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Women walking home following a food distribution in Somaliland after drought led to crop failure in June 2022.



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# **Escalating Climate Emergencies:** Implications for Humanitarian and Loss & Damage Policy and Programming

**Year on year the impacts of climate change are increasing in severity and frequency, leaving a trail of destruction and humanitarian crises. Climate-related hazards continue to increase in prominence: in 2021, 90% of recorded natural disasters were triggered by climate- and weather-related hazards.<sup>1</sup> Since then, people all over the world have had their homes engulfed by wildfires, and thousands have lost their livelihoods to devastating floods. Meanwhile, persistent drought is leaving millions on the brink of famine in East Africa and tropical cyclones continue to displace hundreds of thousands across South Asia. This is laying bare the deficits of climate action and the limitations of humanitarian response. Our global systems are being pushed to breaking point.<sup>2</sup>**

This paper investigates escalating climate-induced crises and humanitarian sector responses to these, identifying lessons that can inform the future of Loss and Damage<sup>3</sup> programming and policy. The analysis draws upon the lived experiences of three women facing the climate crisis within humanitarian contexts across three continents: Alta Prophète in Haiti, Toe Toe in Myanmar and Khadija Jamal in Somaliland.<sup>4</sup>

The challenges and opportunities explored in this paper highlight the following four recommendations for donors and policymakers grappling with climate emergencies.

- 1) Loss and Damage finance needs to be new, additional and at scale and cannot be taken from existing climate, development or humanitarian funds;**
- 2) Loss and Damage programming needs to be truly locally-led and enable local groups, particularly youth-led and women-led organisations, to have direct access to funding;**
- 3) Responding to climate-induced loss and damage must integrate long-term resilience building and preparedness measures;**
- 4) Loss and Damage finance must be flexible and adaptable, particularly in rapidly changing fragile and conflict-affected contexts.**

## **Addressing Loss and Damage and the gaps in finance**

Whilst the impacts of climate change are global, it is the countries and communities in the Majority World that are bearing the brunt of the climate crisis, despite contributing the least to climate breakdown.<sup>5</sup> Global climate agreements have established the principle of common but differentiated responsibility and stipulate that those countries most responsible for climate change have a historic responsibility to help stem the flow of the climate crisis and address the devastation that it causes.<sup>6</sup>

These principles of justice and responsibility are partly what differentiates climate finance from development or humanitarian funding and overseas development assistance.

However, broken promises, political inertia and a lack of leadership on climate have meant that funding is not flowing to the places and people that need it most. This is further increasing the scale and severity of climate induced losses and damages, and exposing an ever increasing gap in the funding and resources required. Research highlights that we will need around 400 billion USD a year by 2030 to address climate losses and damages in the Majority World, and that this will rise to 1-1.8 trillion USD by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

At COP27 there was a breakthrough on climate Loss and Damage with an agreement to provide Loss and Damage funding to the countries facing the worst climate disasters.<sup>8</sup> It is crucial that this finance is not repurposed from existing humanitarian or development funds, which are already too stretched to meet escalating needs. UN-coordinated appeals are on average only 60% funded and development funding is insufficient to prevent backsliding on the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the humanitarian and development systems are not set up to deal with climate losses and damages, honour historical responsibility or address climate justice. Finance for Loss and Damage must be new, additional and at scale, and it must be managed under a central mechanism such as the UNFCCC to maintain accountability to countries in the Majority World. This is essential to address the extent of the needs and to honour the Paris Agreement and decisions taken at COP27.

### **Key recommendation:**

- Loss and Damage finance needs to be new, additional and at scale and cannot be taken from existing climate, development or humanitarian funds.**

## Access to finance for locally-led responses to climate Loss and Damage

The experiences of three women from Haiti, Myanmar and Somaliland highlight how the climate crisis often compounds humanitarian situations. The overlaps in context between humanitarian crises and losses and damages suggests that experiences and lessons from the humanitarian sector can inform Loss and Damage programming and policy.

Humanitarian actors have decades of valuable experience in accessing hard to reach places with rapid assistance. This often involves working in complex contexts facing intersecting crises with limited infrastructure through which to respond. Similarly, it is vital that action targeting loss and damage is able to reach communities in fragile settings at speed to avoid the rapid escalation of needs, and to do this it must be locally led.<sup>10</sup>

Alta Prophète, founder and coordinator of the Organisation of Women Peasants of Ouanaminthe, Haiti, described how her grassroots organisation is often better placed than national and international agencies to respond to local needs, especially those of women and girls. Yet, she stated: “It is difficult to work with the UN or donors, if not impossible, because they do not recognise that our role is fundamental.” She added that rightsholders are often excluded from humanitarian decision-making spaces, despite those decisions directly impacting their lives.

Similarly, Khadija Jamal, Director of the Somaliland Women and Children Development Organisation, urged international humanitarian actors to “consult with people who have more knowledge on these issues”. This was echoed in Myanmar, with prominent civil society leader Toe Toe pointing to the value of community knowledge and local access in fragile settings. She explained that due to conflict-induced access issues, the UN and INGOs “cannot do anything” in Myanmar but that local organisations retain “good access to the community”.

Decades of humanitarian action, the localisation agenda and the Charter for Change demonstrate that local leadership is imperative in humanitarian response. The experiences of these three women and ActionAid’s humanitarian programmes more broadly demonstrate that this is equally true when addressing climate induced loss and damage. The role of local and national organisations in leading effective change must be recognised and their leadership supported.<sup>11</sup>

However, the humanitarian sector has not always succeeded in pursuing the localisation agenda.



Heavy rains in June 2023 triggered floods and landslides in several regions of Haiti, leaving thousands of houses flooded and people displaced.

The sector has made significant progress on the Grand Bargain commitment to localisation, including through important policy shifts and the provision of overhead costs to local and national non-governmental organisations. Yet, it remains skewed towards top-down approaches, with limited space for local civil society groups to participate in decision making spaces and with much greater progress needed on direct financing for local groups.<sup>12</sup>

Loss and Damage programming and policy work must learn from both the successes and failures of the humanitarian sector on localisation and adopt a truly locally-led approach from the outset, forming meaningful partnerships with local actors and enabling them to access funding directly. International actors must interrogate their assumptions, incentives and power and make space for local actors to lead.<sup>13</sup> This means moving beyond the rhetoric of localisation by removing bureaucratic barriers to locally-led groups in accessing direct funding.

### Key recommendation:

- **Loss and Damage programming needs to be truly locally-led and enable local groups, particularly youth-led and women-led organisations, to have direct access to funding.**



Habiba at her home in a village near Hargeisa, Somaliland. As a result of drought, she is no longer able to grow enough crops to sell at the market and can only grow just enough to sustain her family.

## Long-term resilience to climate change

The women we spoke to highlighted the need for longer-term, more integrated programmes and funding to build community preparedness and resilience. This is true for both slow onset climate stresses which require long-term resilience building, as well as fast onset climate shocks which demand sustained funding to respond to ongoing impacts in the weeks, months and years following the event itself.

Toe Toe in Myanmar and Khadija Jamal in Somaliland spoke of the importance of long-term funding for effective resilience building. Toe Toe told us “to be sustainable we need long-term funding” and Khadija agreed, stating “my most sustainable projects have been long-term funds.” Alta Prophète also shared that long-term funding was essential for communities in Haiti to “be prepared for what is coming in the long run”.

Alta elaborated that a lack of reliable long-term funding had left her organisation dependent on short-term international assistance rather than able to lead its own change: “There is little funding to help women farmers and girls to deal with climate change issues. We are not only waiting for funding,

but we also want to be autonomous.” Similarly, Toe Toe in Myanmar explained that long-term flexible funding is key to leading independent action at the local level: “If we don’t get core funding, like the UN and INGOs, we gain nothing for our efforts.” These experiences highlight the importance of resilience within Loss and Damage programming.

### Key recommendation:

- ▶ **Responding to climate-induced loss and damage must integrate long-term resilience building and preparedness measures.**

## Climate finance within fragile and conflict-affected contexts

Flexible, accessible and reliable climate finance is particularly needed in fragile and conflict-affected states, where humanitarian and climate crises intersect to multiply needs. Highly fragile and conflict-affected states face disproportionate levels of risk in relation to loss and damage, in part due to their reduced capacity to invest in adaptation. Communities living in fragile and conflict-affected states thus need to be able to access climate finance easily and adapt this funding based on their changing needs.<sup>14</sup>

Alta Prophète explained how political instability in Haiti made it very difficult to build preparedness: “The context is volatile. You can plan for an activity to happen next week and on the set day, it cannot be held because some roads are blocked due to protests or gang violence.” Similarly in Myanmar, Toe Toe shared that planning for climate response can be challenging amid demanding humanitarian priorities: “We are in an emergency situation. We know climate change is important but now we are saving lives.”

Despite there being a complex interplay between climate change, conflict, economic shocks and displacement in many of the countries at greatest risk of climate impacts, the funding requirements imposed by donors continue to push organisations into siloed ways of working with limited flexibility to adapt funding to needs.<sup>15</sup> As Toe Toe explained, “We used to have many development projects. After the coup, humanitarian aid support is the most needed in Myanmar. But we could not change our program. We don’t want that. We should be able to change the project target, based on the contextual change.”

Loss and Damage finance must integrate mechanisms to ensure that it can be operationalised in highly fragile and conflict-affected states, such as ensuring funding approaches are designed to be tolerant of risk and aware of the dangers of increasing conflict.<sup>16</sup> This involves building in flexibility from the start so that funding is not restricted to certain types of action or specific programmes but rather can be adapted based on changing circumstances.

### Key recommendation:

► **Loss and Damage finance must be flexible and adaptable, particularly in rapidly changing fragile and conflict-affected contexts.**



Drought causes mudcracks in Myanmar.

## Recommendations for policymakers

Climate losses and damages are exponentially increasing and outstripping the capacity of our current systems to effectively respond to and address the damage caused by climate change. As we enter an era of more coordinated global response to loss and damage we must learn from the experiences, successes and failings of the humanitarian sector. Drawing on the lived experiences of Khadija Jamal, Alta Prophète and Toe Toe, this policy brief highlights four key recommendations for Loss and Damage policymakers and donors:

- 1) Loss and Damage finance needs to be new, additional and at scale and cannot be taken from existing climate, development or humanitarian funds;
- 2) Loss and Damage programming needs to be truly locally-led and enable local groups, particularly youth-led and women-led organisations, to have direct access to funding;
- 3) Responding to climate-induced loss and damage must integrate long-term resilience building and preparedness measures;
- 4) Loss and Damage finance must be flexible and adaptable, particularly in rapidly changing fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

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