Rethinking the Humanitarian-Development Nexus[1]

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Introduction

The parlance, budgets, policies and practices of the United Nations (UN) system and donors alike have traditionally operated with a clear distinction between humanitarian action and development aid. While both fields serve the purpose of improving the living conditions of people in need, their time horizons, measures and emphasis on structural change are different. The same goes for the principles and values that underpin their work, and it is here that the rationale for keeping them as separate enterprises can be found.

Humanitarian actors see the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence as crucial for the conduct of their work. Hence, they have shied away from being too closely associated with development and security actors due to the fear that this would jeopardise their 'humanitarian space'. For development actors on the other hand, the partnership with governments is key. Moreover, the nature of development work is inherently political. As a result, the work of the development actors has not been seen as compatible with the humanitarian principles.

In the field, however, the lines are not as clear-cut. Here response, recovery and development tend to take place in parallel. Moreover, prevention and recovery are increasingly being seen as central parts of humanitarian action, thus causing some overlap with development action. In the UN, repeated calls have been made for system-wide coherence and for dealing with the root causes of crises and conflicts. There are thus strong reasons for rethinking the humanitarian-development nexus. This policy brief takes a closer look at the arguments for a closer relationship between the two fields as well as how the international community has responded to current

challenges through various agreements and commitments. It discusses some of the implications of the new thinking: the imperative to prioritise prevention; the need to change the aid model and the business model and the so-called localization agenda. It concludes with a list of suggested priorities for the next UN Secretary-General in this regard.

The Case for a Closer Relationship Between the Humanitarian and Development Segments

Over the last 20 years, natural disasters have killed more than 700 000 people, injured 1.4 million and made 23 million homeless. Disasters have cost the global economy at least US$ 1.3 trillion over the same period. Climate change, insecurity and conflict continue to exacerbate underlying vulnerabilities linked to governance, human security and poverty. Currently, more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by state fragility and violent conflict. As a result of disasters and conflicts, there are now around 60 million displaced people – the majority of these women and children. This is the highest number on record since the Second World War. The displacement is unlikely to be a short-term issue. The average length of displacement is now 17 years, and the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are at an historic low.[2] The refugees and IDPs end up living in limbo, in camps or in urban areas – often slums – for generations, lacking protection, legal status and documentation. These camps and areas are not set up for long-term living. There are no opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and very little or no access to basic services and education. This situation poses therefore as much a development challenge as a humanitarian one, with long-term impact on the countries and communities concerned. Indeed, long-term displacement causes entrenched marginalization of entire communities, which in turn may cause further instability and conflict. Arguably, there is a need to deal with emergencies and recovery as well as with the causes of protracted conflicts. Moreover, our lenses must be broadened so that we see beyond shock-driven crises. Slow-onset disasters, climate-related crises and crises caused by structural factors must also be taken into account.

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1 This policy brief is to a large extent based on the seminar titled *Rethinking the humanitarian-development nexus*, which was held at NUPI on 15 March 2016. The seminar was co-organised by NUPI, the Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as part of the UN 70: A new Agenda project (http://www.nupi.no/en/About-NUPI/Projects-centres-and-programmes/UN-70). Magdy Martinez-Soliman, Assistant Administrator and Director Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP, was the main speaker and Turid Lægreid, Head of Department, Norwegian Military Academy, and Kristoffer Lidén, Senior Researcher, PRIO/The Norwegian Centre for Humanitarian Studies, acted as discussants.

2 These statistics were presented by Magdy Martinez-Soliman at the seminar *Rethinking the humanitarian-development nexus*. See note 1. See also http://www.unocha.org/top-stories/all-stories/forgotten-millions.

While the amount spent on humanitarian aid has grown, humanitarian needs have grown even more. Humanitarian appeals have more than tripled in just one decade, rising to an all-time high in 2014 of US$24.5 billion. In the same year, only 38% of the needs defined in these appeals were met. The consequences are by now well known: food rations are cut, programmes are dismantled, populations remain unprotected and organisations are left struggling. These are the realities of the humanitarian field. Also, crises are long-term. This impedes development and compromises opportunities for national capacity building because the urgent supersedes the important. The current level of displacement and violence and the transnational reverberations, such as refugee flows and transnational threats, cannot be managed or absorbed. We simply must rethink how to deal with this. The aim must be to make communities and states more resilient so that they can withstand both natural and conflict-related crises.

The Policy Response

In the UN there is recognition that the system is mismatched to needs, and that the many protracted crises and overlapping responsibilities of UN actors, coupled to the lack of funds, necessitate new thinking. Already in 2010, the Secretary-General's Report on Strengthening of the Coordination of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance of the UN[3] pointed to a gradual paradigm shift in which the humanitarian system is increasingly focusing on underlying vulnerabilities rather than solely responding to shocks. In 2015 there was significant debate on how to change the system that resulted in several emboldening commitments:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which took effect on 1 January 2016, is the first universal development framework.[4] It includes a set of 17 interconnected goals for sustainable development, with targets and indicators. It seeks to eradicate poverty in all its forms within a context of sustainable development. It is an agenda for the people and the planet, with an ambition to 'leave no-one behind' – a clear nod to the humanitarian caseload which is often referred to as the people who are the furthest behind.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, includes seven targets and four priorities for action and can be seen as a road map for building resilience and managing risk. It was adopted at the third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, and subsequently endorsed by the General Assembly.[5]

The Paris Agreement to combat climate change, adopted in December 2015 at the conference by the parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, has been described as a turning point that put the international community on the path towards zero carbon climate resilient development and with the threshold of 1.5 degrees.[6] Needless to say, not all share that optimism.

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The Addis Ababa Agenda for Action adopted at the third international conference on financing for development in July 2015 aims to provide a global framework for financing sustainable development, thus making a shift from funding to financing. It links economic prosperity with people's well being and protecting the environment.[7]

The reviews of UN peace operations and the UN peacebuilding architecture as well as the Secretary-General's report *One Humanity – Shared Responsibility*, which was written ahead of the World Humanitarian Summit, all emphasise prevention.[8] The peace reviews underscores the need to understand the political dimensions of peacebuilding and development, to be people-centred, and to employ a more consultative engagement with broad sections of society in which the UN operates. Similarly, the Secretary-General urges actors to 'reinforce, do not replace, national and local systems'.[9]

Let us now take a closer look at what this will entail.

Prioritise Prevention

Prioritising prevention means that the thrust of all UN action should be to avert and mitigate shocks, whether these shocks are caused by conflict, disaster, climate or epidemics. The organisation would support national partners in addressing the root causes of conflicts and disasters and reduce risk from other hazards. Successful prevention is based on strong analytics and risk management strategies. Risks are complex phenomena. The Ebola epidemic and the current Zika virus challenge are examples of that. International actors need to improve their capacity to predict and then respond together. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) approach is to invest in conflict sensitivity, prevention, risk reduction, preparedness, and alertness. They have a country presence before, during and after a crisis, which enables them to sustain this effort. In other words development starts before a crisis.

'Build back better' is a basic principle of disaster recovery which is included in the Sendai Framework. In essence it means to take measures to reduce future risks while also supporting on-going recovery efforts. The post-earthquake response in Nepal embeds these kinds of resilience measures. Likewise, the comprehensive disaster management programme in Bangladesh includes early warning and flood forecasting systems that could potentially save the lives, livelihood and assets of around 88 million people.

When developing risk reduction programmes, women need to be engaged. It is not just a question of equality but also of effectiveness. It is necessary to take into account how gender influences impact. For example, worldwide there are 1 billion fewer female cell phone users and owners than male ones. Disaster alert systems need to factor that in.

3   A/65/82- E/2010/88, 25 May 2010.
     See, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication.
4   See, http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/press-release/countries-reach-historic-agreement.html.
5   See, http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework.
6   See, http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9485.php

7   See, http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/press-release/countries-reach-historic-agreement.html.
8   A/70/95- S/2015/446, Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations: on uniting our strengths for peace: politics, partnership and people, 17 June 2015; The Challenge of Sustaining Peace, Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, 29 June 2015; A/70/709, One Humanity: Shared Responsibility, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2 February 2016.
9   A/70/709, One Humanity: Shared Responsibility, Report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2 February 2016, para. 110.

The preventive mind-set is also seen as important in connection to violent conflict. Preparedness and a joint and consistent approach from the international community improve the chances of national partners being able to manage potentially violent events peacefully. Political transition such as elections are potential violent flash points and are thus examples of situations in which the UN needs to act early. The UNDP's efforts in Guyana, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Kenya can serve as examples in this regard.

The UNDP also works together with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) to enable conflict prevention activities in field operations, including through the deployment of around 40 peace and development advisors, who are supported by a broad group of international partners.

The Global Study conducted in connection to last year's review of the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 demonstrated that women play a critical role in conflict prevention.[10] The promotion of female participation in these efforts must, therefore, be a matter of course.

Security Council Resolution 2282 emphasises that the concept of sustaining peace 'encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development', and that this requires 'sustained international attention and assistance'.[11] In other words, staying the course is essential for long term conflict prevention. This means that (re)establishment of core government functions and basic justice and security services in the aftermath of violent conflict is far from sufficient. Support from the international community must persist for an extended period – certainly long after the attention of media and policy makers has subsided. When peace missions depart there is still need for support in order to prevent sliding back into instability. The current humanitarian crisis illustrates in horrendous detail the need for increased efforts to prevent future crises and violent conflict, which may cause large-scale displacement and suffering.

Change the Aid Model and the Business Model

Another suggested change is to aim for a new business model of joint action between humanitarian and development actors. In this model the two segments would be working together, planning together, mobilising resources together and responding together. Action on issues such as forced displacement, for example, should routinely incorporate resilience approaches. The 3RP, Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria crises is an example of such joint action.[12]

In co-operation with donors, the UN should work to establish fungible and flexible financing models, *inter alia* multi-year joint appeals that cut across the peace, development and humanitarian segments. This is especially important for countries in protracted crisis situations. Among other advantages, the flexibility would give UN country leadership, the Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators, the ability to respond rapidly to change in needs and risks.

The Addis Ababa Agenda for Action introduced the concept of replacing funding with financing. This entails working closely together with governments whenever possible on how they are managing and spending their revenue streams, national and aid budgets. It involves working with authorities on how to address humanitarian need, promote resilient development and build peace nationally. The engagement of international financial institutions is crucial here. The Somalia Compact[13] is an example of such a model, and is based on the statebuilding and peacebuiling goals of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.[14]

Within the UN system, an implication of the new model would be integration across the UN pillars. Joint analysis and planning is at the heart of the shift towards such integration. Having one common problem statement and one common plan to address risk and vulnerability is crucial in this respect. The idea of one UN framework in one country is also part of the same shift. This would involve gathering all the data, analytics, risk assessment and strategic planning in one place. Multi-year, combined humanitarian and development planning would prevent both institutional and mental silos. The strategic United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF) with government partners,[15] would also include multi-year planning and common multi-year resource mobilization strategies.

The shift would also entail empowered leadership. The senior leadership should be able to fulfil their role with authority, trust and support. It should be able to call on all capacities and resources to ensure that the UN can deliver as one. Hence, developmental and humanitarian coordination should be linked. There should also be a closer engagement with peacebuilding and political missions, which in defining their mandates should build explicitly on the strength of the UN country teams.

In addition, calls have been made for deepening the partnerships with the private sector as part of a new business model. Public financing and aid could be used to leverage private investment in order to enable communities affected by crises to take responsibility for their own development, and refugees and displaced job seekers for their livelihood.

Localisation

A third suggested change within the humanitarian-development nexus could be placed under the heading of localisation. It takes as its starting point that localised humanitarian action and development saves lives. It is a process of empowerment of stakeholders aimed at making assistance more responsive and relevant to community needs and aspirations. For the UNDP, livelihood is seen

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10   Global Study: Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace, 14 October 2015.

11   S/RES/2282 (2016) , 27 April.

12   See, http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/the-3rp/strategic-overview/.

13   See, https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/somalia/documents/press_corner/20130916_the_somali_compact.pdf.

14   See, http://www.g7plus.org/en/new-deal/document.

15   In future perhaps called United Nations Sustainable Development Assistance Frameworks.

as an important element of this. This encompasses three tracks: stabilisation of livelihoods; early economic recovery; and long-term employment and inclusive growth. The Syrian crisis presents a compelling case for building resilience through localised solutions, not least because the conditions vary so much from one locality to the next, in terms of how affected they are by war. The aim is to develop joint sustainable strategies to address the protection and livelihood of refugees and displaced people, within Syria's borders and in the neighbouring countries. This includes supporting community security measures and livelihood initiatives, strengthening local service delivery as well as encouraging community cohesion, resilience and self-reliance, with a special focus on vulnerable groups.

Localised joint action is seen as a hallmark of the UN's approach to bridging the humanitarian-development nexus. We enter an era of SDG implementation, of climate accords implementation, of development finance implementation, with a less than robust global economy and with the existence of protracted displacement like never before. We see conflicts and crises on a grotesque scale. Increasingly extreme weather events are the new normal. Natural disasters contribute to cause unnecessary death and damage, and resources are finite. National revenue, development and humanitarian aid, private enterprise, international financial institutions and government loans need to be used more effectively. The 2030 agenda aims to address these challenges – it can in itself be understood as a lifesaving appeal.

Advise for the Next Secretary-General

The discussion above has outlined the first steps taken in the rethinking of the humanitarian-development nexus. The next Secretary-General would be advised to continue on the same path in order to make sure that the recent commitments made by member states and expressed in various documents are realised. In the context of these commitments, the next Secretary-General should prioritise

- Strengthening the coordinators – the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) – as the platforms for coordination of both communities in the multilateral system as well as the Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators in UN country teams.
- Improving planning horizons. Accelerating development planning to make it faster in the mode of emergency development action while broadening the horizon of humanitarian action to address the mid-term, not only the immediate response.
- Placing the Sustainable Development Goals at the centre of UN action, as they constitute clear goals defined by the international community, with the emphasis on leaving nobody behind. All humanitarian and development action should happen under and in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, which are compatible with the humanitarian principles.
- Prioritising prevention in practice. Let money and action follow words. It is easy to agree that prevention is preferable to reaction, but since it is impossible to prove that the outcome would have been different without the preventive measures, it takes commitment and courage to take the preventive approach. Be brave and prioritise early action so that the need for humanitarian assistance does not arise in the first place.
- With donor support, the UN should make available funds for joint programming between humanitarian and development actors. Joint endeavours should be rewarded while preparing for more profound systemic reform.
- The purpose of rethinking the humanitarian-development nexus is to make humanitarian action obsolete, by initiating development and building resilience in preventive mode. This will not happen over night, though. It is therefore important to keep in mind that in the short – and perhaps medium – term there will be situations that may require that a clear distinction is made between humanitarian and development actors in the field. During acute violent conflicts in which governments are involved, humanitarian actors are best served by keeping their distance from development actors (and indeed security actors), in order to ensure that they are not perceived to be compromising their humanitarian principles.

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