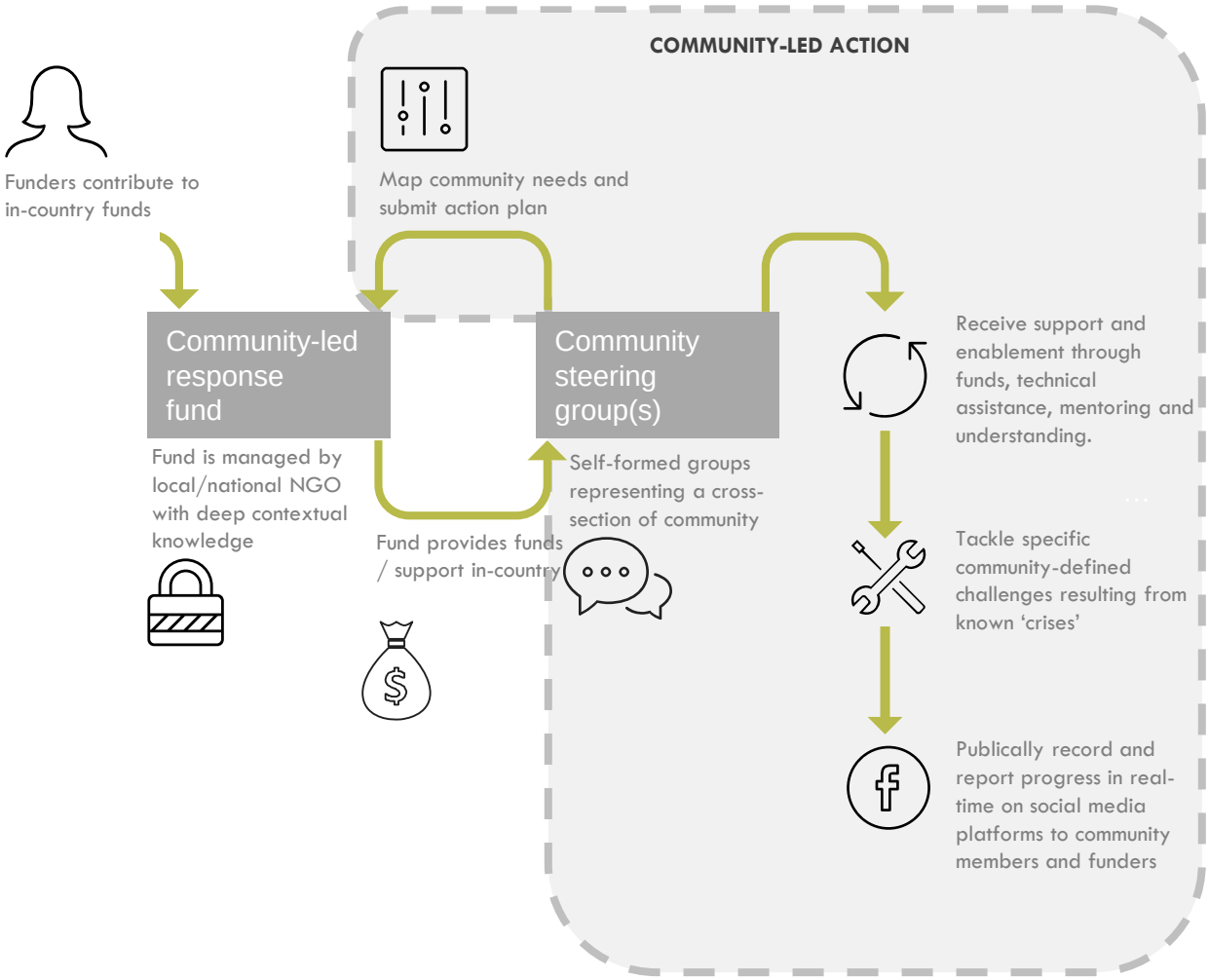
The Community-Led Response Fund concept is driven by the need to direct unrestricted funding to local responders based on priorities set by the community. The Community-led Response Fund would allow communities and community groups to organise, assess needs, and implement responses. Donors contribute directly to the Fund to offset operations in areas where they may be less present due to access issues, geopolitics, etc., and to address needs not covered by other humanitarian organisations.

The Fund links real-time self-assessment of threats, capacities and opportunities with immediate actions in rapidly changing crisis response situations. This kind of model promotes local ownership of both problems and solutions. There is an evaluation process by national NGOs or existing community councils who have deep contextual knowledge, and recipients account for the money in a cost-effective way. Primary accountability will be to the communities themselves through publication of all decisions, plans and financial data (transfers, bills paid, etc.) using appropriate means (billboards, social media reporting and peer feedback via Twitter and Facebook, etc.). In a rapid onset/evolving crisis phase, support for specific self-help initiatives are vetted by pre-trained national/local NGO-staff (as appropriate) to ensure that humanitarian and other principles, such as 'do no harm' are upheld. They also ensure that there is subsequent light-touch follow-up through mentoring and monitoring.

aims and objectives

1. **Fill gaps relating to access, reach and coverage by supporting community-led response efforts already on the ground.**
2. **Disburse funds rapidly and directly to local response efforts and activities.**
3. **Build upon the energy, skills and agency of survivor-led and sometimes informal community-based groups who have a vested interest in rapid and accountable action.**
4. **Respond to needs that may not be immediately life threatening, but the community deems worthy of immediate action, such as dignified burials and critical infrastructure repair.**
5. **Strengthen linkages between funders, responders and affected communities through meaningful relationships that reduce the emphasis on paperwork and increase the emphasis on listening, understanding, action and transparency.**

how it works



RECOGNISE PROBLEM & FORM GROUP

Community members, activists and others recognise a crisis or problem in their community and come together to form a group and seek help. Alternatively, an already-formed community-based organisation working in a particular area decides to take action.

MAP THE NEEDS

These community-based self-formed groups or organisations conduct quick needs assessments through interviews, conversations with community members and local leaders, and/or surveys to better understand the problem, key partners and ways to synergize with relevant organisations and response efforts.

SUBMIT ACTION PLAN

Community-based groups become aware of the Community-led Response Fund, where they access funding directly to address their problem. They submit a proposal with an action plan requesting a grant and assistance.

RECEIVE FUNDS

Donors contribute directly to the Community-led Response Fund. An intermediary organisation, such as a national NGO or an international NGO working at the frontline with deep contextual knowledge, reviews the proposal and checks that the groups is able to ensure compliance with humanitarian standards. Upon approval, funds are rapidly disbursed.

RECEIVE SUPPORT & SPEND FUNDS

The intermediary organisation provides training and support for the community group to strategize and implement solutions. They also provide light-touch monitoring throughout the proposed period. Community groups work with other groups and partners to carry out tasks to address problems.

REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

Community groups use social media such as Facebook pages, discussion groups, and tweets to inform members in the community on how funds are used, who is involved, the progress of activities, and expected outcomes. They also provide simplified reporting structures to update donors and intermediaries on their activities.

Community-led Response Fund storyboard

from the experience of a crisis-affected community representative

1 Capacity strengthening

Local groups are able to be trained on how to map threats, capacities, vulnerabilities, opportunities, etc.

2 Crisis response required

Pre-formed community volunteer protection are trained to map and identify acute needs that formal system responders may not know about.

3 Seeking out help

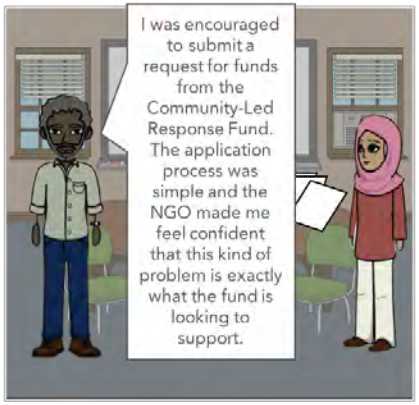
National NGOs with deep contextual knowledge are able to confirm the need in the area and promote access to funds.

4 Mapping the needs

The relevant National NGOs offer support for grant management, M&E, and other capability building in order to fulfill funder requirements.

5 Submitting request

National NGOs have access to pooled funds which are dedicated to servicing acute, emergency-related needs with small grants.



6 Receiving funds & increasing transparency

Grant recipients are faced with 'light touch' reporting requirements for the donor, and are instead encouraged to share how the money was used on dedicated community-owned Facebook groups as a form of peer accountability and awareness-raising.

7 Paperless reporting

Community-Led Response Fund donors recognise achievements made possible through the fund by visiting in person or video reports rather than paper-based ones.

Community-led Response Fund

testing with others

> With some communities, the furthest ones, the illiterate ones, you need time, a lot of time. It is not about the money you have, it is about your staff, and your belief. In one community, before we could start anything, we needed to visit them more than twenty times to build that trusting relationship.

> If there are other organisations working in the same communities as us but doing so in the 'traditional' way of working, that is, they come and distribute something to the people and leave. This creates conflicts in the community when people see money or things for free - it makes it harder for the protection group to make people understand.

> For instance, if they have an invoice saying they have one ton of cement, the monitoring committee will take the receipt and ensure the amounts are the same as in the invoice… then in a very simple way they have to write it in their report and they have to upload this on their Facebook page saying: "We thank you Mr and Mrs who donated the amount of XYZ," or "We thank you to this man because he did not charge any money for his work"

current barriers

1. Despite an emboldened push towards strengthening local crisis response efforts, donors remain reluctant to directly fund local NGOs and other frontline organisations because of perceived problems of scaling responses, lack of familiarity with their work and ways to vet them, and potentially differing political ideologies.
2. Community-based groups and local organisations struggle to access funds that are flexible enough to be responsive to changing needs on the ground.
3. Community self-help groups may not always have the right resources and training to react to needs on the ground.
4. There is insufficient focus on *downward* accountability, that is, being accountable to crisis-affected communities.

overcoming barriers

1. Involving intermediary organisations gives legitimacy, context, and support to community-based groups to address pressing needs during crisis.
2. Tapping into alternative funding sources, such as diaspora groups, philanthropists, and private sector circumvents any potential reluctance from government donors.
3. Integrating Community-led Response Fund with country-based pooled funds.
4. Convincing government donors that this idea's inherent accountability mechanisms could alleviate concerns through demonstrating successful examples.

An independent watchdog evaluating the impact of humanitarian aid using peer-to-peer and top-down approaches

Relief Watch

overview

Currently there is an overall lack of accountability within the humanitarian sector. Most evaluations take place either internally or by external organisations with a stake in current or future response efforts, and therefore have the potential for conflict of interest and dishonesty. Moreover, independent needs assessments, when they are actually done, are not always linked with strategic planning, coordination and delivery of aid.

Relief Watch aims to function as an independent body centered on accountability for how funds are used, coverage, quality and relevance of aid delivered. This concept endeavors to produce standardised frameworks for identification of areas of success and failure, contribute to increased quality and value for money, provoke public debate, address the scrutiny of aid and questions on how aid is used.

Most importantly, this entity stands outside of the sector and is not linked to any one humanitarian organisation. At the global governance level, it is composed of individuals such as journalists, and other experienced individuals no longer affiliated with a particular organisation, but who are familiar with the expectations placed on the sector. There will also be rotating member representatives appointed by different international humanitarian organisations. At the local level, trained local representatives collect and share data and report on ground-level activities.

There is a public reporting function, as well as strict enforcement mechanisms to deter bad behaviour. These mechanisms include corruption busting, sanctioning individuals, and linking with legal entities representing crisis affected people. If effective, it could have an enormous impact on the sector's own capacity to achieve impact. This concept has the potential to equip donors with an in-depth understanding of how their money is used and its impact on the ground.

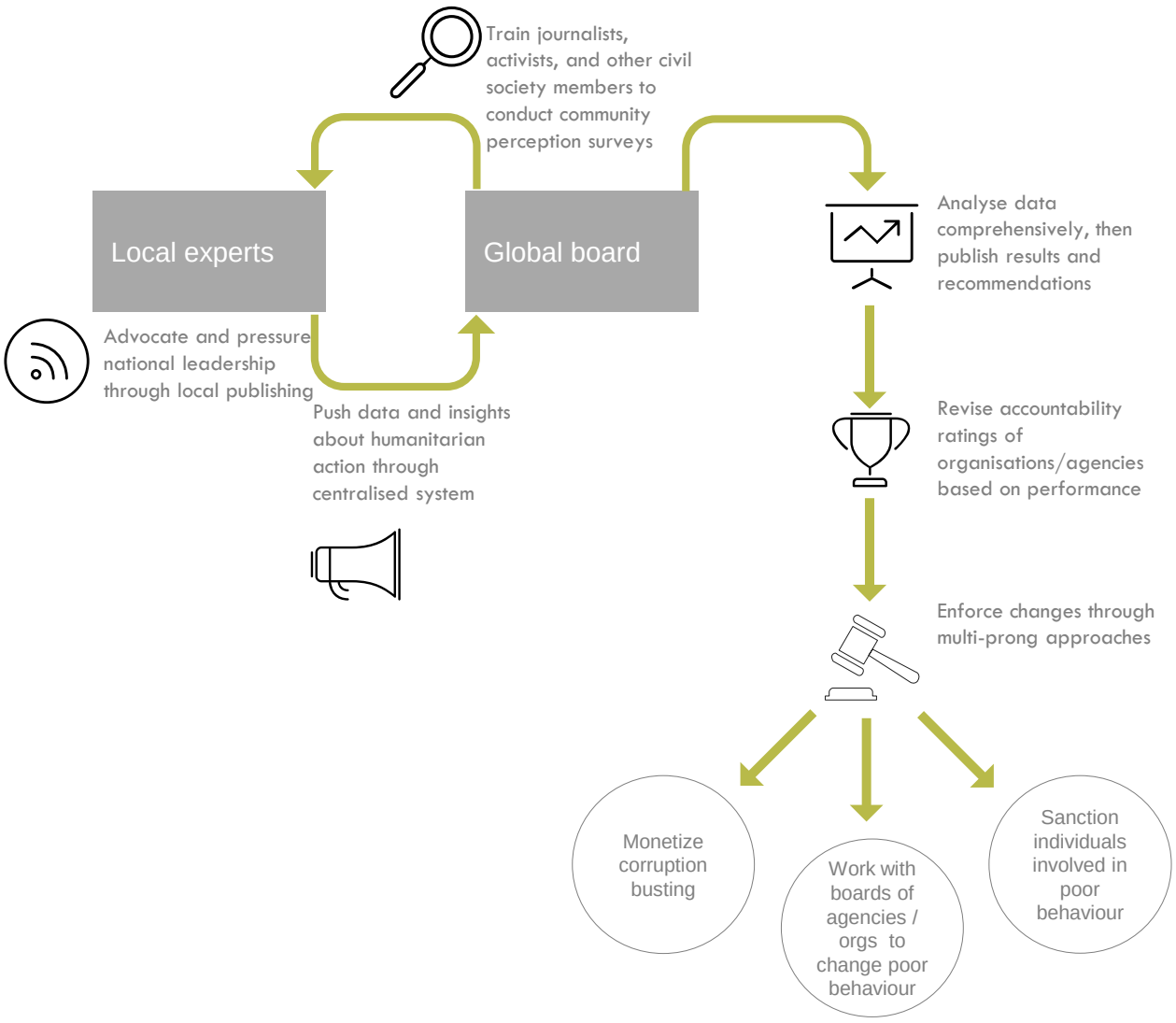
This concept could be funded through an automatic 1% tax from all participating humanitarian actors to generate funds. This would require a clear understanding of who will be taxed, and an agreement by the actors in the system to participate. Private and/or pooled funding could supplement this, and delinks the politics of particular government donors and international actors.

The people who are pioneering this concept envision it is as a driver for change, and as a tool for learning from success and mistakes from aid delivery.

aims and objectives

1. **Empower actors at the international and national level to understand, monitor and/or react to the performance of those responding (or not) to crisis.**
2. **Analyse and report objectively on needs, expenditure and activity; to identify gaps, especially where people are not receiving the right things and/or where people are not receiving anything.**
3. **Develop a strong network of pressure delivery relationships with boards, political associations, and other groups in order shift the behaviours of aid actors, aid donors and crisis affected governments.**
4. **Forces agencies to think about their impact on people rather than just reporting on resource use and output back to donors.**
5. **Creates a culture of honesty about failure, and relieves pressure to present results as perfect and predictable.**

how it works



FORM GLOBAL BOARD

A board made of highly mixed groups. They are outside the sector, such as journalists, experienced leaders, and representatives appointed by traditional humanitarian organisations who are periodically rotated out/replaced.

TRAIN/ EMPOWER LOCAL EXPERTS

Train journalists, activists, civil society members to conduct community perception surveys, media monitoring, rumour tracking of aid response. Support them to report, advocate, and pressure national leadership.

PUSH DATA UPWARD

Create a centralised system for local accountability experts to share data and insights/ stories on crisis response and effectiveness of humanitarian organisations.

ANALYSE DATA

Analytical experts gather and analyse data from community surveys, media reports, etc. and compare those with information from independent needs assessments to determine impact of crisis response and effectiveness of international and local agencies.

PUBLISH & RATE AGENCIES

Publish findings in the media and create reports with detailed accounts of failings and successes of aid efforts. Generate accountability rankings of organisations, similar to financial credit ratings.

ENFORCE CHANGES

Develop strong set of enforcement mechanisms via incentivising boards of humanitarian agencies and donors to change poor practices, monetize corruption busting and sanction individuals involved in poor performance and bad behaviours.

Relief Watch storyboard

from the experience of a community-based journalist

1 Train local experts

Many of the stories that are told about what occurs in the humanitarian sector, especially in camp contexts, is told by practitioners in the formal system. The affected people themselves often have very few outlets for self-representation.

2 Demanding transparency in data

The politics of representation and storytelling can belittle efforts to make humanitarian media more transparent, open, and honest. For this reason, Relief Watch enforces a structure that pushes data *upward*.

3 Finding a new avenue

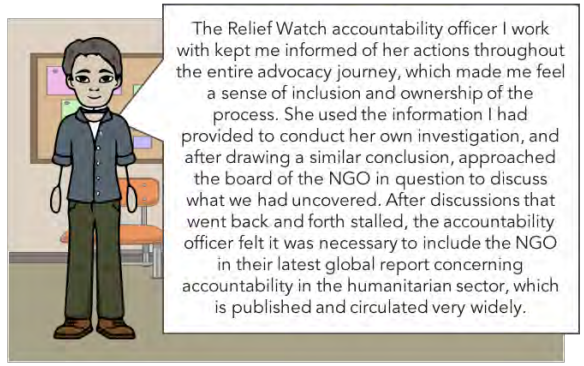
Relief Watch provides a way to apply what the newspaper had found regarding under-performance and lack of accountability for the betterment of the entire sector. This helps to legitimise their cause.

4 Assuring quality

Relief Watch not only capitalises on local knowledge for whistleblowing, but it also provides a foundation for people who need training and support to improve the quality of the data that's provided.

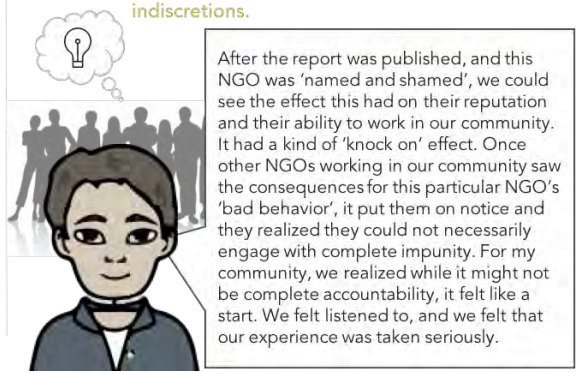
5 Using information responsibly

With a pipeline of quality data and information established, Relief Watch is able to aggregate learnings and publish them widely so the sector can react accordingly. This is so that crisis-affected people's stories are not misused or misinterpreted.



6 Exposing poor performance & showcasing enforcement

One of the side benefits of the publications that Relief Watch is responsible for is that it encourages other organisations to ensure their practices are not aligned with the poor performing orgnaisations. It also means that measures may be taken to increase visibility over aberrations and indiscretions.



An independent watchdog evaluating the impact of humanitarian aid using peer-to-peer and top-down approaches

Relief Watch

testing with others

> There would be a degree to which you could occasionally get a blockbuster story out of this that would shame an organisation into changing behaviour, but that doesn't sound to me like a recipe for real systemic change.

> If you get a front page article in the New York Times by X that says this new Ombudsman (Relief Watch(has found out that all this shit is going down and WFP, Save the Children and NRC are all complicit of this, well believe me people will pay attention. If the organisation is able to uncover problems and news organisations deem it to be important.

> There's the humanitarian equivalent of the Gulf Oil Spill, report it, put it on the front page and believe me there will be accountability. They won't be able to bow it off if there is malfeasance at that level.

> The biggest question is who is willing to give this organization the mandate? Or from what does the organization derive its credibility? It has to be a group of people who are fearless and who don't care that they'll never get another job in the aid community again… I don't think you can have donors on the board. I don't think you can have donor reps on staff either, its got to be people who are beholding to no one.

> Good luck with finding your independent world. Your independent financing. The reality is that all the money people -- Most people just want to do good and be associated with good… and there are very few people who have money or means or influence who would want to be critical of attempts to do that.

> By getting more public engagement and creating greater public accountability you will finally force the system to change a little bit.

current barriers

1. There is limited use and respect for existing definitions of success, or enforceable humanitarian laws or legal standards, beyond the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.

2. A tax on humanitarian actors to create delinked funding avenues may not be realistic. Equally, funding sourced from private individuals/philanthropists may be 'wishful thinking' and may contain its own political baggage.

3. The concept assumes having sufficient power, willingness, and 'teeth' (in terms of legal sanctions) to enforce sanctions, and penalise corruption.

4. There is a fear of increased transparency/accountability among humanitarian agencies, and of looking 'bad.'

overcoming barriers

1. Getting critical mass/consensus around need for transparency and buy-in from humanitarian agencies, donors, etc.

2. Donors and host governments rely on certification/greenlight from Relief Watch before funding or letting agency into country.

3. Branding this as a learning tool, and creating a culture that failure or a poor rating from Relief Watch is okay.

4. Rotating representation of agencies on global board causes strong governance

5. Determining innovative financing mechanisms, including crowd funding, using progressive philanthropists

Connecting procurement supply chains of humanitarian actors with displacement affected community owned cooperatives for a sustainable social economy

Humanitarian Social Economy

overview

In many protracted crisis scenarios, displaced people experience life under conditions of liminality, both spatial and temporal. As a result, they often remain dependent on international aid for extended periods of time with little opportunity for leading self-reliant, dignified lives.

This concept reimagines the relationship between humanitarian actors and displacement-affected communities in protracted situations by building a sustainable social economy. Here, international humanitarian actors forego their function as direct providers of aid in favour of two new roles. First, they mobilise their convening capabilities to form a working group in partnership with local state authorities and public institutions, community-based organisations, and local NGOs to enable and facilitate a cluster of community-owned enterprises that form the backbone of the humanitarian social economy. Second, as a procuring organisation or 'anchor institution', humanitarian response organisations become clients of displacement-affected communities through their 'worker-owned cooperatives.'

Initially, this concept may work best in protracted crisis settings with a significant international humanitarian response presence. Donors grant money directly to a 'community investment fund' – with a committee composed of elected members of the host community and representatives from displaced populations – to review, advise/assist, and provide seed capital for worker owned cooperatives. The 'enabling actor' can act as liaison between the fund committee and donors to assist in building its financial and governance structure.

Refugees, internally displaced and host community members can connect through these worker owned cooperatives to produce goods and services that meet the procurement needs of humanitarian anchor organisations working in the area. The community affected by displacement themselves manage the means of production in exchange for living wages.

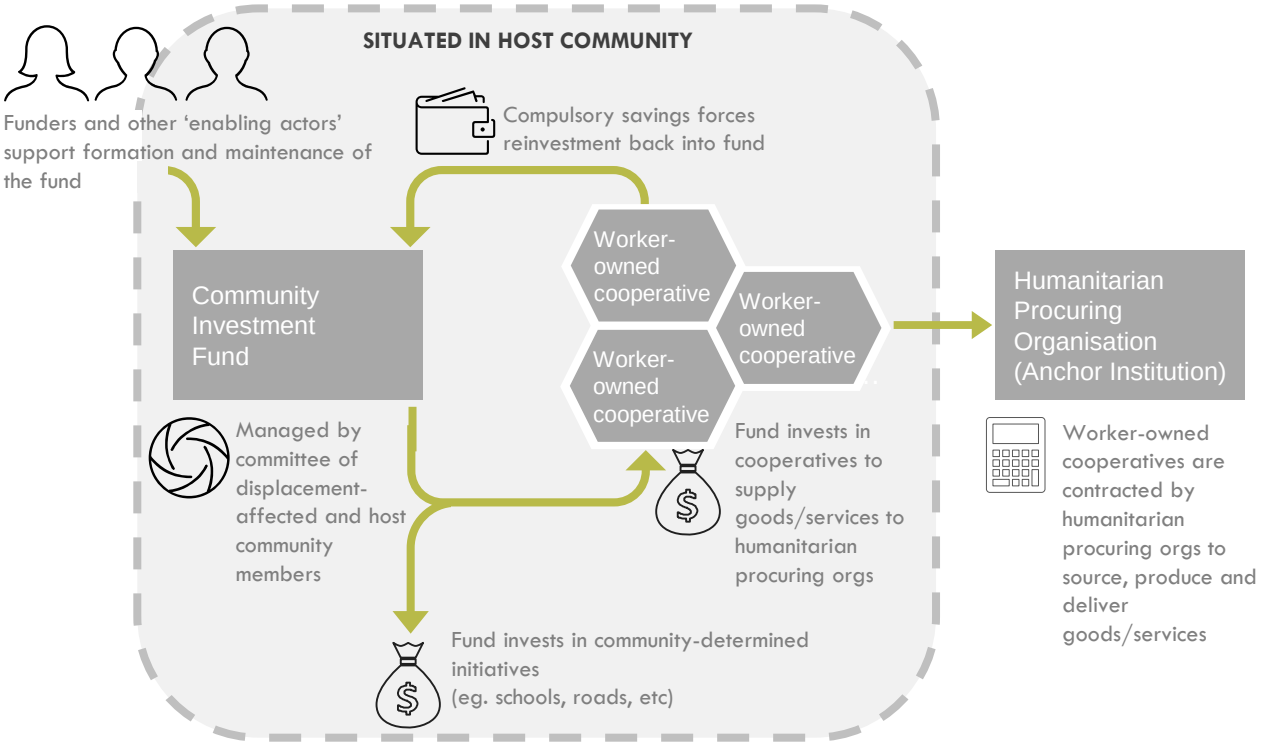
Alongside this, a certain portion of profit from each cooperative is reinvested towards the fund through a compulsory savings scheme, and the remaining percentage is retained by the members of the cooperative for their own private use. The money from the community investment fund can be directed towards community needs, such as, supporting community-owned schools, health clinics, etc. This all builds greater integration between the local population and the refugees, who are all potential worker-owners.

The humanitarian social economy concept has a multiplier effect by allowing displacement-affected people to reinvest their money into dignified, self-determined opportunities that significantly expand the size of displacement-affected economies.

aims and objectives

1. **Creating space for existing residents and new arrivals to work in common cause under dignified working conditions.**
2. **Establishing self-sustained financing of humanitarian interventions thereby strengthening displacement affected communities' capacity to withstand future shocks.**
3. **Launching a community fund, through which surplus from worker-owned cooperatives can be recycled to finance further community initiatives.**
4. **Establishing worker owned cooperatives, producing goods and services that can meet the procurement needs of humanitarian agencies and INGOs.**
5. **Creating exit strategies from protracted situations for humanitarian actors, enabling them to focus more on emergency situations and on populations that do not have access to the humanitarian social economy.**

how it works



SET UP COMMUNITY INVESTMENT FUND

Funders can contribute to a community investment fund by liaising with an enabling actor group – comprised of representatives from local municipality, displacement-affected community, local, national, and international NGOs, and humanitarian agencies. The investment fund is composed of representatives from displacement-affected and host community members. The enabling actors assist in the initial financial and governance setup of the fund.

SUPPORT CO-OPERATIVES

The fund's committee assists in needs assessment, strategy and investment planning. In addition, they determine which cooperatives to fund, provide business support. The cooperatives in turn, receive seed capital and assistance to set up their business, and negotiate with humanitarian anchor institutions to procure a fix-term contract to produce goods.

PRODUCE GOODS & REAP PROFITS

The owner-workers of the cooperatives produce high-quality goods for anchor institutions, such as UN agencies and international NGOs, and receive wages and cover costs from the exchange. A percentage of the profit from the sales (e.g. 30%) are returned to the workers as a dividend. The workers can decide to reinvest a proportion into the company or use for consumption or other purposes.

CONTRIBUTE TO SAVINGS MECHANISM

The system requires that a proportion of the profit (e.g. 70%) is is reinvested into the fund. The fund's committee determines how and when that money can be used. The worker-owned cooperatives make annual accounts available for scrutiny by the Community Investment Fund.

INVEST IN COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

Based on needs assessments, and priorities in the community, the investment fund committee can fund community development initiatives, such as, supporting community-owned schools, health clinics, etc.

PROVIDE FEEDBACK

The investment fund committee reports progress and results back to donors, and also keeps the community abreast of how the money is used and invested.

Humanitarian Social Economy storyboard

from the experience of a refugee

1 Lacking rights

Among refugees who are able to secure work after displacement, there are few who have stable employment opportunities where their rights as a worker are respected (i.e. fair pay, regular hours, etc.).

2 Lacking options

Where opportunities for employment exist for people affected by crisis, they are often few and offer little to satisfy their longer-term ambitions and aspirations.

3 Defining a new pathway out

Initially supported through donor-provided seed funding, the Community-Owned Cooperative initiative affected people to become worker-owners and fulfill the procurement needs of humanitarian INGOs (e.g. food distribution). The affected people control the means of production, providing goods and services that fulfill procurement needs.

4 Becoming a member

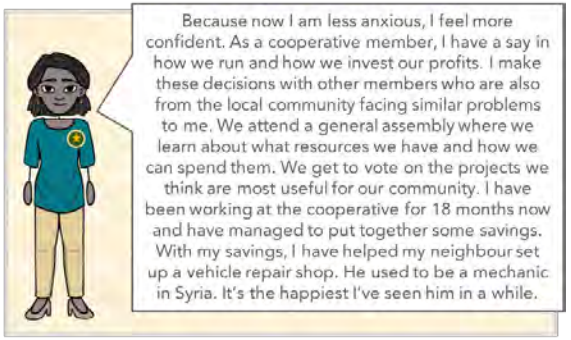
Being a member of a worker-owned cooperative means that you are provided with a living wage, savings opportunities, and more.

5 Sharing profit & growing community

The cooperative model ensures that 70% of surplus made from procurement contracts are funneled back into a "Community Investment Fund" (credit union) which serves as a savings mechanism for affected people. The remaining 30% of surplus remains with the worker members of the cooperative who have decision-making power over how they want to use this. They can save it, use it to establish private enterprise, etc.

6 Becoming a decision-maker

The cooperative redefines one's role in the community, from a refugee to a worker to a worker-member, to a worker-owner. The cooperative also allows a worker to reclaim a sense of dignity in his/her work, since the cooperative is its own community built on values of solidarity and wealth-sharing.



Connecting procurement supply chains of humanitarian actors with displacement affected community owned cooperatives for a sustainable social economy

Humanitarian Social Economy

testing with others

> Ownership… it's more than the money they're going to make. When someone comes to be a refugee, they have lost a lot of things. […] So it's like restarting the journey of feeling, 'I own something', and gaining the dignity back. It's a good thing.

> From the point of view of the refugee or the IDP, they don't care about what's humanitarian and what's development. That's been proven over and over again. They want to get on with their lives.

> There's a lot of discomfort from our side- from the international community side, it's a power relation thing. In the end, I think there's the whole issue of transaction. The transaction starts-- the money comes from us and goes to them. Here by buying a service, you can alter that transaction or that power relation a bit but if just, money comes from us to go to them, then that's when it doesn't happen. The minute you try and alter that power balance, the dynamics changes but that requires change from our side.

> There is nervousness and concern and, 'can they do it well enough?'. Then comes all sorts of explanations, can they manage it well enough? Is the quality of the bread good enough? These mattresses, are they as good as the mattresses that we would supply them? Do they comply with Sphere standards? We have all these excuses but it's because we just have a really hard time letting go. It's a big power relation that has to be altered and I can see it already a little bit in the way this is framed.

current barriers

1. Willingness of host states to give displaced people the right to work and the right to establish these cooperatives.
2. Reluctance by some humanitarian actors to invest/support long-term development efforts.
3. The political economy of the humanitarian anchor organisations must be well understood in order to fundamentally disrupt and change it.
4. Given there will be social benefits that are harder to quantify, these approaches do not always fit neatly into a quantitative-heavy log frame culture.
5. Concern that quality control of goods and production cannot be maintained by cooperatives.

overcoming barriers

1. Recognising and pitching this concept as a way to deal with protracted humanitarian crises and provide an avenue for dignified employment opportunities for communities.
2. Collaborating with development partners, private sectors and others to bridge the humanitarian-development divide.
3. Learning from cooperatives in other spaces can help scale concept.
4. Procuring contracts with humanitarian anchor institutions at the outset, allows cooperatives to overcome barriers to market entry.
5. Using a compulsory savings mechanism from cooperative profits to reinvest in the community initiatives, decreases long-term dependence on international aid.

A humanitarian network and platform where people affected by crisis can connect with responders and service providers who have a matching supply for their demand

United Beyond Nations

overview

This concept envisions a humanitarian system that is networked, adaptive and driven by problem-solving rather than by mandate-based service provision. Currently, local responses during a crisis are coordinated in an ad hoc manner, relying on established relationships with other international humanitarian actors. This concept aims to have a quicker, more flexible, adaptable response, and connects people and organisations beyond the international humanitarian sector.

Using a digital platform, this concept is to create a network where local organisations/community-based groups have access to a local, regional and global network of people with skills and resources that are pre-vetted, and can be mobilised in a decentralised way to solve specific and defined humanitarian problems.

People affected by crisis and first responders needing support can make requests through the platform and interact with a bot (artificial intelligence) to help 'diagnose' the problem and determine needs. The platform will provide a list of certified and nearby providers, who have resources or expertise to deliver customised, needs-based solutions. For more complicated problems, requests will be escalated to the platform secretariat, composed of representatives from national government, NGOs, and international experts, to determine operational and technical needs, as well as validators. Certification of providers and members in the network will be done by the platform's ISO committee. Quality assurance could be ensured through: franchising; peer-review; or public ratings system.

This concept can maintain both online and offline capabilities by enabling offline representatives to feed requests into the network and act as liaisons. Money can be contributed into the network through private individuals, web-based crowd sourcing platforms, or as institutional donors funding certified NGO initiatives/requests.

Responders and providers on the ground may choose to self-fund certain requests as well. People who make requests through the platform will report back on the quality of service received from providers, and potentially with donors who funded service providers.

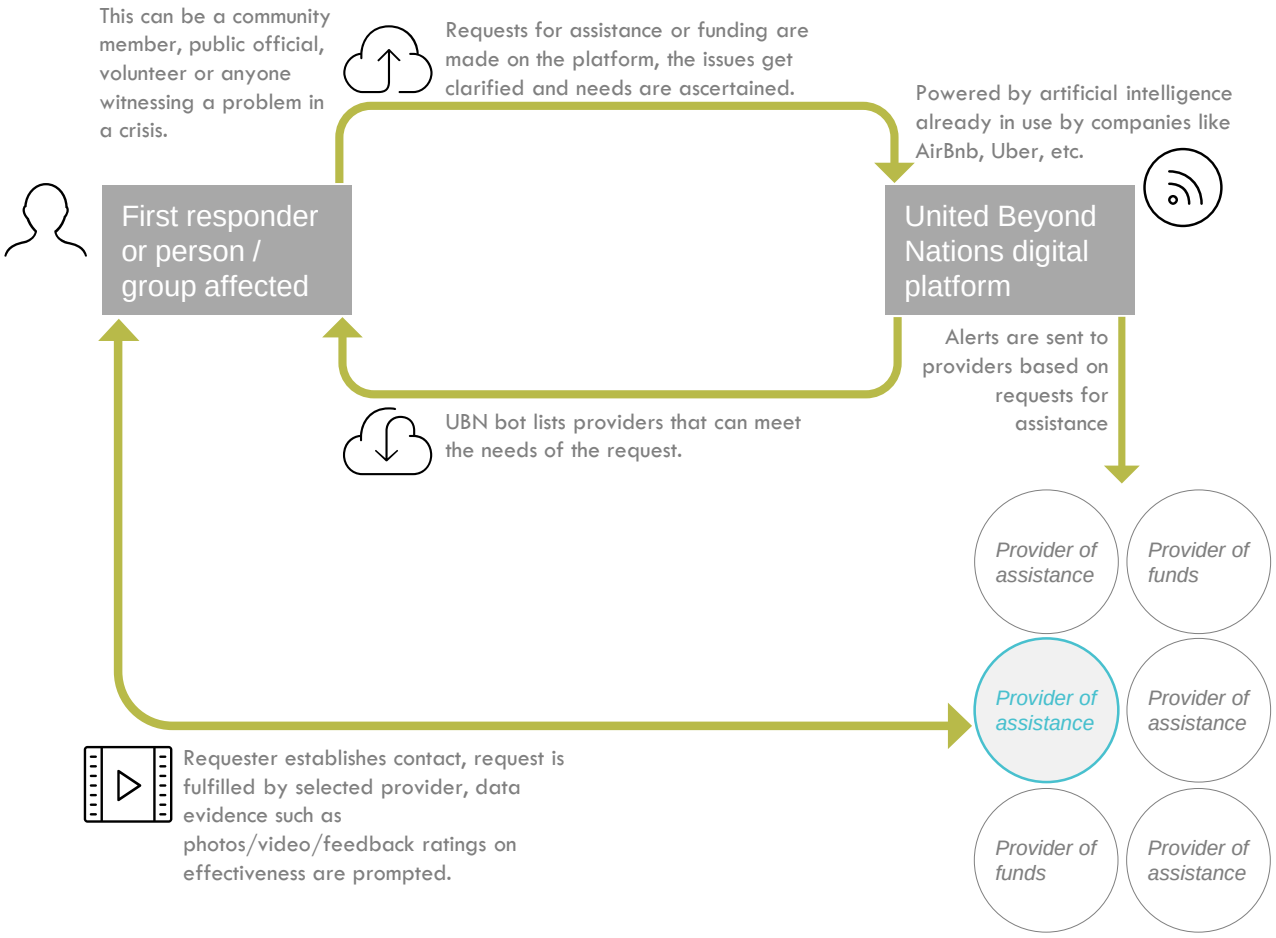
This concept aims to automate the transactional activities that humanitarian actors currently spend a large amount of time on, and instead places value on human relationship-building efforts. This concept will mainly address low cost, lower complexity problems, and is not a substitute for state action or covering the the full range of needs in a crisis situation. As state capacity improves, the need for this platform will likely decrease. This concept accommodates and can work concurrently and weave in with the international humanitarian system.

aims and objectives

1. **Having more nimble, agile, and appropriate crisis response that is grounded in problem solving.**
2. **Enabling local response as a first response. Building a community of service providers by drawing on and supporting local response capacity and resources.**
3. **Tapping into a broad range of actors and capabilities regionally and globally, to expand the 'we' within the system.**
4. **Discouraging and undermining institutional flag planting, and instead rejuvenating solidarity as the starting point for humanitarian response.**
5. **Levering technology to connect people and organisations in a rapid way, and have fail-safe mechanisms for offline services to overcome barriers in network connectivity.**

This concept name was inspired by Skinner, P. (2018) Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success. London: Robinson

how it works



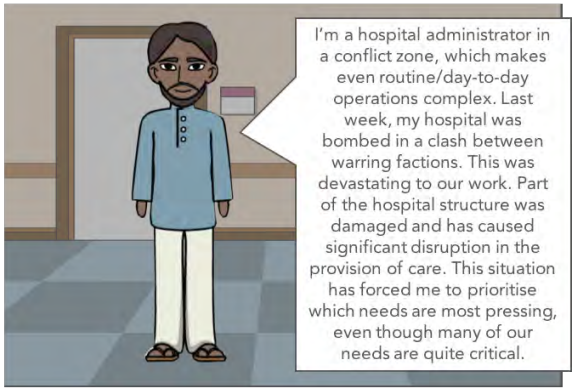
IDENTIFY PROBLEM(S)	MAKE REQUEST	INTERACT WITH BOT	CONNECT WITH PROVIDERS	RECEIVE/ SPEND FUNDS	PROVIDE FEEDBACK
A person affected, frontline responder or community organisation encounters a specific problem during a crisis, and identifies what they need from the specific 'problem areas' on the United Beyond Nations digital platform.	They register their organisation into the platform. They then make a request by providing details of the problem, what their specific needs are and the kind of help required. The bot assesses the request and ascertains the needs.	The bot verifies providers in the network, and proritises certified / highly rated responders. It searches for a match at the local level first, and if it can't find one, then it goes regional, and failing that, national or international. If the problem is more complex, the issue is escalated to the platform secretariat to determine support.	The bot lists options in rank order based on capacity to address the specific needs and reviews. The person making the request can choose and connect with the preferred provider(s).	Responders and providers on the ground can self-fund requests or submit a request into the platform to access individual private donors, or institutional/public pooled funds. The bot assesses the financial needs quickly and can rapidly disburse money from pooled funds or through private individuals or web-based fundraising platforms.	All who make requests on the digital platform are required to rate the quality of service they have received from providers they work with, and can interact with donors through a chat service. They will be requested to provide simplified reports of completed work through sharing photographs, audio/video recordings, testimonials etc.

United Beyond Nations storyboard

from the experience of a hospital administrator

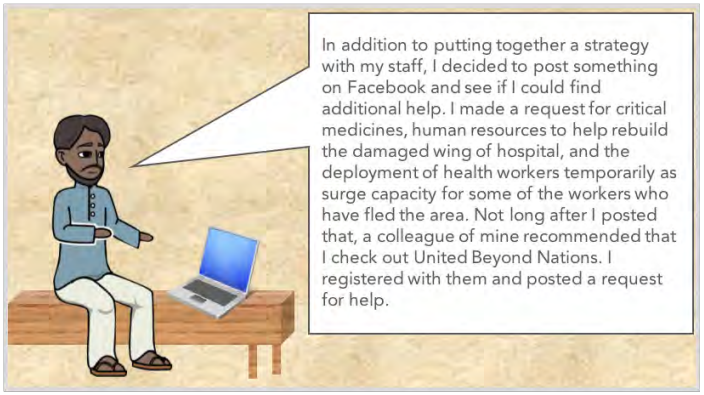
1 Identifying the problems

During protracted conflicts, smaller scale problems are often not addressed by the formal humanitarian system. Local organisations facing these problems are the experts on their context and ways to address them. Conflicts disrupt their supply chain, making it difficult to problem-solve and connect with the right people and partners.



2 Making a request

Premised on the idea that specific problems require specific solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, United Beyond Nations allows local organisations to request help to address specific needs. Users are able to easily register and log into the online platform to make a request. They list their needs, and other identifying information.

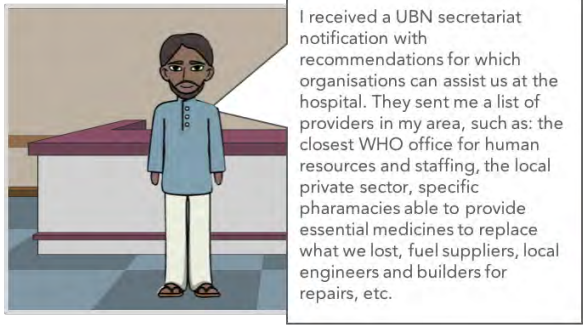


3 Interacting with the platform

Once a request is submitted, the bot or automated software assesses the request against the service providers and suppliers in its database. The program uses a 'chat function' to interact with the user and further clarify their needs.

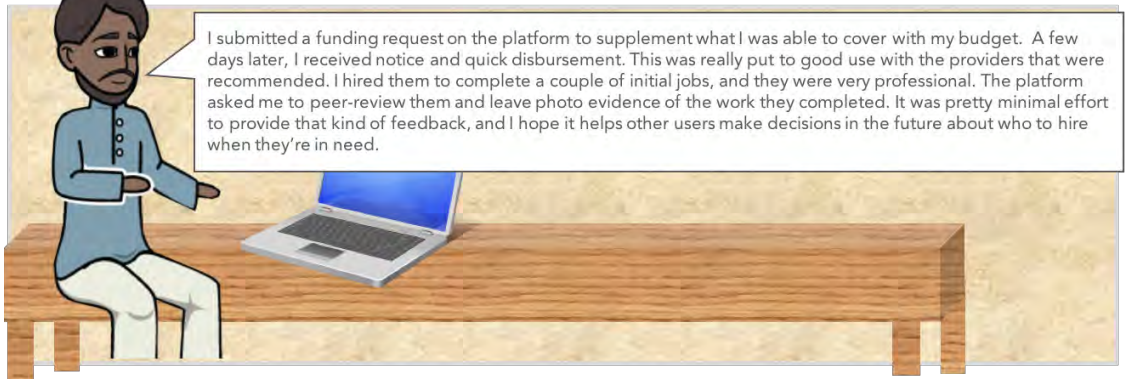
4 Connected with others

The bot is able to match certified providers, some of whom are local traditional and non-traditional humanitarian organisations, while others are local offices of international organisations. Based on expertise, proximity, availability, and ratings, the bot makes recommendations on which organisations could assist the best, and sends the full list of providers.



5 Seeking funding & feedback

The platform serves as a coordination tool between individual donors and others who want to submit funds to a pool. Users are able to access that pool of funding upon request, which gives them the autonomy to decide how the money is spent and on which provider. Users can also report back to the platform on the quality of the service they received from the providers. Rather than being intermittently available, designated people from donor agencies are also directly and consistently available via a chat service. Users are then asked to provide evidence of completed work through data, photographs, testimonials, etc.



A humanitarian network and platform where people affected by crisis can connect with responders and service providers who have a matching supply for their demand

United Beyond Nations

testing with others

> I have a sense you would miss out on some people, hard to reach areas… I'm assuming you would not get good coverage. I'm assuming it would be more individuals benefitting rather than large communities benefitting in that some are just quicker or have internet or have a phone. Those that have and have access to internet can immediately put in their requests and might get serviced... This could create some new dynamics that was not foreseen.

> We're starting to see that, in fact they organise themselves now together and like that they're able to then have access to more funding, and there's more interest from government to fund them, more interest from donors to fund them. So I think an important aspect of all of this has been really establishing the platform for these actors to come together and to fund them not one over another, but to fund them as a system. If we all want to get to this level, then what do we need together to get there? So I think that was one of the things that we see has let's say sustainable impact in that way.

> It starts from a country capacity assessment. So it's an assessment not just of an organisation but of the system, the humanitarian system. How does it work? How does local government, national government link up with civil society? What are the links between civil society? So it's really looking at a picture of how the whole system functions, including organisational capacity. Who's there is that capacity there?

current barriers

1. Potential for resistance from international agencies and others who currently have power. This concept risks circumventing their role in determining need and delivering aid.
2. Raising visibility and getting a critical mass of members.
3. Maintaining quality control among service providers, and standardising the certification process.
4. Potential problems scaling and integrating solutions with larger strategic planning.
5. Poor access to network connectivity and technology in some of the most vulnerable and challenging settings.

overcoming barriers

1. Pitching this concept as a complementary approach to fill gaps left by the "formal system."
2. Utilizing existing technology and interest whether it is through social media for communication, satellite imagery, Facebook photo matching, etc. For remote areas, offering offline capabilities through platform liaisons or other means will be critical.
3. Leveraging different, non-traditional actors in the system to expand the network and increase membership.
4. Enticing and tapping into diaspora efforts, including individual donors to fund small projects that require immediate assistance.

conclusion

6

Photo credit: Irina Mosel/ODI

our ethos

People affected by crisis and conflict have rights. When states struggle – or fail – to protect and provide for their people's needs, the global community has an obligation to act. We, the Core Design Team on this project, recognise that efforts to serve people affected by crisis have often been compromised by the incentive structures of the system in which we operate. We recognise that, at its worst, the sector can be impatient, competitive, bureaucratic, and demonstrate poor accountability to the people it claims to be helping. It is time to turn this behaviour on its head, unravel the current top-down model of humanitarian action and create a new paradigm. This new paradigm has three core elements: Agency, Adaptability and Accountability. Using this paradigm, we:

Agency

1. acknowledge that people affected by crisis are humanitarian actors and active agents of change in their own lives;
2. commit to recognising and supporting those best positioned to respond, irrespective of our own political agendas and financial interests; and
3. commit to addressing the imbalance between the voices of donors and the voices of crisis affected communities, so as to place them at the centre of policy, planning and operational decision making.

Adaptability

1. acknowledge that others have an important and legitimate role to play in assisting and protecting crisis affected communities; and
2. commit to creating organisational incentives for collaboration, co-creation and failing-forward in a spirit of honesty, transparency and learning.

Accountability

1. commit to independent reviews of our application of humanitarian principles and professional standards and publishing the results of such reviews.
2. aim to ensure a level of coverage, assistance and protection in line with the principle of impartiality and in line with fundamental human rights.

With this in mind, we will do three things: work and advocate for states to better fulfil their obligations; mobilise a diverse coalition of actors to test new models of support, and source new funding streams to stimulate and embed innovation.

What does success look like? A more sustainable humanitarian system that better addresses needs, shows greater accountability to people affected by crises, and is less exposed to political agendas.

Living the ethos: a behavioural shift

The principles and values contained within the starting ethos cannot live by decree alone. Instead, they live through the behaviours and practices of humanitarians who uphold them everyday. Living this ethos means nurturing a new approach, a behavioural shift through a different way of thinking, speaking, and doing.

Thinking differently

attitudes & beliefs

Attitudes can signify one's membership to a particular group; they act as an extension of shared values.
The new humanitarian worldview relies on actors' belief in: transparency even when it's not convenient, power that's shared rather than assumed, trust in actors not because they have the credentials but because they have earned it, accountability that's human-centred and downward – to the people who humanitarian action purports to serve, and dignified pathways to a healthy and productive life. Above all, it is seeking out previously unheard, smothered, and ignored voices within the humanitarian conversation.

Speaking differently

linguistics & lexicon

Words are actions – what we say has a force, an influence, on the world around us.
This new approach embraces this. It rejects the concept of a 'beneficiary' as a non-actor. Beneficiary as 'rights holder', coordination as 'synchronisation' or 'symphony', and sector as 'network' represent examples of the new perspectives and intentions forged through an alternative humanitarian lexicon.

Doing differently

ritual & ceremony

Ritual, routine, and other activities help us inscribe meaning into our lives.
This means going far beyond attendance at exclusive conferences or making global commitments which fail to be adequately enforced. The new approach to humanitarian action means more day-to-day rituals and ceremonies that incentivise proactive trust-building, reward genuine collaboration, and prescribe complementarity to avoid parallel structures.

Thinking differently means…

Rejecting the following:

Sanitising political problems AND colonial attitudes to power.

Mandate-driven mindsets that breed exclusivity and entitlement.

Easy and comfortable simplifications of any sort, ie. international is rational, neutral, impartial and independent – whereas local is primitive, biased and self-interested OR international is self-interested and biased – whereas local is authentic and just.

Simplistic and emotive statements as a way of avoiding the difficult realities.

Orthodoxy and self-satisfied, self-censoring consensus in favour of questioning and disagreeing.

Unhelpful dichotomies, such as Saviour V victim AND Giver V receiver AND Deserving V undeserving AND Good/just V bad/evil

Speaking differently means…

Using the words:

Crisis-affected	*Agent/Actor*	*Rights-holder*
Disaster-affected	*Reciprocity*	*Producer/Participant*
Displacement-affected	*Solidarity*	*Investment*

Rejecting the words

~~*Recipient*~~	~~*Host/guest*~~	~~*Localisation*~~
~~*Beneficiary*~~	~~*Caseload*~~	~~*Traditional/non-traditional*~~
		~~*Charity*~~

No longer use “us/them” phrasing as an active “us” suggests crisis-affected people play a passive role in crisis response.

No longer conduct meetings, write reports, and share knowledge exclusively in the English language. Language and form is adapted based on audience.

Doing differently means…

No longer have meetings, conferences, or fora about people who are not present, or at least represented, at the table. It is now ‘never about us without us’

No longer putting up psychological, political or physical barriers between each other

No longer planting flags or competing out of habit

Openness to working with actors outside of the international humanitarian system (and non-humanitarian actors working towards common goals) rather than supplant or exclude.

Existing meetings and conferences and annual meetings become platforms for highlighting stories of human agency, community-led action and self-reliance.

No more unidirectional ‘capacity building’ activities that assume international actors are the teachers and local actors as the students. It is now about a spirit of learning and sharing knowledge as equal contributors to ongoing and adaptive learning processes.

What we learned

The humanitarian system of today is marked by boundaries that are often fluid and situation-dependent; engagements that are forged through diverse and challenging geopolitical contexts; organisations that are expected to be competitive under certain circumstances and mutualistic partners in others; and resources that are limited distribution, managed by parallel or unrelated stakeholder groups and always urgently demanded.

Applying design thinking, a craft that is as creative as it is disciplined to these knotty dynamics was as fulfilling as it was frustrating: It has resulted in new ideas, new takes on old ideas, and, in the end, prompted more questions than answered:

"What is exogenous to the formal system and what is not?", "In what ways are power structures context- and time-specific? And in what ways is power something that is 'held,' 'shared', and 'taken away'?", and "Being a sector lacking a command-and-control function, who holds the strategic vision for change in the sector?". The further we got in our research, in our designing, and in our testing with actors in the system, the more we realised these were highly cogent and present questions that many actors (across scales, roles, and geographies) had been asking themselves for years.

Ultimately, what this process had to offer was a new approach to system change that charted out the desired experience of system users – from aid recipients to frontline responders to large aid agencies and the donors that fund them – and derived from this the ethos, characteristics and culture this ideal system should embrace in order to enable these ideal experiences: in short, a more interconnected and adaptive humanitarian system that is built upon the agency of people, and is held accountable for its failings and successes. Moreover, this human-centred design process has proven to be a rich launch pad for re-thinking the way change happens in this system. Identifying opportunities for change in this space was far from straightforward, but most people we interviewed rejected the market-based, mechanistic and deterministic models for catalysing change have dominated the thinking and behaviour in the sector to date.

They expressed an avid desire the desire to see things work differently. Many wanted the time and space to adapt, and had scores of ideas on how to do things differently and better.

True change, however, will not happen without a cultural shift that involves the international humanitarian system accepting an alternative role and a different approach to solving the problems it confronts in its work, in its actions and interactions. For example, what if the international humanitarian system:

- flipped the humanitarian supply chain, imagining aid recipients as both end users but also producers and service providers that have a role and a long-term stake in the response?

- reimagined our bureaucracies as highly adaptive networks that allowed for disintermediated interactions, devolution of power and decision making as close to the ground as possible?

- honed its skills as 'humanitarian gardeners,' where a primary role was not always action, but cultivating the talents of others that exist outside the formal system, and at the same time

- rebuilt its field craft and fortified itstolerance for risk to remain 1) best-in-class in technical expertise; 2) centres of excellence for innovation and learning; and reliable and skilled sources of timely and impartial assistance and protection, and particularly in situations of catastrophic failure, where countries and communities fall through the cracks, where the needs and aspirations of the truly voiceless need amplifying, where the size of the problem is too big for any one group to take on?

For those involved, success in this process means seeing the readers of this document not only building empathy for others in the system (as many people we spoke with have worked across many roles and contexts) but employing that empathy in their work. Now is the time to take up this new worldview, this new humanitarian practice. Join us in imagining – and practicing – alternative humanitarian action that is human-centred, adaptable and accountable.

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Concluding remarks from the Core Design Team

For the first time in a long time I feel like we are moving forward on defining a new paradigm for humanitarian action.

Lars Peter Nissen

Participating in this project has been enormously inspiring. Of course it has surfaced well-known frustrations with the global humanitarian system; but it has also yielded a wealth of ideas and opportunities. Being able to pilot and refine at least a few of these will hopefully liberate untapped energies and help us move towards more dignified and sustainable solutions.

Richard Smith-Bingham

To my mind, some of the ideas that emerged from this process are not radically new or even radical at all. But I've come to believe that small changes – piloted and implemented at a small scale wherever possible – can have greater impact than we may imagine. Introducing small changes – call them experiments – in the way the international community prevents and responds to crises can begin to shape the narrative around whether change is possible, shape the landscape in which humanitarian action takes place, and eventually, shape humanitarian action itself.

Heba Aly

One possible way of thinking about the humanitarian endeavour is that it helps us (through our actions and interventions) get away from the world as it is and closer to the world as it can be. In that sense it is always on the cusp of becoming – it is a striving. The ideas outlined in this design document are potential trajectories for humanitarian journeys of becoming. I imagine there are plenty of others also.

Tahir Zaman

When you put yourself in other people's shoes and judge problems from others' perspectives, the results can surprise you. Politics, mandates, processes fade from view; what emerges in their place is compassion, ingenuity and good sense. This process was never about the art of the possible, and the ideas in this Design Experiment may not all be feasible, given the current system and the politics of the day. But they do represent what is desirable, according to those who engage with the humanitarian sector in some way. May they serve as inspiration, points of departure, seeds of change.

Christina Bennett

How to build a better humanitarian 'system'? We used design theory to approach that question from a different angle. The process yielded no answer and no solution, which strikes me as a sign of our having properly engaged with the complexity and dysfunction of humanitarian action. What did it yield? A pile of designs; equal parts new ideas, new takes on old ideas, opportunities, difficulties, disagreements and dead ends. And all a call for heading back to the drawing board.

Marc DuBois

Designing for people with people is what made IKEA become a successful company. At the Foundation we bring the values that drive such design-thinking to our grant-making. As we need to make smart decisions as to where to place investments, we look for drivers of change, holding true to the same design-principles IKEA uses as much as we can. This design experiment is the first showing several solutions for barriers long-identified against the overall system, and it helps us as a funder to consider new investment areas that speak to the new future of humanitarian action.

Annemieke Tsike-Sossah

For those of us who spend our days drawing attention to the maladies and disappointments of the humanitarian response system, the chance to take fresh and constructive approach to developing a positive vision and designing practical solutions was too good to pass up. The conversations were deeply uncomfortable a times, even for practiced cynics and critics. Its worth reading the report to hear what some of the 'users' of the system told us they experience and feel.

This was always a difficult undertaking however, and we realised along the way that it is difficult to think outside of the system if you are a creature of the system, and it is tempting to reach for practical and technical solutions when often the pathologies are really rooted in desires to control power and money. In short, there's still much further we need to go, but for once we felt we were on a positive path, armed with some powerful tools to drive more inclusive, constructive and creative conversations.

Lydia Poole

Providing basic services for people in situations of conflict, where the state can't, or won't, is a massive and growing global problem. We all know the world isn't keeping up with it, but discussions on 'what to do' feel stale and circular. In contrast, I found this process energising and powerful. I disagree with some of what was said, and with a number of the ideas. Which is as it should be. The discussion needs better options, more voices, and real debate. I hope that there are ideas here that will give decision-makers a bit of a shove.

Paul Knox-Clarke

Deconstructing the present is much simpler than re-imagining the future (or futures). The design journey took some of us well outside our comfort zones, into a space of different voices, views and alternatives – bewildering at first but ultimately liberating. It gives me confidence that humanitarian action can be re-made.

John Twigg

As participants in the humanitarian sector, it is often necessary as well as desirable to compartmentalise our organisations and activities. This design process, however, has forced us to confront the world as it appears to those who experience and navigate it as a result of crisis. Free from the constraints of more traditional reform initiatives, it has compelled us to confront the fundamental organising principles of societies, as well as our own responsibilities to one another as 'citizens of everywhere'. Channeling that scope, and the resulting research and debates, into ideas which could act as touch points to affect wider change has been by turns a confusing, maddening, overwhelming – but ultimately exhilarating experience, and one that I am convinced will be useful for the future.

John Bryant

Our proposals for the future of the system are a mixed bunch, and we're sure that you will welcome some of them – but we also hope that you will disagree strongly with others. The impact of this design document will be in the discussions that it generates – so take it to your colleagues and community, and discuss what you think the future of the humanitarian system should be!

Paul Currion