

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
PRINCIPALS MEETING

**Making the Links Work: How the humanitarian and development
community can help ensure no one is left behind**

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Under the auspices of the IASC, the FAO and World Bank convened a panel of experts to identify key obstacles to bridging the divide between relief and development, and assess what works well and why, and what needs to change.

Bottlenecks/challenges

The panel emphasised that the international humanitarian and development communities need to rethink their modalities of engagement, particularly for protracted crises in fragile and conflict-affected states. Humanitarian assistance has been repeatedly used to address what are often chronic, long term and recurrent problems. It has helped people stay alive, but resulted in many vulnerable people being stuck in situations where they receive only costly, unpredictable and annual hand outs. This is now starting to be challenged. The resilience agenda has had a positive impact in starting to break down these barriers, but there remains a tendency for individual donors and agencies pursuing their own agendas, rather than collective action and alignment behind a common analysis, vision and plan of action. At the same time, there is an increasing push within the development community to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’. For the development actors, this will require increased focus on some of the most vulnerable people in fragile states and protracted crises. For the humanitarians, there is an increasing necessity to re-focus their efforts and finite finances to what is mission critical.

Specific challenges include:

- **Common and holistic understanding of context:** A shift to a systems-based approach based on a shared understanding of capacities, risks, governance mechanisms and political economies is needed. This marks a significant move away from the current focus on immediate needs. The perspectives of people in crises need to be front and centre and consolidated with a robust understanding of the context including latent vulnerabilities, local mitigations strategies and local capacity that can be further built on.. Agency capacity is needed to perform and utilise context analysis to inform operations, even in the turmoil of response.
- **Shared leadership and genuine partnership:** Division of labour should be based on an unbiased assessment of technical competencies and capacity to deliver. Leadership of individual agencies tends to often focus on maximising agency benefits and market share rather than overall system optimisation to support crisis-affected populations. Collaboration needs to be based on common goals and on convergence of actions, even if values and methods of implementation are different (e.g. private-public partnership). Where feasible,

humanitarians should **refer** populations to the development community, so that they are provided longer-term, predictable assistance.

- **Distortionary effects of incentives:** There is a lack of clarity about trigger mechanisms for collaborative work, limited discipline to focus on core competencies, and a lack of common standards across humanitarian and development activities. Humanitarian agencies do not prioritise exit strategies from the beginning and development agencies have little incentive to work in more risky environments. There are few real incentives to innovate, be flexible or take risks. The humanitarian view of resilience can become a barrier to strengthening resilience by limiting growth. To be relevant as a resource for resiliency, humanitarian assistance must be a part of the safety net system on which poor and vulnerable individuals, households and communities can turn in times of need. Current financing mechanisms are no longer fit for purpose, as the effort of the two communities to address extent of needs and opportunities are often handcuffed over the boundaries that divide the humanitarian and development specialists; a more “layered” approach would help incentivize local, national, regional and global actors to remain focused on their core responsibilities and bring discipline to the system.
- **Vitalising communication:** Communication is key to progressing greater cooperation and complementarity between humanitarian and development interventions. Information and knowledge needs are not being met and communication pathways should be more extensive than those currently in operation. An “us and them” mentality often permeates communication between humanitarian and development; of particular concern is when this occurs within a multi-mandated institution, and when the IASC tasks itself to “advocate to development actors” on a particular topic.

Transforming operations: focus on the how

The notion that issues related to closing the humanitarian-development divide are related to objective factors that can be “fixed” or remedied often reinforces the bifurcated nature of current response efforts. The so-called “gap” cannot be filled with a new construct, program or project (as has been tried before), but rather must be closed by the humanitarian and development agendas becoming complementary and mutually reinforcing to serve a common goal. This requires a fundamental shift in the current modus operandi, in particular with regards to controls and structures, roles, resources and knowledge.

Humanitarian and development actors largely know what to do but are not systematically capturing and institutionalising how, when and where to replicate successes and go to scale. There is however a range of good practice indicating what works, for example: Ethiopia Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP); FAO, WFP and UNICEF consortium in Somalia; initiatives in the Horn (Global Alliance), Sahel (AGIR) and Political Champions; and development support for government basic services to host Syrian refugees, such as in Lebanon.

There are a number of principles that may be considered, including collective leadership, strategic anticipation, agility, collaboration/networks, and systemic learning. Multi-mandated agencies and international financial institutions should enable and lead the shift. Donors should join in policy dialogue with host governments to ensure their planning efforts include communities from the humanitarian “case-load”. Common

long-term goals on the order of decades will ensure coherence and that short-term financing vagaries do not derail the process. Flexibility and risk taking can be encouraged by shifting from a rules-based to a principles-based approach.

Way Forward

A number of parallel and complementary processes are pursuing similar objectives to the IASC, including: World Humanitarian Summit, UN Chief Executives Board, Montreux humanitarian retreat, Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative and the Solutions Alliance. In addition, a number of donors are already taking measures to address some of the bottlenecks linked both to financial incentives and internal coherence mentioned. The IASC should seek to align and leverage these efforts.

The following actions for implementation are proposed:

1. Identify one or two countries and develop a 10-15 year overall strategy based on a common understanding of risks, led by the government and supported by humanitarian and development actors (including the World Bank and climate change actors) with some committed donors with a view to scaling up programmes in a region or sub-region of one or two countries that have experienced protracted crises over a significant timeframe and demonstrate how multi-year humanitarian plans would dovetail with the longer-term strategy. In line with this effort, the Principals may choose to explore the opportunity of supporting the proposal that is being developed with the Government of Uganda and the USAID-led Global Alliance around a plan of convergence for the northeastern part of Uganda – the Karamoja region.
2. Pilot the development of an incremental exit strategy for the humanitarian community in certain countries of the Sahel (possible country candidates that can be considered are Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and/or Senegal) Each of these 3 countries are launching social safety net programs (often with the World Bank, UNICEF, EU involvement) which potentially provide an effective bridge between humanitarian actors and Government programmes, offer an opportunity for humanitarians to exit and avoid these countries becoming a permanent member of the Sahel annual humanitarian appeals.

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