



LESSONS IN MULTILATERAL EFFECTIVENESS

**Rethinking Effective
Humanitarian Organisations**





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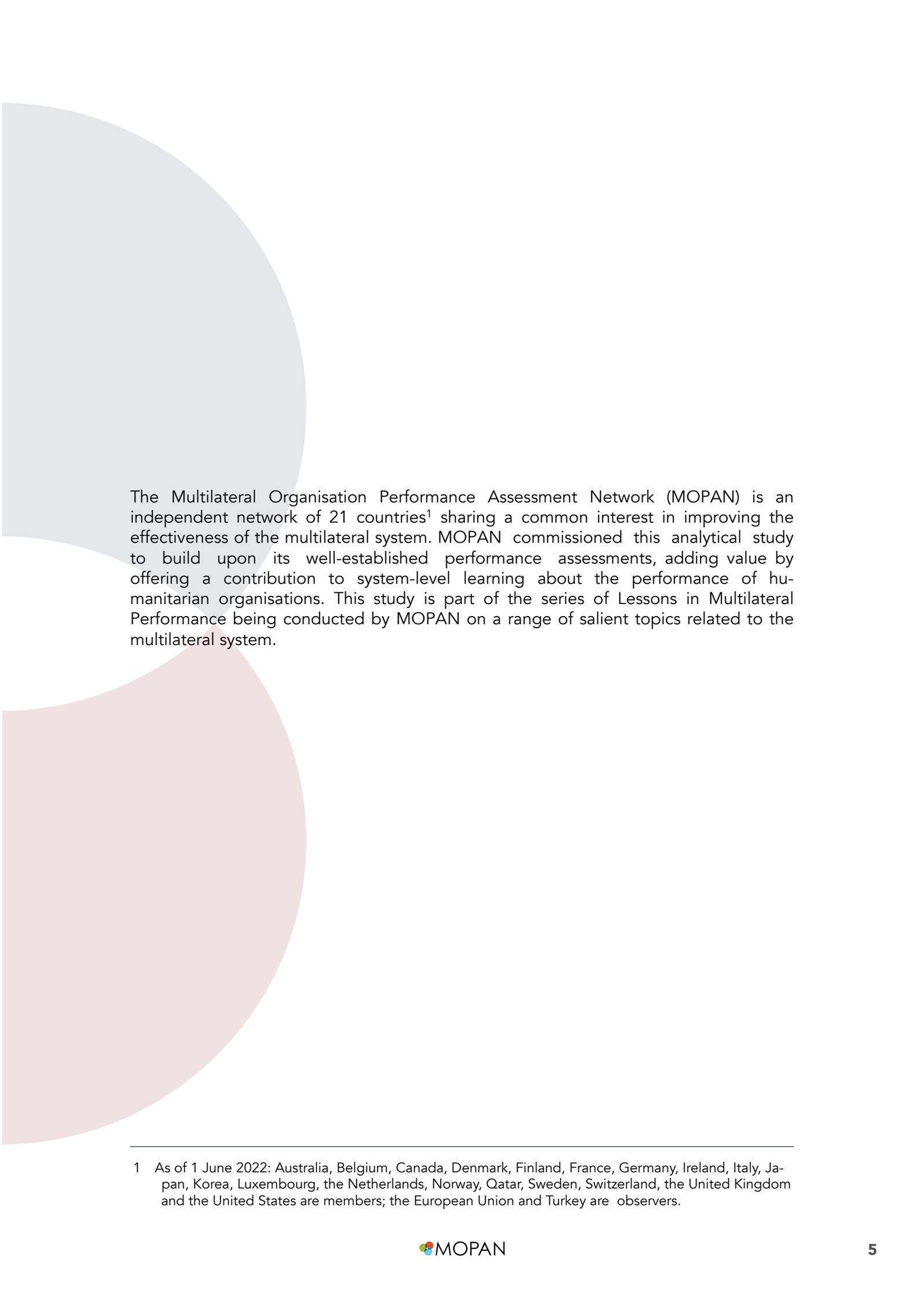
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Please cite this publication as:

Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN), (2021), *Rethinking Effective Humanitarian Organisations*, Lessons in Multilateral Effectiveness, Paris.

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The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) is an independent network of 21 countries¹ sharing a common interest in improving the effectiveness of the multilateral system. MOPAN commissioned this analytical study to build upon its well-established performance assessments, adding value by offering a contribution to system-level learning about the performance of humanitarian organisations. This study is part of the series of Lessons in Multilateral Performance being conducted by MOPAN on a range of salient topics related to the multilateral system.

¹ As of 1 June 2022: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States are members; the European Union and Turkey are observers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was conducted by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) under the overall strategic guidance of Suzanne Steensen, Head of the MOPAN Secretariat. It was prepared under the responsibility of Jolanda Profos and Rachel Scott, with support from Cara Yakush and Anstasiya Sindyukova, who oversaw the production.

The study was carried out in collaboration with a team from Agulhas Applied Knowledge and Humanitarian Outcomes, led by Marcus Cox, Lauren Pett, and Glyn Taylor, with support from Mazvita Mutambirwa and Meriah-Jo Breckenridge. Christopher Mooney edited the report and Alex Bilodeau provided design and layout.

This study would not have been possible without the generous time of interviewees from management and staff of the Multilateral Organisations in our sample who provided substantive inputs: We would also like to convey our appreciation to the management and staff of HOs in our sample for their valuable inputs and time, in particular FAO, OCHA, UNHCR and UNICEF.

We are grateful to the MOPAN members who participated in the reference group for their advice and comments: Janis Grychovski, Camille Pabalan (Canada), Jannicke Jaeger and Hilde Salvesen (Norway), Ashley McLaughlin, Jacqui Pilch, Tica Ferguson, Kristina Grossman, Liam Kincaid, Hierete Desta, Nathalie Eisenbarth, and Dilafruz Khonikboyeva (USA). The study also drew on insights provided by teams that were undertaking, or had undertaken, MOPAN assessments of UNICEF and OCHA, which helped reduce the burden of data collection for these agencies.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CBPF	Country-Based Pooled Fund
CCCs	Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action
CERP	Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peace
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HAC	Humanitarian Action for Children
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
HO	Humanitarian Organisation
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IFIs	International Finance Institutions
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MOPAN	Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network
NGO	Non-government Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Programme Division
RBB	Results-Based Budgeting
RBM	Results-Based Management
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollars
WFP	World Food Programme



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, the international humanitarian system sought USD 46 billion in donor finance, to support 183 million people across 63 countries.¹ Creating effective accountability for humanitarian aid on such a scale is a perennial challenge. External scrutiny of international humanitarian organisations (HOs) has increased over the years, as funders have sought more and better evidence that their resources are being used to best effect.² Organisational assessments by the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) are one such scrutiny process.

Accountability for humanitarian finance should rest on a shared understanding of what constitutes good organisational performance for HOs. However, past MOPAN assessments reveal that HOs often score poorly in key performance areas, raising a question as to whether the right performance measures are being used. Furthermore, ambitious international agreements on humanitarian system reform – and the difficulties of translating many of those commitments into practical action – opens the possibility that the performance expectations placed on individual HOs may not be fully consistent with evolving expectations for the performance of the system as a whole.

This study was therefore undertaken to explore what ‘good’ looks like in the organisational effectiveness of HOs. It explores two main research questions.

1. How can HOs best reflect agreed objectives on reform of the international humanitarian system in their own organisations? The study looks in particular at the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, accountability to affected populations (AAP) and localisation.
2. What is good practice on managing for results in HOs, given the specific nature of humanitarian assistance and the challenging environments in which it is delivered?

The study methodology involved analysis of findings from past MOPAN reviews, a literature review, key stakeholder interviews and brief case studies of four multilateral organisations – UNHCR and OCHA, which are primarily humanitarian, and UNICEF and FAO, which have mixed humanitarian and development mandates.

The headline findings of the study are as follows:

1

First, for HOs, simply signing up to humanitarian reform commitments is not enough, unless they also hardwire the commitments into their organisational structures and business models. The study revealed an extensive list of factors that work against the implementation of agreed reforms.

For the **HDP Nexus**, implementation is held back by:

- tensions with humanitarian principles
- cost and time trade-offs
- the limited presence of development actors in crisis settings
- incompatible modes of working
- restrictions on the ability of HOs to work with governments
- and the persistence of political obstacles that hamper moving towards more sustainable forms of support.

1 OCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021, 2021, p.66, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021_EN.pdf.

2 Global Public Policy Institute, Independent Review of Individual Donor Assessments in Humanitarian Operations, November 2020, https://www.gppi.net/media/GPPI_2020_Independent-Review-of-Donor-Assessments.pdf.

For **localisation**, the study identified challenges around the predominant subcontracting model for working with national and local actors, which entrenches the dominance of international HOs. Other factors include capacity limitations among national and local responders, concerns about preserving humanitarian neutrality, and increasingly stringent donor due diligence and reporting requirements that local Non-government organisations (NGOs) struggle to meet.

For **accountability to affected populations**, there are challenges around designing meaningful consultation mechanisms in crisis situations, the tendency of HOs to set up parallel, *ad hoc* consultation processes, and a lack of financial and human resources.

Given these practical challenges, high-level commitments to humanitarian reform at headquarters level do not translate into meaningful change at the operation level unless they are built into corporate business models, systems and processes. The experiences of the case study organisations suggest that the following may be useful:

- Clear organisational commitments and mandates to humanitarian reform, backed by corporate champions and dedicated resources
- Clear guidance for staff on when and how to progress humanitarian reforms, and how to manage trade-offs with humanitarian principles and other corporate objectives
- Structured investment in contextual analysis and country-specific reform strategies and plans
- More structured investment in building capacity among national and local responders
- Investment and skills training in conflict sensitivity and more comprehensive risk awareness
- Shared initiatives to develop meaningful mechanisms for community participation and accountability.

2

Second, implementation of humanitarian reform commitments also requires changes in humanitarian funding practice. Study participants stressed that following through on Grand Bargain commitments to improve funding practices would help to create more space for humanitarian reform. Possible measures include:

- More funding for crisis prevention and resilience-building
- Greater flexibility to reallocate funding between humanitarian and development interventions in crisis-affected areas
- Greater flexibility in the terms and conditions of humanitarian finance, to support working with national partners and to allow for more adaptability
- Dedicated resources for longer-term investments in capacity building and community consultation mechanisms.

3

Third, delivering humanitarian support in high-risk, complex and fast-evolving situations calls for a different approach to managing for results. HOs have different information needs. They require a regular flow of data on evolving humanitarian needs and whether populations in crisis are being reached but, due to their mandates, are less interested in demonstrating ‘what works’ in the pursuit of longer-term results. The value of aggregating humanitarian results up to the corporate or global level, through comprehensive results-based management (RBM) systems, is not as evident for HOs. Aggregate result data tells us more about the extent of humanitarian needs and the availability of humanitarian finance in any given year, than about the performance of individual HOs. As a result, HOs as a group have struggled to implement corporate RBM systems in a meaningful way, often receiving poor ratings from MOPAN for their early efforts.

More recently, however, some of the case study organisations have made important progress towards meaningful RBM systems. For the two dual-mandate organisations, in particular, efforts to better integrate humanitarian results into their RBM systems has helped drive greater coherence between their humanitarian and development operations. For example, in its corporate strategy, UNICEF now defines a set of global results for children – for example, ensuring nutritious diets – that can be pursued either through development or humanitarian interventions, as the need arises. Similarly, FAO’s corporate objective ‘increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises’ can be pursued both through long-term development initiatives and emergency response to food crises. Effort to integrate humanitarian and development results into a common RBM system is helping the organisations see the humanitarian-development interface as a continuum of options for responding to need, rather than as siloed operational areas. This is helpful in embedding the HDP Nexus into the corporate culture.

4

Finally, for MOPAN itself, the study suggests that the organisational assessment framework needs to be adapted for HOs, to better reflect the nature of humanitarian operations and the practical requirements of working in crisis situations.

1. INTRODUCTION



In 2022, the global humanitarian system aimed to support 186 million people in need across 63 countries, requiring humanitarian finance of USD 46 billion.³ Creating effective accountability for humanitarian funding at such a scale, delivered across many of the world's most difficult operating contexts, is a perennial challenge. Over recent years, the volume of donor assessments of humanitarian organisations has continued to rise, as funders have sought more and better evidence that their contributions are being used to best effect.⁴

Accountability for humanitarian finance should in principle rest on a shared understanding of what constitutes good organisational performance for an organisation working in humanitarian settings (HO). Funders rely on HOs to have in place suitable systems and processes for strategy setting, planning, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, among many other areas. The Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) assessment methodology⁵ is one attempt to define the attributes of an effective organisation, drawing on good practice from across the multilateral system.

However, the premise of this study is that the question of what constitutes good performance in HOs is not settled. If anything, it has been thrown further into question by a shared conviction that the international humanitarian system is not keeping pace with the rapidly growing challenges it faces, and by the difficulty of translating humanitarian reform commitments into practical action.

Over its twenty years of operation, MOPAN's organisational assessments offer a rich body of data on the effectiveness of the multilateral system. Statistical analysis of those results shows that HOs as a group⁶ appear to underperform in a number of areas, compared to other multilateral organisations. These areas include strategy setting, results-based management and budgeting, and sustainability (see Box 1). The pattern is striking, but open to various possible interpretations. These may be areas of relative weakness for HOs, perhaps because of the nature of their mandates, or the challenging environments in which they operate. They may be linked to the nature of humanitarian finance and the ways in which HOs are held accountable by their funders. The pattern may also reflect uncertainty about what constitutes good organisational performance for HOs. It could be that some common ideas on organisational effectiveness have been imported from the field of development assistance, and are a poor fit with the realities of humanitarian action.

3 OCHA, Global Humanitarian Overview 2021, 2021, p. 66, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHO2021_EN.pdf.

4 Global Public Policy Institute, Independent Review of Individual Donor Assessments in Humanitarian Operations, November 2020, https://www.gppi.net/media/GPPi_2020_Independent-Review-of-Donor-Assessments.pdf.

5 MOPAN, "Our Methodology", <https://www.mopanonline.org/ourwork/whatdoesmopanassessandhow/>.

6 Under MOPAN's classification, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are grouped as humanitarian.

This study was therefore undertaken to explore what ‘good’ looks like in organisational effectiveness for HOs. An initial set of study questions were refined through a literature review and conversations with key figures across the humanitarian sector, and two main questions were identified as the most important and interesting:

- How can HOs best reflect agreed objectives on reform of the international humanitarian system in their own organisations? Three reform commitments were selected as particularly pertinent: the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (‘HDP Nexus’), localisation and accountability to affected populations (AAP).
- What is good practice on managing for results in HOs?

These two questions are discussed separately, in sections 2 and 3 of the paper. However, there are important links between the two. International objectives on reform of the humanitarian system have important implications for our understanding of what constitutes good humanitarian results. The commitments on localisation and AAP require consideration not just of whether populations in need are reached with humanitarian assistance, but how they are reached – including whether the support reflects their needs and priorities, and whether local responders have been engaged and strengthened. The HDP Nexus approach suggests that HOs should also be on the look out for opportunities to build resilience and promote – or at least not undermine - peace through their operations, so to as to reduce levels of humanitarian need over time. If these objectives can be built into results-management systems, it should help to drive implementation of reform commitments. Conversely, results-management systems with narrowly defined targets, combined with tight, short-term accountability to donors for the use of humanitarian finance, may constrain the space for humanitarian reform. In short, the performance standards being set for HOs may be working at cross-purposes with international objectives for reform of the humanitarian system.

The study was prepared with two objectives in mind. The first is to inspire reflection and debate on how the performance of individual HOs fits within wider objectives on reform of the international humanitarian system. The second is to contribute to ongoing discussions between HOs and their funders on what constitutes good organisational performance, to help strengthen learning and accountability.

After this first section, setting out the purpose and methodology of the study, the report is in two sections. Section 2 explores how humanitarian organisations have responded at the organisational level to humanitarian reform commitments. In each of three reform areas (HDP Nexus, localisation and AAP), it looks at the nature of the commitments involved and the experiences of the case study organisations in adapting their structures, systems and processes to implement them. It concludes with lessons for both HOs and their funders, together with potential elements of a successful approach. Section 3 explores the topic of results-based management (RBM) in humanitarian organisations. It looks at early debates on whether RBM is suitable for humanitarian action and what practical challenges it presents. It explores the experience of the four case study organisations in implementing RBM, before concluding with lessons learnt and an outline of potentially successful approach.

1.1 Methodology

The study was carried out in two phases. During the first phase, we undertook a detailed analysis of past MOPAN reviews and a brief literature review, to help formulate hypotheses and refine our research questions. During the second phase, we tested those hypotheses through four case studies.

The analysis of MOPAN scores in the first phase revealed five Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the MOPAN assessment framework where HOs as a group scored significantly lower than other multilateral organisations (Box 1). These relate to planning, budgeting, results-management, external partnerships (particularly, working with partner countries) and sustainability of results.

Box 1: Statistical analysis of past MOPAN results

In the 2015 to 2018 period, MOPAN conducted assessments of 26 multilateral organisations, five of which (IOM, UNHCR, UN-OCHA, UNRWA and WFP) are classed by MOPAN as 'humanitarian'. The organisations were assessed on a five-point scale against 12 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). HOs performed worse on average than other groups in 9 of the 12 KPIs. However, a more detailed statistical analysis found these differences were statistically significant for only four KPIs:

KPI 1: Organisational architecture and financial framework enable mandate implementation and achievement of expected results

KPI 4: Organisational systems are cost- and value-conscious and enable financial transparency and accountability

KPI 7: The focus on results is strong, transparent and explicitly geared towards function

KPI 12: Results are sustainable

In addition, we found that there was one KPI on which the HOs performed worse as a group than the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), although not compared to multilateral organisations as a whole:

KPI 5: Operational planning and intervention design tools support relevance and agility within partnerships

In these KPIs, a ranking of all the assessed organisations reveals a cluster of HOs appearing towards the bottom of the rankings, with OCHA, UNHCR and IOM appearing most frequently in the bottom quartile.

Source: [MOPAN Methodology manual](#)

The literature review confirmed that there are a number of common performance-management concepts that are not well or consistently applied by HOs, or whose application is challenging or open to interpretation. These included alignment with national priorities, evidence-based interventions, managing by results, results-based budgeting and sustainability.

Based on the first phase of the research, the Reference Group identified two focus areas for the case studies: managing for results, and the incorporation of system-wide humanitarian reform commitments into the organisational performance standards for individual HOs. During the second research phase, we set out to explore in each area what factors constrained the performance of the organisation and whether the standards used to assess organisational performance accorded with their own understanding of good performance.

We chose four case study organisations. Two of them – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations High Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs (UNHCR) – were selected from MOPAN’s list of HOs scoring poorly in these areas. The other two – United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – were chosen as having both humanitarian and development mandates, providing an opportunity to compare how they undertook performance management across the two spheres. The case studies were light-touch desk reviews, involving synthesis of past and ongoing MOPAN reviews and other relevant reviews and evaluations, and key informant interviews with headquarters staff and field staff in two countries, Afghanistan and Chad.

We also held consultations with a range of key informants, including MOPAN members, humanitarian organisations and independent experts. Our Reference Group for the study, made up of Canada, the European Union, Norway and the United States, provided extensive advice and support throughout.

1.2 Limitations of the study

The study is a preliminary exploration of a complex set of issues, touching on some of the key strategic challenges facing the international humanitarian system. It makes no claim to be comprehensive.

In exploring humanitarian reform commitments, our focus was on institutional factors that facilitate or impede implementation, rather than on overcoming implementation challenges in the field, on which there is a growing literature.

This is an area where generalisations need to be drawn with care. The four case study organisations are diverse in their mandates and ways of operating, and also face distinct challenges across different operating contexts. While this study focuses on humanitarian action, all the organisations discussed here engage in activities that go beyond the delivery of material support to people in crisis. For example, UNHCR builds national protection capacity and promotes durable solutions for displaced populations, while OCHA is focused on humanitarian co-ordination and advocacy. UNICEF and FAO have mandates that incorporate both humanitarian and development action. This is a rapidly moving field, and each of the case study organisations has ongoing initiatives to strengthen their performance. The study therefore seeks to identify broad lessons and principles that HOs can adapt to their own unique circumstances.



2. HOW SHOULD HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS RESPOND TO SYSTEM-WIDE REFORM COMMITMENTS?

In this section of the report, we consider the implication of humanitarian system reform commitments for ‘what good looks like’ in organisational terms for humanitarian organisations (HOs). We look at whether and how humanitarian reform commitments can be translated into individual performance standards for HOs, and ask what external factors – including the terms and conditions of humanitarian finance – hamper their implementation.

Over the years, many humanitarian reform instruments and commitments have been entered into, including most recently at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit through the New Way of Working and the Grand Bargain (adopted voluntarily by a group of humanitarian actors, and now in a second iteration). To focus our enquiry, we looked at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP Nexus), localisation and accountability to affected populations (AAP).

None of these are new commitments. They are the latest expression of a long-running effort to address systemic problems in the humanitarian sector. They seek to overcome the siloed nature of international support in crisis-affected contexts, strengthen the role of national and local actors in responding to emergencies, and accomplish a shift towards demand-driven assistance that is responsive and accountable to target populations.⁷

The international humanitarian system is famously difficult to reform, and it is widely acknowledged that progress on implementing these commitments has been limited.⁸ A recent progress report on implementation of the Grand Bargain talks of ‘a continuing failure to address the long-standing challenges that have inhibited positive change in the international humanitarian system’.⁹ The considerable inertia across the system has meant that reform commitments that are widely subscribed to as high-level principles are implemented only selectively and partially. Well-intentioned implementation efforts encounter systemic barriers and collective action problems that dilute their impact in the field, with the result that meaningful change has been very hard to achieve. The May 2022 Interim Progress Report on the Humanitarian-Development Peace Nexus noted the widespread adoption of new policies, but also noted the challenges in translating these into programming.¹⁰ The Grand Bargain progress report notes:

“ The vast majority of signatories continue to focus on their own institutional priorities, with the result that investments are spread too thin to achieve system-wide change. There has been a general failure to take the wealth of emerging positive practice to scale, even where tangible results have been demonstrated, largely due to a lack of appetite or motivation to take the risks inherent in changing entrenched business practices.”¹¹

Source: The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Report

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- 7 A commitment to greater community participation in humanitarian assistance has been expressed in many past instruments, including the 1992 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the Humanitarian Charter in 2000, the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles in 2003, and the Humanitarian Reform initiative in 2005.
- 8 Patrick Saez, Jeremy Konyndyk and Rose Worden, Rethinking Humanitarian Reform: What Will it Take to Truly Change the System? Briefs, Center for Global Development, 29 September 2021, <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/rethinking-humanitarian-reform-what-will-it-take-truly-change-system>.
- 9 Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., Grant Bargain annual independent report 2020, Overseas Development Institute, June 2020, p. 103, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-12/Grand_Bargain_Annual_Independent_Report_2020.pdf.
- 10 OECD, The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Report, May 2022, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2f620ca5-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/2f620ca5-en>.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

This poses the question of what standards and commitments can be adopted by HOs at the organisational level, to drive forward implementation? But it also suggests that there may be limitations on their ability to drive change through unilateral action. To what extent are demands placed on HOs by their boards and funders working against implementation of the reforms? How does donor funding behaviour also have to change to allow meaningful progress?

2.1 The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

The commitment

The HDP Nexus is shorthand for the desire to strengthen the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts, with a view to reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, increasing the investment in prevention, and ultimately reducing the need for humanitarian assistance.¹² It is affirmed in the United Nations New Way of Working, agreed at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, and in a recommendation – a legal instrument - issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), and to which seven UN agencies have now adhered. According to the DAC recommendation,

“*At the centre of strengthening the coherence between humanitarian, development and peace efforts is the aim of effectively reducing people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities, supporting prevention efforts and thus, shifting from delivering humanitarian assistance to ending need.*”

Source: OECD-DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

It commits its growing number of signatories to “prevention always, development wherever possible, humanitarian action where necessary” (see Box 2).

Box 2: Commitments under the DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus

Some of the key commitments under the DAC Recommendation include:

- Undertake joint risk-informed, gender-sensitive analysis of the root causes and structural drivers of conflict, as well as positive factors of resilience, in dialogue with national stakeholders
- Provide resources to lead on co-ordination across the HDP architecture
- Intensify efforts on crisis prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding
- Place people at the centre, tackle exclusion and promote gender equality
- Ensure risk-focused, flexible and context-adaptable programming
- Strengthen national and local capacities
- Deliver better financing across the nexus, including evidence-based financing strategies at national and global levels, with predictable, flexible, multi-year financing wherever possible.

Source: DAC Recommendation on the HDP Nexus, available at <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-5019>

12 OECD-DAC, DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, 2022, <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>.

The HDP Nexus is not solely, or even primarily, the responsibility of HOs. While humanitarian actors are required by their mandates to focus on pressing humanitarian needs, the Recommendation calls for peace and development actors to tackle structural drivers that will eventually reduce humanitarian need and enable humanitarian actors to withdraw, including by transferring services to state and local institutions.

HOs can support this objective by providing humanitarian assistance in ways that strengthen national and local actors and facilitate the transfer of functions to them – for example, by aligning humanitarian cash distribution to government-managed social protection schemes. They are asked to contribute, within the limits of their mandates, towards reducing humanitarian needs, risks and vulnerabilities over time. They can lend expertise on crisis management to help countries improve their capacity to respond to future emergencies. Both HOs and development organisations are called on to increase their sensitivity to conflict risks and invest in peace.

The HDP Nexus has gained salience in recent years. Half of all people in extreme poverty now live in fragile contexts, and this is projected to rise to 80% by 2030. Recurrent and protracted crises are among the most pressing obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.¹³ Rising humanitarian need is drawing resources away from long-term development, with 65% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) spent in fragile contexts. Ninety percent of humanitarian goes towards protracted crises, where the long-term use of crisis-response instruments is clearly not helping to reduce the humanitarian case load. Climate change is becoming an increasing driver of humanitarian crises, and this is projected to accelerate in the coming years. All these factors militate for step change in the level of attention given to resilience and crisis prevention.

While the case for the HDP Nexus is unarguable, efforts are ongoing to turn it into a clear set of operational principles and programming options. There are as yet few clear answers for who is responsible for what actions. The openings for Nexus-inspired working are highly specific to each humanitarian context, making it difficult to posit general rules. The Nexus is best described as a mindset or way of thinking: an entrepreneurial approach to tackling diverse and complex problems.

The May 2022 Interim Progress Report on the HDP Nexus notes that its growing number of signatories and adherents are making progress in a number of areas, including building a shared understanding of risk at country level, adopting new operational policies and introducing Nexus-friendly financing models. However, there has been limited concrete progress towards collective outcomes, and more needs to be done to carry joint analysis and planning through into programming. Political engagement remains underdeveloped, and there has been little progress on strengthening voice and participation.¹⁴

Feedback from case study organisations

All four of the case study organisations have made significant investments in promoting the HDP Nexus, but none claims as yet to have translated it into a fully operational framework. In our interviews, officials from the four organisations pointed to a significant number of barriers that were holding back implementation. For UNICEF and FAO, as dual mandate organisations, their challenges were about ensuring coherence across the different part of their organisations, as well as coherence with other actors.

13 Samuel Carpenter and Christina Bennett, *Managing crises together: towards coherence and complementarity in recurrent and protracted crises*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute, July 2015, <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/9736.pdf>.

14 OECD, *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Interim Progress Report*, May 2022, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2f620ca5-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/2f620ca5-en>.

Adherence to humanitarian principles: There is an underlying concern among HOs about the risk of compromising the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. In conflict situations, working with national governments and local actors runs the risk of undermining the neutrality and independence of humanitarian action. The principle of independence holds that:

“ Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.”¹⁵

Source: [OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles](#)

Working with national actors might promote more sustainable solutions, but at the expense of mixing humanitarian with other objectives.

- **Cost and time trade-offs:** HOs are almost invariably working in environments of scarce resources, and driven by urgency. Investing in resilience within humanitarian operations means higher unit costs, as well as slower response times. More resilience therefore means fewer lives saved. The HOs lack clear principles or doctrines enabling them to decide when it is legitimate to dilute and delay humanitarian support in pursuit of greater resilience.
- **Geographical separation:** Development actors are often not present in the same operating theatres as HOs, who therefore lack counterparts for collaboration across the HDP Nexus. Conversely, HOs are generally present in areas where crises have already occurred, and have limited scope to invest in resilience outside humanitarian theatres.
- **Incompatible modes of working:** Interviewees noted the gulf between humanitarian and development actors, in terms of the principles, operating frameworks, delivery methods and timeframes. This presents an array of practical challenges to working together.
- **Challenges in working with governments:** Building national capacity in areas such as disaster risk reduction is integral to the Nexus approach. However, HOs are often restricted in their ability to work with governments in conflict zones, due to the principle of neutrality. Across the case study organisations, there is a lack of clarity as to when and where providing technical assistance to national bodies is consistent with the neutrality principle. HOs are also not specialists in institution-building, which requires longer programme timeframes and different skill sets. One commentator pointed out that for many humanitarians, the idea of investing in national capacity is ‘almost a taboo’,¹⁶ given the need for neutrality and the fact that the opportunity cost of doing so is fewer resources for their core mandate of providing life-saving support.
- **Political obstacles:** Moving away from emergency assistance to more sustainable forms of support for vulnerable populations often encounters wider political problems that HOs are not in a position to resolve. This is often the case in respect of longstanding refugee populations, where moving towards more development assistance would involve changes in their legal status or recognition of their settlements as permanent. For example, in Jordan, there has been progress in incorporating Syrian refugees into the national health and education systems, with international financial support. However, the government is opposed to providing refugees with cash-based assistance through the national social protection system, for fear of shifting the financial responsibility permanently

15 OCHA, OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles, June 2012, https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf.

16 ICRC, Humanitarian debate: Law, policy, action. The future of humanitarian action, December 2011, p.1153, <https://www.icrc.org/fr/doc/resources/international-review/review-884/review-884-all.pdf>.

to the national budget. Some interviewees observed that, so long as the international community used humanitarian assistance as a palliative in long-running conflicts, rather than addressing the underlying political issues, progress on the Nexus was going to be limited.

The case study organisations also pointed to a range of constraints to implementing the Nexus relating to the nature of their finance. These included:

- **Funding shortages:** In an environment of increasingly scarce resources, the focus of both HOs and their funders has been on aggressive prioritisation of resources towards the most acute needs. This drives a very short-term focus, and works against the desire for long-term investment in building resilience.¹⁷
- **Short project cycles:** Most humanitarian finance is provided on short cycles of 12 months (which means even shorter implementation periods). This makes it difficult to work on transformative processes like building resilience, which takes longer than a single programme cycle. Short-term programming creates a pressure to focus on outputs, rather than longer term outcomes. One interviewee from a case study organisation told us:

“ Many of our projects are one-year maximum. There is a lot of pressure to get through all the documents, contracts, procurements, delivery, partnerships etc. There is constant pressure on delivery and reporting back to the donors. Surely in some instances you could be doing a better job if you had more time to engage in a project... Even where donors end up providing an extension, we don't know that from the beginning and therefore can't plan around it.”

Source: Case study interviewee

- **Rigidly defined project outcomes:** Donor finance comes with tightly defined budgets and project outcomes. Funds are often earmarked for specific purposes – or negatively earmarked, preventing their use in certain geographical areas or with particular types of partners. This leaves little room for (or incentive to) make investments in resilience.
- **Restrictions on blending humanitarian and development finance:** As dual-mandate organisations, UNICEF and FAO are entrusted with both humanitarian and development finance, often from the same donor. However, each is subject to different terms and conditions, which require them to be managed and administered separately. This prevents the organisations from moving to more programmatic or area-based forms of support, with humanitarian and development funding used flexibly to support populations in need in different ways as conditions evolve.
- **Global resource-allocation processes:** Informants pointed out that global processes for allocating humanitarian and development finance are inherently misaligned with the HDP Nexus approach. Because humanitarian finance is driven by emergency appeals, it is not available at scale for investments in anticipatory work in advance of crises occurring, although some resources are now available for building resilience in areas affected by long-running humanitarian crises. Conversely, development finance tends to be scarce in the riskiest operating environments.

17 FAO, NRC & UNDP, Financing the Nexus: Gaps and Opportunities from a Field Perspective, 2019, p.7, <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/2f620ca5-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/2f620ca5-en>.

Practical experiences from the case study organisations

Among our case study organisation, three – FAO, UNICEF and UNHCR – have undertaken evaluations of their experience to date with implementing the HDP Nexus principle. This section draws on those evaluations and additional information shared with us.

FAO

As a dual-mandate organisation dedicated to defeating hunger and promoting food security, FAO has taken significant steps in recent years towards better integrating its humanitarian and development work. An organisational restructuring in 2012/13 sought to break down the dividing line between emergency response and building resilience. Its Strategy Framework 2014-2017 took this further by introducing more holistic food-systems thinking and a comprehensive approach to tackling food insecurity, aiming to break down internal siloes and bring greater coherence to FAO's work. Emergency response and building resilience were integrated into a single Strategic Programme, which noted the linkages between food insecurity, climate change, conflict and forced displacement. It prioritised the development of national capacity for preventing future food emergencies. This integration of humanitarian and development programme is continued in the new Strategic Framework, for the period 2022 to 2032.¹⁸ It sets out FAO's programming priorities under four 'Betters'. Under 'Better Life', its strategic outcomes make clear reference to the HDP Nexus and risk-informed programming:

- **Agriculture and food emergencies:** "Countries facing, or at risk of acute food insecurity provided with urgent livelihood and nutrition assistance and, adopting a humanitarian-development nexus and its contribution to peace approach, their populations equipped with appropriate capacities to better withstand and manage future shocks and risks."
- **Resilient agri-food systems:** "Resilience of agri-food systems and livelihoods to socio-economic and environmental shocks and stresses strengthened through improved multi-risk understanding and effective governance mechanisms for implementation of vulnerability reduction measures."

It contains a strong emphasis on 'anticipatory action', in order to reduce future humanitarian needs. However, the evaluation finds that FAO does not build risk assessment systematically into its development programming, and is not yet giving enough attention to the risks posed by climate change.

FAO has also identified some useful causal pathways, or theories of change, showing how its programming can contribute to building resilience and reducing future humanitarian needs. These include:

- Improving social capital around food systems, within communities and between communities and the state
- Reducing horizontal inequalities and grievances among groups
- Improvements in natural resource management, to reduce conflict, strengthen local conflict-management capacities and increase the opportunities costs of engaging in violence.

18 FAO, Strategic Framework 2022-2031, October 2021, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7099en/cb7099en.pdf>.

This is potentially a useful step in operationalising the HDP Nexus. However, an evaluation of FAO's contribution to the Nexus finds that these pathways are not yet reflected in programme designs, and therefore remain untested.¹⁹

FAO's strategy and corporate results system prioritise the development of national capacity for preventing future food emergencies. Its strategies and guidance material contain clear definitions of the constituent elements of capacity development, including political commitment, co-ordination mechanisms, evidence-based decision making, effective strategies and investment. It prioritises investment in early warning, community resilience and national disaster risk reduction systems. However, the evaluation notes the difficulties facing FAO in providing effective capacity building in conflict settings. It lacks clear guidance on when it is appropriate to work with government.

FAO has developed some strong partnerships at the global level across the HDP Nexus. It plays a central role in the Global Network Against Food Crises, together with the European Union and the World Food Programme (WFP). Launched at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the Network is a partnership-based initiative that promotes new approaches to reducing vulnerability and managing food crisis risk, in accordance with the HDP Nexus. It emerged from shared analytical work on global food crises, and has expanded to including reporting on individual hotspots and on global financing flows. It is working to develop a typology of resilience interventions that can be adapted to local and national contexts, to help promote stronger co-ordination at national level. It is also a platform for promoting global policy dialogue, to ensure uptake of data and evidence. FAO also has a strategic partnership with the NGO Interpeace and growing linkages with the UN Peacebuilding Fund. However, according to the evaluation, its partnerships at the country level are ad hoc rather than strategic.²⁰ FAO is an active participant in in-country co-ordination processes, but these are mainly led from the humanitarian side, with only limited involvement of the development and peace pillars.

FAO has increased its investment in joint analytical work with other partners, including regular context, conflict and risk analysis, and is seen as strong at pooling data and information with partners. This is an important foundation for Nexus working. It has also invested in learning and evidence collection across HDP actions. However, the evaluation notes that conflict analysis is an area of relative weakness: it tends to be once-off, rather than dynamic, and is not adequately linked to programming.

On the organisational side, FAO continues to face many of the limitations on its humanitarian finance, which presents a significant barrier to integrating its humanitarian and development operations. As a consequence, there remains a substantial geographical divide between the two. The differences in funding support and reinforce separate institutional architectures for humanitarian and development programming and inhibit collaboration across them. The evaluation also points out the institutional culture is oriented towards compliance, rather than innovation and risk-taking, which works against the HDP Nexus mindset.

19 FAO, Evaluation of FAO's Contribution to the Humanitarian – Development – Peace Nexus: 2014–2020, 2020, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb4874en/cb4874en.pdf>.

20 *Ibid.*, para. 93.

UNICEF

UNICEF is also a dual-mandate organisation that should in principle be well placed to lead on the HDP Nexus. In practice, however, the organisation is highly siloed across its humanitarian and development operations. Working across the boundary requires institutional ‘workarounds’, which is inefficient, and not well incentivised within the organisation. The budgets are separate, and generally earmarked for one side or the other, leaving an overall shortage of resources for Nexus-related activities.

UNICEF has made a clear corporate commitment to the HDP Nexus, including formal adoption of the OECD-DAC recommendation. Its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) – UNICEF’s chief policy and framework for humanitarian action – contain a commitment to “foster coherence and complementarity” between humanitarian and development programming. They have made it mandatory for country offices to “implement risk-informed and conflict-sensitive programming that builds and strengthens local capacities and systems to reduce needs, vulnerabilities of and risks to affected populations.”²¹ The CCCs are supported by a 2019 Procedure on Linking Humanitarian and Development Programming, setting out additional requirements.

A 2020 evaluation found that these commitments had led to increased attention being given to the HDP Nexus in UNICEF’s country programme documents and annual reviews, with progress across a range of areas in institutionalising the approach. However, the evaluation also raised some questions about how the approach is conceptualised in UNICEF policy. It noted that framing the challenges as ‘linking’ humanitarian action and development assistance reinforces the notion that these are two discrete ways of programming, reflecting the organisation’s bifurcated architecture. UNICEF is yet to produce practical guidance on how to manage the tensions and trade-offs discussed above, or how to reconcile Nexus approaches with the humanitarian principles. The ‘peace’ pillar of the Nexus is given much less attention, with minimal reference to the need for conflict-sensitive programming.

At the institutional level, implementation of Procedure has been strengthening through the creation of dedicated functions at headquarters, including a Climate, Environment, Resilience and Peace (CERP) unit within the Programme Division (PD). However, it has made less progress on rolling out the Procedure to country offices, and needs to invest more in skills development and creating a supportive culture. It notes the need to invest in core skills, particularly around context, conflict and risk analysis. It stresses the need for an entrepreneurial mindset, in seeking out partnership and resources and advocating for change, which is generally not part of the culture of HOs.

As with FAO, patterns of funding remain a significant obstacle. The short-term, high-volume and urgent nature of humanitarian finance works against moving to different ways of working. UNICEF also faces more cumbersome reporting and compliance processes for its humanitarian finance, which reduces flexibility.

21 UNICEF, Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action, October 2020, p. 32, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb4874en/cb4874en.pdf>.

The evaluation suggests a mixed record on external partnerships across the HDP Nexus. Within its development programming, it works well with national governments on system-strengthening. It co-ordinates well with other development partners within its specialist areas, but could do better at co-ordination across humanitarian and development lines, and it does not yet have strong relationships with peacebuilding actors. Its record of working with national civil society is mixed, held back by rigid contracting systems, poor communications on Nexus issues and minimal inclusion of partners in programme planning and design.

At the programming level, UNICEF is doing good work at joining up humanitarian cash support with national social protection systems, which is an important frontier for the HDP Nexus. Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming is being implemented in some contexts, but weaknesses in context analysis are proving a constraint. UNICEF is yet to define a clear role for itself in peacebuilding.

UNHCR

As an organisation dedicated to support refugees and other forcibly displaced people, UNHCR's mandate covers not only emergency response, but also building self-reliance and promoting long-term solutions to displacement. Its protection mandate and its global co-ordination role on refugees provide a platform for engaging with the HDP Nexus. Its advocacy was instrumental in the adoption of the New York Declaration, which makes new commitments on international solidarity, responsibility and burden sharing, and calls for a new approach to large-scale refugee movements which is firmly grounded in Nexus thinking.

At the global level, UNHCR has increased its engagement with development actors in refugee-hosting countries, including the World Bank, the EU, the African Development Bank and bilateral donors such as Germany, the UK and the US. Structured processes in particular countries, such as the Jordan Compact and the Ethiopia Jobs Compact, have facilitated this co-operation, including joint advocacy on issues such as work permits for refugees. It works best with external partners that have dedicated funding instruments for refugees, such as the World Bank's Window for Host Communities and Refugees. Notably, according to an evaluation of UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development co-operation,²² partnerships with other UN agencies are not as advanced. Further, activities undertaken through these partnerships tend to be special initiatives, rather than integrated into UNHCR's core activities. UNHCR lacks a clear corporate position on raising resources from development actors.

At the country level, UNHCR's scope to take forward initiatives under the HDP Nexus is shaped by external factors, in particular host government policies and political stance. Where government policy is restrictive, then UNHCR's contribution to Nexus working is mainly around advocacy and policy engagement. Where the environment is more permissive, then it can deepen its engagement – for example, working in areas such as urban planning to help integrate refugee communities.

22 Global Public Policy Institute, Evaluation of UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation, September 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/61af7be94.pdf>.

At the institutional level, UNHCR's engagement with the HDP Nexus has been facilitated by the creation of dedicated support structures and staff positions. It has appointed 25 Senior Development Officers across a range of country operations. These are often external experts from development backgrounds, who can lead on engagement with external partners. In 2019, it created a Division of Resilience and Solutions, which provides an institutional home for Nexus initiatives at headquarters level, and includes staff working on livelihoods and inclusion, education, health, water, sanitation and hygiene, and social safety nets. This provides focal points for external partners wishing to engage on these sectoral issues. Its Donors Relations and Resource Mobilisation Service also plays a key role in supporting policy-oriented relationships and global agreements.

UNHCR has communicated a clear commitment to the HDP Nexus, including through adherence to the DAC Recommendation, which is well understood by staff. However, while there is a consensus within the organisation on the principle, there is a lack of guidance to staff on the operational implications. According to the evaluation, staff are often unclear about the implications for their own work, and there are differences in views as to the purpose of Nexus initiatives (i.e., whether the aim is to support refugees at lower cost). The time and resources needed for engaging with development actors are not systematically included in budgets and job descriptions. This leads to capacity constraints and weak incentives for staff to engage in Nexus working at the country level. The evaluation also notes gaps in capacity to gather, analyse and share data as a constraint. Overall, this means that UNHCR's engagement on the HDP Nexus is highly variable, depending on both the national context and on internal factors, such as the engagement of senior leadership at the country level.

2.2 Localisation

The commitment

National authorities have the primary responsibility for the protection of their citizens. In crisis situations, national and local actors are generally the first to respond, and often have the best insights into local contexts and the needs and priorities of target populations. In remote and insecure locations, they have greater access; indeed, international HOs often depend on them as delivery partners. They are more likely to be accepted by and accountable to target communities, and they are certainly more cost effective. Yet the international humanitarian system has been built by and for international actors, who control the lion's share of the resources.

There is a longstanding commitment to increasing the role of national and local actors in humanitarian response. The 2003 Good Humanitarian Donorship principles included "strengthening the capacity of affected countries and communities" to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crisis. Under the 2016 Grand Bargain, signatories for the first time adopted a concrete target: to direct at least 25% of humanitarian funding "as directly as possible" to local and national responders. However, while this target is often taken as a proxy for localisation, it sits among a cluster of other commitments, including increasing multiyear investments in strengthening the institutional capacity of local responders and overcoming barriers that prevent effective partnerships with local responders.

Localisation gained additional impetus during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was both a necessity, given travel restrictions, and an opportunity to boost the quality of recovery efforts.

In May 2020, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) issued guidance on how to build “responsible partnerships” based on equality, mutual respect, mutual accountability, trust and understanding. It characterised responsible partnerships as including local leadership of and meaning participation in co-ordination mechanisms.

The localisation agenda is nonetheless beset by definitional problems that make it more difficult to identify concrete commitments. There are uncertainties over what is meant by ‘local and national responders’ (e.g., do they include local affiliates of international NGOs?), what kinds of funding is referred to (core or project funding) and what ‘as directly as possible’ means in different contexts.²³

The 2020 Grand Bargain independent assessment found that there had been an increase in the volume of humanitarian funding directed to local responders, either directly or through intermediaries, with 10 signatories claiming to have achieved the 25% target. Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs), which are managed by OCHA, played an important intermediary role, shouldering much of the administrative burden of conducting capacity assessments and monitoring local partners. However, the assessment found no increase in the resources going towards strengthening the capacity of local partners, and little progress in creating more meaningful partnerships with them, beyond subcontracting. Accountability remains an upward process from local to international actors, rather than a mutual relationship, with donors wary of the financial, reputational and operational risks involved in the localisation of humanitarian action. Most of the Grand Bargain signatories “acknowledged that progress remains at the normative level, there is as yet no system-wide shift in practice.”²⁴

Feedback from case study organisations

Interviews with the case study organisations revealed a number of common challenges that were preventing progress towards localisation, or else causing it to take relative superficial forms.

- **The subcontracting model:** The increased participation of local actors almost exclusively takes the form of subcontracting by international HOs – a form of localisation that does little to increase their autonomy or change underlying power dynamics. It tends to favour a small number of professionalised NGOs in each country that can meet international standards for risk management and monitoring, rather than government or other national actors who may be equally well placed from a delivery perspective.²⁵ The financial model requires that funding pass through an international intermediary organisation – an international NGO, UN agency or pooled funding instrument – which carries out due diligence on local partners, taking a share of the funding intended for on-the-ground services. As a result, the model tends to strengthen the dominant position of international HOs, leaving local responders with limited autonomy and little recognition for their work.
- **Capacity constraints:** There are widespread concerns that, in many fragile contexts, local responders lack the collective capacity to absorb 25% of humanitarian finance, as suggested by the Grand Bargain commitment, and lack the technical capacity to undertake certain types of interventions.²⁶ While the solution to this may lie in capacity building, so far there has been no collected effort to increase the level of capacity-building support for local responders to enable them to absorb the

23 OECD DAC, Localising the Response, World Humanitarian Summit ‘Commitments into Action Series’, 2017, <https://www.oecd.org/development/humanitarian-donors/docs/Localisingtheresponse.pdf>.

24 Victoria Metcalfe-Hough et al., Grand Bargain Annual Independent Report 2020, Overseas Development Institute, June 2020, p. 52, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-12/Grand_Bargain_Annual_Independent_Report_2020.pdf.

25 Sultan Barakat and Sansom Milton, Localisation Across the Humanitarian Development-Peace Nexus, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar, 2020, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1542316620922805>.

26 *Ibid.*

additional funding. The case study organisations note a range of restrictions on their ability to provide capacity-building support, and do not have systematic approaches to assessing and building capacity in the theatres where they operate.

- **Humanitarian principles:** In some conflict situations, localisation is held back by concerns that local actors are more likely to be partisan, and that working with them might compromise humanitarian principles. In a growing number of contexts, national NGOs are subject to government controls on their ability to operate, which might compromise the principle of independence by making humanitarian action subject to other pressures.
- **Donor funding conditions:** Interviewees report considerable variation in the extent to which donor funding conditions and risk tolerances affect localisation. Some donors impose strict accountability requirements that require due diligence and report requirements that few local NGOs are able to meet. Others have relatively high risk tolerance. Interviewees also noted issues around 'negative conditionalities' (e.g., restrictions on funding particular geographical areas or types of partner, due to rules against terrorist financing) and sanctions regimes. Some donors also restrict funding for certain purposes (e.g., cash), as outside their definition of humanitarian support. More broadly, interviewees noted that localisation involves an element of experimentation, and that the funding environment is conducive of risk taking and learning from failure. There is a growing emphasis from donors on professionalising the management of fiduciary and operational risks, but no budget is allocated to national actors to cover these additional requirements.

Practical experiences from the case study organisations

The case study organisations work extensively with national partners in various capacities, but there has been only limited progress in moving beyond the basic subcontracting model towards more genuine partnership. However, some interesting lessons have emerged.

OCHA

OCHA leads an IASC working group on localisation and has been instrumental in preparing a range of guidance material on the topic for the sector. The pooled funds that OCHA manages, particularly CBPFs, are an important channel for localising humanitarian finance. Furthermore, its Financial Tracking System (a platform for sharing financial data across the sector) helps to track the global share of funding going to local responders.

CBPFs are an important intermediary for donors whose rules do not permit direct funding of local actors, or who lack the capacity in-country to carry out due diligence. CBPFs allocate funding on a competitive basis, but award extra points to applications from local responders, to increase their access to funding. In 2021, 43% of funding was provided to national and local NGOs, which was well above the 25% target. The proportion is highest in areas where access for international actors is severely constrained, such as Syria and Somalia demonstrating the value of localisation in delivering services in hard to reach areas.

However, OCHA staff acknowledge that there remain a range of barriers to funding local responders, imposed by donor funding rules. Applicants must be able to operate online and in English, and have a fairly sophisticated understanding of results-based management. This is a barrier in some contexts, particularly for community-based organisations. A 2019 evaluation found considerable variation in the extent to which CBPFs include local actors in their governance and decision making processes – although the shift to online co-ordination processes during the COVID-19 pandemic conditions may have improved the engagement of local partners.

Despite being an important intermediary for localisation, OCHA lacks a systematic approach to assessing and building national capacity. It plays a vital role in the co-ordination of humanitarian support, but has not developed a consistent approach to building national response capacity, to facilitate localisation.

UNHCR

UNHCR works extensively with national government and NGOs as a matter of course. Its protection mandate in particular requires it to work closely with host governments. The localisation commitment is clearly articulated in its strategies and plans, and it has guidance for community-based protection. It met the commitment of transferring 25% of programme expenditure to national responders in 2019,²⁷ and the proportion has increased during the pandemic as more of its programmes have been managed at arm's length.

However, UNHCR recognises continuing challenges in moving beyond a subcontracting model to genuine partnerships with national organisations. In major displacement situations, refugees themselves frequently mobilise, creating community-based organisations or informal networks as alternative providers of protection and assistance. In principle, UNHCR seeks to work with and through these community-based mechanisms, rather than creating parallel ones. However, there is no clear policy on how to work with refugee-led organisations and the practice is variable across contexts. One study finds that local initiatives where the leadership is male and able to speak English have a better chance of accessing funding.²⁸

27 UNHCR, Progress towards implementing the 'Grand Bargain' commitments, UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme 79th Standing Committee meeting, 7 September 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/5f630c5c4.pdf>.

28 Kate Pincock, Alexander Betts and Evan Easton-Calabria, "The Rhetoric and Reality of Localisation: Refugee-Led Organisations in Humanitarian Governance" , The Journal of Development Studies, 2020, https://www.refugee-economies.org/assets/downloads/Journal_Rhetoric_and_Reality_of_Localisation.pdf.

UNICEF

UNICEF has strong partnerships with government and national civil society organisations (CSOs), and provides them with significant levels of funding, but more limited links to local government and local CSOs and community-based organisations. Its partnerships necessarily take distinct forms across contexts, and are more challenging in conflict settings. However, the organisation lacks clear criteria for assessing what forms of partnership are appropriate in different contexts.

Feedback from UNICEF's local partners is that they have no real influence over UNICEF's plans or programme designs. They would like to be 'decision-making partners', rather than just implementers or subcontractors. An internal review found that UNICEF's internal procedures complicate partnerships, making the relationship transactional and leaving little space for dialogue on strategic or programming issues.²⁹ UNICEF's predominant concern is fiduciary risk management, and it has not yet adjusted its approach to working with local responders in crisis situations.

Partners would like to see UNICEF move towards multi-year partnerships with lighter administrative processes and more inclusion of overhead costs. UNICEF allows its international NGO partners to charge a 7% headquarter cost on projects, but does not allow the same for national partners, which is seen as discriminatory. Local partners also lack visibility when working for UNICEF, which hampers their ability to attract other finance. There are also some exceptions, where UNICEF helps local actors to take the lead role, but this is not systematic. Local partners rarely have a meaningful say in the design of programmes.

UNICEF has many capacity-building programmes, but lacks a collective and systemic approach to capacity building. The review notes that UNICEF's crisis response plans regularly underestimate the investment needed in building local capacities. In situations of long-running or recurrent crises, this work should be separate from crisis response, allowing for it to be planned and funded over a longer period. Country offices should routinely map local capacities, networks and organisations. They should also enter into contingency agreements with approved local partners, to allow for faster deployment. This happens, for example, in Somalia, in the face of recurrent risks such as floods. The review notes that creating effective local partnerships calls for a different skill set among UNICEF staff, with a focus on emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, as well as regular interaction to build relationships.

29 UNICEF, A review of UNICEF's approach to localization in humanitarian action, July 2019, <https://glocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/UNICEF-Oct-2019-Working-Paper-on-Localization-Executive-Summary.pdf>.

2.3 Accountability to affected populations

The commitment

Humanitarian action should involve, and be accountable to, the people it seeks to serve. Versions of this principle have been expressed in most of the foundational humanitarian documents, including the Sphere Standards, the Red Cross Code of Conduct, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Principles and the World Humanitarian Summit commitments. Accountability to affected populations (AAP) suggests a move from supply-driven to demand-driven support, based on meaningful engagement with communities.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has five commitments on AAP:

1. **Leadership/governance:** Integrate feedback mechanisms into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and other aspects of programme management
2. **Transparency:** Ensure accessible and timely information to affected population on the processes that affect them
3. **Feedback and complaints:** Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and programming
4. **Participation:** Enable affected populations to play an active role in decision-making processes and ensure that marginalised groups are represented
5. **Design, monitoring and evaluation:** Involve affected populations in design, monitoring and reporting on programming.

However, as with localisation, AAP remains a difficult principle to define in operational terms – and, ironically, there is limited participation of national actors in defining it. The existence of feedback and complaints mechanism is often taken as a proxy measure for accountability to affected populations (AAP). However, it is a relatively poor proxy, and there is limited sign that the proliferation of complaints lines is leading to a meaningful shift in humanitarian practice.

AAP implies a power shift – a change from top-down accountability imposed by funders, who control resource flows, to bottom-up accountability to communities, allowing them to define their own needs and priorities. Without such a power shift, AAP becomes a voluntary limit that HOs impose on themselves. Commentators have suggested that this is leading to a proliferation of technical guidelines and one-to-one initiatives, rather than any fundamental change in humanitarian practice or the culture of the humanitarian system.³⁰ Feedback received through complaints mechanisms tends to be at a micro level, relating for example to the quality of humanitarian goods provided, and HOs find it difficult to incorporate this meaningfully into programme design.

There are concerns that the AAP agenda runs directly contrary to efforts by funders to increase top-down accountability. Concerns about a lack of visibility of results in the field, some donors have moved towards more projectised funding and granular reporting, which leaves HOs with less scope to respond to community feedback. There is also increased concern about risk management, including fiduciary risks and the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), which leads donors to increase their controls over how funding is used. In the face of these countervailing pressures, an on-paper commitment to AAP has not been enough to bring about a meaningful shift in humanitarian practice.

30 Jeremy Konyndyk and Rose Worden, *People-Driven Response: Power and Participation in Humanitarian Action*, CGD Policy Paper 155, September 2019, <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/people-driven-response.pdf>.

Feedback from the case study organisations

Interviewees from the case study organisations shared a number of observations about the challenges of implementing AAP.

Ensuring meaningful participation:

Meaningful consultations have to be designed with care, particularly in conflict settings. There are many groups that may need to be represented, to avoid bias, and checks are needed on their legitimacy. The loudest voices are not necessarily the most representative, and poorly managed consultation risks entrenching local gatekeepers. Building community structures therefore requires detailed local knowledge, time and resources. This is difficult in rapidly evolving humanitarian contexts and given short project time frames. Lack of local language skills and detailed local knowledge is a constraint. In insecure contexts, remote management makes the task even harder.

Sector co-ordination:

The cluster co-ordination system has greatly increased the efficiency of humanitarian operations. However, dividing co-ordination along sector lines (e.g., health, food security, shelter) runs contrary to the holistic way in which affected populations perceive and articulate their own needs, and make it hard for their inputs to influence resource allocation. This was affirmed in our conversations with case study representatives in Chad, who noted that, when consulted, crisis-affected communities often talk about the measures that would be required to avoid future crises, rather than their immediate humanitarian needs.

Proliferation of consultation mechanisms:

AAP is usually implemented on an agency level, and in an *ad hoc* way. This results in a proliferation of parallel feedback mechanisms, which is confusing to aid recipients and results in fragmented feedback. There has been little progress on shifting to area-based feedback mechanisms covering the full scope of humanitarian operations. HOs are incentivised to focus on needs that correspond with the institutional mandates and priorities, rather than take a holistic perspective.

Financing constraints:

The case study organisations spoke of a lack of dedicated resources for AAP. One interviewee noted: "I think there is a misconception that... accountability in projects is totally free. It is not free, it requires resources". Short project cycles and a tight focus on tangible outputs also work against AAP. In practice, HOs often have no choice about what forms of support to offer, as this is dictated by funders, and therefore cannot offer communities a meaningful voice in decision making. They also noted that cost-effective humanitarian action often depends upon the provision of standardised items, procured in bulk. There is therefore limited scope to tailor support according to community preferences. Interviewees noted that donors profess an interest in AAP, but in practice treat it as less important than financial accountability, efficiency, technical quality and performance against predefined variables. Shortfall in the latter objectives would lead to remedial action by donors; shortfalls in AAP would not. HO staff recognise this and behave accordingly.

Practical experience from the case study organisations

All the case study organisations have made commitments, and some progress, towards implementing AAP, while noting that their efforts are still far from systematic. UNICEF's experience is best documented. Its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action (CCCs) sets as an objective for each country office to:

“ Ensure that all vulnerable, at-risk and crisis-affected populations supported through its humanitarian action are able to hold UNICEF to account for promoting and protecting their rights and generating effective results for them, taking into account their needs, concerns and preferences, and working in ways that enhance their dignity, capacities and resilience.”

Source: *Strengthening UNICEF's Humanitarian Action*

It adopted a 2018 Road Map for scaling up AAP, and further commitments are set out in its corporate handbook. There is training for staff on AAP, and progress is monitored through corporate reporting systems. However, UNICEF's 2020 review of its humanitarian action found mixed progress at country office level: 70% had introduced information-sharing arrangements, 50% had introduced mechanisms to promote participation, and 41% had country-level AAP strategies.³¹ However, the review found that complaints mechanisms generally deal with operational issues such as misconduct by implementers, rather than feedback on the support being provided, and that “there is seldom a system to ensure that feedback is acted on”.³²

- The review found that UNICEF's efforts on AAP could be strengthened by:
- More clarity on roles and responsibilities, and stronger lines of accountability
- In light of fragmentation of AAP efforts across countries and programmes, adopting a basic AAP model that can be adapted to different contexts
- Broadening the approach beyond feedback mechanisms, to include participation in planning and monitoring
- Including provision for AAP in programme budgets
- More collaboration and joint work on AAP with other agencies working in the same arena
- More investment in building staff capacity.

2.4 Lessons learnt on institutionalising humanitarian reform commitments

The study reveals a significant range of obstacles that work against the implementation of these reform commitments for the humanitarian system. Some of the challenges are external to HOs, relating to political conditions in crisis-affected countries or to collective action problems across the humanitarian sector, which are difficult for them to resolve through unilateral action. Other challenges relate to donor requirements. Patterns of humanitarian finance restrict the ability of HOs to change their practices, or else leave them subject to clashing principles and accountabilities that hamper progress. A third set

31 UNICEF, *Strengthening UNICEF's Humanitarian Action*, September 2020, p. 69, https://www.unicef.org/media/108046/file/Humanitarian_Review.pdf.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

of challenges relates to problems within HOs that can potentially be addressed through clearer policies and organisational reforms. In sum, these factors mean that, even where reform commitments are widely agreed in principle, they are not yet translating into meaningful changes in humanitarian action.

This section draws out some key lessons to emerge from the first part of the study.

Lessons for humanitarian organisations

1. Humanitarian reform principles need to be operationalised through country-specific strategies. All three of the reform commitments examined in this study pose complex problems that call for unique solutions in each operating context. Country offices must be empowered, incentivised and supported to identify opportunities and craft local solutions. These are medium-term challenges that are best undertaken in anticipation of crises, rather than in the midst of them, or as part of the response to protracted crises. HOs need to back their corporate commitments to the HDP Nexus, localisation and AAP by mandating their incorporation into national strategies. To facilitate their development, FAO's approach of developing a set of theories of change or causal pathways to identify how the organisation might support conflict reduction in accordance with the HDP Nexus, is instructive. It provides a set of options that country offices can select from and adapt.

2. Develop guidance on how to manage tensions between humanitarian principles and reform commitments, possibly based on country typologies. The tensions between humanitarian principles and humanitarian reform commitments, noted by key informants for the study, have been highlighted above. They lead to uncertainties as to when it is appropriate to work with national governments in conflict situations, or when it is legitimate to compromise the speed or extent of basic humanitarian operations by investing resources in resilience. These are areas where HOs could usefully develop additional guidance, either individually or jointly through the IASC. It may be helpful to use country typologies that distinguish between, for example, conflict settings and natural disasters, and between rapid-onset and protracted crises, as the trade-offs are different in each context.

3. Develop stronger policies and approaches on capacity building. The need for capacity building of national actors runs through the humanitarian reform agenda – for example, building national disaster risk reduction systems, strengthening the capacity of local responders, and helping communities become more resilient to future crises. However, the case studies and literature suggest that capacity-building is not a competence of HOs (although it is more familiar to the dual mandate organisations). HOs could address this by developing corporate policies on and approaches to capacity building, to provide guidance on when to incorporate capacity building into humanitarian engagement, how to assess national and local capacities and capacity gaps, how to provide capacity building support, and how to assessment results. Staff also need the skills to identify opportunities for effective capacity building.

4. Pre-position for future emergencies by developing contingency programmes, including with local responders. In Somalia, which faces cyclical flooding, UNICEF develops contingency programmes with local responders to respond to future humanitarian need. Preparing contingency programmes in advance of need gives HOs more time to work with local partners to help them meet the requirements for accessing international funds. As well as facilitating rapid response, it could offer an opportunity to local partners to influence the design of future humanitarian action, tapping into their contextual knowledge and relationships with affected communities.

5. Develop more mature corporate approaches to conflict sensitivity. Conflict-sensitive humanitarian and development programming looks for opportunities in the design and delivery of interventions to promote peace and, based on conflict analysis, take care to avoid inadvertently exacerbating drivers of conflict. The case study organisations have made less progress on engaging with the peace side of the HDP Nexus than with the development side. They need a deeper understanding of conflict dynamics, and the skills to identify opportunities to make a positive contribution with their programming. This suggests a need to make conflict analysis a regular part of the programming cycle, to increase staff skills and awareness on conflict issues, and to make conflict sensitivity a mandatory part of planning and programme design. Further, conflict analysis should be gender-informed, to identify both specific risks of harm to women and girls, and opportunities to engage women in peace- and resilience-building.

6. Promote more comprehensive risk awareness. A good understanding of risk is key to the HDP Nexus approach, and an area where HOs have important contributions to make. In protracted crises, they need to improve their awareness of risks – particularly of climate risks, which are an increasingly important driver of humanitarian need – so that efforts to build resilience and prevent future crises can be appropriately targeted. Risk analysis should be undertaken routinely, covering not just current humanitarian needs and but also potential drivers of future humanitarian need. They should contribute their experience as humanitarian actors, and the data that is collected through their operations, with development agencies, to support their adoption of risk-aware programming.

7. Making long-term investments in putting in place meaningful AAP consultation mechanisms. The key informants interviewed for this study emphasised that meaningful AAP is not something that could be done either cheaply or quickly. Experience suggests that putting in place consultation mechanisms in the midst of an emergency response is very difficult, and generally results in superficial forms of accountability, at best. In protracted crisis situations, however, there are more opportunities to invest time and resources into AAP mechanisms. However, it would be preferable to do this at a response-wide level, rather than establish parallel mechanisms for each agency. OCHA therefore has a key role to play, as humanitarian co-ordinator.

8. In protracted crises, OCHA should advocate to donors for the creation of a window within its Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) to support capacity building for national responders and the building of more effective community consultation mechanisms. Such a window could fund activities such as mapping local responders and their capabilities, and training for national responders on how to meet the eligibility requirements for international funding. It could also help to map and invest in representative structures, to inform resource allocation by the CBPF itself and support consultations on the wider humanitarian operation.

Implications for funders

1. **Look for opportunities to shift towards area-based programming, with flexibility between humanitarian, development and peace interventions.** The case for more flexible, multi-annual funding is already recognised in the Grand Bargain and other instruments. In environments where both humanitarian and development assistance are being provided, donors could facilitate programming across the HDP Nexus by providing area-based funding on longer cycles, with the flexibility to reallocate resources as needed between humanitarian and development modalities. Examples might include programmes able to provide cash support to populations in need either through humanitarian channels or national social protection systems, as the opportunity arises, or that can pivot between cash support and support for livelihoods.
2. **Contribute to pooled funding for capacity building and community consultation.** HOs are often limited in their ability to direct humanitarian finance into capacity building for local responders. Furthermore, capacity building is a medium-term process that is not easily accomplished in the middle of a crisis response. In countries that are long-running recipients of humanitarian aid, donors should consider establishing pooled or joint funding mechanisms for building the capacity of national responders. Such a funding instrument could also be used to support the development of community consultation mechanisms, in support of AAP, to allow participation to move from the project level into having a voice in resource allocation.
3. **Increase funding for preventive and anticipatory interventions in high-risk areas.** The global aid system routinely underfunds preventive action. In countries that are subject to repeated emergencies, donors should consider established dedicated funding instruments for preventative action and resilience building, which would be accessible to humanitarian, development and peace actors.
4. **Introducing set-asides for capacity building and AAP into the terms and conditions of their humanitarian finance.** HOs report that they are often restricted by the terms of humanitarian finance from investing in capacity building of local responders and building representative structures for AAP. To help resolve this, funders could incorporate a condition into their funding agreements allowing for a proportion to be used to fund localisation and AAP, at the discretion of the HO. Permitted activities could include situation analysis, capacity building, contributions to organisational overheads, and investing on consultation mechanisms.

Towards an organisational framework that supports humanitarian reform

The lessons above make it clear that progress on reforming the international humanitarian system will require action on a range of fronts, including many changes that cannot be accomplished unilaterally by HOs. However, there are also lessons on how HOs can reflect and reinforce reform commitments into their own organisational structures, systems and processes, and potential pitfalls to avoid. This section addresses the question: how can we develop organisation **performance standards that reflect our aspirations for reform of the international humanitarian system?** Table 1 summarises some of these lessons.

Table 1: Lessons for integrating humanitarian reform principles into organisational performance standards

MOPAN Performance area		Success factors
Strategic management	Clarity of mandate and approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate strategies and plans contain not just a clear commitment to implementing humanitarian reforms, but also a cogent statement of what those principles mean in the context of the organisation’s mandate The organisation clearly defines its proposed contribution to preventing emergencies, building resilience and promoting peace, where appropriate using a theory of change or identifying potential causal pathways
Operational management	Supportive organisational structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A senior champion appointed to advocate and drive forward humanitarian reform agendas within the organisation Dedicated capacity created at headquarters level to support humanitarian reform agenda, provide guidance to country teams and lead on external partnerships Resources dedicated to support the adoption of humanitarian reform agendas, including special initiatives, the development of guidance and training Plans for implementing humanitarian reforms made mandatory in planning and programme, where appropriate The skills required to implement humanitarian reforms are identified and incorporated into recruitment plans and training programmes An organisational culture is fostered that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation in support of humanitarian reforms
Operational management	Resource allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation dedicates a pool of flexible resources to support HDP Nexus approaches and localisation Internal resource allocation processes give suitable priority to anticipatory action, crisis prevention and reducing humanitarian caseloads
Relationship management	Developing strategic partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation invests in strategic partnerships at the global level across the HDP Nexus, in accordance with its mandate and comparative advantage Organisation identifies strategic partnership at the country level, and areas where it can lead on collaboration across the HDP Nexus Country offices encouraged and resourced to engage in partnerships

MOPAN Performance area		Success factors
Performance management	Diagnostic work and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular cycle of context analysis, including risk analysis and conflict analysis, is introduced into the country planning process. Risks to women and vulnerable groups are included. • Analytical work is conducted jointly with or shared with other development partners • A culture of data sharing with other organisations is fostered • Country offices under period analysis of the capacity of local responders, to inform capacity development
Performance management	Programming guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme guidance specifies an active preference for working with and through national and local government and non-government actors • In crisis-prone areas, potential local responders are identified, support through pre-approval processes, and contingency response programmes developed • Standing community consultation mechanisms are put in place, to inform all programming in a given area, where possible in conjunction with other HOs. The voices of women, young people and marginalised groups are included • Guidelines are developed to support key humanitarian reform priorities, including in areas such as conflict sensitivity • Programme designs are risk informed, including through risk analysis, scenario planning and crisis modifiers • Guidance is available on conflict-sensitive programming and the 'do no harm' principle, informed by gender analysis • Flexibility is built into programme design to permit adaptation
Performance management	Monitoring and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programme and monitoring arrangements are designed with short feedback loops, to inform continuous learning



3. MANAGING FOR RESULTS IN HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS

In this section of the report, we explore the challenges of applying the principles of results-based management (RBM) to humanitarian organisations (HOs). Early debates on whether RBM is suitable for humanitarian action have been resolved in the positive. HOs as a group have nonetheless found it challenging to develop effective corporate RBM systems – particularly systems that link operational management needs to global or corporate strategies and targets. Drawing on the experiences of the four case study organisations, we explore the sources of these challenges and whether they have been effectively resolved, in order to derive some lessons for the future.

3.1 What is managing for results?

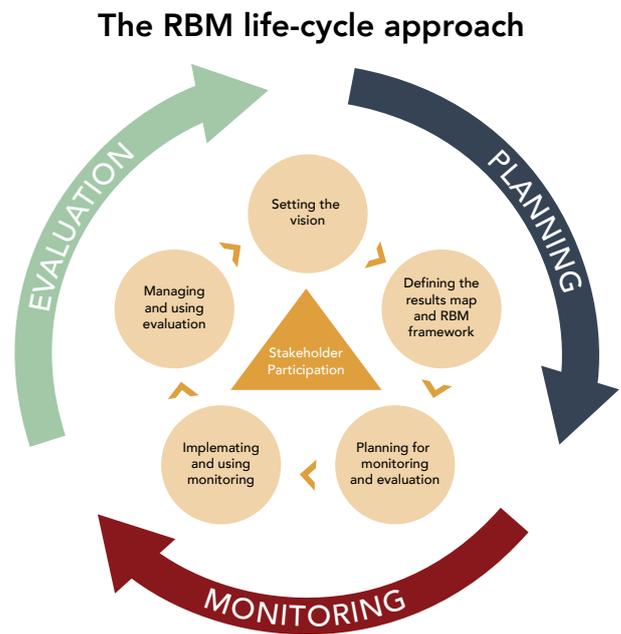
For the UN Development Group, Results-Based Management (RBM) is:

“...a management strategy [or approach] by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of desired results (outputs, outcomes and higher level goals or impact).”³³

Source: [Results-Based Management Handbook](#)

Introduced into development agencies in the 1990s and incorporated into the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, RBM was intended to shift management focus from the support development actors were providing (inputs and activities) to the changes they hoped to bring about (results). RBM rests on causal chains or theories of change, from inputs and outputs through to intended outcomes, often summarised in the form of logical frameworks ('logframes'), with monitoring and evaluation systems designed to track results as they emerge, to allow for learning and accountability.

Results-based budgeting (RBB) is one element of RBM. It places objectives and results at the centre of budget processes, rather than fixed budget lines for expenditure categories. It holds that budget formulation should revolve around corporate objectives and expected results, which are used to justify resource needs, based on the activities and outputs needed to achieve the results. RBB depends on the existence of planning processes that are explicit about the activities and outputs that are expected to deliver results, and on performance management systems that provide objective information on whether results are being achieved.



Source: [UNDP Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results](#)

33 UN Sustainable Development Group. Results-Based Management Handbook, September 2011, <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/unsdg-results-based-management-handbook>.

3.2 RBM in humanitarian action

There are many practical challenges involved in applying the RBM principles, designed for a development context, to humanitarian action, given the imperative of rapid response, insecure and changeable operating contexts, data shortages, and the difficulties of measuring impact during short programme cycles.

There are also important differences in the nature of the 'results' being pursued through humanitarian action. Development programmes work with national partners in pursuit of long-term and sustainable results. Humanitarians, in contrast, provide short-term support, during and in the aftermath of crises and shocks, designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. Their assistance is intended to be temporary, filling a gap caused where a crisis has overwhelmed national and local economic, social or governmental systems, until such time as those systems can be restored. In some instances – such as responding to natural disasters – humanitarian action itself helps to bring the crisis to an end and restore the status quo ante. In other cases, such as protracted conflict, humanitarian action is primarily palliative: other processes in the political or security realm are needed to bring the crisis to an end. In such contexts, it is not clear what long-term outcomes are being pursued, beyond the support of life-saving assistance.

In development contexts, achieving sustainable outcomes usually means working with national actors, particularly government institutions, to build lasting capacity. In conflict settings, humanitarian actors are often restricted in their ability to work with governments by the humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence. While humanitarian action may include action to increase the resilience of vulnerable populations to future disasters, building national capacity has not traditionally been a major focus. In fact, as one commentator pointed out, for many humanitarians, the idea of investing in national capacity development is 'almost a taboo',³⁴ given the need for neutrality and the fact that the opportunity cost of doing so is fewer resources for life-saving support.

Given these differences, some commentators initially argued against applying RBM to humanitarian operations. They suggested that humanitarian operations were more meaningfully assessed at output level, and that the focus of management should be on tracking changes in humanitarian needs and contexts and whether target populations were being reached, rather than the achievement of higher-level results. Van Rooyen argued that standard results measurement systems were unhelpful in large-scale crises: "The very nature of emergency assistance, with the rapid provision of life-saving aid by hundreds of relief agencies, creates a setting where the amount of aid becomes more important than

34 ICRC, Humanitarian debate: Law, policy, action. The future of humanitarian action, December 2011, p. 1153, <https://www.icrc.org/fr/doc/resources/international-review/review-884/review-884-all.pdf>.

the effect of the aid.”³⁵ Save the Children released a report entitled, “The Echo Chamber”, arguing that the new drive for results and value for money risked “dehumanising the humanitarian endeavour” by forcing a focus on what is measurable, rather than what is needed.³⁶

By the time of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, debate on the merits of RBM in the humanitarian sector had subsided, in favour of a solid orthodoxy that it represented the “gold standard” among practitioners,³⁷ a synonym for “high performance, efficiency and quality”,³⁸ and a means of ensuring value for money.³⁹ Some observers have also seen RBM as supporting the objective of strengthening the HDP Nexus, by helping humanitarian and development actors co-ordinate more closely in pursuit of shared results.

Our case studies confirmed the consensus. Of the four organisations, three have made major investments in building corporate RBM systems, while the fourth (OCHA) has announced plans to do so but has yet to implement them. While the practitioners we spoke to were frank about the challenges, they all agree that it was a worthwhile endeavour. However, the case studies show that there is still work to be done to realise the potential of RBM in humanitarian contexts.

3.3 Why RBM is challenging for humanitarian organisations

While RBM is now in common use in the humanitarian sector, this does not mean it is straightforward or uncontentious in application. Past MOPAN assessments suggest that HOs as a group face challenges with creating a clear organisational architecture that links strategic objectives and resource allocation processes through to monitoring and reporting on activities in the field.

The challenge is not necessary with results management at the project level. From our interviews, it was clear that the case study organisations consider themselves to be strongly results-focused. They make major investments in tracking evolving humanitarian needs, and have budget processes and emergency appeal mechanisms that enable them to respond rapidly to new emergencies. They use logframes or similar tools to plan their operations and monitor emerging results. Interviewees pointed out that many humanitarian operations – namely, those that deliver services or material support to populations in need – lend themselves well to quantitative measurement and unit cost analysis, allowing for relatively precise planning and budgeting.

HOs need different kinds of results data to manage their operations. Their monitoring systems are designed to support flexibility in fluid operating environments. Results are measured mainly at output level, generating real-time information as to whether target communities are being reached successfully. This is the most useful results data for management purposes. This is a different set of information

35 Michael VanRooyen, “Effective Aid: Ensuring Accountability in Humanitarian Assistance”, Harvard International Review, Vol 35(2), 2013, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42763567?read-now=1&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents.

36 Juliano Fiori et al., The Echo Chamber: Results, Management and the Humanitarian Effectiveness Agenda, The Humanitarian Affairs Team and Save the Children, https://www.academia.edu/25491591/The_Echo_Chamber_Results_Management_and_the_Humanitarian_Effectiveness_Agenda.

37 Khadija Javed Khan, Naseem Begum and Abid Razak, Practicing Results Based Management for Enhancement of Quality and Performance of Social Development and Humanitarian Programmes, Universal Journal of Management 9(5):231-253, July 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Khadija-Khan-2/publication/343500833_Practicing_Results_Based_Management_for_Enhancement_of_Quality_and_Performance_of_Social_Development_and_Humanitarian_Programmes/links/5f2d163f299bf13404ab6384/Practicing-Results-Based-Management-for-Enhancement-of-Quality-and-Performance-of-Social-Development-and-Humanitarian-Programmes.pdf.

38 *Ibid.*

39 Rachel Scott, Imagining More Effective Humanitarian Aid: A Donor Perspective, OECD Development Co-Operation Working Paper 18, October 2014, https://www.oecd.org/dac/Imagining_More_Effective_Humanitarian_Aid_October_2014.pdf.

than is needed for monitoring longer-term development outcomes, where the focus is on tracking progress towards longer-term outcomes or deriving generalisable lessons about 'what works'.

The reporting demands from humanitarian funders are short-term and output-focused. Humanitarian finance is generally provided in short project cycles, and funders require a high tempo of input- and output-level reporting. The long delivery chains involved in humanitarian operations and the difficulty of monitoring frontline delivery in access-constrained environments means that funders face difficulties in verifying that their funds are being used to best effect. Some have responded by demanding very granular reporting at the project level.⁴⁰

HOs face difficulties in reflect humanitarian principles in their results systems. The case study organisations stressed that quantitative results data captures only part of what they define as effective humanitarian operations. The humanitarian principles (humanity; neutrality; impartiality; independence) are central to their mandates. They guide decision making on who should be prioritised with humanitarian aid and how they should be reached. As one interviewee put it, "It is not enough just to hit the target; it matters how you get there". These qualitative elements and principled ways of working are inherently difficult to integrate into project logframes. This lay behind Save the Children's early concerns about RBM: that it might incentivise HOs to maximise measurable outputs, rather than provide principled assistance.

HOs also perform functions beyond the delivery of material support – such as protection, normative work and co-ordination – which are inherently more difficult to measure. UNHCR, for example, leads on providing protection for refugees and displaced populations. Protection needs vary widely across contexts and require diverse interventions that cannot readily be quantified. A review of UNHCR's uptake of RBM from 2010 notes the difficulty of measuring results on "protection, advocacy, capacity building and legislative reform", compared to service delivery, and of attributing results to UNHCR's efforts, given many other influences.⁴¹ UN HOs also play an important role in advocating for adherence to international norms by national governments and others, but often do so in sensitive political environments where making explicit claims about their own influence may be unhelpful. OCHA's primary role is co-ordination. Some of the OCHA staff we spoke to were unconvinced that co-ordination could meaningfully be broken down into results chain logic, and were concerned that an RBM system would struggle to distinguish between OCHA's performance as a co-ordinating body and the performance of the international humanitarian system as a whole. As a result, while HOs generate results data at the operational level, the picture of performance that it generates is necessarily incomplete.

40 Alexander Gaus et al, Independent Review of Individual Donor Assessments in Humanitarian Operations, Global Public Policy Institute, November 2020, https://www.gppi.net/media/GPPi_2020_Independent-Review-of-Donor-Assessments.pdf.

41 Richard Allen and Angela Li Rosi, Measure for measure: A field-based snapshot of the implementation of results-based management in UNHCR, November 2010, p.2, <https://www.unhcr.org/4cf3ad8f9.pdf>.

Practical experience from the case study organisations

UNHCR – in the midst of implementing a new results architecture

At the time of its last MOPAN assessment, in 2017-18, UNHCR had some elements of an RBM system, but had yet to link them together into a unified results architecture linked to its corporate strategy. Early attempts at standardising results measurement were overly complex, based first on status (categories of people in need of support), then on types of support, divided across five levels of results. This resulted in a proliferation of indicators that were burdensome to collect and could not readily be aggregated to the corporate level. Staff found that the data collected through the system often failed to meet their operational needs, and they at times resorted to managing their operations through parallel, offline monitoring systems. The MOPAN assessment noted the challenges UNHCR faced in attempting to link resource allocation with results, given a needs-based financial model that required constant updating in response to changes in humanitarian needs and the available funds.⁴²

UNHCR has since invested substantial resources into a new RBM system, as part of a new organisational structure introduced in 2020. The new results architecture is built around three levels: impacts (linked to the organisation's strategic objectives); outcomes (changes the organisation seeks to bring about) and outputs (direct support for vulnerable people and building their skills and capacities). Country offices develop their own multi-year strategies, with context-specific theories of change and risk analysis, but must associate each programme with a corporate impact and outcome. Results measurement is done through a combination of standardised and customised indicators; the former allows for comparability and data aggregation.

The system is flexible enough to manage emergency operations. It allows for rapid programming mid-year in response to emergencies, using simple planning templates and basic reporting requirements, to enable rapid preparation and agile management.

The new system supports results-based budgeting for the first time. The corporate budget is organised by impact area (types of impact, linked UNHCR's strategic directions). Resource allocation has been decentralised across countries and humanitarian emergencies. The High Commissioner allocates budget envelopes to each region, based on their anticipated needs. The regions have delegated authority to allocate resources to particular emergencies as needs evolve. A high proportion of UNHCR's funding is earmarked, and it therefore needs to ensure that its funding is associated with relevant budget lines. This is currently done manually, but is being designed into the new system. This will make UNHCR better placed to identify gaps in resources and engage in targeted fundraising. The resources available for multi-annual country strategies are confirmed each year, based on available resources, and inform an Implementation Plan that sets out the operating budget and staffing resources for each country office. Frequent changes in resources mean that implementation plans require constant adjustment, which in turn requires updates to the results framework. The RBM system is designed to help UNHCR manage the difference between its budgetary requirements and its actual operating budgets.

42 MOPAN, 2017-18 Assessments: Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, February 2019, p. 8., https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/unhcr2017-18/UNHCR_report_%5bweb-1a%5d.pdf.

The new system is not yet fully implemented, and its effectiveness is yet to be assessed. However, it is clear that UNHCR has made a major investment in overcoming the challenges associated with RBM in humanitarian contexts and the shortcomings of its first RBM system. It is also clear that developing viable solutions was a major undertaking, requiring corporate restructuring and changes to the full set of resource allocation and performance management processes.

UNICEF – parallel systems for humanitarian and development programming

As a dual-mandate organisation, UNICEF's challenge has been combining its humanitarian and development operations within a single RBM system. Humanitarian action represented 57% of the budget in 2020, with UNICEF supporting nearly 120 million children in crisis worldwide, primarily in complex crises involving forced displacement.

According to the 2021 MOPAN assessment, UNICEF has a strong results architecture, with a clear hierarchy of strategies and planning process. Its Strategic Plan clearly set out the results to be achieved (the 'what'), the groups of children to be reached ('who'), change strategies necessary for achieving results ('how'), and the organisational change strategies needed to support results ('enablers') – one of which is 'results-oriented, efficient and effective management'. The Strategy is supported by results-based budgets, which allocate funds against results and the activities required to achieve them, a corporate results framework, an integrated results management system (the Results Assessment Module), a regular cycle of reporting, and independent evaluation. UNICEF has implemented the key processes for results-based budgeting, and its results management and financing systems are well integrated.

As with UNHCR, UNICEF's development of a workable RBM system has involved a major investment of time and resources. Its first results management system evolved organically, and ended up tracking 16 000 context-specific indicators, making it very difficult to aggregate results. In 2019, it cut this back to 939 output and outcome indicators, which are tracked on a single information platform accessible across the organisation. The platform generates the results needed for reporting against a corporate scorecard. UNICEF had allocated USD 722 million to RBM for the 2018-2021 strategic cycle, including USD 2.6 million for training over 8 000 staff, but the 2021 MOPAN reports suggests that further investment is required to ensure that UNICEF becomes a fully results-based organisation.

However, despite UNICEF's dual mandate, its RBM system designed primary to measure progress towards the development goals in its Strategic Plan. Its multi-annual country strategies (Country Development Plans) are jointly developed and agreed with the partner country, with results areas aligned with the Strategic Plan and progress tracked through the use of standard indicators.

UNICEF's humanitarian operations are to a significant extent delivered through parallel planning and budgeting processes. They sit outside the Country Development Plan, and are not necessarily agreed with government or aligned with national development policies. UNICEF appeals separately for humanitarian funding in each country through its own appeal process, the Human-

itarian Action for Children (HAC). Reporting and performance measurement against the HAC is set up outside of UNICEF's corporate results system – partly for technical reasons and partly because of the distinct requirements of humanitarian funding. In the early stages of emergencies, humanitarian reporting is undertaken via twice-yearly situation reports. A dedicated set of output and performance indicators is created for each response, and tends to be short-term and output-oriented, facilitating reporting at a higher frequency than is needed for development results.

While humanitarian operations are planned and managed outside the core results systems, they are also required to report against a set of standard humanitarian indicators in the Results Assessment Module. This is often challenging. Humanitarian staff lack a strong understanding of RBM and find it difficult to construct logical chains linking humanitarian operations to corporate results indicators.⁴³ Choice of indicators is often left to relatively junior staff, which creates problems with reporting later. Country offices also reportedly have mixed incentives for incorporating humanitarian results into the corporate results system, as it is inclined to reflect poorly on their performance under corporate scorecards. Overall, the system creates incentives to plan and run humanitarian operations using emergency procedures, rather than UNICEF's core set of corporate systems.

UNICEF's RBB system is also made more complex by the different nature of humanitarian finance. Most donor finance is designated strictly as either humanitarian or development, and tagged as such in UNICEF's financial management system. Humanitarian finance is short-term, high volume and fast disbursing, and it comes with more cumbersome reporting and compliance processes. Even for activities that span the humanitarian-development line, such as the treatment of severe malnutrition, it is the designation of funding as either humanitarian or development that dictates how the activity is managed. The share of unearmarked funding has been decreasing, at just 19% in 2019. This makes it more difficult for UNICEF to balance its annual budgets across results areas. While the elements of RBB are in place, only 25% of its funding is available to allocate flexibly across results areas. Most donors 'buy in' to particular results, and inevitably some results areas end up under-resourced. If UNICEF is not able to use its results data to drive resource allocation, then the value of its investment in RBM is reduced.

Several recent evaluations have suggested that UNICEF move towards the full integration of humanitarian operations into its results systems and processes. The new Strategic Plan 2022-25 does not separate out humanitarian action as a cross-cutting priority, but seeks to integrate across its results areas, change strategies and enablers. The approach is intended to support programming across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus by breaking down the organisational siloes that separate these types of activity.

43 UNICEF, Formative Evaluation of UNICEF Work to Link Humanitarian and Development Programming, March 2021, https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/formative_evaluation_of_unicef_work_to_link_humanitarian_and_development_programming.pdf.

FAO – integrating humanitarian action into resilience building

While FAO faces some of the same challenges – particularly the prevalence of projectised, earmarked funding for its humanitarian operations – it has also gone furthest in integrating humanitarian action into its corporate results systems. One of the five strategic objectives in its Medium-Term Plan 2017-21 related to emergencies and resilience: “increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises”. In its new Strategic Framework 2022-31, FAO emphasises that its work spans the humanitarian-development continuum. Its humanitarian work is integrated into one of its Programme Priority Areas, “Agriculture and food emergencies”, and involves providing urgent livelihood and nutrition assistance for countries facing acute food insecurity, together with support to equip their populations with capacities to withstand and manage future shocks and risks. Its humanitarian objectives are closely linked to the HDP Nexus approach, and designed to achieve long-term reduction in the numbers of people facing food insecurity.

In interviews, staff made it clear that the need for humanitarian action to lead seamlessly into resilience-building was thoroughly internalised in the organisation, with less of a division between the two sides of FAO’s mandate. This is facilitated by the fact that food security emergencies are relatively predictable; while it is not possible to predict its geographical distribution, the type and scale of emergencies are relatively constant. This enables FAO to maintain a core capacity in its humanitarian programme areas (e.g., a locust expert team), with additional operational funds coming from crisis-specific appeals.

OCHA – a commitment to RBM that is not yet implemented

As mentioned above, OCHA made a commitment to introducing a comprehensive corporate RBM system in its 2017 Strategic Plan, but did not proceed with its development. As a consequence, it scored poorly for RBM and results-based budgeting in the 2021 MOPAN assessment. OCHA staff explained that, as a part of the UN Secretariat, OCHA has less flexibility to adopt its own systems. OCHA has been waiting for the UN Secretariat to implement a new planning and budget system, and plans to proceed with implementing RBM in its next strategy cycle.

In interviews, we encountered some doubt among OCHA staff as to how effective a formal RBM system would be for OCHA, given its co-ordination mandate. OCHA does not implement humanitarian operations directly, and its core functions (co-ordination, humanitarian financing, policy making, advocacy and information management) are difficult to break down into results-chain logic (inputs, outputs and outcomes). As a policy making body for the UN humanitarian system as a whole, OCHA has been entrusted with trying to promote a significant number of reform initiatives, many of which have proved challenging to advance in the face of some deep structural problems in the sector. Given the challenges of attributing changes in the sector to advocacy and co-ordination, OCHA staff were also concerned that an RBM system would struggle to distinguish between OCHA’s performance and the performance of the sector as a whole. However, the MOPAN assessment noted that: “OCHA’s lack of integrated RBM system leaves it poorly placed to identify and address underperformance in a timely fashion.”⁴⁴

44 MOPAN, MOPAN Assessment Report: OCHA, 2020 Assessment Cycle, Paris, p.53, [https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/ocha2020/MOPAN Assessment OCHA web %5Bfor download%5d.pdf](https://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/ocha2020/MOPAN%20Assessment%20OCHA%20web%5Bfor%20download%5D.pdf).

OCHA staff also expressed the view that there was limited demand from OCHA's funders for the kinds of information that would be generated through a corporate RBM system. Interviews shed an interesting light on the accountability dynamics between HOs and their funders. Overall, there is significant asymmetry of information between HOs and their funders, which is an underlying cause of tension. A number of the large donors – most notably the EU and the UK – have responded by demanding ever more granular information about how their resources are being used in particular humanitarian operations. The reporting requirements – in the form of due diligence assessments and high-frequency operational reports – have increased dramatically in recent years.⁴⁵ However, the focus of these donors is on operational data; because they have the capacity to supervise use of their funds at the field level, they are less interested in aggregate results data. Donors who provide core funding should in principle be more interested in aggregate results, but in practice had other ways of informing themselves about OCHA's performance. In short, OCHA staff reported that they did not feel a strong pressure from funders to generate results data at that level. One key informant noted that RBM was likely to produce only “superficial accountability”.

3.5 Learning on RBM and humanitarian operations

Challenges with measuring results are particularly apparent when it comes to corporate RBM systems that aggregate results from the field to the global level. These corporate results systems are central to MOPAN assessments, which – uniquely among scrutiny processes – look at the performance of multilateral organisations top-down, based on their corporate systems and processes.⁴⁶

HOs operate in an environment where humanitarian need always exceeds the resources available. In that environment, aggregating output-level data from the field to the global level (i.e., the total volume of humanitarian assistance) shows the scale of global humanitarian need and the amount of humanitarian finance that is available. It also provides funders with information on the scale of support that has been provided. However, the information is of limited value when it comes to assessing organisational performance, or for guiding resource allocation and future programming.

Compared to development operations, the results of humanitarian support do not readily aggregate across national contexts or over time. While the total length of road constructed by a development bank, to take one example, may provide useful information on how the volume of support relates to the need, the total volume of humanitarian aid distributed only conveys the extent of humanitarian need and the availability of humanitarian finance in any given year. Likewise, humanitarian results do not accumulate over time: once a target population has regained a minimum standard of welfare, humanitarian aid moves onto other needs. Humanitarian outputs are therefore a flow, rather than a stock, reflected in the numbers supported in any given year rather than incremental progress towards a longer-term result.

As a result, the organisations have found it difficult to implement capture and aggregate humanitarian results in a meaningful way. Both UNHCR and UNICEF found that their first generation RBM system did not meet their operational need for rapid planning and deployment and high-frequency reporting at expenditure and output levels to funders. They therefore resorted to planning and managing their urgent humanitarian operations ‘off the system’, using lighter and more agile tools. This in turn meant

45 Global Public Policy Institute, Independent Review of Individual Donor Assessments in Humanitarian Operations, November 2020, https://www.gppi.net/media/GPPi_2020_Independent-Review-of-Donor-Assessments.pdf.

46 Global Public Policy Institute, Independent Review of Individual Donor Assessments in Humanitarian Operations, November 2020, https://www.gppi.net/media/GPPi_2020_Independent-Review-of-Donor-Assessments.pdf.

that the requirement to contribute results to the corporate results system was seen as burdensome by humanitarian staff, while adding no practical value to their operations. As one key informant observed, “A system built to inform HQ is different than a system built to empower country offices”.

It is therefore not surprising to find that the HOs as a group scored relatively low for their first generation of RBM systems, and that dual mandate organisations like UNICEF that invested heavily in RBM systems, found it difficult to integrate their humanitarian operations.

However, the case studies show that this is not the end of the story. The HOs are pressing forward with developing a new generation of RBM system that meets their requirements better, and appear to be coming up with viable solutions for addressing the challenges discussed here.

The most successful strategies, particularly those adopted by UNICEF and FAO as dual-mandate organisations, have integrated humanitarian operations with development goals, in pursuit of a common set of outcomes. UNICEF’s new strategic plan includes humanitarian assistance not as a separate area of action, but integrated across its results areas. The results that UNICEF seeks to achieve for children – for example, that they have nutritious diets, access to primary health care and opportunities to learn – can be delivered either through development or humanitarian interventions, as conditions require. Similarly, FAO’s Strategy Framework 2022-31 is clear that the organisation’s work spans the humanitarian-development continuum, and that both humanitarian and development assistance can be tools for achieving the organisation’s overarching objectives. Furthermore, it follows the ‘triple nexus’ approach by pledging to ensure that its support for countries and populations facing acute food insecurity also equips them with the capacity to withstand and manage future shocks and risks. Both organisations have recognised that, while short-term humanitarian action is necessarily a large part of their work, achieving their long-term objectives means not just satisfying this year’s humanitarian need with short-term interventions, but also taking a strategic approach to reducing humanitarian need over time.

This context makes the aggregation of humanitarian results into the corporate RBM system a much more meaningful undertaking. It allows the organisation to see what proportion of its overall results is being delivered through humanitarian channels, and the relative cost of delivering results in emergency contexts – important information for an organisation seeking to make progress with the HDP Nexus.

Towards an organisational framework for RBM in humanitarian organisations

The lessons show that implementation of RBM in HOs in a meaningful way is a complex endeavour, generally requiring reforms to a range of wider corporate systems, structures and processes. Table 2 summarises some of the strategies used across the case study organisations to achieve an integrated RBM system that meets both the demands for management information at operational level and the need for accountabilities to funders and governing boards at the corporate level.

Table 2: Potential design features of an effective RBM system for humanitarian operations

MOPAN performance area		Success factors
Strategic management	A coherent strategic architecture, aligning country strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate strategies set out broad objectives and outcomes areas, together with menus of potential programme areas Country offices select their programme areas through country strategies, based on national needs and priorities Country offices must align each of their programmes with a corporate object and outcome areas, to facilitate aggregation of results In many instances, the introduction of a new strategic architecture calls for organisational restructuring, including decentralisation and moves towards a matrix organisation structure to facilitate joint working across outcome areas
	Results-based budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate budgets are organised by corporate objectives and outcome areas Budget allocation decisions are driven by strategic decisions around intended results under each corporate objective, informed by an understanding of trade-offs and opportunity costs. Consideration is given to the value of preventive action and investments in resilience, to minimise high-cost emergency response Each spending programme is aligned with a corporate objective and outcome area in the RBM system. This drives aggregation of expenditure to outcomes and objectives, for budget reporting
Operational management	Truncated planning processes for emergency humanitarian operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures are in place to facilitate the rapid planning and initiation of emergency humanitarian responses, with simpler planning and monitoring requirements, to support frequent reporting and adaptation Procedures are in place to capture the results from emergency operations into the corporate RBM system at an appropriate point in the project cycle It may not always be practical or cost-effective to verify outcome-level results from humanitarian operations. RBM systems could therefore be designed to incorporate verified outputs and projected outcomes, based on anticipated output-to-outcome ratios for standard programme areas. Projected outcomes should be clearly marked as such in results report, for transparency. Output-to-outcome ratios should be based on models that are tested and updated regularly.

MOPAN performance area		Success factors
Operational management	Systems for tracking earmarked funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earmarked funding is tracked through the financial management system and recorded in the budget against outcome areas, permitting the organisation to identify underfunded areas and undertake targeted fundraising
Relationship management	Corporate performance management encourage a robust approach to risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance management systems should pay attention to incentivising an appropriate level of risk appetite – i.e., in operations identified as ‘high risk’, successful is defined as delivery of a certain proportion of results (50-75% of the theoretical maximum). RBM systems can also be designed to incentivise desirable process elements. For example, programmes delivered by local partners (‘localisation’) or that involve a good quality feedback mechanism for target communities (‘accountability to affected populations’) receive a boost in their performance rating
Performance management	Systematic use of theory of change or results chain architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate strategies set out theories of change that articulate in general terms how the organisation proposes to achieve its outcomes, linking activities and outputs through outcomes to corporate objectives Country strategies set out more detailed, context-specific theories of change
	Standard results indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RBM system mandates or encourages the use of standardised indicators, to facilitate aggregation of results Menus of standard indicators tend to proliferate and become unwieldy; a smaller set of indicators is more practical, even though it means that only a subset of results are aggregated Individual programmes are also permitted to use customised indicators to meet their own management and reporting needs Standard indicators are backed clear definitions and guidance and training on their accurate use, to minimise data cleaning requirements



**4. LOOKING AT THE BIGGER
PICTURE: LESSONS FOR THE
MULTILATERAL SYSTEM**

This study is a preliminary exploration of a complex set of issues regarding the organisational performance of humanitarian organisations. The headline findings of the study can be summarised as follows.

1

First, for Humanitarian organisations (HOs), simply signing up to humanitarian reform commitments is not enough, unless they also hardwire the commitments into their business models. The study identified many factors that work against the effective implementation of reform commitments. These include tensions with humanitarian principles, challenging cost and time trade-offs, restrictions on HOs' ability to work with governments, capacity limitations on the part of national and local responders, the difficulties involved in setting up meaningful consultation and accountability mechanisms in crisis situations, and a lack of financial and human resources to advance reform initiatives.

Given these challenges, reform commitments entered into at corporate level are unlikely to lead to meaningful change at the operational level unless they are built into organisational systems and processes. The experiences of the case study organisations suggest that the following may be useful:

- Clear organisational commitments and mandates to humanitarian reform, backed by corporate champions and dedicated resources
- Clear guidance for staff on when and how to progress humanitarian reforms, and how to manage trade-offs with humanitarian principles and other corporate objectives
- Structured investment in contextual analysis and country-specific reform strategies and plans
- More structured investment in building capacity of national and local responders
- Investment and skills training in conflict sensitivity and more comprehensive risk awareness
- Shared initiatives to develop meaningful mechanisms for community participation and accountability.

2

Second, implementation of humanitarian reforms also requires changes in humanitarian funding practices, many of which reflect commitments already made in the Grand Bargain. Potentially useful measures include:

- More funding for crisis prevention and resilience-building
- Greater flexibility to reallocate funding between humanitarian and development interventions in crisis-affected areas
- Greater flexibility in the terms and conditions of humanitarian finance, to support working with national partners and more adaptive programming
- Dedicated resources for longer-term investments in capacity building and community consultation mechanisms.

3

Third, delivering humanitarian support in high-risk, complex and fast-evolving situations calls for a different approach to managing for results. HOs use results data for different purposes than development actors, and therefore have different information needs. They gain less value from aggregating humanitarian results to the global level, through integrated corporate Resourced-Based Management (RBM) systems. Consequently, early efforts by HOs to introduce RBM were rated poorly in MOPAN assessments. However, more recently, some of the case study organisations have made important progress in integrating humanitarian and development results into a shared results architecture, in pursuit of shared strategic objectives. This helps them to recognise that humanitarian and development interventions represent a continuum of options for responding to need, rather than siloed operational areas.

The study has identified a range of potentially useful lessons for HOs and their funders on how to go about better integrating humanitarian reforms commitments into their corporate systems and processes, and how to design corporate RBM systems that are better suited to humanitarian operations. These lessons are summarised at the end of chapters 2 and 3, in lieu of formal recommendations.

For MOPAN itself, the study suggests that more can be done to adapt the MOPAN assessment framework for HOs, to better reflect the distinctive nature of their operations and the practical requirements of working in crisis situations.



ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 : KEY INFORMANTS

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ANNEX 2 : BIBLIOGRAPHY

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