

ALNAP

Essential briefings for humanitarian decision-makers

The climate crisis and humanitarian action: current approaches and discourse

The world is experiencing an **unprecedented, rapid and unpredictable succession of climate crises** including droughts, hunger crises, flooding, typhoons and heatwaves.

Climate change exacerbates needs where vulnerabilities are highest and humanitarians are already stretched. The impacts of climate change are expected to lead to **skyrocketing humanitarian costs** exceeding US\$ 20bn per year.

Yet there is **uneven awareness within the humanitarian sector** about the scale and nature of climate crises and wider international efforts to address these, as well as **uncertainty over what this will mean for the future of humanitarian response**.

Progress to date: The humanitarian sector getting its head around the challenge

- There is **no progress to report on to date**, as the climate challenge and **its implications for humanitarian actors is still taking shape**.
- But there is much to indicate that **the climate crisis will be a challenge to the existing humanitarian action model**.
- The impulse to **prioritise domestic needs** may increase as the Global North is more impacted by climate crises, reducing humanitarian spend.
- Assistance to disaster-affected countries may increasingly be placed in a **'justice and reparations' frame**, with funds directed to national governments.
- The need for **integrated approaches to risk, disaster and resilience** will necessitate a greater emphasis on local actors.
- Arguments for anticipatory action and more prevention and mitigation-focused approaches to crises will **challenge the current post-crisis response-oriented model**.

Two emerging approaches

To support people affected by crises, humanitarian actors are pushing for changes *within the system* and *to the system itself*.

#1 Within the system: new tools and approaches

- **Adapting existing materials and protocols:** for example, adapting shelters to high temperatures and developing protocols for cascading crises.
- **Reducing footprints and mitigating humanitarian impacts:** eg. providing cleaner cooking fuels, tracking and offsetting carbon emissions, switching to renewable energy and flying less. The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations has been adopted by 355 organisations.
- **Anticipatory or early action:** funding for communities to evacuate or move their cattle prior to a disaster, or delivering food aid before supply chains are disrupted. This has attracted policy commitments – see the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) 2023–2026 Strategic Plan – but **much of it is ad hoc and falls to small scale, uncoordinated pilots**. It is rarely integrated into longer term actions or adapted for emergencies such as famines. **It requires humanitarians to coordinate with other actors** and relies on institutional responsibilities and capacity, distribution criteria, pre-positioned financing, delivery channels and early warning systems. Donors are hesitant to put money aside for the 'what-ifs' when funding for current crises is already stretched.
- **Adaptive management:** a non-linear approach that accounts for uncertainty, modifying plans in response to changes in circumstances and understanding. It has challenging elements for humanitarian actors: flexible budgeting, planning, procurement and reporting processes, collaboration and trust between stakeholders, risk appetite and time and bandwidth to try new approaches.

#2 Changing the system: strategic changes

- **Risk reduction instead of/as well as responding to needs.** This requires a consideration of hazards, exposure and vulnerability. Few Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) consider interconnected and cascading risks in their response objectives. (UNDRR has rolled out a [checklist](#) and [Risk Analysis Guidance](#) in several countries) Funding is limited, and the necessary accurate data can be scarce. Where there is data, it is typically delinked from humanitarian planning. Some humanitarians are pushing back against systematically including risk in planning, citing a lack of bandwidth.
- **Nexus approaches.** While response after a disaster falls squarely to humanitarian actors, it's unclear what role they should take in mitigating the impacts and working on longer term approaches. The current landscape is fragmented, with stakeholders from different sectors. Humanitarian offerings are [misaligned with their longer-term adaptation needs of crisis-affected people](#). Addressing risk means integrating into a '[resilience continuum](#)' linked with climate change adaptation, resilience and development programming. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has brought together typically siloed stakeholders – climate change experts, conflict monitoring specialists, private sector, government and civil society – to identify risk drivers and potential impacts and develop scenarios outlining responsibilities and next steps.

- **Localisation and community engagement.** Localised approaches are considered an effective way to address risk and resilience at community level. National, local, private sector and community-based organisations all have relevant skills and expertise, but these are [not being profiled](#) or fed into the development of tools and guidance. A set of [Principles for Locally-Led Adaptation](#) have been widely endorsed. A new financing facility from the Start Network, [Start Ready](#), enables locally-led anticipatory action, where local organisations prioritise risks and provide input on the advance help they most want and need. The mechanism ensures local actors have the funding to respond quickly and appropriately. The approach has been used in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) for river flooding, Madagascar for cyclones and Somalia for drought.

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ABOUT EXplain

The greatest learning challenge for our sector is less about capturing lessons and experiences, but creating spaces for humanitarians to absorb and act on what is already known.

Operational decision makers – at all levels – are often the people with the least time to engage with vital new learning and evidence.

That's why ALNAP is piloting new approaches to communicating knowledge tailored to the needs, expectations and preferences of the busiest humanitarians.

EXplain is ALNAP's new learning experience for 2023.

- Straightforward communications to help humanitarian decision-makers make sense of, and exchange on, current evidence and discourse.
- Key learning and links all in one place: sourced, checked and curated by ALNAP's highly-respected global research team.
- Rich and accessible content, provided in a time efficient way, in an open peercomfortable environment.
- Bringing senior humanitarians more up to date on the latest developments, increasing awareness on the implications for their work, creating confidence as part of continuous professional development.

EXplain is an optimal mix of focused presentations, discussion and sharing of perspectives, with a range of high-quality supporting materials. It gives senior operational leaders a better understanding of what's out there and what they really need to know.

EXplain: simple communication, sense-making, exchange of experience.