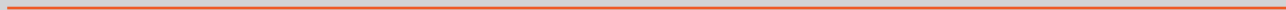

Making it Count:

A feasibility study on
collective indicators to
monitor progress in the
Agenda for Humanity

SUMMARY

Feasibility Study | December 2018



ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve response to humanitarian crises.

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This summary presents the headline findings from *Making it Count: A feasibility study on collective indicators to monitor progress in the Agenda for Humanity*. For more information on the research questions, methodology and a full bibliography, please see the full study at www.alnap.org/makingitcount.

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“Data and joint analysis must become the bedrock of our action. Data and analysis are the starting point for moving from a supply-driven approach to one informed by the greatest risks and the needs of the most vulnerable.”

UN Secretary General’s Report to the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) aimed to raise the ambitions of humanitarian action to the highest levels of international policy.

Its key document, the Secretary-General's Agenda for Humanity, set out five areas of work – or 'Core Responsibilities' – to reduce humanitarian suffering and improve the efficiency of how international humanitarian assistance is provided. At Istanbul in May 2016, hundreds of organisations, including over 60 Member States, submitted 3,780 commitments outlining how they would achieve these five Core Responsibilities (OCHA, 2016a: 5).

More than two years later, it is unclear how the success of these activities, or of the broader Agenda for Humanity, will be judged. There are several aspects of the monitoring process that make it challenging to get an overview of the success of the Agenda for Humanity:

1. Agencies interpret the Core Responsibilities differently and are using different methods for monitoring, making comparisons and aggregation across different agencies impossible.
2. There is a bias towards reporting on activities and inputs (e.g. funding, provision of goods and services) over outcomes and impact (i.e. changes in situations or people and their welfare).
3. There is a tendency to rely more on subjective data (e.g. opinion surveys) over descriptive data (e.g. mortality rates).

These limitations are the inheritances of a highly fragmented sector that has traditionally avoided more structured and collaborative approaches to collecting data and tracking performance (Ramalingam and Mitchell, 2009).

Looking to other post-2015 international frameworks, a potential alternative for tracking progress is the development and use of shared indicators. Shared, or collective, indicators are measures that can be applied across multiple organisations or countries in order to understand changes in a particular area of interest. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals will be tracked using a framework of 232 indicators across 193 Member States and a similar framework of 38 global indicators was developed for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Under the Agenda for Humanity, some initiatives and consortia use shared indicators across multiple agencies in order to track progress, but no sector-wide or global framework exists. This is due in part to the status of the Agenda for Humanity: unlike other parts of the 2030 Agenda, it was not reached through a formal intergovernmental negotiation process. Another, potentially more fundamental reason for the absence of a shared framework is that it has not been clear whether it is feasible to define a relevant set of shared indicators for humanitarian commitments.

What can shared indicators help us achieve?

There are good reasons both for and against the use of shared indicators to monitor progress, based particularly on experience in the development sector. Because indicators capture only the most easily quantifiable aspect of an issue, they offer a limited perspective on performance. But indicators can also be a powerful tool for accountability and advocacy, as they give a clear picture of whether desired changes are actually occurring. Using shared indicators can support humanitarian actors to clearly define what they mean in their policy commitments and provides a common language for what success looks like. When paired with additional evidence on reform efforts, shared indicators can help decision-makers understand where reforms might result in improved outcomes, and where they are failing to achieve positive change.

If humanitarian actors have committed to making progress on a set of core issues, data will be essential to understanding whether this is being achieved. Humanitarians cannot 'reduce forced displacement by 50% by 2030' without knowing how many people are currently displaced

from their homes. Donors cannot achieve cost savings of \$1 million – or even \$1 – on delivery mechanisms for aid if there is no baseline data on what it costs to deliver through current funding channels. Truly assessing post-WHS progress will require looking beyond intentions and actions, to whether the Agenda for Humanity Transformations are actually taking place, particularly for people in crisis.

However, it is also clear that developing collective indicators requires significant resourcing. Therefore, it is important to assess whether they are even feasible given the current state of humanitarian data and monitoring practices. This feasibility study undertaken by ALNAP seeks to identify a set of potential indicators for monitoring the Agenda for Humanity and assess how practicable it is to use these indicators, given current consensus on method and the availability of data.

Is it feasible to track progress using shared indicators?

To assess the feasibility of using shared indicators to track progress in the Agenda for Humanity, ALNAP developed 71 indicators for 10 Transformations (two for each Core Responsibility). Each indicator was ranked using the ranking system in table 1 below, adapted from the ranking system used for the SDG indicators.

The study concludes that better collective monitoring of progress in the Agenda for Humanity is possible – if the sector considers it to be a priority. There are different approaches to setting and using shared indicators, and the selection of approach will determine the cost and feasibility of collecting and analysing the data. There may be stronger cases for monitoring certain parts of the Agenda for Humanity than others, and priority should rest on areas where there is a clearly defined use for the data, either for accountability purposes or for supporting the implementation and course correction of reform activities.

However, these efforts require financial support. Much of the data available for assessing progress is produced by a single organisation relying on medium-term grant funding. This places a great burden of responsibility onto these organisations and also leads to less stable pipelines of data.

TABLE 1. ALNAP TIER CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR WHS PROGRESS MARKERS

Tier	Definition	No. of indicators assessed at this tier
Tier I	Indicator is conceptually clear, internationally established methodology and standards are available and data are regularly produced for at least 50% of countries in which humanitarian assistance and protection are delivered.	4
Tier IIa	Methodologies and standards are available, with active attempts to collect data, and there is consensus on indicator, but data is only partially available.	11
Tier IIb	Methodologies and standards are available, with active attempts to collect data, but data is partial and there is no consensus on indicator.	12
Tier III	No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested.	25
Tier IV	No internationally established methodology or standards are yet available for the indicator, and no concerted effort is underway to develop or test such methods.	19



Core Responsibility 1: Political Leadership to Prevent and End Conflicts

The first Core Responsibility of the Agenda for Humanity addresses conflict and its role in increasing the global demand for humanitarian assistance. Commitments under this Core Responsibility centred on early warning systems (EWS), capacity strengthening and stronger international leadership and collective mechanisms to prevent, reduce and end conflict.

Transformation	Indicator	Tier ranking	Potential/Actual source	Positive or negative progress
1B Act early	1B.1. # of people per 100,000 covered by early warning and response system for 1) sub-national conflict; 2) cross-border conflict	IV	None	N/A
	1B.2. % of countries that have adopted response strategies for preventing & mitigating conflict	IV	None	N/A
	1B.3. # of countries in high-intensity conflict	I	HIIC	Positive
	1B.4. # of wars (defined by 1,000+ battle-related deaths)	I	UCDP	Positive
	1B.5. # of intense conflicts worldwide (e.g. conflicts covering >50% of a country's geographical area)	IV	None	N/A
	1B.6. # of people displaced by conflict	IIB	IDMC	Positive
	1B.7. Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population by sex, age and cause	III	Praia Group/OHCHR	N/A
	1B.8. Fatalities in conflict and violence, global	Ia	UCDP/PRIO	Positive
	1B.9. # of civilians killed or injured by explosive weapons	Ia	AOAV	Positive
1C Remain engaged and invest in stability	1C.1. # of countries decreasing significantly in fragility/conflict or increasing in peacefulness	III	World Bank; OECD; Fund for Peace; Global Conflict Risk Index; Institute for Economics & Peace	N/A
	1C.2. ODA funding to peace and stabilisation, with spend on military or counter-terrorism excluded (for top 20 countries receiving humanitarian assistance only)	Ia	Development Initiatives	Negative

What progress has been made?

The number of deaths due to two-party conflict and one-sided violence is declining, part of a continuing decades-long trend. The number of civilians killed or injured by explosive weapons appears to have peaked in 2015 at 33,307, with steady declines since – yet not to where they were pre-2012. The number of countries engaged in high-intensity conflict has declined since 2016, from 43 to 36. However, the number of conflicts worldwide has risen—from 153 in 2015 to 164 in 2017—and are becoming more concentrated in fewer countries. The number of non-state conflicts rose to 82 in 2017. Also, although fewer people are dying due to conflict, the nature of conflict has become potentially more dynamic, with a greater number of non-state actors involved, which has implications for humanitarian delivery. There are no clear trends to support an assessment of progress on financial support to peace-building.

How good are we at measuring this?

There is relatively better data available for this Core Responsibility compared to others, primarily due to the long-standing work of several independent research organisations in conflict and peace studies. As this work is oriented primarily towards a social science academic audience, some definitions of key concepts may not align with how these terms are applied in international law and policy. More attention to indicators of fragility and to disaggregating financial support for peace and stabilisation will be needed to understand if progress is being made on Transformation 1C.

Looking ahead

The process to monitor SDG 16 will include an indicator for conflict-related deaths, to be collected by National Statistics Offices. Given the potential issues around bias that might arise from governments collecting conflict-related mortality statistics in conflicts to which they are a party, there is continued value in the role of independent organisations collecting and reporting their own statistics.



Core Responsibility 2: Respect Rules of War

Stating that ‘even wars have limits’, Core Responsibility 2 encourages WHS stakeholders to ‘respect the rules of war’. Yet, monitoring respect for the rules of war or compliance with international law is a difficult exercise: no overarching system for this currently exists and data is highly sensitive and difficult to verify. Transformation 2C (not covered by this feasibility study) recognises this data problem, calling for a ‘dedicated “watchdog” to track, collect data and report on trends of violations of, and gaps in, compliance with international humanitarian law’.

Transformation	Indicator	Tier ranking	Potential/Actual source	Positive or negative progress
2B Ensure full access to and protection of the humanitarian and medical mission	2B.1. # of international aid workers killed or injured in violent attacks (per 100,000)	IIb	Aid Worker Security Database (AWSD)	N/A
	2B.2. # of international aid workers killed or injured in violent attacks	IIa	AWSD	No change
	2B.3. # of national aid workers killed or injured in violent attacks (per 100,000)	III	AWSD	N/A
	2B.4. # of national aid workers killed or injured in violent attacks	IIa	AWSD	Negative
	2B.5. # of healthcare providers and auxiliary staff killed or injured in violent attacks (per 100,000)	III	WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care	N/A
	2B.6. # of patients killed or injured in violent attacks (per 100,000)	III	WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care	N/A
	2B.7. Healthcare facilities affected by violent attacks	III	WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care	N/A
	2B.8. Healthcare transports affected by violent attack	III	WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care	N/A
	2B.9. Healthcare warehouse/storage affected by violent attack	III	WHO Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care	N/A
	2B.10. Verified cases of humanitarian access incidents globally	IV	Annual Report of the SG for Children & Armed Conflict	Negative
	2B.11. # of countries with humanitarian access concerns	IV	Annual Report of the SG on the protection of civilians in armed conflict	Negative
2D Take concrete steps to improve compliance and accountability	2D.1. # of countries that have ratified/acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty	IIb	UNODA	Positive
	2D.2. # of UN Member States who have implemented x% of IHL topics	IIb	ICRC National Implementation of IHL Database	N/A
	2D.3. # of UN Member States with x% coverage of customary IHL in their legal frameworks and military manuals	IIb	ICRC Customary IHL Database	N/A
	2D.4. # of state parties providing ‘adequate’ financial resources to the ICC	IIb	ICC Financial Statements	Positive
	2D.5. Proportion of IHL violations prosecuted to total number of documented IHL violations worldwide	IV	None	N/A
	2D.6. # of states exercising universal jurisdiction on war crimes	IV	None	N/A
	2D.7. # of countries that have taken concrete steps to create effective investigation mechanisms for attacks by their military forces	IV	None	N/A
	2D.8. # of countries that have established effective accountability mechanism for attacks by its forces on healthcare	IV	None	N/A

Has there been progress?

Limited data available suggests that there is no progress, and perhaps a decline, in achieving Transformations 2B and 2D. The data source used in this report indicates a rise in the number of national staff killed, injured or kidnapped in humanitarian responses; however, it is unclear if this is due to an increase in number of national humanitarian staff, or to changes in security conditions. The *Annual Report of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict* reported an increasing trend of verified humanitarian access incidents between 2015 and 2017, but this data is not comprehensive.

How good are we at measuring this?

Core Responsibility 2 is potentially the section of the Agenda for Humanity that is most difficult to monitor or track reliably, due to the difficulties in classifying and verifying incidents of attack and IHL violations in humanitarian settings. Yet this Core Responsibility also offers some of the strongest examples of humanitarian organisations collaborating and investing in robust methodologies to strengthen the empirical evidence on issues that significantly affect humanitarian performance.

Looking ahead

There are several initiatives underway to continue improving the quality of data available on humanitarian access and security. The Aid Worker Security Database continues to provide annual figures for attacks on national and international aid workers. The WHO and Insecurity Insights have compared their separate datasets on attacks on medical workers and the Safeguarding Healthcare in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) provides a platform for strengthening the empirical evidence base on access to healthcare in crisis. As part of the SHCC's work, attention is being shifted away from counting attacks towards better monitoring of outcomes of these attacks, namely the implications that attacks have for affected populations' access to medical care. Also, OCHA and Humanitarian Outcomes are currently working on ways to more routinely monitor humanitarian access but it will be years before data is regularly available.

Tracking compliance with IHL remains difficult, and it is widely felt that indicators will not be sufficient for telling the story on how Transformation 2C is being achieved—better case-based research that explores the drivers for compliance is also needed.



Core Responsibility 3: Leave No one Behind

Within the humanitarian system, 'leaving no one behind' centred on improving assistance and protection for overlooked demographic groups, such as IDPs, women and girls, older people and people with disabilities.

Transformation	Indicator	Tier ranking	Potential/Actual source	Positive or negative progress
3A Reduce and address displacement	3A.1. # of new internally displaced people (IDPs) due to conflict	Ila	IDMC	Negative
	3A.2. # of new IDPs due to disaster	Ila	IDMC	Positive
	3A.3. # of total IDPs: conflict	Ila	IDMC	Positive
	3A.4. # of total IDPs: disaster	III	IDMC	N/A
	3A.5. # of new asylum seekers and refugees	I	UNHCR	Negative
	3A.6. Total # of asylum seekers and refugees	I	UNHCR	N/A
	3A.7. # of refugees achieving durable solutions: resettlement	Ila	UNHCR	Negative
	3A.8. # of refugees achieving durable solutions: integration	Ila	UNHCR	Positive
	3A.9. Mortality and morbidity rates of displaced; compared with refugees; compared with non-displaced people targeted by humanitarian assistance	IV	CRED	N/A
3D Empower women and girls to fully and equally participate in decision-making at all levels, meet their specific needs, protect them against gender-based violence, and increase their access to humanitarian funding	3D.1. Proportion of early warning indicators that are gender specific	III	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund; UN ISDR	N/A
	3D.2. % of women and girls who report being able to participate in programme design and use complaints mechanisms	Ila	ALNAP; GTS; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project	N/A
	3D.3. % of humanitarian funding going to women's organisations	IV	None	N/A
	3D.4. % of HNO based on solid gender analysis, sex and age-disaggregated data, which identifies gender inequalities that lead to different power, vulnerabilities, capacities, voice and participation of women, girls, men and boys	III	IASC Gender Desk	N/A
	3D.5. % of humanitarian funding going to projects rated at least 3 on all indicators on the GAM in the monitoring phase	Ilb	FTS; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project	N/A
	3D.6. % of humanitarian projects in HRPs rated at least 3 on the GAM in the monitoring phase	Ilb	FTS; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project	N/A
	3D.7. % of humanitarian funding going to gender-based and sexual violence prevention (GBSV)	Ilb	FTS; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project	N/A
	3D.8. % of women and girl aid recipients who report that humanitarian aid is relevant to their needs	Ilb	ALNAP; GTS; IASC Gender Standby Capacity Project	N/A
	3D.9. Mortality & morbidity rates of women/girls compared to men/boys	IV	CRED	N/A
	3D.10. % of population covered by sexual and reproductive health and rights services in countries receiving humanitarian assistance	IV	None	N/A
	3D.11. Proportion of women and girls receiving humanitarian assistance aged 15 years+ subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months	III	UNSTATS; OECD	N/A
	3D.12. Proportion of women and girls receiving humanitarian assistance aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months	III	UNSTATS; OECD	N/A

Has there been progress?

There are no clear trends on displacement or achieving durable solutions for refugees and IDPs since 2015. Five- and ten-year trends show an overall increase in the total number of displaced people due to conflict and violence. Overall, the number of new displacements per year continues to increase slightly, although the proportion of displacements caused by disaster or by conflict change year by year. It is not currently possible to assess progress on how humanitarian action addresses the specific needs of women and girls.

How good are we at measuring this?

Displacement statistics are tracked globally by IOM and other organisations. While new displacements are relatively easier to track, updating the figures on total number of displaced people is challenging because data can become quickly outdated and current data collection methods are not well adapted to tracking successful returns or repeated displacements.

For assessing progress on gender responsive programming, there are several initiatives which may lead to useful monitoring data in the near future. In 2017, the IASC Gender Capacity Project worked with ECHO, Care International and Oxfam to revise the gender marker and include an age component, leading to the launch of a new Gender with Age Marker (GAM) in June 2018. The revised GAM captures ‘the extent to which essential programming actions address gender- and age-related differences in humanitarian response’ (IASC GenCap 2018a) and will be mandatory for all projects reported to UN OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service (FTS).

Looking ahead

Moving forward, the international Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) is working to support the use of refugee- and displacement-specific indicators within the broader monitoring process for the SDGs and to help improve the capacity of national statistics to ‘better understand the phenomenon of forced displacement, to analyse its impacts, and to measure changes over time’ (EU 2018a: p. 13). Updates to the Gender with Age Marker and its integration into the Financial Tracking Service mean that more comprehensive data on gender responsive programming will be available for humanitarian projects tracked through FTS.



Core Responsibility 4: Working Differently To End Need

This Core Responsibility received the highest number of commitments at the WHS and has had the clearest influence in policy since; while the humanitarian-development nexus later received significant policy attention, at the Summit it was Transformations 4A and 4B that received the most support.

Transformation	Indicator	Tier ranking	Potential/Actual source	Positive or negative progress
4A Reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems	4A.1. % of host country-based actors (government and non-government) implementing contextualised humanitarian standards, tools and policies	III	NEAR; Humanitarian Advisory Group; HQAI	N/A
	4A.2. Strength of national and local non-governmental capacity to respond to emergency	III	NEAR	N/A
	4A.3. Strength of national and sub-national governmental capacity to respond to emergency	IV	None	N/A
	4A.4. # of countries leading the development of Humanitarian Response Plans	IV	None	N/A
	4A.5. # of countries requiring Humanitarian Response Plans	I	UNOCHA HNOs	Positive
	4A.6. # of coordination mechanisms led by national and local actors (government or non-governmental)	IV	UNOCHA	N/A
	4A.7. % of seats for national and local actors in the HCTs or other relevant national humanitarian leadership forums	III	NEAR	N/A
	4A.8. # of coordination mechanisms and associated documentation held and written in the local language	III	NEAR	N/A
	4A.9. # of local & national NGOs report being engaged in humanitarian policy processes, standard setting and compliance mechanisms	III	NEAR	N/A
4B Anticipate, do not wait, for crises	4B.1. # of countries that have multi-hazard early warning systems	III	Sendai Indicators	N/A
	4B.2. # of countries with an adequate % of disaster risk population covered by pre-emptive evacuation	III	Sendai Indicators	N/A
	4B.3. % of global disaster risk population covered by pre-emptive evacuation	III	Sendai Indicators	N/A
	4B.4. Total official international support for national DRR actions	III	Sendai Indicators	N/A

Has there been progress?

Progress is hard to measure, as baselines are still being established. Transformation 4A is one of the most active areas of the Agenda for Humanity, with much of the energy devoted to clarifying definitions of locally-led humanitarian action and outlining what is needed to support this. The commitments related to disaster risk reduction will depend largely on the Sendai Framework—which aims to set baselines in 2019.

How good are we at measuring this?

While inputs appear to be on the rise, particularly with respect to funding for local and national NGOs, there is wide recognition that in order to achieve better power-sharing and truly locally-led humanitarian response, actions need to go beyond financial support to local and national actors. But there is a lack of clarity on what this looks like, particularly when it comes to defining local and national capacities.

Transformation 4A raises questions as to the feasibility of a common set of indicators that could be used to track progress in localisation across all countries worldwide. Local capacity can be highly context- and crisis- dependent and there will be trade-offs between achieving indicators that are meaningful for guiding within-country decision-makers and those that are useful for providing a global picture of progress.

Looking ahead

Efforts by several organisations and initiatives, including Charter for Change, the Network for Empowered Aid Response, the Humanitarian Advisory Group, the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team and the Grand Bargain signatories, are helping to clarify what success looks like for locally-led humanitarian action and how it will be measured. Although not yet sector-wide, these frameworks could provide proxy measurements or test indicators that might over time serve as drivers for change across the sector.



Core Responsibility 5: Invest In Humanity

The two Transformations within this Core Responsibility that received the highest number of aligned commitments are concerned with diversification: 5A and 5E.

Transformation	Indicator	Tier ranking	Potential/Actual source	Positive or negative progress
5A Invest in local capacities	5A.1. % of total humanitarian spend given directly to local and national government	IIb	Development Initiatives; FTS; Grand Bargain reporting process	Positive
	5A.2. % of total humanitarian spend given directly to local and national non-governmental organisations	IIb	Development Initiatives; FTS; Charter for Change; Grand Bargain reporting processes	Positive
	5A.3. % of humanitarian funding to UN agencies and INGOs that is directed to capacity strengthening activities for local & national NGOs	III	Charter for Change reporting process; IATI	N/A
	5A.4. # and types of mechanisms available in-country for local actors to access funding in a response, disaggregated by type	IV	None	N/A
5E Diversify resource base and improve transparency and cost-efficiency of humanitarian financing and response	5E.1. % increase in private sector cash flows to humanitarian response	IV	None	N/A
	5E.2. Total # of non-state funders of humanitarian response	IV	None	N/A
	5E.3. # of distinct types of financing mechanism in humanitarian action	III	Development Initiatives	N/A
	5E.4. Ratio of transactional cost-to-programming spend, by donor or finance mechanism	IV	None	N/A

Has there been progress?

Early signs indicate incremental progress on 5A; it is not possible to assess progress on 5E nor is there agreement on how to measure this.

How good are we at measuring this?

Since the WHS, considerable energy has been put into setting baselines and monitoring performance for Transformation 5A. In connection to the Grand Bargain workstream on localisation, the IASC Humanitarian Financing Task Team (HFTT) formed the Localisation Marker Working Group (LMWG) in mid-2016 to develop a 'localisation' marker to improve tracking of funds to national and local actors. At the close of 2017, they reached consensus on definitions of local and national actors and agreed a compromise on what counts as 'direct' funding to local and national NGOs.

As part of its work, the LMWG commissioned a form to support consistent and comparable tracking of funding going to national and local actors. The IASC HFTT and Grand Bargain signatories have subsequently endorsed this form as the basis for categorising funding flows (Grand Bargain/IASC 2018). These measures are expected to greatly improve the accuracy of data on funding flows to local and national actors within the formal international system.

INGOs have also had their own conversations about how to define and track direct transfer of funds to local and national civil society organisations (CSOs), primarily through the Charter for Change monitoring process.

Looking ahead

Except for one-off studies and evaluations (Stoddard et al 2017; ICVA 2015; CERF 2014), there is no routine, comparable analysis available on the efficiencies of different funding channels, on time spent on donor reporting, or on costs per outcome (e.g. cost per life saved). It may be the case that the most important element for improving humanitarian performance in relation to Transformation 5E is the call for greater data transparency. Without this, the added ambitions of diversification and greater cost-effectiveness will be impossible to monitor.

Ways forward

This study does not seek to provide recommendations to decision-makers but outlines six ways forward that could help facilitate a more collective picture of progress, if desired.

Resourcing data collection and analysis for priority areas

Data collection in the humanitarian sector relies primarily on the work of statistical/data divisions within UN agencies and on independent research organisations, who typically depend on grant funding to maintain high-quality datasets over time. Moderate and predictable increases in resources for a select group of high-priority indicators could support a more reliable pipeline of data.

Better resourcing of data collection and analysis is needed, but resources also need to be prioritised according to who will use this data and for what purpose. For example, it may be better to invest in collecting comprehensive data on the length and severity of displacement, than in systems that achieve more comprehensive figures on private-sector contributions to humanitarian action, based on differences in how these data sets are used to inform humanitarian policy priorities.

Getting more out of current data and research

Alongside targeted resources, more can be done to maximise the value of existing data and research efforts. Collaborations such as the Safeguarding Healthcare in Conflict Coalition and hubs such as the Center for Humanitarian Data's Humanitarian Data Exchange are providing platforms to triangulate and combine data sets from multiple actors, potentially creating a more comprehensive data set than could be achieved by individual agencies.

For Core Responsibility 2, several organisations are monitoring overlapping indicators related to peace, conflict risk and fragility. These efforts could be harmonised to track different aspects of fragility and conflict risk more efficiently. In the area of financing and localisation, where sample-based approaches using shared indicators may be more realistic, agencies and reform initiatives have commissioned in-depth country-based research to create baseline measures for capacity-strengthening efforts and funding flows to local and national organisations.

More could be done to share and replicate these methodologies across different agencies to achieve a wider sample, or to ensure that the same methodologies are applied over time to support analysis of progress. The choice of methodology should be decided on the basis of careful consideration of how data is going to be used, and by whom.

Creating more opportunities for sector-wide collaboration and reflection on progress

None of the ways forward mentioned so far will be fully realised without more formal opportunities to bring together actors and initiatives working on similar areas of the Agenda for Humanity. This includes platforms to share data as well as events and processes that enable joint analysis and coordinated action to reduce duplication of efforts and to strengthen data sharing. While some initiatives, such as Charter for Change, have their own regular opportunities for meeting and reflecting on progress, there could be additional value in bringing initiatives together to further share and cross-fertilise learning based on their work to achieve change.

Protecting the independence of humanitarian statistics

This study looked at relevant monitoring efforts in the broader 2030 Agenda and how these might support the monitoring of progress against the Agenda for Humanity. There are areas in the SDG and Sendai Framework indicators that are relevant for humanitarians and, for certain topics such as disaster prevention and preparedness, it may be appropriate to rely primarily on the statistics collected through national statistics offices.

However, for many other parts of the Agenda for Humanity – particularly Core Responsibilities 1 (prevent and end conflict) and 2 (respect the rules of war) – it is important to retain an independent approach to data collection and analysis to ensure that figures are not influenced by political bias. At the same time, the independence of much of the humanitarian statistical capacity comes with distinct downsides, including issues around intellectual property of data collected by non-profit institutes and a lack of long-term reliability due to the dependence on continued grant or private funding. But this independence, like the operational independence of humanitarian agencies, is critical for developing a more robust and timely picture of trends and should be considered complementary to support for National Statistics Offices, particularly in fragile settings (Samman et al 2018).

Clarifying baselines

In the two years since the WHS, many actors have worked to establish baseline measures for the commitments they made. Across several areas of the Agenda for Humanity, data availability is improving year by year – the most significant examples being in relation to the numbers of attacks on aid workers and the amount of funding going to local and national NGOs. As more organisations report their data, and as more information becomes available, an increasingly comprehensive picture of the state of play on these issues is emerging.

Yet, while improvements in data collection are welcome, these rapid year-on-year changes in the dataset mean it is difficult to draw robust comparisons from one year to the next. In the future, any reported improvements or accomplishments against the Agenda for Humanity or Grand Bargain will need to explain how a baseline was selected. More importantly, humanitarian actors could achieve appropriate baseline measures more effectively if they employ one of two strategies: (1) for organisations that are joining reporting initiatives, backdating data to 2015 if possible; or (2) using sector-wide collaboration to speed up the process of baseline measurement and ensure that appropriate baseline measures can be in place by the end of 2019.

Remembering that indicators are only one part of the picture

Regardless of the orientation (global, country, actor) or approach (comprehensive vs sample), indicators help us understand trends but not their underlying causes or drivers. A broader range of research and evidence will always be needed to parse and analyse the contributing factors to these trends – a point that was emphasised by many of this study's peer reviewers. Successfully achieving the aims of the Agenda for Humanity requires better knowledge of the underlying drivers for displacement, attacks on humanitarian missions, localised capacity for response and many other issues addressed in the five Core Responsibilities. It also requires evidence for what works best for seeing progress on these issues in different contexts. Indicators can tell the sector which way the needle is pointing, but on their own, they are not enough to direct change.

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