GOOD HUMANITARIAN ACTION REACHES EVERYONE IN NEED

ALNAP

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Acknowledgements

The Global Forum Briefing Papers: What are they for and what do they tell us?

The aim of the Global Forum is to identify recommendations that will help the international system become more adaptable to different crisis contexts, thereby making overall humanitarian action more effective. To support these discussions, these Background Papers:

- Outline how the international system is performing against various criteria of effective humanitarian action
- Identify the key obstacles to improvement on each criterion of effective action
- Present the recommendations that have been put forward around the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) process to address these obstacles

Each paper's title describes a **success criterion** for humanitarian action. These are different ideas of what effective humanitarian action looks like. The seven success criteria were identified through a two-stage review of the evaluative research on humanitarian performance and the recommendations put forward for the World Humanitarian Summit process (for more detail, please see the accompanying paper: 'The Global Forum Briefing Papers: What are they for and what do they tell us?').

WHAT IS THIS SUCCESS CRITERION ABOUT? WHY DOES IT MATTER?

These sections give a brief description of the success criterion and the different views on why this is important for good humanitarian action.

HOW WELL DOES HUMANITARIAN ACTION PERFORM AGAINS THIS SUCCESS CRITERION?

This section provides an overview of what is going well and what is not with respect to each success criterion. It draws on evidence to identify the degree to which the criterion is being met in current humanitarian action. The primary source of evidence for this section in each paper is the 2015 State of the Humanitarian System

(SOHS) report, and it should be assumed that this is the key reference unless cited otherwise. This section also introduces the key obstacles to improvement, which are bolded in the text. These key obstacles are also derived from the 2015 SOHS, as well as from other research and evaluation on humanitarian action.

KEY OBSTACLES

This section is a summary list of the key obstacles described in each paper as inhibiting better performance against the criterion.

KEY OBSTACLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides a list of the recommendations which seek to address the key obstacles and so to improve humanitarian action with respect to each success criterion. These recommendations have been synthesised from over 700 recommendations across 39 position papers, WHS consultation reports and the work of the WHS Thematic Teams (see 'The Global Forum Briefing Papers: What are they for and what do they tell us?' for more detail). They reflect the different recommendation areas external organisations have put forward and have been clustered according to the obstacles they seek to address. The aim of the synthesis is to accurately reflect the range of views and ideas for reform, and to connect these ideas to an evidence base on how the humanitarian system is performing. This means some synthesised recommendations may conflict with one another, or may not be mutually achievable, as there remains a lack of consensus among humanitarian actors on how best to improve humanitarian action.

ANNEXES

The annex to each paper (provided in a single-bound document to Global Forum participants) provides the full set of raw recommendations used in the synthesis, showing where these recommendations were clustered.

GOOD HUMANITARIAN ACTION
REACHES EVERYONE IN NEED

1. WHAT IS THIS SUCCESS CRITERION ABOUT?

- The degree to which humanitarian activities reach all populations in need of assistance and protection
- The degree to which humanitarian activities are able to prioritise those who are in greatest need
- The sufficiency of funding and other resources – whether resources are adequate to fully meet the priority needs of crisis-affected people
- *Not* the degree to which resources, when spent, address the right type of need (e.g. the specific needs of women or children, requirements for protection as well as material support or needs as the crisis-affected population affect them). This issue, which is closely related, is considered in Paper 2.

2. WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A distinguishing feature of humanitarian assistance and protection activities is that they are provided on the basis of need. Where people are in need of support and this support does not materialise (because a population group has been overlooked, because humanitarian actors do not have the resources to provide adequately for the basic needs of all crisis-affected people or because people cannot access the support that is available), humanitarian action has failed to meet one of its most important objectives.

3. HOW WELL DOES HUMANITARIAN ACTION PERFORM AGAINST THIS SUCCESS CRITERION?

A basic expectation of effective humanitarian action is that it reaches everyone in need of life-saving support and protection. Evaluations of international humanitarian assistance suggest this expectation has been met more successfully in recent rapid-onset natural disasters (Haiyan) and refugee situations (or at least in refugee camps) than it has in conflict or protracted crises.

Many humanitarian operations, particularly those in response to natural disasters, are conducted by national governments and civil society without the need for international assistance. In the period 2012-2015 the number of responses in which the international community was involved went down.

Despite this, the size of international appeals (in financial terms) has risen steadily from $5.1 billion to $19.1 billion.[i] The number of people included in these appeals has also risen steadily,[ii] from 26 million in 2007 to 76 million in 2014. This rise reflects both the increased size of humanitarian crises over the past seven years and the increasing number of unresolved, 'protracted' situations, which create a large cumulative total of people in need of support year-on-year.

International funding for humanitarian response has also risen significantly over this period. However, because the rise in the number of people covered by each appeal has outpaced the rise in funding, the amount available for each person in need has decreased [iii]– by 35% since the first State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) review (2007-2008).[iv]

There is insufficient funding to provide assistance to everyone in need.

Funding is particularly constrained in protracted and recurrent crisis.

Funding is spent on natural disasters, for which other forms of finance are available.

This problem of **insufficient funding to meet needs** is felt in most humanitarian situations, and is perceived to be increasing according to aid practitioners. Whereas 36% of those surveyed for the SOHS 2015 felt funding was 'sufficient' or 'more than sufficient' in 2010 and 34% in 2012, only 24% did so in 2015.

Funding appears to be particularly constrained in recurrent and protracted crises. Evaluations point to lack of funding as a major constraint in the Central African Republic (CAR) and South Sudan. In CAR, 53% of the amount in the appeal in 2013 was achieved. For operations within South Sudan, the figure was 75%, which actually compared well with, for example, Somalia at 51%, Yemen at 55% and Mali at 56%.[v]

In the face of insufficient humanitarian funding, there has been increased discussion around the need for the international community to emphasise political and developmental solutions, particularly to protracted and recurrent crises, which (in the longer term) would allow funds to be allocated to other priority areas. Some argue that, currently, **humanitarian funding is spent on natural disasters, for which other forms of finance could be available**.

However, problems with reaching all populations in need are not solely a result of insufficient funding. In many emergencies, and particularly in conflict and protracted crises, **international actors (particularly) have found it difficult to secure access** to populations affected by crisis. There are a variety of constraints here. In some situations there are **political constraints to access**: both the SOHS and the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) stakeholder consultation for North and Southeast Asia[vi] reported that government restrictions or interference by governments/donors were an important factor in preventing access. In many cases (e.g. Afghanistan, Lebanon, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria) access was constrained by **insecurity and threats to agency staff**. In 2013, 474 aid workers were killed, injured or kidnapped: of these, 417 were 'national' victims, of whom 206 worked for national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or Red Cross/ Crescent societies.[vii] Additional constraints to access include **physical remoteness and inaccessibility of some affected populations** and a **lack of logistical and other capacity** on the part of many agencies. Over the past seven years, aid actors have become more pessimistic about their ability to reach populations: in 2015, 34% of survey respondents said this ability had 'declined' in the past two years, compared with 27% in 2012. These problems have been partially addressed in

some cases through direct and sustained negotiations with armed actors, pre-positioning of supplies and independent air assets.

Further challenges to reaching all people in need spring from **inadequate needs assessments and lack of information** on needs: baseline data are often not available, or are of poor quality, and access constraints (above) may prevent assessments in areas affected by crisis. This problem is made worse by **different understandings of need and different thresholds for assistance**: there are wide variations in the amounts requested per targeted beneficiary in UN coordinated appeals.[viii] This is a result of differing contexts and the differing severity of crises, but it is also, arguably, a reflection of different 'basic need' thresholds being used in different places. Despite the existence of indicative standards, there are – in many sectors – few hard definitions of need. As a result, high levels of need can come to appear 'normal', and so acceptable, and will not trigger a response. This is particularly a problem in protracted and recurrent crises, and has also been cited as a challenge for urban contexts, in which a threshold for assistance used in rural settings has been met but fails to yield a humanitarian response.

Whole populations may also fail to receive support as a result of **assistance being targeted on the basis of status or ease of access rather than assessed need**. In CAR, the Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), Mali and South Sudan, evaluations and interviews suggest aid actors have struggled to orient assistance to need and assistance has been more likely to go to those who are easy to identify and reach. Similarly, in the Syrian regional response, refugees outside camp settings and host communities appear to have received much less assistance than refugees in camps. In CAR, the needs of hosted internally displaced persons (IDPs) in urban areas were not assessed at all. This highlights the problem that **specific vulnerable population groups (such as migrants and displaced people) are not receiving humanitarian support and protection**. Judging by outcomes, IDPs appear to be particularly vulnerable to being overlooked by humanitarian action: a recent report by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED)[ix] suggests IDPs suffer the worst health impacts of conflict. They and their children are almost twice as likely as refugees to die from conflict-related causes, particularly disease and starvation. IDPs also suffer higher rates of acute malnutrition than refugees or other (non-displaced) people affected by conflict. In some cases, this may reflect the fact that displaced people may not wish to be identified, for fear of persecution.

People in need are being overlooked as a result of inadequate assessment and lack of information.

People do not receive the assistance and protection they require because of different understandings of need and different thresholds for assistance being applied in different situations.

4. KEY OBSTACLES

1

There is insufficient funding to provide assistance to everyone in need of support from the international system.

2

Funding is particularly constrained in protracted and recurrent crises: there is a need for the international community to emphasise political and developmental solutions.

3

Humanitarian funding is spent on natural disasters, for which other forms of finance could be available.

4

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by political considerations.

5

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by a lack of security for aid workers.

6

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by physical remoteness.

7

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by lack of logistical and response capacity.

8

People in need are being overlooked as a result of inadequate assessment and lack of information.

9

People do not receive the assistance and protection they require because of different understandings of need and different thresholds for assistance being applied in different situations.

10

People do not receive the assistance and protection they need because humanitarian action is targeted on the basis of status or ease of access rather than assessed need.

11

Specific vulnerable population groups (such as migrants and displaced people) are not receiving humanitarian support and protection.

5. KEY OBSTACLES AND SYNTHESISED RECOMMENDATIONS

The WHS Thematic Teams' Bonn recommendations reflect the most recent thinking of the WHS Secretariat and Thematic Teams on the key areas for reform to be addressed by the Summit. These recommendations are italicised below.

1

KEY OBSTACLES

There is insufficient funding to provide assistance to everyone in need of support from the international system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. *Source funding/resources for humanitarian action from additional sources, including:*
   - *Diaspora*
   - *Private sector*
   - *Insurance*
   - *Islamic finance*

b. *Reframe the problem in terms of crisis finance. The issue is not only/primarily about how big the international humanitarian assistance budget is, but also about how we use that budget alongside other sources of finance.*

c. *Improve forecasting of financial needs: create a medium- to longer-term forecasting model for humanitarian financing to help facilitate greater predictability and ability to meet future requirements.*

d. Decrease corruption.

e. *Create a basic system of crisis cover for the 'bottom billion', possibly with a global contingency fund underwriting the commitment to basic cover of crisis support. This should provide support when no other mechanism can.*

2

KEY OBSTACLES

Funding is particularly constrained in protracted and recurrent crises: there is a need for the international community to emphasise political and developmental solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. *Create a global compact with targets between humanitarian and development actors for management of protracted and recurrent* crises.

b. *Institute longer-term (multi-year and multi-polar) financing: be prepared to transfer from humanitarian to developmental and other funding.*

c. Political actors commit to addressing the political problems that lead to and perpetuate crisis, in particular fighting impunity in protracted conflict-driven crises.

3

KEY OBSTACLES

Humanitarian funding is spent on natural disasters, for which other forms of finance could be available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. *For natural disasters, there should be a target to reduce the overall contribution from international humanitarian finance, with a shift to development and risk financing.*

4

KEY OBSTACLES

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by political considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Recognise that access is about people's ability to access aid.

b. Decrease the politicisation of humanitarian aid, to facilitate access of aid actors.

c. Ensure that states and non-state parties fulfil their responsibilities to allow access through advocacy, dialogue and education. Monitor access at a global level.

d. Ensure counter terror legislation does not impede humanitarian negotiations and access.

e. Make access a focus for innovation.

f. Use 'remote management' only as a last resort.

5

KEY OBSTACLES

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by a lack of security for aid workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Make funding available, especially for local actors.

b. Keep the issue on UNSC agenda.

c. Prosecute those who attack humanitarian actors under international law.

6

KEY OBSTACLES

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by physical remoteness.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE DECIDED

7

KEY OBSTACLES

Access to assistance and protection is constrained by lack of logistical and response capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Review how the system responds to 'forgotten' and other emergencies where there is no capacity on the ground.

8

KEY OBSTACLES

People in need are being overlooked as a result of inadequate assessment and lack of information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. States should ensure data are disaggregated to show vulnerable areas and ethnic groups.

b. Identify vulnerable areas in advance of crisis.

c. Use new technology for data collection, analysis and mapping.

9

KEY OBSTACLES

People do not receive the assistance and protection they require because of different understandings of need and different thresholds for assistance being applied in different situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE DECIDED

10

KEY OBSTACLES

People do not receive the assistance and protection they need because humanitarian action is targeted on the basis of status or ease of access rather than assessed need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Identify other populations (such as those suffering generalised violence outside conflict) that need humanitarian assistance but are not currently covered by humanitarian action.

b. Ensure vulnerable populations are not being overlooked because they do not fall within the mandates of humanitarian agencies.

11

KEY OBSTACLES

Specific vulnerable population groups (such as migrants and displaced people) are not receiving humanitarian support and protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a. *Create and enforce legal mechanisms recognising the needs of migrants and displaced people at a national and regional level.*

6. ENDNOTES

i.   All financial information is based on Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS) data.

ii.   While numbers cited in appeals are a useful indicator of needs, and of trends in needs, limited information on needs currently makes it impossible to produce definitive statements of need at the local, national or global level.

iii. OCHA FTS also suggests the amount requested per person has decreased over this period, by 19%.

iv.   Using averaged figures for each SOHS period – 2007-2008, 2009-2011 and 2012-2014. Using figures averaged over the period 'flattens out' any particularly anomalous years.

v.   Swithern, S. (2014) 'Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2014'. Bristol: Development Initiatives.

vi.   WHS (2014) 'Regional Consultation: North and South-East Asia July 2014. Final Report', World Humanitarian Summit (WHS)'; WHS (2014) 'Regional Consultation for North and South-East Asia. Preparatory Stakeholder Consultation'. World Humanitarian Summit (WHS).

vii. Figures obtained from the Aid Worker Security database, at https://aidworkersecurity.org/ incidents/report/summary, accessed 24 April 2015.

viii. Swithern, S. (2014) 'Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2014'. Bristol: Development Initiatives.

ix.   Guha-Sapir, D. (2014) 'People affected by conflict 2013: Humanitarian needs in numbers'. Brussels: Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of disasters (CRED).